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# Salafism in Turkey: Between persistent radicalism and cultural resilience

**Abstract.** The purpose of the study is to introduce the question of intra-Sunni ideological rivalry in modern Turkey. An attempt has been taken to understand the contemporary, competing Islamic intellectual thoughts in Turkish society with special attention to Salafism – perceived as an important religious narrative. Thus, some fundamental questions addressed in the article are: How does Salafism operate in modern Turkey and what position has it gained within Turkish Islam? What challenges does it pose to the Islamic philosophical and mystical tradition? Which strands within Salafism are gaining prominence in Turkey? How do Salafists define Islam, and how should politics and society be constructed according to their theology? Although the study is based on the questions posed above, its aim is not only to find the correct answers, but also to assist in a better comprehension of some of the intricate issues of Salafism in Turkey and its implications for the process of cultural resilience, which is subjected to shifting dynamics.

**Keywords:** Turkish Islam, Salafism, Hanafi school, Sunni Islam, Sufi tradition, Maturidi kalām, cultural resilience

## Introductory remarks

Islam, like other religious traditions, does not constitute a coherent entity or a uniform structure. It is a cumulative and complex phenomenon influenced by many internal and external factors. In fact, the interpretation of the Quran

and Sunna (i.e., the traditions from the life of the Prophet Muhammad) always reflect the living conditions and the current needs of its followers, as well as contacts with others. Through different narrative strands, the ongoing interpretation may serve as inspiration for a wide array of convictions and practices. As Daryush Shayegan states, Islam is the sum of many different experiences of Muslims living in diverse conditions and places, influenced by established or imposed modernity and a reflexive or unconscious modernization process. Islam, like other traditional cultures, lives in limbo between losing what it was and endlessly waiting for what it will be (Shayegan, 2001, cit. in Meddeb, 2017, p. 204).

Following the conceptual language for analyzing Islam proposed by Ahmed Shahab in his book entitled *What is Islam. The Importance of Being Islamic*, we try to look at Islam as a "theoretical object that, by identifying the coherent dynamic of internal contradiction, enables us to comprehend the integrity and identity of the historical and human phenomenon at play" (Shahab, 2016, p. 109). Therefore, we interpret Islam as "a process of human discursive and social activity [...] characterized by a multiplicity of voices" (Shahab, 2016, p. 297). By acknowledging Muslim heterogeneity, we share the view that religion grows to accommodate new situations within a disperse and complex community.

Salafism as a global, modern phenomenon is increasingly recognized by Western audiences as the dominant voice representing the essence of Islam. However, reducing Islam solely to the substance of Salafism and its fundamentalist reading of religion negates the sheer diversity of societies, persons, ideas and practices identified and represented by both Islam and Salafism. Additionally, as Ronald Robertson argues, fundamentalism is a significant element of the dual process of particularization and universalization of religious and cultural ideas (Robertson, 1997, p. 17). It can be perceived as the response of individual religious communities to the changes in culture and social structure. Islamic fundamentalism is an attempt to deal with growing problems in the process of rapid social change by means of new interpretations of tradition and experimenting with practical answers that meet social expectations (Mrozek-Dumanowska, 2004, p. 12).

In the theology and history of Islam, we are essentially dealing with the cyclical nature of the religious purification and can enumerate a wide range of radical and essentialist movements. In fact, all Islamic movements are natural outgrowths of Muslim history (Fuller, 2003). Nonetheless, analyzing them requires an objective, nuanced approach without harmful generalizations, as none of these movements has the right to monopolize the understanding of the complex nature of Islam. What Louis Gardet described as "a complex unity

of *dar al Islam* – the 'house' or 'world' of Islam" needs "a clearer recognition of a unity of contrasts" (Gardet, 1977, p. 603).

The aim of this article is to contribute to a better understanding of intra-Sunni rivalry in Turkey with special attention to Salafism, which in our assessment displays specific dynamics determined by the internal, theological discourse embraced and promoted by Turkish religious authorities. It is assumed that the intra-Sunni crisis and Sunni theological discourse in Turkey to some extent take place in the frame of the country's own theological and cultural dynamism (Evkuran, 2019). Moreover, the Turkish theological discourse can be read through the prism of a cultural resilience process, as the outcomes of the clash between the global aspirations of Salafism and the accepted foundations and pillars of Turkish Islam and culture. Thus, it is important to consider whether Salafism will be able to supplant the historical understanding of Turkish Islam and win the battle around the Sunni paradigm in Turkey or whether it will foster cultural resilience and lay the ground for religious healing through the unique filters of national culture and identity.

For our analysis, the theory of cultural resilience has particular importance. Resilience is conceived here through the prism of the postmodern and multidisciplinary view, which defined resilience as a form of adaptation or the force that drives a person, people or system (including society and the cultural system) to effectively reorganize and grow through adversity and disruptions (Richardson, 2002; Clauss-Ehlers, 2015; DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016). It has been argued that "resilience is fundamentally about how best to maintain the functioning of an existing system in the face of an externally derived disturbance" (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013, p. 258). Moreover, the "disturbance is not an enemy to be avoided" but can also be absorbed as part of the cultural resilience process and sustainability (Thiele, 2016, p. 36).

Thus, the notion of cultural resilience refers to the ability to maintain and restore one's cultural traits, belief systems and values. Moreover, it implies both continuity and change. Some scholars have considered cultural resilience as more active and dynamic than passive or static and define it as a precursor to more obviously transformative action such as resistance (Fırınçı, 2018; DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016; Clauss-Ehlers, 2015). As noted earlier, we assume the concept of cultural resilience to be a helpful tool to understand how Turkish Muslims can, through their cultural and religious background, deal with and overcome the adversity of radical strains of Salafism and counter, reorganize and absorb their potential side effects. The perception of Salafism in Turkey, as well as its position in Sunnism, is still debated among Turkish

theologians and scholars. Thus, it is analytically meaningful to consider the conceptualization of Salafism and different approaches presented by Turkish scholars and look from a historical perspective on the role of Salafism in the semantic weakening or strengthening of Turkish religious discourse within the framework of cultural resilience. Finally, an attempt to evaluate the probable consequences of that process will be undertaken, as well as an assessment of the abilities of Salafism to influence the next generations of Turkish Muslims.

Notably, studies on fundamentalism and radical Islamic groups have traditionally emphasized vulnerability, political uncertainty or poor economic conditions as the main factors that open channels to radical Islamic currents (Bruce, 2000; Mrozek-Dumanowska, 2004; Voll, 1994). However, to fully comprehend the susceptibility factors, it is also important to ask: why is Salafism so compelling to Muslim minds, and what makes this particular ideological thinking/world view/religious doctrine attractive? The first step is to expose the religious doctrine without opposing and raising counter-arguments or engaging in narratives that might challenge and persuade against its adoption. Abdulaziz Sachedina has contended that Islamic fundamentalism is in its essences a religious idealism that promises its followers that, as soon as Islamic norms are fully implemented by Muslims, there will be a breakthrough in their lives: the social, political and moral problems that oppress them today will disappear. The claim is thus that enormous trust in religion can reduce almost to zero the border that separates the ideal from reality (Sachedina, 2001, p. 50).

Before we endeavor to deconstruct the phenomenon of Salafism and its implications for the process of cultural resilience in Turkey, let us start by leafing through the history book of Salafism: we shall explore the existing theoretical literature and analytical framework to reveal the poly-semanticity of Salafism and facilitate the decoding of different Turkish Salafist communities and the understanding of their creed. In the next part we discuss the fundamentals of Turkish Islam and the role of Diyanet Işleri Başkanlığı (Presidency/Directorate of Religious Affairs; hereinafter referred to as the *Diyanet*) a statecraft institution responsible for the official theological discourse. Finally, we assess the importance of the Turkish "civilizational approach" toward Islam by highlighting that culturally specific values and the "indigenous" context are important variables of cultural resilience in a clash with global Salafism.

## The literature overview and analytical framework of Salafism

Salafism is a broad concept and multidimensional theme. It is not easily defined and, to some extent, can be filled with almost any meaning.[1] When one reads the literature produced by Turkish scholars from theology faculties, the problematic aspects of the definition of the Salafism are immediately apparent. As Hasan Onat stated, Salafism is not a monolithic structure, but has evolved into a concept that anyone can easily define according to his or her own goals, expectations and attitude (Onat, 2014, pp. 548–549), and in that sense it is a contentious issue. The literature on the subject is abundant and has been evolving for almost two decades. The first ideal-typical taxonomy of Salafism was developed by political scientist Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006) but it has been further re-modelled by other scholars in the field (Bruckmayr & Hartung, 2020).

An interesting introduction that tackled "the ambiguity and fragmentation" of modern Salafism, presented as a global phenomenon, is the collection of essays edited by Roel Meijer, entitled *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (Meijer, 2009). The contributors to that book examine the regional manifestations of modern Salafism that has spread across five continents and whose scope is not easy to grasp. However, the Turkish outlook is not included in that analysis. Turkey has been rather absent from the vast and still growing literature on the global, transnational Salafism, and the Turkish case has been underrepresented when compared to the other Middle Eastern countries.

The challenge to fill that gap was taken up by Bekir Altun (2015) in his master's thesis, which was recently updated and published also as a book (Altun, 2022) and that studies the historical and current dimensions of the formation of Wahhabism and Wahhabi activities in Turkey.[2] Another scholar who looks at Turkish Salafism is Andrew Hammond (2017), whose article analyzed Salafi ideas in Turkey since the 1980s. As Hammond pointed out, Turkish scholars tend to focus on Salafism's theoretical conceptual framework

[1] For a discussion on the history of the concept itself and how to categorize different Salafi strands: Lauzière, 2010, pp. 369–389.

[2] His work presents Salafism in its Wahhabi form that originated from Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism is a fundamentalist movement within Sunni orthodoxy, led by the 18th-century theologian Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who initially operated on the Arabian Peninsula (associated with the school of Ahmad ibn Hanbali [d. 241/855] and referring to the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya [d. 728/1328]). It is widely acknowledged that Wahhabism as an ideology within Sunni Islam came to the fore as part of the power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which supports Shi'ism (Altun, 2015; 2022).

placed in a historical context and to omit the Turkish Salafism experience *per se* (Hammond, 2017). Recently, some interpretive and explanatory research on the issue of Turkish Salafism has appeared in Turkey, including from outside of theology faculties. A useful example that partly complements the shortcoming of previous studies is the dissertation of Yusuf Tapan (2019) that explored the activities of the Turkish Salafis by employing social network analysis (of Twitter data).

Generally, among Turkish researchers we can distinguish studies devoted to Salafism, but mainly in the field of *kalām* (Islamic scholastic theology), the history of Islam and Islamic sects, and *tafsir* studies (Quranic commentaries) published or approved by Islamic theology departments (Kavas, 2014; Koca, 2016; Kutlu, 2016; İşcan, 2017; Evkuran, 2019). Moreover, perhaps due to security concerns and the challenges of fieldwork, there are few studies devoted to sociology and reports from the domain of international relations that can be seen through the prism of security studies. They are mainly related to radicalization or fundamentalism (Taşdemir, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2020) and focus on the phenomenon of militant Salafism in Turkey, especially ISIS (Yalçınkaya, 2017; Saymaz, 2017).

In Turkish media there is a misguided perception of Salafism, and the violent groups attract more public attention. There, Salafism is usually identified with militant *jihad*,[3] which not only distorts its image, but also fuels hostility between various religious communities and groups. However, it is worth mentioning the book *IŞİD Ağları* [Islamic State Networks in Turkey] written by Doğu Eroğlu, an investigative reporter, who analyzes in detail the Salafist jihadism scene in Turkey between 2013 and 2017 (Eroğlu, 2018). Despite its non-scientific character, it is a valuable publication due to the fact that the author gained access to Salafi interlocutors and interviewed people within ISIS. An important conclusion of Eroğlu's research is that the dissolution of the Islamic State formations in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) did not suppress the Salafist communities in Turkey.

In Turkish academia, there are differing and sometimes contradictory approaches to the issue of Salafism, with discrepancies ranging from definitions of the phenomenon to answers to basic questions – such as what Salafism is, how it should be understood (whether as a sect or a mindset/mentality) and who its proponents are (Demirbilek & Atalay, 2018), whether there are very large masses of Salafists in Turkey, and what the real percentage of radical groups that refer to Salafi ideology is. Even though we have considered these

[3] The term militant *jihad* is used in reference to terrorist, militant groups who claim they are carrying out a "jihad" and acting in the name of Islam by attacking both civilian and military targets.

groups marginal, we should not underestimate their inner and palpable radical articulation, which remains significant from the perspective of the cultural resilience theory. According to Turkish scholars, Salafism reveals tensions within sectarian rivalries in terms of a crisis in the Sunni paradigm, but it is also broadly an expression of the cultural conflict and confrontation between "mentalities" – different attitudes, values and beliefs. Salafism is thus anticulturalist in its expression and stance (Kutlu, 2016; Evkuran, 2019).

Ferhat Koca perceived Salafism as a traditionalist, conservative thought and mentality that accepts the first three generations of Muslims called *al-salaf al salih* (pious predecessors) as a model for understanding, interpreting and living Islam; in this view, the model should be part of religion rather than of history and thus needs to be protected and preserved (Koca, 2016, p. 12). The acknowledged principal of Salafism is to revive a pure form of Islam and attach particular importance to a literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunna by cleansing (*tasfiya*) Islamic tradition from false hadiths about Prophet Muhammad and eradicating religious innovations (*bidʿa*) that could lead to heresy. Salafis reject *taqlid*, the "blind" following of the four canonical schools of law (*madhhab*) and aim to strictly adhere to the sharia and emulate practices of the *madhhab al-salaf* (the doctrine/school of the forefathers). There is general assumption that modern-day Salafis' core belief is *tawhid* (the Oneness of God, who alone should be worshipped) and *al-walaʾ wa-l-baraʾ* (loyalty to God, Islam and other Muslims) and the disavowal of unbelief and persons who would harm Islam (Meijer, 2009, pp. 4–5; Wagemakers, 2016b).

In general, it can be affirmed that, like the whole Salafism movement, Turkish Salafism embodies mixed and contradictory trends and is not homogeneous. Although all communities within the movement are based on a similar set of concepts taken from earlier Muslim doctrines and references to the legacy of the *salaf* ancestors, they also differ in their views on details, explanations and interpretations. For this reason, Salafists in Turkey, as elsewhere, constitute groups that are diverse. This diversity extends particularly to their understandings of religious knowledge, the Islamic ideals that they follow in their own life and promote in their mission to proselytize in accordance with the *dawah* concept.[4] Salafists focus on religious education with the aim to create and promote a purified Muslim society. Some of them follow

[4] In general, the classical concept of *Da'wah* or *da'wa* in theological terms means a "call" or "invitation" to follow the right path to salvation that God, through messengers and prophets, addresses to mankind; and in modern applications the form *daw'wa* means Islamic missionary activism that uses a textual approach (Quran and Sunnah) that makes people interested in returning to study religion and inviting them to accept Islam as their own religion (Nasir, 2000, p. 491; Kuiper, 2021).

the legacy of prominent Salafist scholar Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999), whose motto was "Build an Islamic state in your hearts, and it shall be built for you on your land" (Olidort, 2015, p. 18). Thus, they emphasize the importance of religious involvement in jihad al-nafs (jihad of the heart), while radical Salafis conduct religious training to indoctrinate young Muslims and agitate them to engage in militant jihad. Therefore, these differences in terms of armed resistance and political engagement should be taken into consideration when we aim to make clear-cut doctrinal camps of Salafists in Turkey and more general divisions within Salafism.

The relationship between Turkish Salafi *cemaatler* (communities) are not always amicable: they range along a spectrum between tolerance and intolerance. There is no theological consensus and agreement between some groups even if they respect and refer to the common authority of Muslim scholars and reformers (affiliated mainly with the Muslim Brotherhood [*Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*] or with the Jamaat-e-Islami movement) because their teachings are interpreted and read in different ways. Some groups are self-proclaimed Salafis and are known for their ideological rigidity; other followers are silent and even try to hide their Salafism. The question is, who can be considered a faithful or self-proclaimed Salafi, particularly along the blurry lines of piety, moral purity, authenticity and ritual correctness? There are communities/groups that to some extent can be perceived as a hybrid product that have blended the doctrinaire Salafism and the ideology of political Islam. There are also those who make effective propaganda of Muslims' resistance against *kâfirler* (infidels, unbelievers) and despise the local Turkish culture and heterodoxy of *halk İslamı* (folk Islam) for failing to maintain the purity of the faith.

## The ubiquity of Salafism: Multidimensional nature, difficulties and pitfalls

The Diyanet recognized the Salafiyya as one of the branches of Sunni Islam. In "İlmihal: İman ve İbadetler" [Catechism/Summary of Doctrine: faith and worship] published by Diyanet in 1998, it is stated that "... ahl-i Sunna [Sunni Islam] can be separated into three parts as Salafiyya, Maturidiyya and Ash'ariyya [...] the Salafiyya are called 'Ahl as-sunnat-i hâssa' and Maturidiyya and Ash'ariyya are called 'Ahl as-sunnat-i âmme'." The group named "Ahl as-sunnat-i hâssa" directly follows the path implemented by the Prophet and his Companions in faith. Of course, madhab imams, great mujtahids and hadith scholars come from Salafiyya. The differences between these branches have

not led to a breach in the framework that constitutes the basic principles of the ahl-i Sunna. Although there is an agreement on issues such as the essence of Allah, his attributes, the creation of the world, destiny, prophecy, miracles, intercession, resurrection and the afterlife, the Salafiyya, Maturidiyya and Ash'ariyya have different views on details, explanations and interpretations (Karaman, Bardakoğlu & Apaydın, 1998, pp. 23, 25).

For researchers, discovering the identities of Salafi groups in quite dynamic social networks had another layer of complexity. As it has been rightly pointed out, "to be a Salafi is no longer only a creedal *madhhab* that one adheres to, but a '*mashrab*': a way of carrying oneself, a general outlook on religion and life" (Coppens, 2021, p. 173). Therefore, the general view that those who are Hanbali in *fiqh* are Salafi in creed is no longer so axiomatic. In the same tenor, Sönmez Kutlu draws attention to the multidimensional nature of today's Salafism, which he defined as a modern religious-political ideology with a variable structure, and explains that "Salafism is a phenomenon that transcends Hanbalism and Wahhabism. Not every Hanbali is Salafi. Additionally, there are Salafis who are Shafi'i, Maliki, Ashari, even Hanafi" (Kutlu, 2016, p. 139). In this approach we would presume that Salafism is theologically ubiquitous and hardly possible to decode, as it could be praised unwittingly.

Admittedly, Salafism has a complicated structure that can combine affiliation with different sects, without clear contours and dividing lines. It can merge and by the same token exceed the boundaries of particular *madhhabs*. Therefore, identifying these characteristics is not straightforward, since all schools constantly interact and influence each other. These nebulous boundaries of Salafism make it polysemantic and complicate the study, but at the same time go beyond the scope of reductionist understanding of the scientific Salafi heritage and Salafi Islam alongside its historical significance. Moreover, in this context the traditional and commonly repeated assumption that Salafism can been situated on the theological axis in opposition to mysticism (i.e., Sufism) and scholastic theology/*kalām* (i.e., referring to the logical and rational explanation in the teachings of Islam) also needs to be revised and balanced. In "İlmihal: İman ve İbadetler," it is stated that the Salafiyya strongly criticized theologians and philosophers who interpreted the allegorical (*mutashabih*) verses and hadiths in the light of reason, and the Sufis who interpreted them in the light of discovery and inspiration are accused of being *bid'atists* and apostates (Karaman, Bardakoğlu & Apaydın, 1998, pp. 24–25).

Pointing to the theological roots/background of some Turkish Salafists, we should take into account their orthodox Sufi background too and acknowledge that, besides the fierce opponents of Sufism, there are also those who prefer to be called "Sufi-Salafi" and reveal a mutual interdependence or

diffusion.[5] Is Salafism disconnected from the native and national codes of other Islamic movements in Turkey or can it be perceived as an interesting example of the articulation and performance of rather distinct, hybrid religious identities and of identity constructed through transgression (e.g., inherited, individually shaped and socially realized)? To answer that, more detailed analysis is needed and there is still lack of extensive empirical research data on this issue in Turkey. However, we can assume that, like Turkish Islamism, Salafism takes different forms in a pluralistic universe where new social forces such as refugees, immigrants, multicultural spaces and ethnic representation campaigns have been strengthened by the increase in cross-societal permeability (Yıldırım, 2012, p. 41). As proved by Terje Østebø in his comprehensive fieldwork in Bale, Ethiopia, the study of Salafism needs to consider the interactions between the local and trans-local discourse and the religious-cultural heritage of the particular locality. As he claimed, "the tenets of the salafiyya world view are almost instantly moulded deeply into the local socio-religious fabric and unfold their own dynamics" (Østebø, 2012, p. 20). A better understanding of the local determinants of cultural resilience to Salafism requires a broader look at the foundations of Turkish Islam and its history and that those features of Turkish Islam that would make Muslims immune to violent ideologies be highlighted.

## Decoding Turkish Salafism communities

Thierry Zarcone (2003) claims that "Islam in Turkey has always been highly pluralistic and still maintains the heritage of tensions between large cities and the rural countryside, between Istanbul and Anatolia, between Turkish identity and the Arabic Koran" (Zarcone, 2003, cit. in Introvigne, 2005, p. 14). The presence and activity of Salafists is socially visible in 27 Turkish cities. These urban structures/spaces also exemplify different narratives and organizational forms, especially when it comes to Islamic State institutions and networks in Turkey (Eroğlu, 2018). Istanbul, Ankara, Adıyaman, Bursa, Gaziantep, Adana, Kocaeli and Konya are cities with high rates of ISIS recruiters (International Crisis Group, 2020, p. 6). Turkish Salafist groups are active through the whole gamut of associations, foundation/charity organizations, publishing houses (organizing conferences and using printed and visual publications and new media) that promote and encourage particular understandings of Salafi Islam.[6]

[5] For an interesting study on the complex issue of Salafi–Sufi relations and revival movement combining Salafi principles and Sufi mysticism with modern rational thought: Weismann, 2000.

[6] On the Salafi bookstores and associations in Turkey: Altun, 2015.

There are more than 100 organizations legally registered (as associations and foundations) that can be broadly categorized as Salafi (International Crisis Group, 2020, p. 8). However, there are also Salafi communities that have clandestine structures and gather around Salafi *gezici vaizler* (travelling preachers) or operate within unofficial *sohbet* (conversation) circles and Quran schools, madrasahs or teahouses where they gather for religious talks, lectures and sermons or as a part of charitable work for the most needy and misguided Muslims. They are relatively invisible to outsiders.

The key for Turkish Salafi communities is to raise a pious and "Salafi-aware" young generation who will know sharia laws and become guardians of the proper, "corrective" understanding of faith and Sunni Islam. They do this by promoting the literal understanding and application of the Quran and Sunnah in present society. Thus, they conduct special education dedicated to children and the young, whom they usually do not send to public schools but educate within their own structures. Moreover, some Salafists do not attend Diyanet-affiliated mosques, as they pray in their own circles, as some of the groups perceived state imams' sermons as *kâfir*.

For analytical purposes, but being aware of the limitations of this conventional typology, the tripartite scheme can be followed, and three currents within the Salafi movement can be distinguished, namely: quietists, activists and jihadist. This division reflects the apolitical, political and militant character of particular communities. Although there are various categories related to groups labelled as Salafists in Turkey, a more specific review of subgroups and sublabels can be made.[7] We present only selected preachers and personalities of Turkish Salafism and characterize their outlook according to the accepted classification by describing their main ideas without going deeply into the conceptual nuances of Salafi *'aqida* (creed).

Purist Salafists (or, using the category of Wiktorowicz's dominant taxonomy, quietist Salafists) constitute a group concentrating on teaching Islam in its purest form and transmitting the "authentic" core of its meaning and proper way of understanding by reaffirming its basic principles. Thus, what quietists are really concerned with is self-purification and education focused on learning about self-improvement and perfecting their faith. They believe that the moral preparation of society is far more important than involvement in politics and do not hide their distrust of state institutions. However, before the June 24, 2018 election, 14 Salafi associations announced their support for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP (The Justice and Development Party). As a matter of fact, they perceived this

[7] Attempts to classify Salafist in Turkey have been made by Altun, 2022; Güler, 2017.

choice as politically beneficial. The statement said that: "as Sunnis in the Salafi *menhaj/menhec* (path), we inform the public that we support the president and his present government with the opinion that they are better than their peers on the basis of what they have done so far." The signatories of the letter declared that Erdoğan should be re-elected "in order not to again live through the enmity to our religion, treachery to our country, and tyranny against our people. In order not to be like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Egypt. In order not to squander our victories over the past 16 years." "Hoping for a stronger Turkey in its region, in the Islamic world and in the world [...] for a better peaceful future."[8] Therefore we can assume that in Turkish quietists' understanding of politics, there is room for pragmatic compromise and ambiguous respect for powers.

Quietist Salafism in Turkey is associated by some with Wahhabism and has grown since the 1990s (Altun, 2015; 2022, Hammond, 2017). For those who continue the apolitical line of Salafism, prominent Wahhabi Salafi scholars such as the former Saudi Arabia mufti ʿAbd al-Aziz ibn Baz (d. 1999), Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999),[9] Muhammad ibn Salih al-Fawzan (b. 1935), and Muhammad ibn Salih al-ʿUthaymin (d. 2001) played relatively important roles and gained recognition in Turkish Salafis circles via an active publishing movement that started in Istanbul in the beginning of the 1990s. The first and most known Turkish representatives of quietists are Mehmet Balcıoğlu (known as Ebu Said el-Yarbuzi [1950–2021]) and Abdullah Yolcu (known by his Arabic full name as Abd Allah ibn ʿAbd al-Hami al-Athari, but also published under the name of Abdulhamid el-Eseri). Both of them received their religious education from Saudi institutions. Because Yolcu's worldview is already well known and his biography has been discussed in detail (Hammond 2017, pp. 423–426; Altun, 2015), we will focus here on the characteristics of Balcıoğlu as a well-settled representative of the Turkish quietist current.

Balcıoğlu was born in the village of Yarpuz, where he attended primary school before moving to Istanbul. A few years later he immigrated to Belgium. When he was 19 years old he made his first "scientific" journey from Belgium to North Africa with Tablighi Jamaat (a transnational, revivalist Deobandi missionary movement within Sunni, primarily Hanafi, that originated from the northern Indian town of Deoband). Moreover, he also traveled to India,

[8] Beyannâme (The Statement) was published by Yarpuz İslami İlimler Araştırma Merkezi (Yarpuz Islamic Sciences Research Center) via its Facebook account on 12 June 2018. Among the signatories were Salafists associations from Istanbul, Bursa, Inegöl, Izmir, Anakra, Konya, Adana, Maraş, Gaziantep, Adana, Antalya, Nevşehir and Malatya (Birgün Gazetesi, 2018; Haksöz Haber, 2018).

[9] For an interesting perspective on Nasir al-Din al-Albani legacies: Lacroix, 2009.

Pakistan and Afghanistan. His became acquainted with the Salafi *'aqida* (creed) when he was 24 years old during four years of systematic and rigorous training between 1974 and '78 in Saudi Arabia. There, he was influenced by well-known sheikhs, like Taqī al-Dīn Al-Hilālī (1894–1987), while participating in lessons and attending lectures in Mecca, Medina, Jeddah, Riyadh and other cities. After the period of uninterrupted education, he returned to Belgium and built a mosque (Guraba Masjid) and started his life devoted to *dawah*. He traveled to almost all European countries for his teaching work and did not break his ties with African and Arab countries. In 1990 he decided to return to his homeland and back to Istanbul where he spread the Salafist invitation there. In 1995 he built a house in his home village, Yarpuz, and started to engage with students and publishing house activity. The teacher and Salafi authority that Balcıoğlu benefited most from was Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Wadi (d. 1999), a Yemeni Islamic scholar and proponent of quietist Salafism (Elmas, 2015).[10] Within his various books we can enumerate "Kitap ve Sünnete göre namaz" [Prayer according to Book and Sunna]. He claimed that Salafism is about following the Companions and their followers in good faith – that is, imitating them in terms of morality, treatment, discipline and self-purification. Observance of the Quran and the Sunnah is essential. In his teachings he placed great emphasis on children's education, aiming to raise a "true" generation of Muslims, and proper understanding of the principles of Salafi *aqida* and its important fundamental elements like: *fitrat* (the primordial nature of things and beings, the order created by God), *iman* (faith) and *tawhid*. He focused on issues such as obedience to Allah and his messenger, avoiding *taqlid* (imitation) and bigotry, and directed people to the pure Salafi *menhac/menhec* (way, methodology), a true exemplification of piety, and the essence of religion and *fahm* (understanding) of the companions.

Balcıoğlu's lectures and articles are available on YouTube and the İlme Davet Derenği website. This Salafi association was established in Gaziosmanpasa, Istanbul, and its activity focuses mainly on children's education in the Quran and offers hadith lessons dedicated to women. Moreover, Balcıoğlu was the founder of Yarpuz İslami İlimler Araştırma Merkezi (Yarpuz Islamic Sciences Research Center). He led the signatory groups of 14 Salafi associations that declared support for president Erdoğan and the ruling AKP. These associations

[10] Cihan Elmas is also a member of *Yarpuz İslami İlimler Araştırma Merkezi* and a representative of the younger generation of Salafi preachers. His sermons attract attention and are available via a YouTube channel. He discussed a vast range of topics from social, doctrinal and political spheres, i.e. coronavirus, polemic with Sufism, discuss Ibn Arabi, Said Nursi legacy and *tavhid* belief.

operate openly, as communal organizations.[11] However, Balcıoğlu stated that Salafists should stay away from politics in Turkey. It can be assumed that, in his approach to rejection of party politics (*hizbiyya*) and call to respect of the political ruler (*wali al-amr*), he was approximating the ideas and views of his Yemeni teacher Muqbil al-Wadi (Meijer, 2009, pp. 431–432) and his rather non-confrontational strategy. Additionally, Balcıoğlu claimed that the state should remain neutral towards religious groups and that Diyanet should not use its influence to interfere in them. However, like other quietists, Balcıoğlu argued that whenever someone resorts to violence, the state should intervene. He openly criticized radical strains of Salafism and considered them as misleading, accusing them of being responsible for severely distorting Salafism's true image through religious ignorance, instrumentalization and unhealthy fanaticism (Erdem, 2020).

Within the Turkish quietist current, we should also mention "academic Salafism" represented by Salafi-inclined scholars like Mustafa Dönmez (b. 1962) or Necmi Sarı (b. 1970). They both studied at Islamic University of Madinah and specialized in Hadith studies and religious education (Güler, 2017). In 2002, Sarı was a cofounder of Ümmülkura Publishing House in Istanbul (Altun, 2022, p. 125), with its slogan "in the light of knowledge" (*bilginin ışığında*). He is the author of numerous books published there.[12] Moreover, there are also those who are called Zahiri Salafists due to their serious inclination towards Zahirism[13] in its revived form directly derived from the Ahl al-Hadith movement. The movement is known for its interpretation of Islam with a prominent role for understanding the hadiths that guide Muslims on every conceivable issue. They accept that the authenticity of the hadiths is confirmed by an unbroken chain of narrators (A heard from B heard from C heard from Muhammad). The Ahl al-Hadith (also known as narrationists) formed in opposition to the Ahl al-Ra'y (opinionists, rationalists). The Ahl al-Hadith

[11] Yarpuz İslami İlimler Araştırma Merkezi, Gençlik, Eğitim ve Ahlak Derneği, İlme Davet Derneği, İkim ve Hikmet Derneği, Yarım Hurma Derneği, İlim ve İhya Derneği, Uludağ Araştırma Derneği, Asri Saadet Derneği, Davet Eğitim Araştırma ve Yardımlaşma Derneği, Ehli Hadis Derneği, Darul Hadis Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği, İkra İlim Kültür ve Araştırma Derneği, Huzur Vadisi, Basiret Der.

[12] *Ümmülkura* is one of the names of Mecca mentioned in the Qur'an (https://www.ummulkura.com.tr).

[13] Zahirism refers to the doctrine of the Zahiri *madhhab* founded by Daawud ibn ʿAli al-Iṣbahani (d. 270/884). Zahiri followed the textualist approach of the Quran and hadith, rejected practices in law (*fiqh*) such as analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) and pure reason (*ra'y*) as sources of jurisprudence, and disapproved consensus (*ijmā'*). The school rejected anthropomorphism (*tashbih*), attributing to God only those elements and qualities set forth clearly in the Quran. The Ẓāhirī school was criticized by orthodox theologians. On the origin and development of the Ẓāhirī tradition: Osman, 2014; Öztürk, 2019.

movement was led by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and is generally interpreted by some Turkish scholars (for example: Kutlu and İşcan) as the movement that laid down the historical and theological background of the Salafi community and is depicted as a pioneer of Salafism. Zahiri Salafi maintained the view that faithful Muslims should live in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet and of the Companions without seeking to establish a systematic law based on reasoning. Ebu Muaz Seyfullah el-Çubukabadi (known also as Seyfullah Erdoğmüş) can be assigned under the branch of "Zahiri Salafism." El-Çubukabadi was born in 1976, and he can be considered as the first "indigenous" Turkish Salafist. He has a Sufi background and a radical aversion to modernity, and he perceived social media as a forbidden tool in the light of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence). In his work entitled *Kuran ve Sünnet Işığında Sahih Ilmihal* [Authentic Catechism in the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah] published in 2013, he stresses the word of *sahih* (authenticity) to turn back the pure way of understanding Islam. He uses rather divisive, political exclusionary language that leaves no room for debate (Güler, 2017).

Another group constitutes the Salafists that support political parties with religious motives and that could be located in the Salafi *haraki* (activist) current, which can be also labeled as "politicos." Members of that branch advocate that moral transformation and the protection of Islam is impossible without active participation in politics. Thus, with the aim of achieving their goals and building a more Islamic society and state, they are supporters of political involvement, but they do not accept any acts of violence. Thus, in general assumptions, they are similar to and have all the hallmarks of representatives of Turkish hardline Islamists.

Additionally, there are Salafists who declare that they are from the Shafi or Hanbali sect, or those who have neo-Khariji inclinations. Such inclinations are considered as modern manifestation of Kharijites and are associated with extremism due to disagreements on political issues, and most precisely with the most radical sub-sect of Khārijism known as Azāriqa.[14] They are defined in this way because they go to extremes in their *takfirism* stand and fight against Islamist structures and Muslim masses, but not non-Muslims (Gömbeyaz, 2016). Within the jihadi current, we can enumerate figures like Mehmet Emin Akin, Abdullah Kucuk, Murat Gezenler and Halis Bayancuk (Ebu Hanzala), the leader of the Tevhid Salafist Community and a writer on the Tevhid

[14] Kharijites are a sect whose name *al-hawariğ* means "those who came out"; they separated from supporters of Ali during the First Fitna (656–661). They were an extreme faction intolerant of the other branches of Islam and attached to the literal meaning of the Quran. However, they gave rise to non-conflicting and less fanatic sects such as Ibadiyya, which presents in Oman and partly in North Africa (Gömbeyaz, 2016, pp. 53–66).

Gündemi website. There are various groups connected with militant networks abroad, as well as domestic associations involved with violent extremism. They reject democracy, do not recognize the Turkish state as a legitimate entity, and endorse an anti-imperialist discourse. Their activities are linked with Jihadi fighters and Islamic State. Most of the militant Salafi networks have entered the Turkish religious public/niche since 11 September 2001 and used the legacy of radical Islamist movements (such as Turkish Hizbullah, IBDA-C [İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncılar Cephesi – Eng., Islamic Great Eastern Raiders Front], Kaplancılar, Taksiyeciler) by operating within their networks. They are confined to comparatively small circles and are under the scrutiny of Turkish intelligence services (Taşdemir, 2016). We observe a stagnation of the militant current until the outbreak of conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

Admittedly, the militant approach rejects ideas that differ from its own, including the theologically charged legal practice of "declaring someone an unbeliever" (*takfir*) and attributing Muslims to *shirk*[15] as being in opposition to core belief in the unitary God (*tawhid*). Therefore, "Jihadi Salafism" (known also as *Takfiri*/radical) has been criticized for accepting violence as a method and has led to the questioning of the nature of Salafism's lines and accusations that it defiles the reputation of Islam.[16] The term *takfiri* is derived from *takfir*, and it is a pejorative term for radical Salafis that emphasizes the radicals' *takfir* (i.e., pronouncement of apostasy) upon Muslims whom they accuse of acts that contradict Islam. This pronouncement is made on the grounds that being a member of the Salafi community is a kind of spiritual contract that the *takfiri* have broken. Withdrawal is seen as a betrayal of religious values and will be decried.

*Takfiri* Salafi groups produce violence and come into conflict with the state and society in various aspects. They undermine and question the functioning and legitimacy of the Turkish state. They do not vote, do not pay taxes and avoid national military service. According to quietist Salafists, *Takfirism* cannot be considered Salafism by any means because it is responsible for creating discord and bloodshed among *ummah*. They distort and abuse the true concept of Salafism's *menhac* (perceived as a way of life in the sense of religion). Moreover, *takfirism* contradicts the essence of salafi *dawah*. On the other hand, jihadists perceive the lack of armed involvement from the other Salafists as sheer cowardice. The Salafi groups not only disagree in terms of their stance of engagement in *jihad* militancy but differ also in the aims and

[15] *Shirk* is a term which signifies the act of "associating" with God, in other words, accepting the presence at His side of other divinities; it may be translated either literally, by *associationism* or, in more explicit fashion, by *polytheism* (Gimaret, 2012).

[16] For more on the importance of *takfir* in the militant Salafist thought: Nędza, 2020.

scope of their assigned religious mission. In order to attract the masses within the jihadi current, social media play the biggest role in spreading Salafi ideas. In Turkey, several internet sites (*Takva Haber*, *Mustaqim Haber* and *Enfal Medya*) considered illegal tools of online jihadism have been shut down or blocked, but new ones have quickly replaced them (as was the case of Tevhid Gündemi mentioned earlier) and continue to offer materials teaching their understanding of Islam based on *takfiri* ideology.

## The lineaments of Turkish Islam and Salafis approach to Sufis

Obviously, it is not possible to encapsulate the theological and genealogical trajectory of Turkish Islam in a few paragraphs. Nonetheless, even a cursory view of its fundamentals will facilitate an understanding of its nature and the theological orientation embraced and promoted by Turkish scholars and theologians. Turks have made an important contribution to the formation of what is known today as the civilization of Islam. The adopted form of religiosity that is manifested in social religious life in Turkey reflects their cultural and historical lineament. According to Sönmez Kutlu, the Turkish concept of Islam is expressed as Hanafism in *fiqh*, Maturidism (theological school of its eponym, Abu Mansur Maturidi (d. 944) in *inanç* (faith) and Yesevism (derived from Sufi poet Ahmed Yesevi (d. 1166) who greatly influenced the religious-mystical life of the Central Asian Turks) in the mystical and moral dimension, *tasavuuf* (Sufism). Viewed from this perspective, these three dimensions constituted the core of understanding Islam manifested in the language of Turkish society (Kutlu, 2011).

Turkish Islam has gone through various stages throughout history. However, both the Ottoman Empire and then Turkish Republic authorities favored the liberal in terms of the law and morals of the Hanafi legal school. The hanafiyya is considered to be one of the most legally coherent *madhhabs*, which thanks to *ra'a* (opinion), *qiyas* (analogy) and *iğma* (the principle of agreement) influenced its doctrinal coherence and quite clearly defined the path of Sunnism. The acceptance of Hanafism by Turks is closely related to the support given to the Ahl-i Rey school, which attaches importance to reason. This is evidenced by the fact that only Abu Hanifa (d. 767), the founding father of the Hanafi *madhhab*, and his disciples served as *kadı* in Turkish cities. Moreover, the Turkish interest in Abu Hanifa was due not only to the importance he placed on reason, but also to his not being an Arab, opposing the Umayyad administration and being influenced by an interpretation of religion that prioritized

tolerance (Kutlu, 2011, pp. 60–61). Although the universal principles of Islam were influential in establishing Islam among the Turks, it was, according to Kutlu, mainly Abu Hanifa's liberal and tolerant understanding of Islam that played a pivotal role in this religion being established and taking root (Kutlu, 2011, p. 91). Along with the spread of Hanafism among Turks, the theological teachings of Abu Mansur al Maturidi also evolved and later developed as a new school with a more pronounced reliance on human reason; it now has a wide following in regions where Hanafi law is practiced (Kutlu, 2011, p. 143).

Generally, Salafists exclude rational considerations in religious matters and refute Sunni kalam; by the same, they challenge the Maturidi doctrine.[17] It is also usually acknowledged that Salafists are hostile toward Sufism and popular Islam, which have extremely rich and strong legacies in Turkish society. Salafi approaches to Sufism (which is also not monolithic and since the beginning of Islam has taken various forms) also differ among its adherents. Some Turkish Salafist linked to the Guraba publishing house in Istanbul and its founder, preacher Abdullah Yolcu (b. 1958) do not consider Maturidi as a scholar in *'aqida* and also engage with theological polemics against "extreme" Sufism *(aşırı tasavvuf*), but they did not condemn Sufism entirely (e.g., they accept "correct Sufism" limited to the borders of Islamic orthodoxy). Some Turkish Salafists have a negative attitude towards Sufi ritual practices, such as *sema* and *dhikr* (a ritual for remembering God through meditation and prayer, which sometimes include musical performances, songs and dances). Thus, for example, Yolcu claims that it was thanks to Sufism that Byzantine and Persian musical customs penetrated Islamic culture (Hammond, 2017, pp. 423–425). In a similar attitude, Halis Bayancuk points out that many Sufi elements are *bida*', as they are imported from other religions. However, Bayancuk goes further by claiming that Sufism is a parallel religion with parallel gods, prophets and sources. According to him, Sufists have withdrawn from the Sunni tradition and that, through their mysticism, polytheism entered the Muslims' agenda. Salafists do not approve of the *mawlid* celebrations, visiting mausoleums and graves, or performing supererogatory prayers with the congregation. They regard all of these as *bida*' and *haram*. Besides that, in Salafists dogmatic understanding of religion and their strict, literal piety, there is no place for philosophy (Bayancuk, 2019). It is also widely acknowledged that Salafists consider members of sects, congregations and Sufi orders (*tarikat)* to be idolaters and criticize their practices.

In contemporary conflicts between Sufis and Salafis, the differences concerning the propriety of saint veneration are among the most contentious

[17] For more on Maturidi doctrine and Salafi dispute over its legitimacy: Bruckmayr, 2020.

issues. In Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Mali, Malaysia and Indonesia, Salafis have earned the undying enmity of Sufis for destroying holy graves (Woodward, Umar, Rohmaniyah & Yahya, 2013, p. 63), but in Turkey this attitude does not take radical forms or violent actions. Moreover, some Turkish Salafists believe that there is nothing wrong in visiting the tombs of holy men, as long as their intercession is not sought.

Sufi religious orders continue to play important roles in Turkey, despite the fact that they have been outlawed and forced underground by republican secular governments. But here, as in the Salafi movement, there are also some inter-group divisions and rivalry. Many Sufi orders (*tarikat*) and their branches (Kadiri, Nakşibendi, Mevlevi, Rifai, Halveti, Galibi, Cerrahi, Uşşaki, Melami, Haznevi, Menzilci, İsmailağa group, Işıkçı, Erenköy group, and so forth) have a special outlook on politics, modern life, education and customs by appealing to their own symbols and the path that needs to be followed (Shively, 2021, p. 435). The question is whether the confluence of local dynamics in areas of Turkey where the Sufi tradition is strong constitutes a counterbalance and to some extent sets the limits of radical currents of Salafis. Some reports have claimed that eastern and south-eastern areas are less vulnerable to ISIS recruitment (Saymaz, 2016) but, as we do not have access to actual and exact figures, we are still far from providing a comprehensive picture and estimate of the Salafist prevalence and influences in those regions.

There is quite a fierce response to Salafist activities from members of sects or congregations who claim to feel concerned about the activities of Salafi associations and their growing popularity among Turkish youth. It seems that some members of sects, by their public stances, aggravate the conflict. For example, controversial preacher of the İsmailağa community (from the Halidiyya branch of the Nakşibendi order) Ahmet Mahmut Ünlü (known as Cübbeli Ahmet Hoca) took an open stance on the Salafism issue. Ünlü is well recognized for his hostile sermons and public speech warning against the Salafi threat, claiming that there are 2,000 Salafi associations in Turkey and there is a risk of civil war, as Salafis are armed and promote terrorism and violence (Cumhuriyet, 2020). Moreover he warned the Diyanet about the consequences of members of Salafism and Wahhabism being hosted and allowed to speak in mosques and has accused the religious authority of turning a blind eye to Salafi activities (Timeturk, 2022).[18] In response to these allegations, members of Turkish Salafists associations accused Ünlü of exploiting his pulpit and his media stardom in order to defame the Turkish face of Salafism and of using divisive language.

[18] Ünlü made this statement after Kuwaiti sheik Osman El Hamis make a speech in Sakarya mosque in June 2022.

Ali Erbaş, the head of the Diyanet, during his speech at the "3rd Youth Workshop" organized by the Presidency of Religious Affairs, emphasized that the aim of the Diyanet is to raise Turkish youth in a way that is loyal to their roots and values. Moreover, he noted that the Diyanet was working hard to provide religious knowledge from the right sources and to assimilate Turkish civilization values, and thus trying to raise awareness of objectionable and harmful currents and to equip young people with the ability to protect themselves from all kinds of extremism (En Son Haber, 2022). Another issue is what religious narratives will attract the Turkish youth, who are exposed to different voices in Islam, with different groups and movements clashing and claiming the right to represent the authenticity of their faith and practices. Polemical criticism of Islam led by Muslims themselves is to some extent a way of dealing with the crisis of religious authority within intra-Sunni competition. Young Muslims are embroiled in various internal and external conflicts that from the one side can lead to religious zeal and even fanaticism and from the other to wandering of faith or total renunciation of religion. Here, the important role of Diyanet is to reassert the Hanafi frames and vocally condemn any manifestation of radical Salafists. From the other point of view, as rightly noted by Hilmi Demir and Selim Koru (2016), in this theological battle there is a threat that "the unduly strong Diyanet can also be perceived as a threat by non-Hanafi citizens of Turkey, including peaceful Salafists and non-Muslims." This, if the authoritarian narrative of state elites continued, could be dangerous because the Diyanet could be misused and become a handy political tool to fight against "theological others" instead of acting in favor of tolerance and the maintenance of dialog and intercommunal peace. Under the AKP government, the Diyanet has been criticized for being indifferent to other beliefs and being politicized to the point that in a speech in 2018 President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan compared the staff and imams of the directorate to "members of the army" (Turkish Minute, 2022).[19]

Paradoxically, taking into account the inconsistencies and dynamics of Salafism, we can assume that there is also a potential for the mainstream religion associated with rationalism to be reinvigorated on the Salafi–Maturidi line (literalism versus rationalism). This new vigor could attract and sustain belief and prompt a theological reorientation, which in turn could make radical Salafism obsolete in the future. Thus, to increase the resilience of young people against all kinds of extremism, Kutlu emphasizes the importance of the revival of the Hanafi-Maturidi-Jesevi vein, which Western scholars call

[19] The Diyanet has become one of the best-funded institutions in Turkey, with a budget of 35.9 billion liras allocated for 2023, which outstripped seven out of 17 Turkish ministries.

the "Eastern Hanafi tradition," and of strengthening the rational religious discourse by defending and updating Hanafism and Marturidism as symbolic affiliations of Turks (Kutlu, 2017).

## Conclusion

In today's environment, Turkish society needs a new narrative that will reinforce the cultural meaning of Islam and that accommodates the incoherence of Salafism discourses. Notably, the narrative will need to bring to the fore Turkey's cultural and religious distinctiveness but at the same time be more open to the conscious choices of the religiosity of its own citizens (including individualized spirituality) and different interpretations of Islam. This approach could eventually become a powerful impetus for change driven by internal necessity and assisted by the cultural resilience process. The process should start by abandoning the narrative of authoritarianism that facilitates the evolution of the radical strains of Islam and in some way strengthens extreme religious conservatism. Overall, research indicates that the more politically stable and economically prosperous Muslim societies are, the more confident they become in their Islamic identity and trust in Islam's ability to contribute to modernity instead of being threatened by it, thereby reducing the appeal to reactionary sentiments (Bano, 2008). As the Turkish case has confirmed, when a conservative and moderate religious sector is free to operate, ultra-strict alternatives enjoy only limited success. On the other hand, extremist groups find more followers when conservative but non-violent alternatives are either not easily available to religious consumers or are harassed in their public activity by the state (Introvigne, 2005, p. 17).

Indeed, Salafism has become a feature of Turkish Islam and has infused religious and political culture. However, it seems problematic to unequivocally gauge the consequences of the functioning of Salafism in Turkey, as many internal discrepancies and meanings lie beneath its surface. Nevertheless, we can conclude that the particular local context and historical religious experience of Turks determine the cultural resilience process and soften the level of radicalism transmitted by the complex global Salafi platform. On one side, the importance of the radical current should not be overestimated, and overstressing one dimension of Salafism would be mistake, but on the other, we cannot completely ignore its manifestations that aggravate sectarian conflict.

Turkish Salafism is mainly associated with non-violent Salafi groups that embrace religious and social reform and stand against the exclusionary stance that causes violence and hatred. It is essentially clear that the Salafi interpre-

tation(s) of Islam creates general tensions in the religious and political spaces of Turkey, but, paradoxically, it has a transforming potential and has provoked discussion on doctrinal issues and intra-Sunni competition between different expressions of Turkish Islam.

Bearing this in mind, the Salafi interpretation of religion that has spread in Turkey elicits the process of reasserting authentic religious discourse based solely on the authority of the exposed local or national belief (dominated by the Hanafi/Maturidi legal-theological system with the priority to the kalām tradition and Islamic mysticism).

In her latest research, Masooda Bano implies that Islamic rationalism is consistent with Sunni orthodoxy, which is getting attention among young, elite, educated Muslims, who are now engaging with classical Islamic texts. Thus, it is not jihadism but Islamic rationalism that is emerging as a leading movement in the contemporary Muslim world (Bano, 2020). From that perspective, the Turkish theologians and religious authorities function as the support network for religious individuals by guarding the patterns of doctrine and practice that should be cultivated and preserved. They have undertaken the duty of defending the religion of Islam against other systems of religion and thought. From that angle, within the wider process of the ongoing Islamic global activism, they also play an active role and try to balance the interaction of different trends inside and outside Turkish Islam by promoting their own Islamic scholarly tradition as an alternative to the textual literalism that is a natural outgrowth of the contemporary Muslim experience.

There is no doubt that reconfiguring the religious also implies renunciation. By the same token, within the framework of the cultural resilience process, a new, more inclusive narrative is needed that facilitates religious transformation and initiates a more pluralist approach, fostering or at least recognizing the existence and validity of religious diversity. The Turkish cultural resilience and the adaptability of Salafists initiate an opportunity for remodeling competing discourses within the Sunni paradigm and create opportunities to obtain a creative balance between extremes in the near future. As Sachedina correctly states, "Muslims are engrossed in resolving the contradictions their discovered in the complex web of their believes, actions and practices as they seek an ideal world order under divine guidance" (Sachedina, 2001, p. 12).

The bottom line is that religion is often a source of divisions; but it can also be a source for alternative means of addressing differences. As in other religions, in Sunni Islam there are multiple voices that clash and vie against one another. The deepening rifts in approaches to teaching faith, piety and purity can seem at times impossible to bridge. But, in the end, all these elements are parts of the multi-sided face of modern religion, where faith is

gradually being de-institutionalized. Ultimately, religion can transform rather than decline. However, it is another story to determine the saliency of religion and its possible future.

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