



Anatomy of political Islam in Republican Turkey: the Milli Görüş Movement as a legacy of Naqshbandism

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Abstract

The Milli Görüş political Islamic movement and the first political parties under its banner were founded and dominated by the Naqshbandis. Numerous scholars have so far suggested that political participation has led these groups to transform and moderate their former Islamist views over time. This study examines this possibility by scrutinising how Naqshbandi and Milli Görüş leadership perceive the state, essential political institutions such as the legislature, political parties, opposition, elections, and independent media, together with some defining issues in Islam such as jihad, excommunication, and *al-wala' wa-lbara'* (loyalty and disavowal). In particular, the study seeks to uncover how the Naqshbandi theological background has been turned into a political Islamist ideology through the influence of two important Naqshbandi shaykhs, Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1952–1980) and Mahmud Es'ad Coşan (1980–2001), and two leading Naqshbandi-affiliated Milli Görüş leaders Necmettin Erbakan and R. Tayyip Erdoğan to reveal if/to what extent Islamists' participation in politics has transformed their Islamist views. As a methodology, content analysis and political discourse analysis have been used. The findings demonstrate a continuity of Islamist Naqshbandi thought in Milli Görüş leadership and that political participation has neither 'democratised' nor 'moderated' these parties and their radical Islamist thoughts.

Keywords Naqshbandiyya · Islamism · Islamist parties · *Milli Görüş* · Erbakan · Erdoğan · AKP · Democracy

Introduction

The Naqshbandi Sufi orders have a significant place in the religious, social, and political spheres of Turkish society (Algar, 1976: 140–141). Though it is known that there has long been a link between Naqshbandi Sufi orders and Milli Görüş,

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a Turkish political Islamist movement, the fact that Naqshbandi shaykhs have had a significant ideological impact on the formation of Turkish political Islamism remains relatively understudied. Additionally, the fairly common belief in the extant literature from the 1990s to the 2010s, as will be discussed in the next part, that Naqshbandism's involvement in politics in the secularist regime led to moderation and the pragmatic transformation of Turkish Islamism, while there is a group of scholars who resisted the idea that Islam and democracy are compatible claiming that Islamists' ultimate goal is to take over the state using democratic means and replace it with the Islamic one. However, these arguments are usually ideologically informed and there has been very few comparative and empirical works focusing on the existence or the non-existence of evidence supporting either of these claims at the political and religious levels (Cornell, 2015; Erturk, 2020).¹ This is the gap that this study aims to bridge. In general, in this study, I argue that Naqshbandi leadership has shaped the language and mindset of Turkish political Islamism and its leading figures, Necmettin Erbakan and Recep T. Erdoğan, who are both Naqshbandi disciples. In particular, and contrary to much of the extant literature noted below, I propose that Islamists' engagement in the politics of the secularist republican regime in Turkey has not been moderate and pragmatic nor has it altered their belief that Shari'a and Islam can function as an alternative political regime.

This study investigates Naqshbandism as the theological source and originator of the Islamist ideology of the Milli Görüş Turkish Islamist parties up to the AKP, and looks at how Naqshbandis' piety, mindset, and agenda have been transferred into the Islamist political language of Turkey. It does so by analysing the political discourses of two leading Naqshbandi-affiliated MG leaders, Necmettin Erbakan and R. Tayyip Erdoğan. The study argues that although Islamist parties may have seemed moderate and pragmatic from time to time, they have remained essentially Islamist actors and maintained their commitment to an ideological and theological background shaped by Naqshbandism.

The research method of this study is broken into three sections. First of all, I will offer a brief content analysis on the works of the most renowned Naqshbandi masters in modern Turkey, Mehmed Zahid Kotku and Mahmud Es'ad Coşan, to elucidate their views on core issues: the ideal political regime and political institutions; the source of sovereignty (*hakimiyya*); jihad; the status of non-Muslims; and the meaning of the Salafist concept of *al-wala' wa-lbara'* (loyalty and disavowal), which is deemed as the source of *takfir* (excommunication) (Bin Ali, 2016), including apostasy in Islam. I will explore the theological background of the MG movement and parties using Kotku's books *Hadislerle Nasihatler (Warnings through the Hadiths)* (vols. 1 and 2) and *Tasavvufi Ahlak (Sufi Morality)* (vols. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), and Coşan's articles, published periodically under the sobriquet Halil Necatioğlu in İskenderpaşa's monthly journal, *Islam*, between 1983 and 1998. Secondly, I will discuss the philosophy of Milli Görüş in terms of the Naqshbandi narrative of *firqa al-najiyya* (saved sect) or *ahl al-Sunnah* (people of the Sunnah) and then introduce Erbakan and Erdoğan as the two most prominent figures in the MG leadership. In the third and main part of the study, I will conduct a 'political discourse analysis' (PDA)

¹ See (Demirci, 2008; Heper & Toktas, 2003; Mardin, 2005; Özal, 1997; Yavuz, 1997).

of two prominent MG leaders, Necmettin Erbakan and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, examining to what extent there exists ideological coherence and continuity between Naqshbandi masters and these figures: in essence, how Naqshbandi theological references and piety constructed Milli Görüş' political Islamist ideology, and how this ideology continues to operate in a parliamentary democratic regime. In doing so, I will focus on essential political institutions: the state; the source of *hakimiyya* (sovereignty); the legislature and the rule of law; political parties; and opposition and elections. The final section contains concluding remarks and the findings of the study which demonstrate that there is a tight relationship between the Naqshbandi teachings and the mainstream Turkish Islamist political movement, Milli Görüş, arguing based on the empirical evidence that Islamists' participation in politics in a democratic environment neither democratised nor moderated their radical thoughts and attitudes. All told, this study will consider the question of how a Naqshbandi legacy, as realised through the Milli Görüş ideology and its leadership, has regarded essential political institutions in a democratic regime.

The significance of this research is threefold. Primarily, it will provide a substantive theological reflection on Naqshbandism within the political sphere and how its religious values were transferred into politics and became political instruments utilised in a democratic regime by the MG leadership. Secondly, it will tell us what Naqshbandis and MG consider to be an ideal political regime and society. Thirdly, it will reveal the foundational religious understanding of dominant political Islamist thought in Turkey today, and how it might continue to evolve 50 years since its first emergence. I have chosen PDA as a methodology because there is a vital relation between political discourse and ideology in that 'political ideologies are largely reproduced by discourse' (van Dijk, 2006a: 728; 2006b). PDA also 'refers to the practice of analysing raw material and information as discursive forms' (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000: 4). Thus, PDA allows me to focus on texts and talks such as election campaigns, public meetings, speeches, media interviews, etc. (Flowerdew, 2013; van Dijk, 1997). The time frame is between 1970 and 2021.

An overview of background analysis and literature on Islamism and politics in Turkey

During Turkey's transition to a republican regime, however, the republican elites adopted an 'assertive' form of secularism (Kuru, 2007; Berkes, 1998: 461–506). Though they recognised the necessity of religion as powerful bond and political instrument in the process of nation building, they aimed to confine it to the private sphere. In order to minimise the influence on society of the Islamic elites they opposed, republicans banned Sufi brotherhoods and madrasas in 1925, and most of their buildings, *dargahs*, and possessions were either confiscated or transferred to the Directorate-General for Pious Foundations. The *Diyanet*, the Directorate for Religious Affairs, was founded in 1924 in order to 'tame' Islam and help the state mechanism to control religious sphere and to hinder the capacity of religious groups and figures to mobilise and gain political influence (Shively, 2008). Those who resisted republican reforms and demanded the restoration of Shari'a—mainly

Naqshbandis—were defamed and depicted as ‘snakes’ and were either neutralised or forced to retreat underground (Goloğlu, 2011: 335, 130; Algar, 2007: 57), while some of them continued their practices in the Diyanet mosques under the surveillance of the Kemalist elites.

The Naqshbandi order was founded by Abdul Khaliq al-Ghujudawani (d.1179), though the order was ultimately named after Baha-ud-Din Naqshband from Bukhara (d.1389) (Şuşud, 1992; Hourani, 1981: 76–77). It was later re-institutionalised under the tag of *Mujaddisim* (renewal) by the Indian Shaykh Ahmad al-Sirhindi (d.1624), known as *Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thani* (renewer of the second millennium of Islam) in the seventeenth century. The *Mujaddidi* tradition of Naqshbandism is a millenarian, political, and revivalist project intended to eradicate *bida'a* (innovations) from Islam and restore Islam to its purest form by adhering to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The *mujaddidi* tradition was transported into Ottoman lands and disseminated by the nineteenth-century Kurdish *mujaddid* (renewer) Shaykh Khalid al-Baghdadi (1779–1827) (Abu-Manneh, 1982; Özdalga, 1997; Hourani 1981). The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya has been the most widespread and enduring Islamic brotherhood since the nineteenth century in Turkey (Algar, 1976: 140–141; Le Gall, 2003: 90; Abu-Manneh, 1982: 1). After the time of al-Baghdadi, the order continued to be guided by his prominent deputies, who established close affinity with the state bureaucracy and religious elites of Turkey and built vibrant sub-branches and *dargahs* (dervish convents or lodges), such as the Istanbul-based Gümüşhanevi, İsmet Efendi, Kelami, and Kaşgari *dargahs*. The most active of these lodges is the Gümüşhanevi *dargah*, and Ahmed Ziyaeddin Gümüşhanevi (1813–1893), the eponymous founder of the Gümüşhanevi suborder, is the most important figure after Shaykh Khalid in Ottoman Naqshbandiyya history (Weismann 2007: 152).

The Gümüşhanevi suborder is one of the significant Naqshbandi *dargahs* successfully continued its lineage up until the Republican period, later taking the name *İskenderpaşa Cemaati* (the İskenderpaşa community) under the leadership of Shaykh Mehmed Zahid Kotku between 1952 and 1980. Born in Bursa in 1893, Kotku received *ijaza* (licence, vicegerency) from Gümüşhanevi lodge in Fatih, Istanbul. After the *ijaza*, he started to work as an official imam in 1930 in various Diyanet mosques in İstanbul and Bursa. Upon Shaykh Abdulaziz Bekkine's death in 1952, Kotku's senior friend from the lodge, he became the master of Gümüşhanevi lodge, relocating the centre of the lodge to the İskenderpaşa mosque in Fatih. Until his death in 1980, Kotku endeavoured to gather intellectuals, academics, bureaucrats, and politicians around him and proselytised his Naqshbandi-Gümüşhanevi teachings. Under the leadership of Kotku's son-in-law Mahmud Esad Coşan (d.2001), a professor of the Arab-Persian philology, the lodge became known as *Hakyol Vakfi Cemaati* (the Truth Path Foundation Community), and it all the better prospered in Turkey until 28 February 1997, known as Kemalist soft coup. By that time, Coşan had already left Turkey for Australia, where he died in a car accident in 2001. By then, the community has been led by Coşan's son Muharrem Nureddin Coşan (b. 1963), becoming one of the influential social entities in the bureaucracy as of the 2010s, under the rule of the Justice and Development Party.

The question of Islamists' attitude towards the state has become a significant issue of debate since their first appearance in the political realm in 1969. Some are

sceptical about Islamists' 'commitment' to essential democratic institutions, with some claiming that Islamists have a 'hidden agenda' with which they are undermining political institutions, allowing them to 'take over the state' and replace it with Shari'a 'when the right moment comes' (Tibi, 2008: 45–47; Lakoff, 2004; Pipes, 2005; Masoud, 2008; Kramer, 1992). In fact, it is more widely believed that when Islamist groups are allowed to participate in the political system and the electoral process, they moderate their radical views (Wickham 2004: 206; Langohr, 2001; Robinson, 1997; Hale & Ozbudun, 2010). This process is defined as the 'transformation' of Islamists into Muslim democrats (Yilmaz, 2009; Ibrahim, 2006; Nasr, 2005; Çayır, 2008). These analyses usually lack a methodological framework and/or offer little in the way of in-depth analysis, however.

The transformation of Islamism into Muslim democracy issue has been predominantly assumed true for the Turkish context, at least until the 2010s, when the AKP has taken a turn towards authoritarianism. When Turkey transitioned into a multi-party system in 1950, the influence of the once-banned Naqshbandis gradually became more visible in politics. Having seen their ability to send a few deputies to parliament from the rightist Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti) and then Justice Party (Adalet Partisi), successively in the 1950s and 1960s, Naqshbandis founded the Milli Görüş (MG) political movement and the political parties under its banner in 1969. This was interpreted by many to mean that Naqshbandism had changed its codes and developed a symbiotic relationship with the secularist republican regime. For many, this differed from revolutionary Islamist organizations, which idealise Islam as an alternative political regime. For instance, a leading sociologist, Şerif Mardin, stated that the Naqshbandi understanding of Islam 'synchronised with the political code promoted by the Republic' (Mardin, 2005: 158). In the same vein, Nasr explained that Turkish Islamists developed a pragmatic approach and moderated their ideas over time as a consequence of participating in a democratic system. According to Nasr:

Faced with the uncompromising secularism of the state, Turkish Islamic forces have abandoned their narrow fundamentalist views in favor of an inclusive and pragmatic approach to the role of religion in politics: they have dropped their demands for strict adherence to Islamic law, they support Turkey's relations with the West (Nasr, 2003: 71).

Yet, while Mardin and Smith argued that Naqshbandism's 'modern' and 'liberal' orientation was adopted by the Islamic parties of the Milli Görüş movement, such as Milli Nizam ('national order', 1970–1971), Milli Selamet ('national salvation', 1972–1981), Refah ('welfare', 1983–1998), Fazilet ('virtue', 1997–2001), Saadet ('felicity', 2001–), and Adalet ve Kalkınma ('justice and development' (AKP), 2002–), Perekli claimed that such Milli Görüş parties 'became the exception' when compared with other revolutionary Islamic movements (Perekli, 2012: 3; Mardin, 2005: 160).² For example, since its emergence in 2002, one of the Milli Görüş parties, the AKP, had been considered to represent the most successful 'transformation' to 'ideological moderation' and pointed as an ideal Islam-cum-democracy

² See also (Demirci, 2008; Smith, 2005: 316).

model for other Muslim majority countries (Mecham, 2004; Yavuz, 2014; Kuru, 2013). This view was based on the idea that Naqshbandism, as a Sufi order, had an inclusive and peaceful understanding of Islam, engaged in disciplining the soul and supporting the moral aspect of ‘civil society’ rather than Islamizing the state (Mardin, 2011: 90). Hakan Yavuz suggested that the focal point of Shaykh Mehmed Zahid Kotku’s beliefs was ‘disciplining the soul’, while Heper and Toktaş claim that Kotku considered Islam to be a peaceful and ‘moral development’ (Yavuz, 1997: 130–131, 141; Heper & Toktas, 2003: 165), and he ‘disapproved of the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam’ (Heper, 1997: 39).³ In the same vein, while Turkish political scientist Şahin Alpay once underscored İskenderpaşa’s ‘positive orientation towards a democratic secular political system’ (Alpay, 2008 : 13-17), Brian Silverstein suggested in 2013 that the AKP’s ‘sincere attempt to fashion a politically liberal Muslim society can be seen as a legacy of their Iskender Pasha experience’ (Silverstein, 2013 :58; Smith, 2005: 309, 315). Of course there have emerged several studies post-2010 that criticise the AKP’s turn towards authoritarianism, and some of the scholars have revised their position on the relationship between democracy and political Islam in Turkey.⁴

A brief analysis of Naqshbandi views on socio-political issues in Islam

To begin with the ideology of Naqshbandiyya, in Kotku’s and Coşan’s works there is strict emphasis on Shari’a as an all-encompassing set of rules for social and political life. And on the issue of the Salafi doctrine of *al-wala’ wal-bara’*, which regulates Muslims’ relationships with non-Muslims, Kotku and Coşan adopt quite exclusionary language. For instance, for Kotku, Muslims must isolate themselves, their families, and their children from unbelievers, and he asserts that non-believers’ ‘behaviours are contagious like diseases’ (Kotku, 1982a: 120). In the same vein, Coşan insists that only ‘Muslims are friends and true brothers of each other. Unbelievers are the enemies of God and they are [always] ruthless enemies of Muslims’ (Necatioğlu, 1990a). Coşan and Kotku suggest to their disciples that they should not imitate infidels in their ways of dressing or living, their customs, or traditions (Kotku, 1992: 14; Necatioğlu, 1991a). And, just as Kotku warns his disciples not to ‘Europeanize’ themselves, Coşan frequently underlines the threat of Westernization, claiming, for example, that an EU-Turkey Customs Union would ‘lead to an invasion of Turkey by Christian missionaries, Armenians and Jews’ (Kotku, 1982b: 195; Necatioğlu, 1988). As for apostasy, Kotku is quite exclusivist and sectarian. Defining his community and followers within the boundaries of *ahl al-Sunnah* (the people of the Sunnah) *al-firqa al-najiya* (the saved sect), he denounces other Islamic sects to be an apostate who deviates from the path of *ahl al-Sunnah*. Referring to a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, he foresees that the Muslim *ummah* will split into 73 sects, and that all of these sects will be apostate and will go to Hell, all except for *ahl al-Sunnah* (Kotku, 1992: 109). Kotku loosely applies the term apostasy to other political views and parties such as the

³ See also Çakır (1990: 24).

⁴ See for example (Bacik, 2020; Yavuz, 2020; Yılmaz & Bashirov, 2018)

Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) (Kotku, 1991: 42, 2010a: 84, 136, 2010b: 147–148).

Contrary to the classical peaceful Sufi ethos, which sees jihad as an inner struggle and disciplining of the self, Kotku and Coşan employ jihad in an armed, militant, and aggressive way. For Kotku, the future of Islam depends upon jihad (Kotku, 2010b: 207–208). During the leftist versus rightist clashes in the 1970s, defining them as *ahbesü'l kafir* (the most wicked of apostates) (Kotku, 1991: 42; 2010a: 284), Kotku claimed that communist, leftist, and anarchist groups must be confronted in jihad (Kotku, 1982a: 114; 1984: 52). Similarly, in reaction to the Kemalist military intervention against Islamic groups on 28 February 1997, Coşan labelled the Kemalists as non-Muslims. Coşan insisted that Muslims are the 'real owners' of this 'blessed soil' and that they should spill blood or die for it when necessary (M. E. Coşan, 1997).

For Kotku and Coşan, the state has been lost to a minority group of pro-Western Masonic people who came after Abdulhamid II, and it must be regained (Emre, 2017: 167).⁵ Thus, Kotku encouraged his disciples to establish a political party resting upon *darurah* (necessity), though he was essentially against partyism (*particilik*). *Darurah* is an Islamic doctrine, which allows Muslims to commit unlawful acts (*haram*) for a limited period of time so as to prevent any possible harm.

On the issue of the source of *hakimiyya*, sovereignty, and the legislature, Kotku sees Islam as an alternative political regime: what he calls *nizam*, vis-à-vis *beşeri* (man-made) regimes. In order to emphasise the need for an Islamic *nizam*, Kotku believes that 'other man-made regimes, laws [...] lead to controversial lifestyle[s] and push [humanity] into anarchy' (Kotku, 1982c: 1). Rather than advocating popular suffrage, Kotku insisted that the right to vote should be reserved only for *ulemâ-yı zevil-ihtirâm* (notable ulama) (Kotku, 1982c: 149). Kotku holds up the Saudi Islamic regime as a model on issues like *qisas* (retaliation) and *hadd* (prohibition) as a punishment code (Kotku, 2010b: 86).

Similar to Kotku, Coşan defines Islam as a holistic *ilahi* (divine) *nizam* in which Islamic principles dominate politics (Necatioğlu, 1985a). In this *nizam*, referring to a hadith that the 'ulama are the caliphs of the Prophet', Coşan proposes that politicians and statesmen must obey the *mashaikh* (shaykhs) because the ulama and the shaykhs are the real caliphs (Necatioğlu, 1990b, 1991b). Coşan insists that religious and worldly affairs become corrupt when the *ulü'l-emr* (ruler) is not chosen from the *mashaikh* (Necatioğlu, 1990c). Having defined Islam as an 'ideal world order', he responds to those who 'seek solutions from defective man-made ideologies and doctrines outside Islam and the Qur'an', emphasising that the solution is in Islam, rather than in Western codes and reforms (Necatioğlu, 1983, 1985b). On the issue of sovereignty, Coşan states that the 'authority is God Himself [and] sovereignty belongs to Him' (Necatioğlu, 1995a, 1991b). In his 1994 piece, he holds up Omar al-Bashir's Sudan as an ideal Islamic model for Muslim majority countries (Necatioğlu, 1994a). Similar to his master, Coşan basically sees partyism as a division among the ummah. In his 1995 sermon, delivered in the İskenderpaşa mosque,

⁵ See also M. E. Coşan (1997).

Coşan argues that there has been two parties on Earth: ‘*hizbullah* (party of God), supporters of Allah, and *hizb-üş-şeytan* (party of Satan), helpers of Satan’.

Coşan sent most of his Islamist messages to his disciples under the name of Halil Necatioğlu, but spoke more cautiously in his *sohbet* (sermon) cassettes and the publications released under his real name due to Kemalist hegemony. Thus, the conditions made Coşan far more pragmatic than Kotku.

Put briefly, we can conclude that the Naqshbandi views on political issues are essentially opposed to the existing political institutions of Turkey. The content analysis of the two leading Naqshbandi masters neatly shows that, contrary to what the extant literature says, their Islamic beliefs extend beyond disciplining the self and focusing on the moral development of society at the individual level. Significantly, Silverstein’s argument, which proposes a correlation between İskenderpaşa Naqshbandism and ‘liberal Muslim society’, does not seem reasonable.

In the following section, I will discuss the idea that Naqshbandism has both transferred its ideas and given shape to the political ideology of MG, in particular the political figures Erbakan and Erdoğan. Before getting started, I will first discuss the meaning and philosophy of Milli Görüş in the context of the Naqshbandi narrative of *al-fırqa al-najıya* and *ahl al-Sunnah*. After this, I will briefly turn to introduce Erbakan and Erdoğan themselves.

A portrait of Milli Görüş as a Naqshbandi project and its two leaders, Erbakan and Erdoğan

The word *milli* (national) in Turkish has both racial and religious meaning. The term *milli* in Milli Görüş is a Qur’anic concept, as in the complementary term *Millet-i İbrahim* (the people of Abraham) (Tuğrul, 2018: 13). It refers only to the Muslims (ummah) as an umbrella term.⁶ Just like Kotku, as stated above,⁷ it seemed that Erbakan employed the term *al-fırqa al-najıya* for his political language. He defined his political movement and his followers as *al-fırqa al-najıya* (the saved sect) and *al-taifa al-mansura* (victorious society), claiming that they are the only community to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong. Erbakan said, ‘Do not worry, do not loosen your ties, because if you believe, then you are superior. That’s why all of the falsehood will be destroyed. [...] Victory belongs to the believers and the victory is close enough [and] God will perfect His light’ (Erbakan, 2018). Additionally, Erbakan defined the MG as a ‘jihadi army’ to which all believers must submit (Erbakan, 2013: 25). He claimed that ‘all of the other [political] views [outside the MG] are the watchdogs of Zionism’ (Akkiraz, 2012: 8). Under the influence of Kotku’s teachings, Erbakan declared that in modern Turkey, there was a clash between truth and falsehood, and that in the falsehood camp there existed 72 sects, and the only saved sect that could lead the people to paradise was the MNP (Anayasa Mahkemesi, 1972: 8).

⁶ See Tuğrul (2018: 13–14).

⁷ See also (Kotku, 1992: 109).

Like Erbakan, Erdoğan saw his political party and party affiliations in terms of a chosen sect rather than a political entity and as representatives of true Islam, while denouncing others as Satanic. In 2018, in his address to the muftis from provinces across the country, Erdoğan said,

We shall not leave any domains to others. We will work hard in politics, while you will work as spiritual leaders as well. Remember! As a universal rule, nature abhors a vacuum. The space which cannot be filled by the pilgrims of the truth, will be filled with the ones who are slaves and subjects of Satan (Erdoğan, 2018).

Coşan noted that his master, Kotku, himself initiated Milli Görüş as their ‘*dargah*’s action’ (M. E. Coşan, 2017: 142). According to the narrative, Shaykh Kotku and Shaykh Sami Ramazanoğlu of the Kelami *dargah* (known as the Erenköy Naqshbandi community) together invited Erbakan to Istanbul in the 1960s and charged him with a political duty: to establish the *Milli Görüş* political movement and the Islamist party, MNP. According to Şama, they said,

All of the senior *mürşids* (guides) in the world [spiritually] invested their authority in us. For our part, and in the name of those procurations given by the *mürşids*, we appoint you as the Leader of the Ummah! Now, go back to Ankara, and carry on your political work! You are the leader of the ummah [from now on]! (Şama, 2015: 159)

In the same vein, Cevat Akşit, a prominent disciple and spiritual son of Kotku, reported that Shaykh Kotku, having assigned Erbakan his task as a political leader of the ummah in a secularist regime, said, ‘We sacrificed Necmettin [for politics]’ (Milli Gazete, 2014). Erbakan had by this time already been a disciple of the Naqshbandi-Gümüştanevi Shaykh Abdulaziz Bekkine (d.1952) and later Bekkine’s successor, Kotku; he was also in close connection with other Istanbul-based Naqshbandi *mashaikh* such as Sami Ramazanoğlu, Ali Haydar Efendi (Ahıskavî), and his successor, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, of the İsmet Efendi *dargah* (known as the İsmailağa community)—ties that he had established because he was from the same society and culture.

Erbakan was matrilineally of Caucasian descent and came from Sinop, a Black Sea province. His grandfather had been one of the most high-ranking commanders of the Naqshbandi shaykh, Imam Shamil, who had engaged in jihad and fought against the Russians for many years (Çalmuk, 2017; Şama, 2015). Similarly, Erdoğan was born to a Caucasian family in 1954; his family first moved to Rize, a Black Sea province, and then to Istanbul. Like Erbakan, he grew up in a Naqshbandi network and became quite acquainted with its social and political culture (Yalçın 2014: 11–12). During his childhood, Erdoğan became the student of Naqshbandi *vekil* (vicegerent) Ali Kemal Efendi (Hut) in Kasımpaşa Grand Mosque. Kemal Efendi (b. 1934) was from Rize, who moved to Istanbul in 1952 as well (TRT Diyanet, 2016). He is one of the prominent elders of İsmailağa Naqshbandi community (İsmet Efendi *dargah*). Erdoğan spent his childhood with Kemal Efendi, learned essential Islamic knowledge and principles from him.

Later on in his adolescence, like many Milli Görüş members and admirers of Erbakan, Erdoğan became a disciple of Kotku and then Coşan (Heper & Toktas, 2003: 163; Mardin, 2005: 159). As a staunch Milli Görüş member, he had lodged with the MSP in 1972 when he was 18, and then became head of the MSP's Istanbul Youth Organization (Heper, 2013: 148; Al Jazeera, 2018). His Islamic code of behaviour was built within that milieu.

Following the death of Kotku in 1980, although Erbakan clashed with the new shaykh, Coşan, for a while in the late 1980s and early 1990s on the issue of whose authority would dominate the *dargah* and the party, Erdoğan's cordial ties continued with Coşan and he frequently attended Coşan's *sohbets* (Çakır & Çalmuk, 2001a: 33, 2001b).⁸ In return, Coşan supported and preached his followers that vote for the elections, in which Erdoğan competed for mayor of Istanbul for the first time in 1994, was a creedal issue (Necatioğlu, 1994b). However, between 2001 and 2011, all the Naqshbandi orders, except İskenderpaşa (they supported the National Action Party), had supported Erbakan instead of Erdoğan, believing that the AKP veered away from the MG tradition.

When compared with Erbakan, and along with the increasing Kemalist pressure driving the success of the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party, RP) in the 1994 elections, Erdoğan became far more adept at adopting pragmatic and 'moderate' tactics; Erdoğan's 1995 speech while he was mayor of Istanbul is useful to understand his approach. In his speech, addressed privately to party members, Erdoğan said, 'I will do whatever it takes to bring this struggle to power. I will even put on a cassock if my command centre tells me that I need to wear it. Is it allowed by *usul* [*al-Din*] (the principles of Islam)? Of course, it is.' (Milliyet, 2002; Odatv, 2014). Erdoğan decisively continued and developed this new *modus operandi* between 2002 and 2010 and unlike Erbakan by employing a highly pro-European democratic language and party program. It is now apparent that he did so to avoid the wrath of the Kemalist hegemony in the military and judiciary.

Following the death of Erbakan in 2011, Erdoğan gradually turned back to his Islamist MG root when the AKP weakened the Kemalist hegemony. It was another fact that Erdoğan sought for Naqshbandi support when the AKP was implicated in a series of corruption and bribery scandals in 2013. Since then, all of the Naqshbandi communities publicly and unanimously have revealed their support for Erdoğan one after another, including Nureddin Coşan (Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Vakfı, 2018; Coşan, 2014, 2019; Sputnik, 2018a, b). The one that Kemal Efendi from İsmailağa is worth mentioning: 'This is our last chance. Supporting Mr. Erdoğan is our last chance. It is our religious duty to be behind Mr. Erdoğan. For this reason, let's support Mr. Erdoğan with all our strength [...]' (Yeni Şafak, 2015). It was even reported by some Naqshbandi disciples that Kemal Efendi was claimed to have said that those who do not vote for Erdoğan would go to Hell (İhvanlar.net, 2013). Having recited Qur'an 14:7, Kemal Efendi, drawing an analogy between the verses and supporting Erdoğan, underscored that those who fail to support Erdoğan shall be severely punished by God:

⁸ See also Mardin (2005: 159).

In this verse, Allah says that if you are grateful to me, I will certainly give you more and more. This is one of the greatest favours of Allah that Mr. Erdoğan is in office now. For that reason, we shall support Mr. Erdoğan as much as we can [...] because the existence of the ummah is dependent upon him. If we are grateful to Allah for this favour, Allah loves those who are grateful, and He severely punishes those who are ungrateful to Him (Yeni Şafak, 2015).

Under the leadership of Erdoğan, Naqshbandis came together and established a common platform, *Milli İrade Platformu* (The National Will Platform) in December 2013, and issued numerous declarations in support of Erdoğan and the AKP, stating that they were ‘standing guard’ and ‘would not surrender’.⁹ Some Naqshbandi disciples marched side by side carrying banners proclaiming that Erdoğan was their ‘hero’, each with their shaykh’s photo and name (T24 2015). In order to counteract the opposing media publicising the AKP’s scandals, some of the Naqshi elders initiated counter propaganda: some argued that Muslims became able to read and teach Qur’an owing to Erdoğan ‘because Erdoğan redeemed and freed the Holy Quran in Turkey’ (TRT Diyanet, 2016), while others contended that Erdoğan began to memorise the Qur’an and that AKP leaders were appointed by the Prophet Muhammad Himself (Yeni Şafak, 2016; Odatv, 2015).

Naqshbandis’ and Milli Görüş’ perception of essential political and democratic institutions

In this part, I will scrutinise how the Milli Görüş political movement perceived political and democratic institutions such as the legislature elected by the people, the source of *hakimiyya*, the rule of law, political parties, political opposition, and elections. It is also worth examining what the ‘state’ meant as an ultimate goal to Naqshbandis and Milli Görüş leaders Erbakan and Erdoğan.

The State: Islamic Turkey

For Naqshbandis, as mentioned above, the state is *din wa dawla*, which means a state where religion and politics are merged and where its rule is based solely on Shari’a. For Kotku and Coşan, the state has been taken over by a Westernist and Masonic minority group since Abdulhamid and must be taken back by the Muslim people. Moreover, while Coşan defined them as ‘parasites’ (Necatioğlu, 1994c), Kotku claimed that unless these Masonic people who have taken the state are eternally expelled from the country, and unless all of their houses are destroyed, Muslims in Turkey can never be rid of their enslavement or debts (Kotku, 1984: 37). No different from Kotku, Erbakan believes that the roots of the Turkish Republic have been constituted by unbelievers such as Zionists or by their Masonic connections and collaborators inside. Erbakan thinks that the Ottoman state was demolished and then taken over by the Zionist and

⁹ See for the declarations, ‘Milli İrade Platformu’ (2021).

Mason lodges. He added that these Masons founded the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) against Sultan Abdulhamid to annihilate the Caliphate and Islam through reforms (Erbakan, 2013). Erbakan asserts that they deposed Abdulhamid so that the world's administration would pass from the Muslims to the Jews (Anayasa Mahkemesi, 1972).

For Islamists in general, there are two ways to take the state back from 'Masons' or other unbelievers in Muslim majority countries where democratic institutions dominate more or less. One is via elections; the other is by force. The latter is not creedal but rather an issue of *zaruret* (circumstance, necessity) and methodology. For instance, Cemalettin Hocaoglu (Kaplan, known also as Black Voice), a former Milli Görüş member and the 'caliph' of an Islamic group that once announced an Islamic Federal State in Germany,¹⁰ argued that partyism and electoral methods (*particilik yolu*) cannot be followed since they contradict the Prophetic model (Kaplan 1986). However, Milli Görüş has chosen the latter method. Because, unlike revolutionists, Kotku dreamt of and preached a gradual and pragmatic change in power by benefitting from the nature of the democratic system, which was institutionalised to a degree after 1950 in Turkey. This gradual change was not totally bottom up, as many indeed thought.¹¹ This was about strategy and power. Secondly, Kotku must have thought that participation in politics was not an issue of moderation or cooperation with 'others' or with the institutions of the republican system, as some have argued. This non-revolutionary program might be explained by the fact that many of Gümüşhanevi's disciples, including the shaykhs Bekkine, Kotku, and Coşan, were state officials. We know that Kotku was an official *imam* (preacher) and Coşan was a professor at a state university while they were organising leadership of their *dargahs*. This modus operandi maximised their legitimacy, visibility in the society. Thus, it seems that they did want not to lose these benefits and privileges. Additionally, during the Cold War era, the NATO wing of the Kemalist elites supported them in its struggle with the 'atheist' Soviet's communist 'threat', in line with the then international relations policies of the Western bloc supporting Turkish Islamic movements against the Soviet expansion.¹² As a third fact, the Kemalist cadres in the army, the judiciary, and the media were so strong that the cost of revolutionary methods would be too high, even fatal. The Naqshbandis had bitter experience of the Kemalist regime crushing them during the Naqshbandi uprisings of Shaykh Said in 1925 and Menemen in 1930 (Azak, 2007).

Nevertheless, when compared to his Naqshbandi shaykhs, Erbakan did not hesitate to threaten the Kemalists from time to time that the revolutionary method might be an option that they would adopt if they were over-suppressed. Indeed, far from being pragmatic, Erbakan's main motivation was quite hegemonic and top-down in his idealisation of an Islamic state. For him, an Islamic state was going to be established in Turkey eventually; the only question was whether it would be 'difficult or soft, bloody or bloodless'. Erbakan said in 1994, 'The Welfare Party will bring *Adil Düzen* (Just order) and *Adil Düzen* will be established, this is a must. The question is

¹⁰ See (Çakır, 1990: 193–198; Ozkan, 2019: 17–18; Vielhaber, 2012: 61).

¹¹ For example see Heper (1997)

¹² See Ozkan (2019)

whether the transition will be difficult, or soft, bloody, or bloodless. Turkey should decide. Sixty million of people shall determine this' (Ergin, 2014: 339–340). Indeed, Erbakan named this a 'screw of jihad'. For him, Islam cannot be without jihad and this means implementing '*emri bil ma'ruf, nehyi anil münker*', that is, enjoining the good to prepare the right social conditions, political atmosphere, and government, which is necessary for preventing evil (Erbakan, 2013: 34–35). His statements regarding the regulation of social and public realms in his idealisation of an Islamic regime, for instance, strengthened this idea. He said once in an interview that if they, as Muslims, won a majority in parliament, they would not allow women wearing knee-high socks to walk freely in Istanbul in six months' time (Büyükkara, 2016: 160–161). Because of his such outspoken opinions, Erbakan was accused by Coşan of drawing the wolves to the herd and endangering Islamist groups' existence.¹³

To sum up, in light of the above findings, it can be said that both Naqshbandism and its political foundation Milli Görüş see the state as something to be taken back from unbelievers.

Source of sovereignty, legislature, and the rule of law: the Nizam

I will briefly review *nizam*, in other words, what is understood by 'political regime' in the Naqshbandi discourse. This is the issue of legislature or source of sovereignty, *hakimiyya*. In defining an Islamic political regime and Islamic governmental authority, we see that *nizam* (order) is frequently used by the Naqshbandi masters in lieu of Shari'a. *Nizam*, as a political and umbrella concept, usually goes with jihad and a moral and judicial set of values in Naqshbandi discourse. For example, in the nineteenth century, Ahmed Ziyaeddin Gümüshanevi said that *nizam* can be maintained successfully if the state keeps waging jihad, since 'jihad [...] is the most productive of all *nizams*' (Gümüshânevi, 2017: 11). Similar to Gümüshanevi, in the republican period Kotku cited *nizam* as being an Islamic way of administration. Like his contemporary radical Islamist thinkers such as Qutb, Kotku developed *nizam* by comparing it with *beşeri sistemler* (man-made regimes), especially democratic and communist regimes. For Kotku and Coşan, as a *hayat nizamı* (life order) put in place by Allah, Islam is such an encompassing and holistic belief that it naturally includes the political administration of life, including the legislature (Kotku, 1982c: 1). Kotku suggests that a Muslim cannot adopt any other *beşeri nizam* because other regimes produce diseases and depressions by allowing individual freedoms and liberties (Kotku, 1982c: 8; 2010b: 417). As noted above, Kotku and Coşan openly claim that the sources of authority and sovereignty are God and Shari'a.

Likewise, other Naqshbandi shaykhs prominent in the formation of the ideology of Erbakan and Erdoğan, such as Ali Haydar (1870–1960) and his successor Mahmut (1929–2022) Efendis of İsmailağa community, affirm that the true source of authority is God alone. It is known that Haydar Efendi proclaimed that constitutionalism, parliamentarism (*Meşrutiyet*), and the Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Mebusan*), which were re-opened in 1908 in Turkey, were un-Islamic (Ahışavî, 2014). As evidence supporting his fatwa, Ali Haydar Efendi interpreted the Qur'anic verse

¹³ See for example M. E. Coşan (2017:144, 145).

5:44 in one of his *tafsir* (exegesis) lessons—usually held at Sultan Abdulhamid’s court during the month of Ramadan—which reads, ‘those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are indeed the unbelievers’ (Ahishavî, 2014).

Nizam, as a new political system, is frequently addressed by Erdoğan. For him, the main goal is to establish and implement it with all one’s strength (Milli Gazete, 2011). Similar to Kotku, for Erdoğan the true sources of sovereignty are the Qur’an and revelation. Erdoğan summarises the point, saying that ‘No [political] system can be a source of justice and truth other than Islam’ (Erdoğan, 2013: 71).

Erdoğan delivers similar statements regarding the legislature and *nizam*. Like his Naqshbandi masters and his role model in politics, Erdoğan, Erdoğan argues that the true source of sovereignty does not belong to the people but to God, and that the current Turkish democratic regime will be replaced when people want it to happen. In his 1994 speech, Erdoğan said, ‘When this people want it to happen, of course the secularism will be gone! You [the secularists] cannot prevent this. You are not capable of doing this in spite of the people! [...] A Muslim cannot be a secular. Why? Because the God is the owner of the sovereignty’ (Hürriyet, 2001). Erdoğan, having insisted that they, as Muslims, currently live in a society whose rules have been put in place by a structure outside Islam, says that ‘we are struggling to change those rules and bring about our own *nizam*’ (Milliyet, 2002). Erdoğan draws an analogy between man-made laws, democracy, and pre-Islamic Meccan polytheism (*jahiliyya*), and openly declares that they will demolish the democratic regime, using it as an instrument, through its own means, considering idolatry to be equivalent to elections:

Those who prepared that set of laws [regime] will also be the instruments of eradicating this order, God willing. Yes, they will be the instrument. Look, humankind prepares his own idol, erects it himself, worships it himself, and then destroys himself. This *qiyam* [standing up, or a politically Islamic insurgency] will eventually begin (Hürriyet, 2001).

Before he adopted prodemocratic discourse in the 2000s, he used to liken democracy to a train which ‘you get off once you reach your destination’ (The Economist, 2016). In 1996, he also noted in Arab Youth Association (MAYA), the US-based Muslim Brotherhood organisation, saying that, ‘Democracy can never be a goal for us (Muslims) [...] it is simply an instrument. If democracy itself is a tool used to implement the will of the people, then it shall yield what people demand. Thus, those who allege that they believe in democracy must also endure its consequences’ (Erdoğan 1996). Erdoğan spoke in a similar vein in 1997:

Our reference is Islam. They can never intimidate us. [...] Minarets are our bayonets, domes are our helmets and the mosques are our barracks. [...] If the skies and the earth open up, if storms blow, if volcanoes flow over us, we will never change our ways. My guide is Islam... (Hürriyet, 1998).

In order to urge his followers to accept that man has no inherent capacity to produce laws, Erdoğan continued by stating that secular regimes and man-made laws are not Islamic: ‘How our ancestors beautifully uttered, “do not lean your back against a tree so that it dries up; do not lean your back on a human, as he dies”—he is mortal,

and you will remain unguided. Lean your back against Allah so that you can survive’ (Ferik, 2015). He challenged a famous aphorism of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which says that ‘sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the people’. Erdoğan called this is a ‘big lie’ because, he noted, ‘God, who created the Muslims, Himself is the ultimate sovereign’ (Hürriyet, 2001).

Most of these statements were made in the 1990s, when Erdoğan was a staunch MG supporter under the leadership of Erbakan and before he had developed the pragmatist methods politically. Between the 2000s and 2010s, Erdoğan recanted many of his anti-secular and pro-Shari’a statements and seemed to support EU accession talks and made democratic overtures. He declared that he ‘is [now] a different person’ and supportive of Islam and democracy, and ‘took off the Milli Görüş shirt’ (The New York Times, 2002; NTV, 2003). He explained that he now finds immoral to instrumentalise anything simply to reach out the end claiming he fully internalised democratic principles (Çakır, 2012). Moreover, he declared on an Egyptian TV channel:

Laïcité absolutely does not mean atheism [...] In a laic system, people have freedom to be a believer or an unbeliever. I hope to see a laic Constitution in Egypt because secularism does not mean animosity against religion. Don’t be afraid of secularism! (Quoted in Yavuz 2012)

Additionally, the vitality of democracy as a government regime and values in a liberal sense was underlined in the AKP Electoral Declaration in 2002. It was noted in the declaration that free and fair elections were essential character of democracy, and democracy was a ‘regime of tolerance’. The constitutional rule of law, the diversity of belief, and culture were seen as richness for a country. The pamphlet was supportive of universal human rights, freedom of expression, transparency of the government, and civil and pluralist political participation and saw the political parties as an essential part of democracy. It was also strongly noted that the AKP was supporting EU candidacy and Copenhagen criteria (AKP, 2002).

However, after about a 10-year hiatus, when he began gradually to free himself from the yoke of the Kemalist military, judiciary, and media, he started to systematically return to his original position. Erdoğan defined this return as his ‘mastership period’ and ‘the spirit of 1994’, referring to his MG roots (Yeni Şafak 2021). As of 2016, there is strong evidence that Erdoğan desires to replace the secular codes in Turkey and regulate them in accordance with Shari’a, both discursively and practically. For example, on the question of universal human rights and Western codes, he has insisted that, ‘What George [the U.S.] or Hans [the EU] say does not concern us. What concerns us is what God says’ (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016). In a similar vein, for the first time in the Turkish Republic, a set of Shari’a rules was decreed in a government-issued Official Gazette on 14 December 2019. It cited several Islamic jurisprudence, hadiths, and Qur’anic injunctions, such as 16:90, 4:58, 33:72, 2:30, 6:165, 11:61, 5:2, 3:102, 65:2–3, 103:1–3, 3:104, 16:90, 2:195, 4:1, 13:33, 20:7, 99:7–8, 4:86, 4:6, and 3:199, under the title ‘Code of Ethics for Accountants and Auditors of Islamic Financial Institutions’ (Resmi Gazete, 2019; Cengiz, 2020). Similar to Kotku and Coşan, Erdoğan now sees the cause of the backwardness and

relegation of Islamic civilisation as being the result of Muslims' deviation from the true path of Islam and from Qur'anic injunctions, rather than the rule of law. As previously quoted above, we have plenty of his statements before the 2000s, which tarnished secularism, constitutionalism, and the people's rule comparing them with God's rule, Shari'a. We see that he resumed his Islamist discourse after he strengthened his power. In 2018, Erdoğan said:

Unfortunately, Muslims do not obey the rules laid down by the Qur'an. That's why the Islamic world has gone into decline. The disunity [in the Muslim world] withers us. Our God orders us to hold fast to the rope of Allah—all of you together [Q3:103]—to hold fast to God's Qur'an; not to disband, not to fall into *tafrika* [differentiation] (Sputnik, 2018c).

In 2019, in his addressing to the judicial members, Erdoğan also stated that 'the stronger we keep (our) tie to Shari'a, in other words the law, the more confidently we can look to our future' (Ahval, 2019). In another speech, Erdoğan has emphasised the need for univocality:

During the times when Muslims distanced themselves from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, they could not prevent the fire of *fitna* [strife] from burning them. The essential cause of the depressing scene of the current Islamic world is that we have deprived ourselves from the light of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (TRT 1, 2019).

For him, unless all Muslims strictly adhere to the Qur'anic and prophetic injunctions, 'the *fitna* fire' burning the Islamic world will not be put out (TRT 1, 2019).

Over the course of his political career, significantly as of 2013, Erdoğan has explained that he follows Qur'anic injunctions as his guide and has imitated the Prophet's way against the *musriks* (polytheists). Establishing a special link between his manner of operation with that of the Prophet Muhammad (Gursel, 2014; Uranli, 2015), he explains that he has pragmatically followed a Prophet-like politics, which, allegedly, the Prophet also followed in order to establish an Islamic state step by step without incurring the wrath of Meccan polytheists. For instance, concerning the question of whether he would implement any legal regulation on the issue of the headscarf in 2013, Erdoğan answered quite unequivocally that the right time and place would come: 'blessed births (*kutlu doğum*) do not happen without pain' (Star Daily, 2013). Likewise, on the issue of the Islamization of state institutions and education, we see that Erdoğan follows the same rationale:

The divine message could have come at once, but it did not; the divine message of the Qur'an came within twenty-two years' time. [This is] because humanity must have been prepared for this. Without this preparation period, its acceptance would have been difficult. So, we had to regulate its psychological and sociological dimension (Zaman Daily, 2013).

Also, emphasising that the Prophet occupied both sacerdotal and governmental offices, in 2019, Erdoğan said, 'The Qur'an is a key of a felicity for believers, and our Prophet, with his militancy and governorship, is our guide' (Diyanet, 2019).

The rich empirical data thus shows that the Naqshbandi and MG leadership's idealisation of Islamic rule and source of sovereignty is not the people, and that the legislature cannot be regulated by man-made laws. They believe that democratic systems and the universal rule of law are incompatible with Shari'a *nizam* and want to replace them with Islamic ones.

Political parties, opposition, and elections

In this section, I will scrutinise how Naqshbandi theological teachings were transferred into the political discourse of MG, using the examples of Erbakan and Erdoğan. In this section, I will also draw analogies between the political discourse of MG leadership and their Naqshbandi masters' use of apostasy, *al-wala' wal-bara'* and jihad in politics.

Kotku's language of apostasy, and the denunciation of other political parties and views as *munafiq* (hypocrites) or *ahbesü'l kafir* (the most wicked of apostates), as well as leftists, anarchists, communists, and Kemalists, can be seen in MG's leadership. Kotku formed the concepts of *hubbün fi'llah* (love for Allah) and *buğzun fi'llah* (hate for Allah), which are equal to Salafi doctrine *al-wala' wal-bara'*, and this was followed by Coşan (Kotku, 2010a: 170–171; Necatioğlu, 1987). For Kotku, political parties undermine the essential Islamic foundation, or *wahdat* (unity) of Islam, in that they introduce different ideas (Kotku, 1984: 25). Kotku declared other political parties, except the *Milli Görüş* parties, to be un-Islamic: 'A Muslim cannot definitely vote for a Godless [one], for an atheist, for a Mason or for a villain and cannot choose their side, even if he/she knows that he is going to die of starvation' (Kotku, 2010b: 263). During the elections, Kotku's quotes have been still used by the pro-AKP Naqshbandi disciples as a propaganda since 2014.¹⁴ Similarly, Coşan has insisted that they must unite against the other parties, comprising the godless, Masons, socialists, or 'parasites' (Necatioğlu, 1995b). Kotku's and Coşan's attitudes constitute the source of the exclusivist discourse in the political realm. This is demonstrated much better in the exclusionary political discourse of Erbakan, and later of Erdoğan as well. Like Kotku, for Erbakan there are no diverse political ideologies and programs in Islam. Erbakan has openly declared that there is no place for 'concepts and parties like rightist, leftist, or liberal in their belief and in their history' (Erbakan, 2013: 248). Additionally, in a 1971 speech, Erbakan himself explained that they had to form a political party—because the republican system had forced them to do so—in order to reach their goals, though they were essentially against partyism and any political system in which political parties compete (Anayasa Mahkemesi, 1972: 6). For that reason, Erbakan asserts, they 'have believers, while other parties have voters' (Çakır, 1994: 57). Erbakan clearly stated in one of his speeches given in 1997:

¹⁴ See (Erzincanlı, 2015; Yeniakit, 2018).

There are not twelve political parties in this country. There are only two: The Truth and the Falsehood. [...] The name [of the Truth's party] is Refah. Well, what about the others? Those other political parties are all falsehood and they are altogether one party (Erbakan v. Turkey, 2006).

Erbakan addressed the members of his party at another meeting in Sivas on 13 January 1991, declaring that those who vote for other parties are not true Muslims: 'If you do not serve the Welfare Party, your prayers will not be accepted [by God] because there is no other way to be a Muslim. [...] This party is an army of Jihad. Are you a Muslim? Then you should be a soldier in this' (Gumuscu & Sert 2009). Similar to Shaykh Gümüshanevi's definition of jihad as a political regime, Erbakan then warned, 'If you don't, then you belong to the potato religion. It is your religious duty to obey this call for jihad' (Sarfati, 2013: 157).

To reiterate, Erbakan proclaimed that the Ottoman state was demolished and then taken over by the CUP, which was led by Zionists and Masons, demanding *Meşrutiyet* following Abdulhamid (Erbakan, 2013: 114–115). For Erbakan, then, the political regime in modern Turkey is a Jewish project, and the root of the Turkish political parties dates back to this event. In the same vein, Erdoğan sees the democratic regime as an interim phase in the establishment of an Islamic order.

Reviving back his MG spirit of the 1990s, we see that Erdoğan continues his Islamist discourse on democracy since the 2010s. It can be inferred from his statements that In Erdoğan's idealised version of democracy, there are no checks and balances, no separation of powers, no opposition parties, or independent media. Conversely, he sees dissident media and opposition parties as hindrances to his version of democracy (Sputnik, 2018d). Similar to Coşan's parasite metaphor, by defining opposition political parties as a 'virus' and calling them 'disaster-mongers', in his 2020 speeches, Erdoğan openly accuses them of responsibility for 'each turmoil, chaos and coup', adding that 'God willing, our country will soon get rid of those viruses of media and opposition politics' (T24 2020). In another statement, he branded the opposition parties as insidious 'products of a project' and of being the 'sword of the infidel' under the guise of opposition even though they possessed Turkish republican identity cards (DuvaR, 2021).

Echoing the *takfiri* discourse of Kotku, Coşan, and Erbakan, Erdoğan also denounced other opposition political parties, the CHP and the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokrasi Partisi, HDP), as un-Islamic. For instance, in 2020, Erdoğan declared apostasy of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the head of the main opposition party, who was critical of his excessive praise of martyrdom in his speeches:

O Mr. Kemal! We have given these martyrs in Uhud, Khandaq [...] and will continue to give them from now on. But you don't know what martyrdom is and what it is to be a martyr. It is impossible for you to comprehend this. Because you are infidel, you are unbeliever (Yeni Şafak 2020).

In another speech, which he addressed to the religious officials from Diyanet, Erdoğan announced that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu had nothing to do with *adhan* (call to

prayer) or the Qur'an. He added that Kılıçdaroğlu deceived people by pretending to practise funeral prayers in the mosque yards (Sputnik, 2018e). In the same sense, he has repeatedly declared the Kurdish opposition party in the parliament and its followers to be unbelievers. In 2016, Erdoğan addressed his followers in the city of Diyarbakır regarding the HDP: 'They are atheists, they are Zoroastrians! They are useless! They have nothing do with our [Islamic] values' (Akyol, 2016). Similarly, in 2018, during his election campaign in Diyarbakır, Erdoğan referred to the HDP: 'Do they have any connection to our [Islamic] values? Do they have any connection whatsoever to Islam? They are atheists, they are irreligious' (Ahval, 2018).

Erdoğan continued his *excommunicative* discourse on the issues of the Alevis and his old ally Gülenists, simultaneously employing the *Diyanet* (Directorate of Religious Affairs) as a legitimising tool. For example, while he classified the Gülenists as *batıl* (falsehood), *imansız* (disbelievers), and *sapkın* (deviants) (AA, 2017; T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı, 2016), the head of the Diyanet also declared the Gülenists to be 'morally, *itikadi* (creedal) and *ameli* (practically) a deviant sect' (AA 2018). As for the Alevis, Erdoğan seemingly preferred to group them into two categories, as 'Alevis with Ali' and 'Alevis without Ali', implying that *Alevis without Ali* are not real Alevis but mostly atheists under the guise of Alevis (Tastekin, 2014).

The *al-wala' wa-lbara'* rhetoric of Kotku and Coşan thus continues in the discourse of Erdoğan as well. In his speech to the mosque attendants at the Çamlıca mosque, one of the symbols of the AKP government in Istanbul, following a Friday prayer, Erdoğan cited and interpreted Qur'anic verse 26:29:

God orders us to be violent against the unbelievers. Who is 'us' here? It is the Muhammedan community. Thus, He orders us to be tolerant among ourselves. We shall be compassionate among us and we shall be forceful against the disbelievers (Haber7, 2019).

The Naqshbandi-Gümüşhanevi's understanding of jihad has also been fully transferred into the MG's understanding of elections and political contests. The MG leadership mainly defines political parties and elections in a binary and jihadi mode as truth vs. falsehood, cross vs. crescent, or 'we' (Muslims) vs. 'they' (non-Muslims, *mushriqs*). According to Erdoğan, for example, the number of votes for the MG parties in general elections also denotes the number of Muslims in the country (Yilmaz, 2015: 66). Similar to Shaykh Kotku and Coşan, both Erdoğan and Erdoğan see that Muslims are in a state of war in Turkey. They regard elections not simply as the appointment of heads of state and legislators who serve for a fixed term in office, nor as administering the peaceful transfer of power, but rather as a matter of creed between believers and non-believers. For example, Erdoğan addressed his followers before the local elections held in 1994 and said that by voting for *Refah Partisi* in the elections, the *Adil Düzen* would be established and then Bosnia, Azerbaijan, and Quds would be freed (Erdoğan v. Turkey, 2006).

In the same sense, Erdoğan sees elections as a jihad between the Islamic world and others. Subsequent to the 2014 presidential elections, Erdoğan declared: 'My brothers, today not just Turkey, but Baghdad, Islamabad, Kabul, Sarajevo and Skopje

have also won. Today Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, today Ramallah, Nablus, Gaza, and Jerusalem have won' (Reynolds, 2015: 25). In another instance, before the referendum for the constitutional amendment which was to abolish the current parliamentary system and replace it with an executive presidency in favour of the AKP on 16 April 2017, Erdoğan claimed that the referendum was another crusade between Christians and Islam: 'My dear brothers, a battle has started between the cross and the crescent. There can be no other explanation' (Deutsche Welle, 2017). Additionally, Erdoğan went on to define the AKP's victory in the elections not as a political victory but as a 'decision that descended from the heavens'; its result had already been ordained by God Himself.¹⁵

So, we can conclude that Naqshbandi teachings have been reproduced by the MG leadership in its politics and that there is a tight discursive continuity between them. In their idealisation of Islamic *nizam*, there is no place for political parties, opposition, or elections.

Conclusion

In this study, I have scrutinised the relationship between the various religious values promoted by Naqshbandism and investigated how their ideas were transferred to the milieu of Milli Görüş' political ideology, focusing on two prominent Naqshbandi shaykhs from the republican period and two Milli Görüş political leaders. In doing this, I have reviewed several significant defining issues in Islam—*al-wala' wal-bara'*, apostasy, jihad, the source of political authority, and the idea of the state—by conducting a content analysis of the primary sources that the Naqshbandi masters Kotku and Coşan dealt with. In order to analyse to what extent the political ideologies of Erbakan and Erdoğan were influenced from Kotku and Coşan, I have conducted a political discourse analysis on their perception of political institutions such as the state, the source of sovereignty, the legislature, the rule of law, political parties, political opponents, and elections. The study has shown that radical Naqshbandi piety and values have been disseminated and transferred into Turkish politics via Milli Görüş' leadership and have widely infiltrated mainstream Islamist political culture and ideology over time, especially through the political discourses of Erbakan and Erdoğan. Contrary to the extant literature, the findings show that Islamist parties have not become more moderate or transformed their political approach despite their symbiotic relationship with the secularist republican regime but have always remained committed to their Islamist roots and ideals, such as the realisation of Shari'a and a caliphate, though there have been pragmatist 'transformations' from time to time in order to avoid the hegemony of the secularists. The existence of long-established Naqshbandi radical thoughts behind these leaders' views leaves not much space for the claims declaring they are simply populist actors.

¹⁵ See for example (Sabah, 2014).

Author contribution Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials Any datasets used in this research study can be accessed through libraries, bookstores, or the internet websites cited under the “Notes” title at the end of this study.

Declarations

Ethical approval I certify that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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