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Diriliş: Resurrection theme in the populist regime of 'New Turkey'

[version 1; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]

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Abstract

Populism has become the pillar of contemporary right-wing politics, and it has a large discursive toolkit, varying in different geopolitical contexts but always drawing its references from existing narratives, myths, affects, and cosmologies of a given public. The success of populist regimes lies particularly in their ability to harness existing imaginaries and turn them into political currency. Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) is no exception to this trend through its constant cultivation of antagonistic themes and manufacture of new hostilities. To get a better grasp of the ways in which this is accomplished, this report focuses on one of the most appealing, popular, and political themes in Turkish-Islamist politics: *Diriliş* (Resurrection). One can come across this theme in national politics, foreign policy, popular media, or the Islamist intellectual realm. Starting out as a Turkish Sunni Islamist philosophy in the Islamist intellectual realm, the *diriliş* theme proliferated over the years, subsequently with the rise of political Islam, and became a building block of Turkish-Islamist populist discourse in Turkey. With a close focus on various Islamist journals in *İslamcı Dergiler Projesi* (Islamic Journals Project) database and media, popular culture, and politics, this report charts the trajectory of the *diriliş* theme from the 1960s until today. I show its popularization process, its politicization throughout decades, and its gendered foundation. *Diriliş* theme appears and disappears at significant political moments in Turkey, and it successfully appeals to Turkish-Islamist groups while converting feelings of oppression to power and domination. Its loaded history makes *diriliş* a very powerful instrument for AKP's populism.

Plain language summary

This report follows the evolution of a central theme in right-wing populist discourse in contemporary Turkey: Diriliş(resurrection). Diriliş is a theme one can encounter in politics, media, popular culture, and

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intellectual circles. More than mere rhetoric, diriliş frequently circulates in contemporary politics and (re)produces antagonisms between different publics in Turkey. Although the diriliş theme has been around for decades among Sunni Islamist intellectual circles in Turkey, the rise of political Islam and the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) subsequent rise to power brought this theme to the mainstream. All populist regimes apply to such themes, narratives, myths, and feelings that exist in the psyches of the publics that they intend to draw the attention of. In Turkey, the diriliş theme has been instrumentalized in various ways and contributed to polarization, politics of resentment, and empowerment of political Islam. With a focus on İslamcı Dergiler Projesi (Islamist Journals Project) database, popular media, news, and politics, I trace the journey of diriliş from the 1960s to today. From a broader lens, this report intends to contribute to understanding tangible ways populist discourses come to life.

Keywords
populism, right-wing, resurrection, political Islam, Turkey, diriliş, neo-Ottomanism



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Introduction

Populism appears to be the zeitgeist of our contemporary global political landscape and thus inevitably triggered new literature around its content, power, and economic and political background. While populism's place in both right-wing and left-wing politics should be acknowledged (Todorova, 2023), the toolkit of right-wing populism still requires scrutinizing to grasp the appeal of today's politics of emotions, resentments, and imagination by the larger publics. This report is written based on two premises: that rising populism across the globe rely heavily on elements beyond the rational, and its motivations require scrutiny. Second, in making sense of populist reasoning, local references are to be analyzed more comprehensively and in connection with cosmologies, beliefs, and vocabularies. It is based on those elements that gain various forms of populist movements' power that they can turn the existing themes, narratives, symbols, and myths already existent in the collective psyches of their base/potential followership into political currencies. In the history of Turkey's politics, right-wing parties like Democrat Party (DP), Justice Party (AP), and Motherland Party (ANAP) resorted to populist rhetoric as well (Çınar, 2023). However, it is plausible to argue that very little of the populist rhetoric they circulated became as mainstream and popular as *diriliş*. In this report, I specifically focus on the "*diriliş*" (resurrection) theme to provide an overview of its historical changes and shifts while highlighting the centrality and importance of masculinist elements in its formation and success.

The *diriliş* theme is visible in national politics, foreign policy, media, fiction, and the intellectual realm. As I will discuss in more detail below, it was a recurring theme in the Islamic revivalist movement of the 1980s, which was reflected in the literary productions of the Islamist intelligentsia, but later, it proliferated to the larger public with the rise of political Islam in Turkey. *Diriliş* is not an ideology but a functional theme that emerges, disappears, and reemerges at significant political moments in Turkey. By following the trajectory of this theme from the margins of different Islamist circles to the center of Turkey's politics, I will show that in contemporary Turkey, *diriliş* has reemerged as a driving force of contemporary populist discourse under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and became instrumentalized as a catalyst for appealing to specific affects that are engraved in Islamist as well as conservative subjectivities. Although the link between populist discourses and political effects has been widely discussed, the notion of discourse becomes an empty signifier when its specifics are not scrutinized. The success of populist discourses in powerfully cultivating specific effects is closely linked with its possession of a distinct fervor that goes beyond mere rhetoric. These discourses can ignite excitement, galvanize communities, and inspire action. As a theme that constantly resurfaces in specific moments in the history of political Islam in Turkey, the *diriliş* theme is also loaded with emotions, meanings, and imaginaries. As I will demonstrate in this report, the notion of *diriliş* not only triggers certain emotions but also cultivates ready feelings that are present in people's imaginaries and, therefore, could easily be provoked. *Diriliş* carries the potential to build and harness hope within oppressed generations in Turkey, and in doing so, it opens a platform in which political Islam can be constructed by drawing upon existing cosmologies and nationalist sentiments.

The resurgence of the *diriliş* theme is intertwined with the global rise of right-wing populism and its connection to postcolonial history. From the 19th century onwards, former imperial powers collapsed under Western colonialism. The lost empires of the past gave birth to postcolonial sentiments of unease, defeat, and resentment in the 20th century (Bargu, 2021; Sehlikoglu, 2021; Tokdoğan, 2018). Today's global populism almost exclusively appeals to these emotions. While building their populist rhetoric by cultivating affects that were accumulated throughout the 20th century, they tend to skip the era of defeat and rewrite their national histories by treating this as a period of break or sleep. The Islamist idea of *diriliş* follows this thread of neo-imperial thinking.

In this report, I will lay out the history of the *diriliş* theme in Turkey through its appearance, disappearance, and reappearance in intellectual, mediatic, and political sources and platforms. Most prominently known from Sezai Karakoç's work in the Turkish Islamic literary tradition, "Resurrection" (*Diriliş*) occupies an important position in the populist rhetoric of political Islam in contemporary Turkey. The popularisation of the Turkish TV show *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (2014–2019), both in and beyond Turkey's borders, familiarised different publics with the concept of *diriliş*. However, the velocity of this popularisation is precisely a result of the existing reference points in the Islamist, more specifically, Turkish Sunni-Islamist imaginary. Although this theme existed among the Islamic intelligentsia in Turkey, it failed to spread to the grassroots until the 2000s. I show that with the rise of political Islam in Turkey, *diriliş* philosophy was revisited and proliferated by Turkish-Islamist populist politics.

This report will chart a chronological journey of the *diriliş* theme from the 1960s until today. The report is divided into historical periods based on the emergence and reemergence of this theme. In each section, I will discuss the historical background that triggers this theme's resurfacing. I will first look at Islamist journals frequently using this theme in their work. By investigating the *İslamcı Dergiler Projesi* (IDP) database with a particular focus on the keyword *Diriliş*, I provide an overview of the journals, articles, and genres around this theme from the 1960s until 2023. Secondly, I focus on the well-known usage of this keyword in politics and popular culture under AKP government. In doing so, I will also highlight the gendered structure of this notion and provide some insights into the fundamentally masculine characteristics of this populist theme. By laying out this chronology, I demonstrate a clear shift in the theme of *diriliş* from the intellectual realm to the political realm and delve into the popularization and

politicization of this theme in Turkey. Finally, I will make a conceptual discussion about this term itself to grasp its gendered signification economy.

1960s

Although its intellectual history can be traced back to the late Ottoman Empire, the popularisation of the *diriliş* theme in the cultural and intellectual realm is primarily visible through the Islamist journal *Diriliş*. The journal was published between 1960 and 1992 and edited by Sezai Karakoç and Hüsnü Gündüz. Following the line of Turkish-Islamist intelligentsia like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Mehmet Akif Ersoy, the journal published 392 issues on politics, society, literature, and history (Karakoç & Gündüz, 1960–1992). Although the journal's publication ended in 1992, another journal, *Diriliş Saati* (Resurrection Time), edited by Osman Çil, started its publication life in 2003 until 2018 with an interest in similar topics from the lens of Islamist thought.

The beginning date of this journal marks a critical period in Turkey's history. After transitioning to the multiparty system, the Democrat Party (DP) and its leader, Adnan Menderes, remained in power for ten years between 1950 and 1960. As the first right-wing and conservative party in Republican history comprised of cadres formed in opposition to the secular policies of the Turkish state and the Republican People's Party (CHP), DP was the first political arena where Islamist ideas could gain visibility in Turkish politics. Menderes became a prominent figure for conservative and Islamist publics and enacted many right-wing populist policies, such as lifting the ban on Arabic calls for prayer (Köse & Selçuk, 2021). The ever-growing visibility of the anti-secular, pro-religious reactions to the Turkish state under the leadership of Menderes alarmed the Turkish army, and the 10-year DP government ended with the 1960 military coup, followed by the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. The 1960s also marked the rise of the Turkish left, where major left-wing parties such as the Turkish Communist Party (TKP) and Turkish Worker's Party (TİP) were established. The rise of the left subsequently triggered the anti-communist stance, which became the cornerstone of right-wing politics.

The critique of secular modernization and anti-communist rhetoric is a fundamental part of Islamist intellectual thought in Turkey, reified in the works of figures like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (Köse & Selçuk, 2021). Nonetheless, the 1960s became the first building block of the popularisation of the idea of *diriliş* in Sunni Islamists' intellectual imagination. The execution of Menderes as the first leader of the Islamist-conservative right in Turkey is remembered as a significant moment in Turkish history. The DP period gave the center-right relative confidence, and the period ending with Menderes's execution and DP's shutdown resulted in a big disappointment and fear (Tokdoğan, 2018). Menderes's death is recalled as a defeat and almost a trauma, a scar that has been opened at the hands of the secular, Westernized, Kemalist state. The post-DP period was characterized by the revival of Ottoman nostalgia, which was instrumentalized by right-wing parties following DP and later became a significant tool to fight the rising left (2018, 41). Therefore, the Islamist *diriliş* idea could be seen to first flourish in the intellectual realm through the confidence it gained by the revival of center-right in Turkish politics.

The Islamist *diriliş* idea that is discussed here refers to an inherently Turkish one, calling for the resurgence of Turkish-Islamism rather than the resurgence of an abstract ummah. It finds its legitimacy through the imagined power and glory of the Ottoman Empire. It imagines a homogenous empire, exempt from heterogenous ethnic or racial groups and inner-class antagonisms. Therefore, following the 1960s, Islamic revivalism became even more Turkified and irrevocably intertwined with Turkish identity after the 1980s military coup.

1980s – 90s

The publishing activities of various Islamist groups in Turkey increased, especially in the second half of the 1980s, in parallel with domestic socio-political dynamics and the political debate and revitalization observed in Muslim countries (Öztan, 2020). When we look at the IDP database, 1988 stands out as one of the peak years of publications with the keyword *diriliş*. Following this period, the *Diriliş* journal, edited by Sezai Karakoç and Hüsnü Gündüz, ended its publishing life entirely. The significant number of publications in 1988 is not surprising because the 1980s is also identified as the revival period of Islamists in Turkey (2020, 644). Between the 1990s and 2000s, there were limited publications on this theme. This is a striking absence, considering that the 1990s was a moment of political upheaval for various Islamist groups in Turkey. This absence indicates that with the rise of political Islam, a political space is carved up, enabling the *diriliş* philosophy to shift from the intellectual and literary field to the political field.

The 1980s until the beginning of the 1990s marks what is widely known as the period of Islamic revivalism. After the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, Islamist groups with different political orientations started to become more visible and outspoken in the public realm. Islamist groups, which went underground during the founding years of the Turkish Republic, organized themselves around nationalist-conservative demands in multi-party life and established relations with center-right politics at various levels to gain strength (2020, 645). The 1980s military coup crushed the rising left of the 1970s and expanded the space of right-wing politics. Also, the neoliberal restoration period Turkey underwent after the 1980s military coup enabled Islamist groups to benefit from this economic restructuring, therefore expanding not only their political but also economic area of activity. The high number of publications in 1988 indicates how the political and economic restructuring period in Turkey also gave pace to Islamist intellectual production. The Islamist *diriliş* theme is widely discussed intellectually in this period but also shifted towards the political realm in the 1990s.

2000 – 2010s

Numerous other journals with different names show a similar interest in the *diriliş* theme from the 2000s until today. Some topics examined through the *diriliş* lens are The East,

the city, the nation, and the civilization. The convergence of these themes reflects the Islamist intelligentsia interest in offering an alternative modernization and nationalism to the Western-oriented modernity of the secular elite. It was no longer fashionable to follow the West, but rather, the critique of Western modernity and the search for an "authentic culture" was on the rise. Islamist intellectuals selectively made use of Western post-modern critique to challenge the Western hegemony, and Ottoman-Turkish modernization was rediscussed through a critique of secular Turkish modernity (2020, 646).

After 2000, there are publications focusing on the philosophy of "*diriliş*"; however, up until the 2010s, they are limited. After the 2010s, the publication of books, articles, literary work, and research gains pace. Between 2013–2022, ten research articles, six fictional books, two history, four theology, one biography, one poetry, one research, and one children's book are published with the keyword *diriliş* (IDP, 1960–2023). Especially research articles and philosophical books primarily reexamine Sezai Karakoç's work. There are over 273 texts with the keyword *diriliş,* and like in 1988, the publications are concentrated in 2013. After 2013, both publications and the diversity of genres increased compared to the pre-2010 period.

From 2000 to the 2010s, political Islam lived its heyday with the AKP's majority win in 2002 elections. Although AKP proclaimed itself as the representative of "moderate Islamism" by excluding radical Islamist ideas from state policies and happily marrying neoliberalism and political Islam, this mildness started to decline over the course of this decade. Although mild in political discourse, AKP's rise in power was supported by its organic links to the Islamist movements in Turkey, the most prominent being the Gülenist movement led by Fetullah Gülen. Throughout the 2000s, Gülenists set up their cadres in state institutions with the support of the AKP government. The gradual replacement of secular state establishment with officials raised and trained in Islamist communities reflected on public life as an ever-increasing Islamization. Islamization of state structures, accompanied by the construction-led neoliberal policies of AKP, shrunk public spaces, weakened the welfare state, and eroded fundamental human rights.

The emergence and snowball effect of the Gezi Park protests coincides with this rapid Islamization in state structures and civil society. Gezi protests are a response to the confident *palazlanma* of Islamization, which first attacked basic human rights, freedom, and equality and later demonized the justified demand for democratic life that came from diverse segments of society. *Palazlanma*[1] appears as the right word to describe the Islamization of state structures in Turkey. As state structures got more filled with members of Islamic cults such as the Gülenists, political Islam started to live its heyday. The collaboration between the AKP government and Gülenists led many state officials and AKP supporters to gain more wealth and confidence (Tee, 2021). Political Islam grew thicker became more assertive, greedier, and more arrogant. Later, it started to attack any voice that challenged that newly claimed power. At the peak of this rapid Islamization, the Gezi movement posed an important challenge to the attack on democratic rights and constructed a new democratic imaginary for diverse oppositional voices. The AKP government's counterattack reframed democratic demands as a malignant and deliberate attack on the resurrection of the Turkish nation under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This repackaging was best symbolized by the election video[2] aired by AKP in the first local elections right after the Gezi Park movement (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı, 2017). A mysterious guy in black approaches the giant flagpole and sabotages the pulley holding the Turkish flag. Like a call from the prophet, we hear the Turkish national anthem vocalized by Erdoğan's voice, and as he starts to speak, thousands of people rush to resurrect the falling flag. A populist divide gets established via this video by marking two different groups within the borders of the nation: those who sabotage the flag and those who rush to its rescue. From this period onwards, we observe that the *Diriliş* theme is frequently instrumentalized to reinforce and reify this divide.

On May 28, 2013, the Gezi Park protests started with the resistance of a few environmental activists to the reconstruction of Topçu Barracks at Gezi Park, which is one of the few remaining green areas at the center of highly urbanized Istanbul. AKP government insisted on the reconstruction project, which resulted in a mass political upheaval, uniting people from different ideological engagements under the umbrella of opposition to the AKP government's increasingly anti-democratic domination and neoliberal policies. The reconstruction of Topçu Barracks was a perfect example of the AKP government's neoliberal and neoconservative urban projects. Historical Topçu Barracks was the place where Abdülhamid II, supporting pro-Sharia upheaval, was defeated by Operation Army under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and this event later led to Abdülhamid II's dethronement, becoming the symbol of the treason of secular elites and subsequent downfall of Islam in the contemporary neo-Ottomanist imaginary (Tokdoğan, 2018). Therefore, Topçu Barracks was not only a profitable urban project but also a space that had historical significance in the Islamist imaginary, or at least, its relevance was selectively highlighted after the mass influence of the Gezi Park protests.

Gezi Park protests posed a threat to the AKP government's increasing anti-democratic and conservative domination, as well as Islamization and conservatisation of public life. The aftermath of the Gezi Park movement marked the beginning of intensifying governmental pressure. The polarization between pro-Erdoğan groups and the opposition also gained momentum after 2013, and the Islamist/conservative vs. secular/leftist/progressive dichotomy deepened. From 2013 until today,

[1]Getting fat, getting rich, growing and getting confident in the meantime.

[2] This video was first aired for March 30, 2014 local elections. Later the video was updated in 2017. First version has a Turkish flag at the top. The second version has a red flag that says "The nation will not bent down, Turkey will not be defeated".

Erdoğan's and AKP's populism fundamentally bases itself on a self-proclaimed "local and national" (*yerli ve milli*) us, excluding and criminalizing any opposition it deems as immoral, Western, traitor, terrorist "them". This polarization is reflected in the cultural and literary realm, *diriliş* reappeared as a response to democratic demands and backlash of anti-Erdoğan and anti-AKP publics after 2013 up until today.

Post-2010s

After the 2010s, the *diriliş* theme started to become much more mainstream. Especially the local and global success of the Turkish TV series *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (2014–2019) familiarized this notion with the non-Islamist mainstream publics and, in doing so, blended popular culture with history for political purposes (Carney, 2018). The historical period *Diriliş Ertuğrul* takes place in, and the protagonist it puts at the center shows continuity with the selective rewriting of neo-Ottomanist narratives under Erdoğan's leadership. Ertuğrul Gazi is the father of the Ottoman Empire's founder Osman Gazi. The story focuses on the destruction of the Kayı tribe by Mongols and the leader Ertuğrul Gazi's *diriliş* to power. Erdoğan and AKP's rise to power also becomes a representation of "the *diriliş* of Turkish greatness" (2018, 100). Choosing the father of the father of Ottoman Empire as a protagonist shows a search for an archaic paternal legitimacy that can strengthen Erdoğan's neo-Ottomanist claim to Turkish-Islamist leadership. Erdoğan becomes the contemporary embodiment of the historic figure Ertuğrul's resurrection of Turkish greatness. In addition, Erdoğan's leadership gains an even deeper legitimacy with Ertuğrul's reimagination as the creator of an imperial legacy based on Turkish-Muslim power. In doing so, even after a long 600-year multi-ethnic and multi-religious and almost a 100-year republic, Erdoğan's leadership is presented as the legitimate successor of Turkish-Islamic leadership through channeling his power to an archaic paternal figure.

In 2015, *Diriliş Postası* (Resurrection Post) started its publication life as an outspoken Islamist and pro-government newspaper. Its website declares that its publication principles are solely based on Islam, highlighting that "Like everything written by humans, laws are open to change. Diriliş Post accepts Islam as a reference by commenting on all human variables, especially laws". Furthermore, it states that it does not "justify, normalize or beautify *haram*", to emphasize what seems to be its critique of other publishers and journalists (Diriliş Postası, 2015). It also defines its political stance as anti-imperialist, against any kind of -ism, anti-nuclear, anti-alcohol/drugs, anti-racist, and anti-adultery by clearly distinguishing itself from "the West" and embracing universal humanism only to the extent that is compatible with Turkish-Islam majoritarianism. Established by Ali Yıldız and Mehmet Akosman, Diriliş Post is another product of the restructured media landscape under AKP.

The July 15, 2016, coup attempt marked the beginning of the popularization of the notion of *diriliş* in national politics. President Erdoğan's call for his supporters to fight against the Gülenist coup attempt and the subsequent failure of the coup resulted in the identification of the AKP government's victory as the "*diriliş ruhu*" (resurrection spirit). Gülenist's infiltration of state structures was only possible through Erdoğan's alliance with the movement's leader. Nonetheless, the post-coup narrative of Erdoğan was solely based on being deceived, betrayed, and the inevitable compensation Gülenists faced through the vengeful *diriliş* of the people. After the coup attempt, state led TRT channel broadcasted the "From Coup Attempt to Diriliş: The Anatomy of July 15" documentary to solidify this populist narrative around July 15 (TRT, 2017).

Turkish army's history of numerous coups in the name of the protection of the Republican regime became a perfect ground for the AKP government to expand its populist narrative in the post-2016 era. "The people" who resurrected against the "traitors" within were up against not only the Gülenists but also anyone who was challenging the "national will" that was craving for democracy. This overarching national will resurfaced through Erdoğan's prophetic call for democracy. This populist narrative led to the repackaging of the power clashes within the state as a new chapter in democracy and the Turkish people's *diriliş* from an anti-democratic sleep enforced by the older regime. The populist narrative is told and displayed to reconstruct and solidify this selective memory. July 15 Memory Museum at the corner of the renamed July 15 Martyrs Bridge (formerly Bosphorus Bridge) exhibits visuals and items from that night to reify the "resurrection spirit", and the process of mythologizing July 15, 2016, continues today through annual celebrations, becoming markers of "New Turkey".

As the *Diriliş* theme gained more popularity through popular culture and national political discourse, we can see that it also began to become a part of Turkish foreign policy. For instance, President Erdoğan welcomed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2015 by displaying 16 Turkic warriors in the new presidential palace in Ankara (AGP, 2015). Similarly, Erdoğan welcomed President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev in 2015 with a ceremony where 16 Turkic nations were represented by soldiers carrying flags and wearing uniforms. Aliyev's welcoming ceremony was also accompanied by the *Diriliş* Anthem, supposedly an old Turkic anthem, and the generic song of the TV show (Bianet, 2015). A similar linkage between the show's popularity and foreign policy continues in 2018. For example, Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro wears the hat "bork" and holds the Kayi flag associated with the series and poses for the camera (AA, 2018). Overall, the show's popularity, which has a place in the historical imagination of global audiences, is instrumentalized by the AKP government to mythologize the Turkic-Ottoman history. History is rewritten to legitimize Turkey's leadership claims among the Turkic and Muslim nations of the Global South.

Erdoğan's constant emphasis on the TV show's success and the sensitivity around the critiques towards this show is striking in understanding what this success signifies for the government. Erdoğan praised the show's success (Topçu, 2019) and visited the set when the show was still airing. The show was

not only praised, but those who mocked it were sued. For instance, in 2021, a journalist critiqued neo-Ottomanist shows like *Diriliş Ertuğrul* and *Kuruluş Osman* on Twitter, and he was later taken into custody. Similarly, TV host Okan Bayülgen mocked the show and later had to publicly apologize (Birgün, 2016). AKP government's sensitivity around the critiques towards this show appears to be closely related to its fragility in a field that is difficult to "conquer", namely the field of cultural production. Erdoğan's statements about the inability to dominate the field of cultural production even though they've been ruling for over two decades account for this fragility (Hacaloğlu, 2017). The show does have international success, especially in post-Ottoman geographies, as well as among nationalist and conservative groups in Turkey. However, AKP does not have a cultural hegemony over a multiplicity of local media audiences and is unable to conquer the media consumption practices of secular, intellectual, and other anti-AKP audiences. Although the AKP government has a strong hold over media channels in Turkey and strict censorship practices through the Radio and TV Supreme Council (RTÜK), the diversity of digital platforms and other online media enables cultural producers to resist the media-led hegemony of AKP.

Masculinity and Diriliş

The appeal of the *diriliş* theme among various Islamist and conservative masses inevitably raises the question of masculinity and its role in the popularization of *diriliş*. The idea of *diriliş* refers to a fundamentally glorious act that leads the subject to regain power. This imagined act shares strong symbolic resemblances with the act of *kiyam* and an erect phallus. The former is grasped by educated pious Sunnis, and the latter by much larger populations within and beyond Turkey. *Kiyam* is the standing posture during prayer, which begins the prayer (*namaz*) and is followed by *secde* when a praying Muslim's head reaches the ground. This symbolic reference was quite common in the 1990s during Islamic revivalism, although it lost its vogue after 2000. After 2000, as soon as Islamist intelligentsia started joining the center-right, the *diriliş* gained a noticeably masculine tone.

One of Erdoğan's statements during Turkey's military intervention in Afrin, Syria, in 2018 best grasps the masculinist boast embedded in *diriliş*. As a justification of the military intervention, Erdoğan highlighted that Turkey is on the eve of a "new *diriliş*". His reference to the nation's ongoing *diriliş* from a symbolic death under his leadership also came along with an emphasis on avenging the symbolic castration the nation has endured;

> "This is the resurrection of a nation from the ashes. What is done to us through terrorist organizations is like cutting the beard of our nation. However, they do not know that when we take action, we destroy those terrorists completely and break the arms and wings of the structure they are working hard to build. The cut beard will grow thicker, but the arms and wings will not come back." (Bianet, 2018)

In this gendered narrative, symbolized through cutting the beard, the nation has the power to castrate the enemy, to defeat their hard-built structures by rendering them permanently impotent. In contrast, the enemy's attempts to castrate the nation will only make it stronger. Therefore, *diriliş* is also a phallic event, symbolizing an erection after enforced impotence by enemies within and outside the borders. Turkey's militarist interventions are for the sake of resurrecting the nation from some kind of sleep, i.e., impotence.

The "new Turkey" is the heart and brain of the resurrected old civilization, namely the former Ottoman Empire and its particularly Sunni Muslim Turkish population. It is envisioned as powerful, expansionist, militarist, neoliberal, and aggressive in national and international politics. Therefore, Resurrected Turkey is assertive and entirely masculinist in its vision and actions. It is stripped of any kind of characteristics that are deemed feminine. Non-assertive politics such as peace, negotiation, democracy, and coalition do not have a place in the New Turkey. The future is envisioned through an assertive existence, only through defeating the enemies within and beyond.

Conceptual discussion

Diriliş is not a consistent, linear, and ever-growing ideology but a specific affective rhetoric that successfully appeals to the specific histories and emotions that stick to the Turkish-Islamist imaginary. Especially Erdoğan-led populist Islamism is successful in using the *diriliş* theme to bridge the history of the oppressed "Sunni Muslim underdog" with today's victorious political Islamism under Erdoğan. When we question what Turkey is resurrecting from, we see that new Turkey is resurrecting from its imagined postcolonial situation, which is not enforced upon Turkey by colonial powers but rather by the secular Republican elite and their successors. Here, *diriliş* might appear as an ascendancy from a symbolic death, however, *diriliş* is not analogous with a phoenix-like revival. Rather, *diriliş* signifies a state of sleep where the sleeping body grows thicker, stronger, and vengeful towards those who put it into sleep. The sleeping body is not static, rather, it is cocooning and waiting for the right moment to rise gloriously. *Diriliş* does not have a linear temporality. Instead, it has a cyclical time frame, akin to the Islamic understanding of death.

The kind of rising "diriliş" refers to is best described by the Turkish word *şahlanmak*. The Persian root of this word *şah* means ruler or leader, and the verb *şahlanmak* signifies "rising to power". Those who "rise to power" are unstoppable because they are provoked, and their inner power is unleashed. The term is also used as *şaha kaldırmak,* which provokes the horse to raise its front feet to the sky. So, once the cocooning body is resurrected from its sleep, the next thing it does is *şahlanmak,* rising to power. This rise to power is a fundamentally masculinist one. The symbols of the powerful Turkish masculinist mythos are *at, avrat, ve silah*, (horse, women, and weapon). Only Turkish men who possess all three can be powerful. The resurrected body ought to possess all three and

regain its honor by avenging those that rendered him impotent. If politics of resentment and victimhood under AKP appealed to the "impotent" past of "Old Turkey", the proliferation of *diriliş* signifies the glory and vengeful victory of a particular Islamism under Erdoğan and AKP.

Conclusion

In this report, by putting the *diriliş* theme at the center, I intended to lay out tangible and intangible elements that bring right-wing populism to life. Populist rhetoric's appeal is intertwined with the political unconscious of a particular group and the geopolitical cosmologies it draws from. *Diriliş* is an important theme for the Turkish-Islamist imaginary, and it has been successful in harnessing feelings of defeat and oppression among Islamist and conservative masses and transforming them into power.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

The data for this article consists of bibliographic references, which are included in the References section.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to the PI of the Takhayyul Project, Dr. Sertaç Sehlikoğlu, for encouraging me to write this report and for her endless feedback. I wrote this report as part of the ERC-funded Takhayyul project, and I want to thank both the European Research Commission and my team members at the Takhayyul Project. Finally, many thanks to EU Open Access for providing a publication venue for this report.

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This paper is timely as it engages with a significant question regarding Turkey's current government—the symbolic construction of power and its historical antecedents. I propose the following suggestions to strengthen the author's already compelling analysis.

The paper needs a stronger introduction that reveals the significance of the Diriliş concept for the current government. The author highlights the importance of this theme for the AKP government but needs to provide robust examples to substantiate these statements early in the discussion. The subsection titled "Post-2010s" contains several examples. I recommend that the author incorporates some of these examples into the introduction.

My primary concern with the analysis is that the author assumes the secular vs. Islamist dichotomy without questioning it. In a way, the analysis falls into the same trap that the author herself criticizes regarding populism, by creating two neatly divided, contradictory sides. As the author also highlights, the discourse of Diriliş is part of a specific interpretation of the Turkish Republic's history, wherein the struggle between Islamists and secularists is depicted as the main driving force behind political transformations. However, recent literature criticizes this well-established scholarly reading (Akan 2017, Lord 2018), emphasizing that these two poles share a significant common feature: their support for Sunni Islam. For instance, the author suggests that the aftermath of the 1980 coup was a period during which Islamist groups were empowered by the government. However, this empowerment of Islam, which actually pertains to a very specific version of Sunni Islam, traces its roots back to the early republican period and lies at the core of the Turkish nation-building project (Yeğen 2004). During this era, secularist cadres emphasized that secularism is not anti-religious, and "religion" here always referred to an official interpretation of Sunni Islam. They founded the Diyanet and expanded their support for it in response to rising communist activism, among other factors (Akan 2017)—since the early days of the republic, not only in the post-1980 era. I believe that incorporating such complexities will enhance the author's explanation of why the discourse of Diriliş resurfaces in certain periods while disappearing in others.

I also believe that the author should consider different media as distinct modalities and pay attention to the shifts occurring in the broader media landscape across different decades. The Diriliş discourse, as presented through periodicals and TV shows, likely adopts different modalities depending on the media used to convey it. It's not very clear how, if at all, the author incorporates these nuances into their analysis. I suggest that the author integrate some of the literature on the Diriliş TV show (Carney 2018, 2019) to examine the nuances brought about by television in the performativity of this discourse. Furthermore, the media landscape underwent significant changes throughout the decades examined by the author. The author suggests that the AKP does not have cultural hegemony, which could be attributed to the disappearance of the "mediated center" with the emergence of social media, as argued by some authors (Johnson Andrews 2022). In other words, the analysis lacks consideration of the role that the specific media environment plays in the effectiveness or performativity of the Diriliş discourse during each distinct period. This aspect deserves more careful consideration.

Lastly, I do not understand the connection between "şahlanmak" and "Diriliş" at the end of the analysis. I am not sure if the author needs yet another phrase to drive her argument home, especially at the very end of the paper.

By historically tracing a core discourse of the AKP government, this paper addresses a significant gap in scholarly discussions of the AKP period and its predecessors. Implementing the suggestions above will render this argument more nuanced and robust.

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Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?

Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?

Yes

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Anthropology of media, anthropology of secularism.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 08 May 2024

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"Diriliş" [resurrection] is a concept of vital significance for understanding the history of political Islam in Turkey and its connected geographies. This timely essay does an interesting job of exploring the historical trajectory of the concept and its contemporary circulation in Islamist political discourse and cultural production. While the work has great potential, there is also room for improvement in several regards.

The first major issue with the essay is the historical framework. The author claims that "The critique of secular modernization and anti-communist rhetoric is a fundamental part of Islamist intellectual thought in Turkey, reified in the works of figures like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (Köse & Selçuk, 2021). Nonetheless, the 1960s became the first building block of the popularisation of the idea of *diriliş* in Sunni Islamists' intellectual imagination." She does not, however, fully substantiate this argument. In the regions of the Ottoman Empire that would host the Republic of Turkey, Islamism dates to the 19th century. As Yusuf Akçura famously presents in *Üç Tarz-ı Siyâset* [Three Styles of Politics] (1904), Islamism was one of the three major ideologies in the Empire's final years. During this period of decline, Islamist politics and intellectual production were often implicitly or explicitly about resurrection. An important example is the work of Mehmet Âkif Ersoy (see Yılmaz, 2022). While the author mentions Ersoy in passing, she does not discuss his work on resurrection. The case is the same with Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and his magazine *Büyük Doğu* [The Great East] (1943-1978) (for the concept of resurrection in Kısakürek's work, see Erken, 2015). Moreover, popular religious figures like Said Nursi also employed the discourse of resurrection. For these reasons, it seems difficult to argue that the 1960s "became the first building block of the popularisation of the idea of *diriliş*." It is, however, true that the relatively liberal 1960 Constitution, combined with the broader Cold War dynamics, provided a suitable environment for urban Islamic movements and media production to flourish.

A significant shortcoming of the essay is the author's engagement with existing scholarship—which is limited to nine works and does not even cover publications that are about the concept of resurrection in Islamist politics in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, such as Erken (2015), Doğanay (2020), or Cengiz (2022). A closer engagement with the literature can broaden the author's perspective on the historical development of the concept of resurrection and its articulations in Islamist politics.

Another problem with the essay is how the author analyzes diriliş, which she alternately describes as a concept, theme, and keyword. If she studies diriliş as a keyword, which seems to be the way she explored the İDP database, she is bound to miss synonyms and related concepts, such as "ihya" or "yeniden ihya."

The author rightfully associates "the *diriliş* theme" with the global rise of populism, but she explains its attraction primarily with reference to "postcolonial sentiments of unease, defeat, and resentment in the 20th century." This framework fails to explain some of the most significant articulations of the populist discourse of resurrection in global politics, such as Donald Trump's Make America Great Again. Even more importantly, it does not cover how individuals invest in populist movements in response to their exploitation and impoverishment by capitalism. This critique is already implied in the author's discussion on contemporary Turkey, but the connection needs to be made clearly.

There seem to be some overgeneralizations about Islamist political thought in the essay. The author claims that "The Islamist *diriliş* idea that is discussed here refers to an inherently Turkish one, calling for the resurgence of Turkish-Islamism rather than the resurgence of an abstract ummah." This framing ignores the different articulations of the concept. For example, Sezai Karakoç, whose work the author mentions, conceptualizes Turks as a race and Muslims as both an ummah and a nation (Cengiz, 2022). Similarly, given the diversity in the articulations of Islamist political thought in Turkey, I recommend that the author avoid generalizations and mention the names of specific intellectuals or movements in sentences such as "Islamist intellectuals selectively made use of Western post-modern critique to challenge the Western hegemony, and Ottoman-Turkish modernization was rediscussed through a critique of secular Turkish modernity (2020, 646)."

In the discussion on Sezai Karakoç, his Diriliş Partisi [Resurrection Party], which still exists as a fringe political party under the name of Yüce Diriliş Partisi [Supreme Resurrection Party], is worth mentioning.

I am not sure if the slang word "palazlanma," which is normally used for the growth of poultry, is necessary for the essay. It reads like a redundant insult that distracts the attention from the essay's substantial political critique.

It is unclear to me why the author describes Erdoğan's recitation of the national anthem as prophetic. Erdoğan's success has largely depended on the strategic alliances he built to destroy his foes and competitors, and his amalgamation of diverse, often conflicting discourses. Presenting Islam as the sole or even structuring framework for analyzing Erdoğan or the AKP would be misleading.

In the discussion on the Gezi Protests, it is worth noting that the Topçu Barracks project was to be

a mall.

In the section on the television series *Diriliş Ertuğrul*, the author argues that "Choosing the father of the father of Ottoman Empire as a protagonist shows a search for an archaic paternal legitimacy that can strengthen Erdoğan's neo-Ottomanist claim to Turkish-Islamist leadership. Erdoğan becomes the contemporary embodiment of the historic figure Ertuğrul's resurrection of Turkish greatness." A more comprehensive analysis of how this metaphor works would be helpful—in part because Ertuğrul was not Muslim.

In the discussion on the coup, the author argues that "Turkish army's history of numerous coups in the name of the protection of the Republican regime became a perfect ground for the AKP government to expand its populist narrative in the post-2016 era." It is worth mentioning that this strategy dates to AKP's early years when fearmongering about a secularist coup facilitated the notorious Ergenekon and Balyoz trials that the government utilized to undermine the secularist military and bureaucratic elite, legitimize its Islamist neoliberal policies, and consolidate its power.

I have strong doubts about the association of the concept of *diriliş* with an erect phallus. If anything, the term *kalkışma* [attempt], used for the failed coup attempt in 2016, has that connotation. The term *diriliş* is primarily about coming back to life after death. As far as the term's associations and connotations are concerned, I think it would be more fruitful to discuss how an Islamist intellectual and political figure like Said Nursi, who desired to create an Islamic revival in Turkey, also paid attention to the religious concept of apocalyptic resurrection. Potentially, Nursi's work can also help the author develop their argument that "*Diriliş* does not have a linear temporality. Instead, it has a cyclical time frame, akin to the Islamic understanding of death."

Finally, the author claims that "*diriliş* signifies a state of sleep where the sleeping body grows thicker, stronger, and vengeful towards those who put it into sleep." "İslami uyanış" [Islamic awakening] is a concept that has a different historical trajectory and political significance than *diriliş* (Doğanay 2020).

Overall, this is an important essay with substantial potential. As she revises, I recommend that the author conduct a comprehensive literature review both to improve the content and to demonstrate the originality and significance of her work. A critical discussion on methodology would also strengthen the essay.

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Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?
Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?
Partly

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Turkey; Cultural history; Gender and sexuality studies; Theatre and performance studies; Islamic cultural production; Critical archival studies

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.