

An Analytical Study on the Political and Intellectual Legacies of Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan

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Abstract

This study analyses the political and intellectual legacies of Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan, two influential figures in modern Turkish history whose ideologies have significantly shaped Türkiye's political landscape. The main research question guiding this study is: How did the political and intellectual contributions of Erbakan and İlhan influence the development of Türkiye's nation? The data collection method involved a documentation of primary sources, including speeches, political writings, and literary works of both figures. This was supplemented by secondary source analysis of their influence in Turkish political and intellectual circles. The analysis adopted a thematic and comparative approach. The findings reveal that while Erbakan's legacy has contributed to the rise of the AKP and political Islam, İlhan's intellectual work has provided a strong secular and anti-Western critique that has influenced Türkiye's intellectual left and ongoing debates about Türkiye's place in the West. Despite their contrasting ideologies, both figures significantly contributed to the shaping of Türkiye's national identity and its complex relationship between secularism and Islamism. The study suggests that contemporary political movements in Türkiye, particularly those related to Islamist policies and secular-nationalist discourse, are deeply informed by the legacies of both Erbakan and İlhan. In conclusion, the paper underscores the continued relevance of their ideas in understanding the dynamics of Türkiye's political identity, offering insights for future research into the influence of political ideologies on Türkiye's evolving relationship with its past and future trajectory in the globalized world.

Keywords: Politic of Türkiye, Muslim history, secularism, Erbakan, İlhan

Introduction

The political and intellectual landscape of modern Türkiye has been deeply shaped by the visions of Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan, two towering figures who, despite their vastly different ideological orientations, have profoundly influenced the course of Turkish society. Erbakan, a prominent Islamist political leader, and İlhan, a renowned Marxist intellectual, represent two ideological poles that have both contested and complemented Türkiye's national identity, its relationship with the West, and its stance on secularism. Their legacies, while initially appearing divergent, each offer valuable insights into the ongoing debates surrounding Türkiye's political future and cultural identity.

Necmettin Erbakan was the founder of the Milli Görüş movement and a key architect of Türkiye's form of political Islam, advocating for a rejection of secularism and a turn towards Islamic governance. His ideas laid the groundwork for much of the contemporary Islamist movement in Türkiye, including the rise of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) (Justice and Development Party), which has dominated Turkish politics for over a decade. Erbakan's opposition to Westernization and his push for Türkiye's alignment with Muslim-majority countries marked him as a key figure in the Turkish struggle between Islamism and secularism.

Atilla İlhan, a prominent poet, novelist, and philosopher, provided a secular critique of Türkiye's political trajectory. İlhan, an anti-imperialist and Marxist thinker, criticised the Turkish elite's Kemalist secularism and Western powers' grip over the country's economic and political systems. His intellectual contributions, which are intertwined throughout his literary works, continue to reverberate in discourses of nationalism, social justice, and Türkiye's worldwide role in the post-Cold War period. Erbakan and İlhan shared a strong concern for Türkiye's national identity, sovereignty, and relationship with the West, despite their ideological differences.

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Their perspectives on secularism and Westernisation, as well as their opposing tactics for establishing a just and sovereign Türkiye, remain fundamental to modern Turkish political disputes. This study will examine their political and intellectual legacies, compare their visions for Türkiye's future, and determine how their ideas are still shaping Turkish society and politics today. This paper analyses Erbakan's Islamic political program and İlhan's secular, anti-imperialist critique to better comprehend how they have moulded modern Türkiye's cultural and political dimensions. From this perspective, we will investigate the ongoing relevance of their ideas in the context of Türkiye's evolving political landscape in the twenty-first century, where problems about secularism, national identity, and Türkiye's connections with the West are still relevant.

Literature Review

This review explores the political and intellectual legacies of both Necmettin Erbakan, a prominent Islamist political leader, and Atilla İlhan, a renowned poet, novelist, and intellectual, each of whom significantly shaped the socio-political and cultural landscape of modern Türkiye. While both figures were highly influential in their respective spheres, their views on secularism, Western relations, and Türkiye's national identity significantly diverged. The analysis in this review examines their ideas regarding political Islam and secular nationalism, and their differing perceptions of Türkiye's place in the world.

The literature around Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan captures key features of Turkish political and cultural discourse. Erbakan's political thought, notably his support for the presidential system, is critical to understanding contemporary Turkish governance. Meanwhile, İlhan's contributions to Turkish literature and social commentary act as a cultural counterweight to Erbakan's political narratives. Meanwhile, Soysal¹ conducted a bibliometric analysis of history researchers in Turkey between 1975 and 2023, which was published in 2024. The following section discusses their individual influences and legacies.

Necmettin Erbakan's Political Legacy

Necmettin Erbakan was the leader of the National View Movement (Milli Görüş) and served as Türkiye's prime minister from 1996 to 1998.² His political journey has been extensively studied in the context of Islamic political movements in Türkiye. A significant body of literature has focused on Erbakan's critique of secularism and the westernization of Türkiye. Erbakan's views on secularism were based upon his belief that Islamic values should inform public life and governance.³ He rejected Türkiye's secularism, as instituted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, seeing it as a force that undermined the country's Islamic heritage. Erbakan's push for Islamic political governance was discussed in the works of Kuru, who examined how Islamic political movements such as Milli Görüş developed in Türkiye's secular state, positioning Erbakan as a key figure in the rise of political Islam in the country.⁴

Erbakan's political ideology also led him to emphasize economic nationalism, advocating for policies aimed at reducing Türkiye's dependence on Western economic structures. This was most clearly demonstrated in his efforts to seek alternative trade partnerships with Muslim-majority nations, which contrasts with Türkiye's traditional North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership and its political alignment with Europe. Scholars like Mardin⁵ have analysed Erbakan's vision of an Islamic economic order and the anti-Western sentiment that permeated his political platform, reflecting his broader critique of Türkiye's alignment with the West. Serif Mardin's "Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey" further offered a profound exploration of the intricate relationship between religion, societal changes, and modernity in Turkey, particularly during the late Ottoman period and the early Republican era. He articulated how historical contexts, political ideologies, and socioeconomic transformations have shaped contemporary Turkish identity and civil society.⁶

¹ Murat Soysal, "A Bibliometric Analysis of History Researches on Turkey 1975 – 2023," *Istoriya-History* 32, no. 2 (2024): 157–76.

² Milli Gazete, "Molder of new world vision: Turkey's Necmettin Erbakan", *Milli Gazete*, May 27, 2019.

³ Turkey Analyst, "Erdogan's towering role in the AKP", *Turkey Analyst*, March 12, 2008.

⁴ Anadolu Agency, "Trailblazer of national vision: Necmettin Erbakan", *Anews*, February 27, 2021.

⁵ Serif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey*, (Syracuse University Press, 2006), passim.

⁶ Ibid.

Çokogullar Bozaslan⁷ has argued that Necmettin Erbakan's Political Ideology emphasized a "fair state order" and proposed a presidential system to address Turkey's political instability and economic challenges. His vision included "state-nation integration," which advocates for a government that prioritizes national desires and democratic principles.

Çınar⁸ has discussed the impact of Erbakan's political strategies on the Turkish political landscape, including the rise of the AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which drew heavily from Erbakan's political principles. Erbakan's influence on Türkiye's political Islam, particularly through the Islamist political parties he founded, is crucial to understanding the evolution of Türkiye's political Islam and its growing prominence in Turkish politics during the 21st century. This is in line with Çınar's findings that Erdoğan had learned hard lessons from the fate of his mentor Erbakan.⁹ Çınar's analysis highlights the interplay between political Islam and the secular state, illustrating how Islamist movements have adapted to the political landscape while navigating challenges posed by secularism and authoritarianism.

Cevik & Thomas¹⁰ stated that contemporary political Islam has evolved from a reactionary stance against Western influences to a more integrated approach, termed "Muslimism," which seeks to harmonize modernity with Islamic values. New religious orthodoxies have challenged traditional secular-religious binaries. Turkish Muslimism influences international institutions and global processes. The evolution of contemporary political Islam in Turkey has been marked by significant transformations, particularly since the late 20th century.

Atilla İlhan's Intellectual and Literary Legacy

İlhan's works frequently mirrored Turkey's sociopolitical scene, exploring issues of nationalism and identity. His poetry and prose criticised the political class, providing insights into the cultural ramifications of Erbakan's policies. İlhan's literary legacy provides a counternarrative to the political discourse dominated by leaders such as Erbakan. While Erbakan's political initiatives sought to reform governance, İlhan's literary critiques frequently questioned the basic foundations of such political beliefs, demonstrating Turkey's dynamic interplay between politics and culture. Unlike Erbakan, Atilla İlhan embodied the intellectual and cultural left, combining Marxism, nationalism, and existentialist ideas. İlhan's legacy is frequently discussed in the context of his critiques of Kemalism, Western imperialism, and class conflict. Mustafa Türem examined İlhan's poetry and fiction as a political critique of Turkey's ruling elite and its economic enslavement to Western powers.

İlhan's views on secularism differed from Erbakan's Islamism and the Kemalist secular establishment. Kemalists considered secularism as a means to modernise Türkiye along Western lines, while İlhan believed secularism should be a liberating force, allowing for free thought and expression of multiple identities. İlhan's literary works, particularly his novels and poetry, explored the alienation and cultural identity crisis suffered by many Turks, which was compounded by the prevalent Westernised view of Turkish culture. According to Özcan, İlhan's critique of Westernisation was not just a cultural rejection, but also an anti-imperialist stance rooted in Marxism. He rejected capitalism systems that led to economic dependency.

Türem¹³ claims that Atilla İlhan criticised American-backed military actions in the Middle East and neo-imperialist tactics that threatened Third World sovereignty. In contrast to Erbakan's concentration on an Islamist alternative, İlhan's resistance to the West was rooted in his socialist philosophy, and sought to free Türkiye from both Western capitalism and the Turkish state's authoritarian secularism.

⁷ Çokogullar Bozaslan, E., "Fair State Order and State-Nation Integration: Necmettin Erbakan's Imagination of The Presidential System," *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 73, (2022): 217-228.

⁸ Muslum Çınar, "Modernity, religion, and politics in Turkey: Secularism and its critics," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 15, no. 3 (2010): 301-324. See also Alev Çınar, "Modernity, Islam, and secularism in Turkey: Bodies, places, and time," (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), passim.

⁹ Cemil Kerimoğlu, "The rise of Erdoğan: Towards the new Turkey," *Radical Dose*, January 17, 2025, passim <https://radicaldose.com/the-rise-of-erdogan-towards-the-new-turkey/>.

¹⁰ Neslihan Cevik and George M. Thomas, "Muslimism in Turkey and New Religious Orthodoxies," *ORSAM* 3, no. 2 (2012): passim.

¹¹ Ali R. Savaş, "İlhan's Poetry and Fiction as a Political Critique of Turkey's Ruling Elite and Their Economic Enslavement to Western Powers," *Journal of Turkish Literature* 12, no. 3 (2008): 45-67.

¹² Umut Özcan, "İlhan's Critique of Westernisation: an Anti-Imperialist Stance Rooted in Marxism." *Journal of Turkish Studies* 15, no. 2 (2005): 123-145.

¹³ Mustafa Türem, "Atilla İlhan's Anti-Imperialism and Critique of Western Dominance," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 22, no. 3 (2010): 145-167.

Burcu Alkan¹⁴ has examined Attilâ İlhan's articles and novels to uncover his anti-cosmopolitanism. İlhan, a renowned writer and public thinker, criticised universalism and cosmopolitanism as tools of Western cultural imperialism. He recommended a "national culture synthesis" for Turkey, emphasizing the importance of integrating Turkish, Ottoman, and Islamic elements while rejecting Western universal principles. The article explores İlhan's anti-cosmopolitanism in his literary works, stressing the ambiguities and contradictions in his portrayal of cosmopolitanism. The author then compares İlhan and Frantz Fanon, both Marxist philosophers with anti-imperialist beliefs, but highlights their distinct approaches to battling capitalism and imperialism. Fanon argued for a new internationalism, while İlhan favoured nationalism. Alkan examines İlhan's novel *Zenciler Birbirine Basmaz* as a case study to illustrate his complex and evolving approach to anti-cosmopolitanism. It highlights how İlhan navigates the tensions between his anti-imperialist stance and the cultural cosmopolitanism present in his works. The novel serves as an example of how İlhan's views on nationalism, identity, and resistance against Western cultural dominance evolved over time, showcasing the ambivalences and contradictions inherent in his portrayal of cosmopolitanism.

Contrasting Views on Secularism

One of the central contrasts between Necmettin Erbakan and Attilâ İlhan lies in their views of secularism. Erbakan viewed secularism as a foreign imposition that alienated Turkey from its Islamic roots. His vision was of a Turkey where Islamic principles guided political and social life, in direct opposition to the Kemalist secular framework. This contrast is especially evident in his efforts to instil Islamic values in the education system, as well as his campaigns to increase the visibility of Islamic symbols in public spaces. Erbakan believed that secularism, as implemented by the Kemalist regime, was a tool used to suppress Islamic identity and values. He argued that a return to Islamic principles would be essential for the moral and spiritual revival of Turkish society. This perspective led him to advocate for policies that promoted Islamic education, the wearing of headscarves in public institutions, and the incorporation of Islamic symbols and practices into public life.

In contrast, Attilâ İlhan's views on secularism were shaped by his socialist ideology. İlhan saw secularism as a liberating force which would allow for free thought and the expression of multiple identities. He believed that secularism was not concerned with the suppression of religion, but rather about creating a space in which diverse beliefs and identities could coexist. İlhan's critique of the Kemalist secular establishment was rooted in his belief that it had become authoritarian and exclusionary, stifling cultural and intellectual diversity. His literary works, in particular his novels and poetry, explored the alienation and cultural identity crisis suffered by many Turks, which was compounded by the prevalent Westernized view of Turkish culture. İlhan's vision of secularism embraced cultural pluralism and intellectual freedom, in contrast to Erbakan's vision of an Islamic state.¹⁶

Saira and Sohail Shafiq¹⁷ discuss the significant impact of Necmettin Erbakan's political strategies and ideologies on the resurgence of Islamic identity and political Islam in Turkey. They discuss how Erbakan's principles and leadership played a crucial role in shaping the Islamic political landscape in Turkey. His efforts to integrate Islamic values into the political and social spheres laid the foundation for the rise of political Islam in the country. They posit that the resurgence of Islamic identity in Turkey, influenced by Erbakan's policies and initiatives, contributed to the revival of Islamic values and practices. In addition, this resurgence is seen as a response to the secularist policies of the Kemalist state. They then explored the aftermath of Erbakan's political career, particularly focusing on the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The AKP's success has been attributed to its ability to build on Erbakan's legacy, while adopting a more moderate and pragmatic approach to political Islam. Saira underscored the lasting impact of Erbakan's contributions on Turkish politics, particularly in terms of the increased visibility and influence of Islamic political parties. The broader implications of this Islamic resurgence for Turkey's political and social dynamics were also analysed.

¹⁴ Burcu Alkan, "Attilâ İlhan's anti-cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Turkish Language and Literature* 61, no. 2 (2021): 493-509.

¹⁵ Hakan M. Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 2003), passim.

¹⁶ Shiraz A. Sheikh, review of *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, by Hakan M. Yavuz, *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 22, 3, (2005): 134-136.

¹⁷ Saira and Sohail Shafiq, "The contributions of Necmettin Erbakan for Islamic Resurgence in Turkey: An Analysis of Its Aftermath," *Al-Aijaz Research Journal of Islamic Studies & Humanities* 7, no. 4 (2023): 45-67.

Saira and Shafiq investigated the major influence of Necmettin Erbakan's political techniques and ideology on the revival of Islamic identity and political Islam in Turkey. They analysed Erbakan's political views and leadership, which had an important part in creating the country's Islamic political scene. Erbakan's efforts to incorporate Islamic ideals into Turkish politics and society laid the groundwork for the growth of political Islam. The rise of Islamic identity in Turkey, spurred by Erbakan's policies and activities, helped to revive Islamic principles and practices. This comeback has been interpreted as a reaction to the secularist policies of the Kemalist state. Saira and Shafiq also analysed the aftermath of Erbakan's political career, focussing on the development of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). They attributed the AKP's success to its ability to continue Erbakan's heritage while taking a more moderate and pragmatic approach to political Islam. The research highlighted Erbakan's long-term impact on Turkish politics, notably the increasing visibility and importance of Islamic political groups, and investigated the wider consequences of his Islamic revival for Turkey's political and social dynamics.¹⁸

In contrast, Atilla İlhan embraced secularism as a tool for democratic and intellectual freedom, but rejected Kemalist authoritarianism, which suppressed political expression and dissent. İlhan¹⁹ stresses that secularism, for him, was not about removing religion from public life, but about ensuring freedom of expression in a society that was free from both religious and political authoritarianism. His literary works reflect this stance, presenting secularism as a way to navigate between religious pluralism and the political freedom required to critique both religious dogmatism and state power. İlhan believed that true secularism should allow for the coexistence of diverse religious and cultural identities, fostering an environment where individuals could freely express their beliefs and opinions without fear of repression. This perspective is evident in both his novels and his poetry, in which he often explores themes of alienation, cultural identity, and the struggle for intellectual and political freedom. By advocating for a secularism that promotes democratic values and intellectual freedom, İlhan sought to challenge both the authoritarian tendencies of the Kemalist state, and the dogmatic aspects of religious institutions.²⁰

Contrasting Views on Western Relations

The two figures' perceptions of Turkey's place in the Western world diverged significantly. According to Çınar,²¹ Necmettin Erbakan's anti-Western stance was rooted in his belief that Turkey was politically and culturally subjugated to Western powers, while Erbakan saw the country's NATO membership and its aspirations to join the European Union (EU) as detrimental to Turkey's independent Islamic identity. He believed that reliance on the West undermined Turkey's sovereignty and eroded its cultural and religious values. Consequently, Erbakan envisioned reducing Turkey's dependence on Western alliances and forming stronger relationships with Muslim-majority nations, particularly in the Middle East. His Islamic foreign policy was aimed at creating a bloc of Muslim countries able to counterbalance Western political dominance and promote mutual cooperation based on shared Islamic principles. This approach was in stark contrast to the pro-Western orientation of the Kemalist establishment, which sought to align Turkey more closely with European and American political and economic systems. Erbakan's vision included not only political and economic independence from the West, but also a cultural revival emphasizing Turkey's Islamic heritage. He believed that by strengthening ties with other Muslim countries, Turkey could both reclaim its role as a leader in the Islamic world and resist the cultural imperialism imposed by the West. This perspective influenced his domestic policies as well, as he sought to integrate Islamic values into education, governance, and public life, thereby reinforcing Turkey's Islamic identity and resisting Westernization.

Çora, H., & Çora, A. N.²² emphasised Atatürk's revolutionary efforts post-independence, focusing on enhancing Turkey's international prestige and positioning. They highlighted his commitment to establishing a modern state, while ensuring the Turkish nation earned its rightful place among global nations. Their study on Turks from the Western world's historical perspective underscores several key points regarding Turkey's international relations and historical context. The authors highlight Atatürk's

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Atilla İlhan, "Secularism and intellectual freedom in Turkey," *Journal of Turkish Literature* 15, no. 2 (2007): 123-145.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Muslum Çınar, "Erbakan's anti-Western stance and its impact on Turkey's foreign policy," *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004): 123-145.

²² Hakan Çora and Ali Nazmi Çora, "An International Relations Study: Turks in The Western World's History Perspective and Atatürk's Approach," *Journal of Organizational Behavior Research* 7, no. 1 (2022): 96-107.

revolutionary efforts to elevate Turkey's global status through both domestic reforms and international positioning. Atatürk implemented significant reforms post-independence, with the aim of modernising Turkey and asserting its place among nations. His policies were centred on enhancing national identity and fostering a sense of pride in Turkish heritage, which was crucial for international recognition. Their findings show that Atatürk aimed to elevate Turkey's global status by focusing on substance over form in state-building efforts.

In contrast, İlhan's opposition to the West was framed in anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist terms. His critique of the West was based on his belief that Western imperialism had economically exploited Türkiye and other countries in the Global South. His focus was on economic sovereignty and social justice, rather than religious conservatism (Savaş, 2008). İlhan saw Westernization as a form of economic and cultural domination, which he thought would prevent Türkiye from achieving true social progress and independence.

The intellectual and political legacies of Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan appear to offer valuable insights into the competing ideologies that have shaped modern Türkiye. Erbakan's Islamist political vision and critique of secularism contrast sharply with İlhan's Marxist anti-imperialist intellectual stance, and his advocacy for secular democracy. While both figures opposed Western dominance, their paths diverged significantly. Erbakan sought an Islamic alternative, while İlhan advocated for economic sovereignty and cultural freedom from Western influence. Understanding these contrasting legacies will provide a deeper comprehension of the complexities and tensions within Turkish politics, society, and culture.

While there has been substantial research on Necmettin Erbakan's political impact and Atilla İlhan's literary and intellectual contributions, comparative studies analysing their political and intellectual legacies in a unified framework remain relatively scarce. Much of the existing literature focuses either on their political ideologies or cultural outputs in isolation, and a synthesized comparative approach that bridges the two domains has been underexplored. This study will delve into how their secularism and views on Western relations intersect with and diverge from one another, particularly in the context of their respective political ideologies and intellectual pursuits.

Methodology

Data Collection

The documentation method involves the systematic collection and analysis of written materials, documents, and archival sources relevant to the study topic. This method is widely used in historical, political, and intellectual studies, as it allows researchers to gather textual evidence, often from primary sources, in order to gain insights into the ideas, actions, and legacies of significant individuals or movements.

The documents examined in this study have included:

- i. Primary documents:
 - o The speeches and writings of Erbakan and İlhan:
 - Erbakan: His political speeches, public statements, manifestos, and writings that reflect his views on Türkiye's secularism, Western relations, and his vision for political Islam.
 - İlhan: His literary works (poems, novels, and essays), as well as his interviews and public speeches, are key primary sources that provide insight into his Marxist ideology, views on secularism, and critique of Western imperialism.
 - o Official records and political documents:
 - Erbakan: Official documents from Erbakan's time in power (such as the 1996 Welfare Party Government), government reports, and policy documents can be examined to understand the political landscape and policies shaped by his views.
 - İlhan: His literary publications, essays, and columns in newspapers such as "*Cumhuriyet* and *Yeni İstanbul* provide valuable insights into his intellectual positions.

ii. Secondary sources:

- Books, Articles, and Biographies:
 - Secondary sources such as biographies, academic articles, and historical texts that discuss both Erbakan and İlhan's lives, careers, and contributions would offer context and deeper analysis of their influence on Turkish society. This includes works written by other scholars on Erbakan's political legacy and İlhan's literary and intellectual contributions.
- Political Analysis and Critiques:
 - Research articles and critiques analysing their political ideologies, their relationship with Western powers, and their impact on Turkish secularism would also be part of the documentation process.

Methods of Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a common method used in qualitative research to identify and analyse patterns or themes within qualitative data. This assists in gaining an understanding of the underlying ideas, assumptions, and beliefs expressed in the texts. The procedures used were as follows:

- i. Identifying key themes by scrutiny the texts, speeches, and writings of both Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan, identify recurring themes related to topics like secularism, Islamism, Western relations, and national identity. For example, both Erbakan and İlhan frequently discuss the importance of national sovereignty, but approach it from different ideological perspectives.
- ii. Grouping relevant excerpts by identifying key themes, organizing the relevant excerpts from each document. This includes quotes from speeches, writings, or essays that address specific themes or issues (such as secularism or Türkiye's role in the West).
- iii. Analysing patterns in how both figures discuss similar issues. For instance, Erbakan emphasized Islamic values in shaping national identity, while İlhan emphasized secularism as essential to the country's democratic future.

Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis involves systematically comparing the ideas and policies of two or more subjects. In this case, Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan have been compared to identify similarities and differences. This method is particularly useful when studying figures with contrasting ideologies, such as Erbakan's Islamic conservatism and İlhan's secular Marxism. The procedures used were as follows:

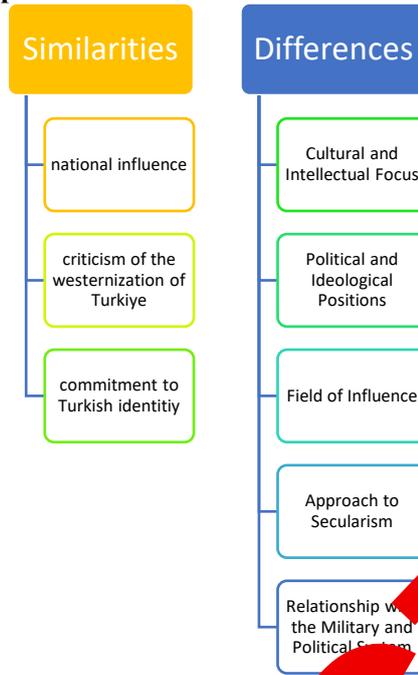
- i. Compare their arguments: Compare how both figures address similar issues, such as secularism, Türkiye's place in the West, and national identity. For example: How does Erbakan's Islamic vision of Turkish identity compare to İlhan's secular-nationalist vision? How do their views on Türkiye's foreign policy (relations with the West) differ? This approach is widely used throughout this article as appears in the literature review section (2.0), discussion (4.0), and findings (5.0) for instances.
- ii. Contrast their political and intellectual legacies: Compare the ways in which Erbakan's influence on Turkish politics and religion contrasts with İlhan's influence on literature and political thought. For instance, how did Erbakan's political actions shape Türkiye's Islamic governance, versus how İlhan's literary and intellectual work influenced secular thought? This approach is widely used throughout this article, as appears in the literature review section (2.0), discussion (4.0), and findings (5.0) for examples.
- iii. Identify the impact: Compare the influence of both figures on Turkish society. How did their ideologies resonate with different segments of the population, and how have their legacies endured over time? This approach has been widely used throughout this article, as appears in the findings section (5.0).

Discussion

Comparison between Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan

Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan were two prominent figures in Turkish politics and culture, but they came from vastly different backgrounds and had different roles in society. Erbakan was a political leader, while İlhan was a renowned poet, writer, and intellectual. Despite their differences, both had a significant influence on Turkish society, especially in the context of the political and cultural climate of their times.

Figure 1: Comparison between Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan



Similarities

i. National Influence:

Both Erbakan and İlhan exerted a considerable influence on Turkish society. Erbakan as a political leader and İlhan as an intellectual and literary figure each shaped the cultural and political discourse in Türkiye in their own way.

ii. Criticism of the Westernization of Türkiye:

Both figures expressed strong criticisms of the Western influence on Türkiye, though in different forms. Erbakan, through his political career, was deeply critical of Western imperialism, particularly in the economic and military realms. He argued for an independent Türkiye that was not dependent on the West, and pursued policies that emphasized Islamic solidarity and self-reliance. İlhan also criticized the Westernization of Turkish culture and society in his writings but his critiques were more philosophical and literary. He often expressed concerns about the erosion of traditional Turkish values and identity in the face of Western cultural dominance.

iii. Commitment to Turkish Identity:

Both were committed to defining and asserting a strong sense of Turkish identity. Erbakan focused on an Islamic-nationalist identity, and sought to bring religious values to the forefront of Turkish politics. İlhan, as a secular intellectual, was deeply invested in the concept of a Turkish national identity, often exploring the complex relationship between modernity and tradition in his works.

Differences

i. Field of Influence:

Necmettin Erbakan was a political leader, an engineer, and an academic. He founded the National Salvation Party (MSP) and the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), leading these parties in their efforts to bring more Islamic principles into the Turkish political system. He served as Prime Minister in the 1990s and was a key figure in Turkish politics. Atilla İlhan, on the other hand, was a poet, novelist, and essayist. He was not involved in politics directly, but his work in literature and philosophy had a profound impact on the cultural and intellectual life of Türkiye. İlhan's writing focused on social, political, and existential themes, often questioning Türkiye's modernization and the effects of Westernization on its society.

ii. Political and Ideological Positions:

Erbakan was a staunch Islamist and nationalist, advocating for policies that integrated religious values into public life. He was deeply critical of secularism and sought to reduce the influence of Western liberalism, particularly in terms of Türkiye's membership in NATO and the EU. His ideology was

rooted in conservative Islamic principles and economic nationalism. İlhan was a left-wing intellectual with a Marxist influence. While not strictly a member of any political party, his writings were aligned with anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist thought. He often critiqued both the political right and the military elite in Türkiye, favouring a more progressive vision for the future of the country. His political views were aligned with socialist ideals, and he was a critic of both the Islamic conservatism promoted by figures such as Erbakan, and the Westernized secular elites.

iii. Approach to Secularism:

Erbakan was openly against the secularism of the Turkish Republic, which he saw as an obstacle to the integration of Islamic values into political life. His vision was one of greater religious influence in the public sphere, and he tried to challenge the secularist state apparatus, especially during his tenure as Prime Minister. İlhan was also critical of secularism, but from a different perspective. His critiques were not levelled against secularism per se, but rather against its association with a certain Westernized elite that he believed had detached itself from the realities of Turkish culture. His works often explored the tension between traditional Turkish values and the pressure to conform to Western norms.

iv. Cultural and Intellectual Focus:

Erbakan's contributions remained largely in the realm of politics and economics. His focus was on reshaping the political landscape of Türkiye, with an emphasis on Islamic solidarity, economic independence, and nationalism. His legacy is thus primarily political. İlhan, in contrast, focused on the cultural and intellectual realm. His works, including poems, novels, and essays, interrogated the human condition, politics, and society, and were often used as a means to express his critiques. His legacy is largely in the fields of literature and intellectual thought.

v. Relationship with the Military and Political System:

Erbakan had a contentious relationship with the military establishment. His Islamist policies clashed with the secularist military establishment, leading to his ousting as Prime Minister in 1997 during the "post-modern coup." Erbakan's political career was marked by his opposition to military influence in Turkish politics. İlhan was less directly involved with the military or the day-to-day politics of Türkiye. However, as a left-wing intellectual, he frequently criticized the military's role in politics and its intervention in civilian governance. He was particularly vocal about the military's involvement in suppressing political movements, both left-wing and Islamist.

Findings

Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan each made significant but distinct impacts on Turkish society, each shaping the country in unique ways. Erbakan worked primarily through his political movements and İlhan through his intellectual and literary contributions. The following is a breakdown of their respective influences.

Necmettin Erbakan's Influence on Turkish Society

Political and Economic Vision

Erbakan's leadership was pivotal in the development of political Islam in Türkiye. As the leader of the National View Movement (Milli Görüş), Erbakan introduced an Islamist political agenda seeking to reassert Islamic values in public life. His policies and rhetoric emphasized economic development based on Islamic principles, a strong opposition to Westernization, and a critique of Türkiye's alignment with NATO and Western political structures. His tenure as prime minister (1996-1997) marked a period during which political Islam began to be recognized as a serious force in Turkish politics. He set the groundwork for later Islamist leaders, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who went on to found the AKP.

Economic and Social Vision

Erbakan's vision of an Islamic economy included an attempt to create an alternative to the capitalist, Western-oriented model. This included advocating for state intervention in the economy, fostering cooperation among Muslim countries, and focusing on self-sufficiency rather than relying on Western financial institutions. His government also promoted social policies that resonated with Türkiye's conservative and religious population, such as increased state support for religious education and the promotion of Islamic values in media and culture.

Anti-Western Sentiment and Nationalism

Erbakan's criticism of Türkiye's Westernization, as symbolized by its NATO membership, and his advocacy for a more independent Turkish foreign policy fostered a sense of nationalism that appealed to conservative and religious segments of Turkish society. His rhetoric often framed Türkiye's future as being more aligned with the Muslim world rather than with the West. His stance led to tensions with the secular elites, including the military, which saw his policies as a threat to the secular order established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This ultimately resulted in the 1997 "postmodern coup", in which Erbakan was forced to resign.

Enduring Legacy

Despite being ousted from power, Erbakan's legacy has lived on through his ideological influence on the AKP. His emphasis on Islamic values in politics, as well as his critique of secularism and Westernization, significantly shaped the direction of Türkiye's political landscape in the 21st century.

Atilla İlhan's Influence on Turkish Society

Intellectual and Literary Impact

Atilla İlhan was a towering figure in Turkish literature and intellectual thought, known for his poetry, novels, essays, and political commentary. For an example, *Benim Adım Denis* (My Name is Denis) (1967) is one of his most important works of poetry, where he seeks to merge his poetic style with his political beliefs. Atilla İlhan's poetry is often marked by powerful imagery, social commentary, and a critical stance against social inequalities and political oppression. Apart from that, he wrote a novel entitled *Havva'nın Üç Oğlu* (Havva's Three Sons) (1971), which was a socio-political commentary reflecting the evolution of Türkiye's political climate, especially regarding the rise of conservatism and religiosity. His novels often blend political narratives with rich psychological and social analysis, addressing the dilemmas of modern Turkish society. He combined Marxism, nationalism, and existentialist philosophy to critique Turkish society, politics, and history. Through his literary works, İlhan challenged the dominant narratives of the Turkish public, particularly the Kemalist ideology and the secular-nationalist policies of the state. His works are often seen as a rejection of Western imperialism and an exploration of Türkiye's socio-political struggles.

Political Commentary

İlhan was a vocal critic of the Turkish military establishment, which he saw as the main force behind maintaining a secular-nationalist status quo. His leftist, anti-imperialist stance attracted many readers who were disillusioned with the ruling elite and sought alternatives. His works frequently critiqued the economic injustices and social inequalities in Türkiye. Through his novel *A Şiir Hırsız* and his poetry, he portrayed the struggles of ordinary people, elevating their voices against systemic oppression.

Fusion of Literature and Politics

İlhan's ability to merge literary expression with political ideology made him a unique figure. His poetry often engaged with political events, and he wrote about Türkiye's tumultuous political landscape, including military coups and the struggles of the working class. His novels, such as *Sisler Bulvarı*, explored existential crises and social alienation, while also conveying a deep political critique. His Marxist-inspired class struggle and his critiques of neoliberal economic policies in Türkiye resonated with a growing intellectuals and youth who sought to understand Türkiye's place in the broader global context.

Cultural Nationalism

While İlhan was critical of Western imperialism, he remained deeply nationalistic, although his version of nationalism was distinct from the Kemalist or Erbakan-style nationalism. He called for a more authentic and humane vision of Turkish identity rejecting both Western cultural dominance and the authoritarianism of the state. His works often drew on Turkish history and culture, while calling for reform and modernization in ways more aligned with social justice and humanism than with traditional state-backed nationalism.

Lasting Influence

İlhan's influence on Turkish literature and intellectual life continues to be felt today. His works are still widely read, and his political views continue to spark debate. His commitment to individual freedom,

social justice, and anti-imperialism has made him a champion of the left-wing intellectual tradition in Türkiye.

Comparing Their Impacts

Erbakan had a more direct and long-lasting impact on Turkish political structures, particularly in shaping the political landscape for future Islamist movements. His legacy is embedded in Türkiye's political Islam, influencing the policies of the AKP. İlhan, on the other hand, made a cultural and intellectual contribution, challenging the dominant political and social structures through literary and philosophical works. His influence is more often seen in the realm of intellectual discourse and literary critique.

Both figures challenged Türkiye's political and cultural status quo in their own ways. Erbakan's influence was more focused on policy and governance, while İlhan's was focused on cultural critique and intellectual thought. Together, they represent two powerful, yet contrasting forces in shaping modern Türkiye: Erbakan's rise of political Islam and İlhan's critique of authoritarianism and Western imperialism.

Measuring Necmettin Erbakan's Influence

Political Legacy

- i. **Electoral Success and Political Movements:** One key indicator of Erbakan's influence is the success of the National View Movement (Millî Görüş) and the later formation of political parties such as AKP. The rise of political Islam in Türkiye can be tracked through the growth of these movements, particularly after Erbakan's tenure. One could measure his political legacy through the success of political parties that followed his ideological principles, especially in terms of their performance in national elections. For an example, the AKP's dominance in Turkish politics starting in 2002 serves as a long-term indicator of Erbakan's ideological success, even after he was no longer in power. The party's Islamist roots, as influenced by Erbakan, demonstrate the lasting impact of his ideas.
- ii. **Policy Influence:** The policies implemented during his tenure (e.g., economic independence, close ties to Islamic countries) continue to influence Turkish policy, especially in areas such as foreign relations and economic nationalism. The extent to which these policies were adopted or modified by future governments (including the AKP) is another measure of his political influence.

Public Opinion and Ideology

- i. **Support Base:** The strength of the conservative and Islamist electorate in Türkiye is another sign of Erbakan's long-lasting influence. Public opinion polls showing the strength of political Islam in Türkiye can give insight into his ideological legacy. One could look at surveys of Turkish voters to see how many still identify with the Islamic-conservative political ideology he promoted.
- ii. **Cultural and Social Movements:** Erbakan's emphasis on Islamic values, religious education, and social conservatism had a cultural impact, especially in educational reforms and media. One way to measure this is by examining the number of religious schools (such as the Imam Hatip schools) and the growing presence of Islamic media (TV channels, publications) during the AKP's rule, as reflections of his influence.

Political Events and Movements

- i. **Military Interventions:** The 1997 military intervention (the "postmodern coup") that forced Erbakan to resign is a crucial moment in his political story. The military's resistance to his government and the subsequent role of the military in Turkish politics can also be a measure of the tension Erbakan created between secular and Islamist factions. The historical documents, military reports, and political discussions from that era invite an assessment of how Erbakan's ideas challenged the secular establishment.

Measuring Atilla İlhan's Influence

Literary and Intellectual Impact

- i. **Publication Reach and Sales:** A basic quantitative measure of İlhan's influence is the publication history of his works—how many of his books and poems have been published, how many editions there are, and how they have been received over time. For instance, the reprints and continued popularity of his works, such as *A Şiir Hırsız*, indicate how widely his ideas have been circulated and appreciated.
- ii. **Cultural Institutions:** If one were to examine how often İlhan's works are taught in universities and discussed in literary and intellectual circles, one could measure his intellectual influence. The inclusion of his work in university syllabi and the establishment of academic conferences and journals dedicated to his thought are strong indicators of his ongoing relevance in Turkish intellectual life.

Public Perception and Critique

- i. **Impact on Political Discourse:** İlhan's poetry and essays critiqued Turkey's political systems, including military rule and Western influence. One way to assess this is by analyzing literary criticism, academic papers, and political commentary that engage with his works. For example, his critique of imperialism and capitalism has resonated in Turkish leftist circles. The extent to which his critique shaped political discourse, especially among the intellectual and working-class left, demonstrates the breadth of his influence.
- ii. **Public Opinion and Popularity:** Measuring how frequently his ideas and poetry appear in public discourse, including debates, articles, and media, could provide insight into his influence on Turkish society. For example, his political opinions are referenced in media debates and his poetry is quoted by public figures, indicating that his intellectual contributions have permeated public life.

Awards and Recognition

- i. **Awards and Literary Recognition:** The number of national and international awards he received, as well as literary recognition (e.g., his inclusion in global literary anthologies), serve as an indicator of the broad acceptance and influence of his intellectual legacy.
- ii. **Translations and Global Influence:** The number of translations of his works into other languages is another important measure of his cultural influence. His works were translated and studied internationally, indicating the global reach of his ideas.

Enduring Influence

Film and Television Adaptations: A qualitative measure of İlhan's lasting influence can also be seen in how his works have been adapted into other forms of media, such as films, documentaries, and TV shows. His works have been continued to be interpreted by later generations, demonstrating their

Socio-Political Movements

Influence on the Left: İlhan's contributions to the Turkish left-wing intellectual movement can be tracked by examining how his writings have been taken up by activists and political leaders. One of Atilla İlhan's works that has been particularly influential and frequently referenced by activists and political leaders is his poem *Benim Naçiz Vücutum* (My Humble Body), particularly the line: "*Benim naçiz vücudum, elbet bir gün toprağa varacak... Fakat, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ilelebet payidar kalacaktır!*" [Translation: "My humble body will surely one day return to the soil... But the Republic of Türkiye will forever endure!"]

This line has been embraced by activists and politicians, especially those who advocate for the continuation of Türkiye's secular republic and Kemalist principles. İlhan's declaration reflects his firm belief in the lasting strength of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's republic, which is an idea that has often resonated with secular-nationalist political figures and movements in Türkiye. Atilla İlhan's poems such as *Benim Naçiz Vücutum* have been quoted by leftist and secular activists and leaders who align with Kemalism and advocate for the protection of secularism, democracy, and national sovereignty in

Türkiye. His works often serve as rallying cries for political groups that seek to defend Türkiye's independence and secular republic, particularly against perceived threats from political Islam or authoritarianism.

In addition to this poem, İlhan's essays and literary works often addressed issues of social justice, class struggle, and anti-imperialism, which were also influential for leftist political figures and activists, particularly in the 1960s-1980s, during which Türkiye saw the rise of political radicalism. His intellectual engagement with Marxism, secularism, and anti-imperialist thought helped shape his identity as an activist intellectual who sought to inspire change through both literature and political thought. His works remain significant for political movements in Türkiye which emphasize the importance of the republic's founding principles, secularism, and national independence.

Conclusion

In essence, Necmettin Erbakan and Atilla İlhan represent different spheres of influence in Turkish society: Erbakan in the political arena with his Islamist-nationalist agenda and İlhan in the cultural and intellectual sphere with his Marxist, anti-imperialist stance. While both were critical of Westernization and concerned with Türkiye's national identity, their approaches and ideologies were worlds apart. Erbakan's focus was on implementing Islamic principles within the political system, while İlhan's work critiqued both the Islamic right and the secular left, with the aim of fostering a more progressive and culturally-rooted vision for Türkiye.

Erbakan's influence can primarily be measured through political success, policy shifts, and long-term electoral success, while İlhan's influence is best measured by literary acclaim, intellectual legacy, and his impact on cultural and political discourse. Together, they illustrate the diverse ways in which politics and intellectual thought have shaped modern Turkish society, with Erbakan's legacy in the political realm and İlhan's in the cultural and intellectual spheres.

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