

Neo-Islamic Culture's Influence on Recent Turkish Media

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Edited by

Asli Kotaman, Artun Avcı
and Onver Cetrez

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INTRODUCTION

ASLI KOTAMAN

This book aims to study the Islamic influence on the Turkish media, especially on cinema during early 2000's. Turkey has a long tradition of secularism, where the role of religion was limited in the public arena already in the era of Kemal Atatürk. Since then Turkey has seen itself as a "secular" state, but religious belief is still dominant in the cultural sphere. In Turkish movies, most of the traditions and rituals tend to be derived from Islamic culture. Turning a critical eye on Turkish movies in Turkey's cultural life, the book will examine the Turkish films against the backdrop of the country's overall socio-political development, starting from the beginning of the Turkish film industry. It will try to illustrate a broad array of themes: from gender relations to feminism, religion and popular ideas about sexuality and morality. Focusing on representations of a religious minority, it will draw out issues such as the formation of the Turkish nation, Turkey's political and social taboos, and how these affect cinematic stereotyping.

The volume concentrates on various approaches concerning the relation between Turkish cinema and religion, the traditions and rituals of Islam, the representation of Muslim women and changes in the narratives and characters. This will be a comprehensive source on Turkish cinema in English - a milestone at a time when numerous disciplines have shown an increasing interest in the emerging new Islamic popular culture.

The book is addressed to a wider public, but scholars such as advanced students will be very interested in this topic. *It is for* those who are interested in Turkey's opinion about itself and for people who work in film studies, media studies, religious studies, gender studies and the political sciences, in fact for anyone who has an interest in Middle Eastern studies as well as for world cinema enthusiasts in general.

In Önver Cetrez's chapter titled "**Meaning-Making Activity through Media use: A Description of Value Studies in Turkey**", the author presents data from different value studies, comparing Turkey with some

other countries as well as presenting specific results on media use in Turkey. The chapter ends with a discussion on relations between religion and secularism, as well as problematizing the comparison of values across countries.

In Artun Avcı's chapter titled "**The Nationwide Rise of Political Islam in Turkey**", religion (Islam) was held responsible for the country's underdevelopment, and the program of secularization of modern Turkey consisted of eradicating the religion (Islam) from the public sphere and limiting it to the private sphere. Although the dominant ideology of modern Turkey has been "assertive" secularism, Islam has always been a very important component of the socio-cultural and economic system in Anatolia. Islam had the power to shape the beliefs, contribute to a sense of safety, and give the believers a feeling of power. Following the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey, the recently radicalized ideological line of political Islamism became the most attractive choice for subaltern populations, as a result of which the main support base of the ruling party shifted from the conservative provinces to urban poor areas in the metropolitan centres. And the neo-liberal economic and social policies of the 1980s promoted religious interest groups, the development of an Islamic business world and religious or conservative middle classes and "bourgeoisie" whose members originated from the provincial towns of Anatolia.

In Elif Andac and Cigdem Slankard's chapter titled "**Un-covered: The Headscarf as an icon in Turkish Cinema**", using cinematic examples from three major periods in modern Turkish political history, the 1950s and '60s, the 1970s through the early '80s, and the post-'90s, this chapter looks at the use of one of the most visible and controversial elements in the religion-state conflict: the headscarf, and narrates the process of politicization of the headscarf in Turkish public life through film.

In Britta Van Paepegem's chapter titled "**'Signating' Representations of Islam in Semih Kaplanoğlu's *Yumurta***", she aims to interpret Semih Kaplanoğlu's award-winning *Yumurta*, the first instalment of his "Yusuf Trilogy," through the lens of Hamid Dabashi's novel and the radical semiotic theory of "Signation". This post-Orientalist cinematic theory offers an imaginative way of analysing manifestations of culture that are often assumed to have single, fixed meanings. In Dabashi's studies of Iranian cinema, "signation" occurs when the semiotic sign rebels and resists our attempts to signify it, and then "palpitates," as Dabashi puts it. The goal of this chapter is to relate signation theory to selected scenes in *Yumurta*.

Eylem Atakav's chapter titled "**Honour is everything for Muslims**": **Religious Identity and Gender Politics in Turkish Cinema**" questions the ways in which perceptions and misperceptions of Islam are represented in film. Religious values are significant determinants of Turkish cultural practices and customs: honor killings may not be religious but they are certainly religiously practiced. Indeed, violence shapes gender relations in various ways. Both in reality and at the level of representation, it resonates at different levels: verbal, physical, emotional. In examining the concepts of religious identity and gender politics, this chapter will focus on the cinematic representation of honor killings whilst considering the documentary aesthetics of *Vendetta Song* and the contingent relationship between Islam, culture and these killings. As stated in the film, honor crimes have indeed nothing to do with Islam and this customary practice has been wrongly associated with religion.

In Nilay Ulusoy's chapter titled "**A Neo Noir in the Age of Neo Islam: Takva**" the author states that "Takva" highlights a great problem by directing attention to the conflicts between the practices in Islamic institutions, the Islamic way of life and the financial substructure enabling such a lifestyle. In the present study, through the dilemmas a true Muslim Muharrem who used to be a man of modesty and transience faces in his new life backed up with money and technology, we shall attempt to analyse the current socio-cultural status, expectations and anxieties that introduced a "neo noir" in the Turkey of the year 2000 which had witnessed an era shaped under market conditions but also, on the other hand, the rise of conservative policies.

In Tulay Dikenoglu Suer's chapter titled "**The Transformation of Welfare Regime and TV Dramas**" the dramas have been selected for examination from among the most popular ones from the mainstream TV stations rather than those associated with Islam. In these narratives, big committed families or neighbourhoods where love, respect and solidarity prevail are praised, whereas individualism is downgraded. Conservative touches can also be observed in the representation of women according to moral values. Women are portrayed positively as long as they obey the rules of the family. Otherwise, several negative features such as dishonesty, adultery, blackmail, etc. are attributed to them. The author argues that these fictitious worlds do more than bringing the illusion of good old times into our living rooms through television by projecting a conservative and neo-liberal approach to welfare on to society.

In Ugur Kutay's chapter titled "**Dream Cinema: Possibilities and Impossibilities**", the focus is on dream cinema in the mid-1990s, where civil society gets rid of the effects of the coup of September 12, 1980 in Turkey. Three thinkers reflect on Islamic cinema: A. Şasa, S. Yalsızuçanlar and İ. Kabil. They head off to lay the foundations of a theoretical "spiritual cinema", an attempt which fails to reach a stronger theoretical level than "National" and "White Cinema", as it repeats the many same mistakes, while Turkey becomes a modern and globalized country.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATIONWIDE RISE OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN TURKEY

ARTUN AVCI

The history of Turkish modernisation has been linked with the question of secularism, which has been a key political theme since the early twentieth century (1908). Islam was considered responsible for the underdevelopment of the Ottoman Empire in the opinion of the Western-oriented bureaucrats. From the advent of the Turkish Republic (1923), the founder, Kemal Atatürk, initiated a programme of secularisation of modern Turkey. The programme consisted of eradicating religion (Islam) from the public sphere and limiting it to a “very narrowly defined” private sphere. So Turkish secularism is based on a radical “laïcité jacobine” that aimed to transform society through the power of the state and eliminate religion from public life (Yavuz and Esposito, 2009:xvi).

According to the founders of the state, ‘modernisation’ is only possible if religion can be banished from the public and social spheres. As a result of the idea of “Islam being an obstacle to progress”, there was an engagement between modernity and positivism. Positivism became the powerful ideology of the modern Turkish state. Positivism and secularism both made their mark on the new republic of Turkey. Religion was expected to fade away as a result of the consequential ‘enlightenment’ and ‘modernisation’ of Turkish society and the associated upward economic and social mobility of its citizens (Gulalp, 2003).

The meaning of the term ‘secular’ is usually understood as “a process of organizing society or aspects of social life around non-religious values or principles that is linked closely to Max Weber's concept of a growing ‘disenchantment of the world’, as the sphere of the magical, sacred and religious retreats in cultural significance before the driving force of rationalization” (Online Dictionary, ‘Secularisation’). But in Turkey, the

term is not understood as the separation of the religious and political realms; Turkish secularism does not involve a neutral stance toward different religious beliefs. Instead, the Turkish state has a preferential link with Sunni Islam.

Actually, owing to “the search for security and stable political authority”, the religion (Islam) has always been seen as a vital instrument for the existence and preservation of the Ottoman-Turkish state. And naturally, the state has been seen as a vital instrument of Islam and the Muslim community. Thus, the state and the *ulema* (Muslim scholar interpreter of the doctrines of Sunni Islam) have been in a symbiotic relationship because of the need for the legitimacy of the state (Yavuz, 2004:220). The goal was/is always “to protect the state”.

The difference between the Republican and the Ottoman eras is revealed in how they conceive of religion. In both eras, there was a supervisory control of religion by the state which was the result of the concept of “state-centric religion”. However, the Republican elites did not consider religion as a social and cultural structure for unification. They were also different from the Ottoman elites. The new elites had an affinity with the ideals of the Enlightenment; they believed progress was only possible through positivist science and rationalism.

The new republican elites broke with the old Ottoman practice of establishing bridges that linked the elite and the masses through the recognition of religion as a discourse—as the foundation of society. The new republican ideology denied Islam its role as a discourse and as the “cement” of society (Mardin, 1997). As Mardin commented in his study of the Ottoman system, Islam promoted “a form of solidarity and socio-political identity “which established bridges between social groups (a common language shared by the upper and lower classes). Islam was the way of life of Ottoman practice. However, this organic link disappeared in the new republic when the Turkish intellectuals of republican times made a clean break with the past. The elite (intellectuals) felt disoriented in the first years of the republic and the shattering of the “everyday” way of life presented serious problems (ibid.). One of the serious problems was “delimiting the scope of modernity”.

The historical genesis of the state tradition in Turkey determined the choices made by the modernisers in their attempt to delimit the scope of modernity, thus undermining their avowed goal of Westernisation (Keyder, 1997). Modernisation is accepted as an efficient state policy in

Turkey. Progress, modernisation and development were the ideals built for the project of the new Turkish Republic. This period was the time when the 'nation' was considered to be homogeneously unified, with common interests without any class differentiation or privileges. The ideal perception of Western modernisation was built on eliminating all kinds of traditional and authoritarian communities and enabling individuals to exercise their autonomous wills. In Western modernisation, the subject of the public sphere is the people who possess their own free will. However, in the construction of the new Turkish Republic, the people are to be seen more as a homogeneous community than as individuals. The modernised interpretation of Turkey was not disposed to providing individuals with their fundamental rights and desires (Keyder et al., 1995).

The "restricted public sphere" of religion illustrates the antagonistic approach of the Turkish state towards religion during the period 1923–1946. The processes of modernisation and particularly secularisation were top priorities for the Turkish state, and the influence of Islam on politics, economics, education and culture was seen as the most significant barrier to the progress of modernisation (Crona and Capelos, 2010).

The ban on both orthodox and heterodox Islamic religious *tariqats* (orders) and religious attire, and the eradication of religion from the public and social realm "to confine it to the conscience of people", put religious institutions under the control of the Directorate of Religious Affairs to promote a "modern Islam" free from all kinds of superstition. The founder of the republic, Kemal Atatürk, stated clearly: "*We get our inspiration not from the heavens or invisible things but directly from life*" (1945:389). In 1924, Atatürk replaced sharia with secular law and emphasised the political-legal supremacy of citizenship over Islamic religious affiliation in defining Turkish identity. On March 3, 1924, the Caliphate was abolished and the National Assembly passed legislation which undermined the legality of the religious foundations. The head of the Presidency of Religious Affairs was to be appointed by the President and under the direct control of the government. The law entitled "the Unification of Education" placed all educational establishments (especially religious establishments) under the Ministry of Education, thus under the central government. A Faculty of Theology at Istanbul University and special schools for training imams and hatips (ministers and preachers) were opened by the new Ministry of National Education. However, in 1933, the Faculty of Theology was abolished and *Imam Hatip* schools were discontinued due to a lack of student interest (Cakir et al., 2012).

Kuru (2012) has mentioned the term ‘assertive secularism’ as more accurately describing state-religion relations in Turkey. “Assertive secularism” – different from “passive secularism”¹ – excludes religion from the public sphere. It demands that the state plays an “assertive” role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain. According to Kuru, “assertive secularism” has been the dominant ideology in Turkey since the foundation of the Republic.²

“Assertive secularism” cannot be considered a dominant ideology all on its own. The dominant understanding of Ottoman-Turkish politics was/is a “state-centric political culture” or “protecting the Turkish state”. To strengthen the state and centre was/is always the main principle of Ottoman-Turkish politics. In the Ottoman-Turkish state philosophy, the control of the state over the economy was/is the proof of the hierarchy between the economy and politics. The state is synonymous with politics in Turkish political culture. Those who are authorised to deal with politics must be “superior governors” and must have superior personal skills. The mass was considered to be unauthorised, immature and incapable of attaining this position. There is a meeting point in both republican and Islamist political perceptions in restricting the public sphere and limiting the legitimate political field. Both ideologies aim to homogenise society in a non-liberal and non-pluralist way, each claiming that it represents the true will of the society.

Republican elites also accepted the aim of “strengthening state power” as the main policy. As a result of this, sceptical and distrustful governance in the periphery and its values made its mark on the first era of the Republican period (1923–1946). It lay behind the idea of delimiting “the scope of modernity”, with the Republican elites choosing to impose laws and regulations from the top down rather than activating the public to reconstruct the new society (Mardin, 2003:64). The elites wanted to create a new society through revolutions and reforms just like the *Jacobins* in the French Revolution. To create a new society was to start from the beginning, launching a new history. To achieve this, all Ottoman values, structures and institutions had to be rejected except for the “state-centric political perception”. There would be a new language, new history and

¹ Passive secularism allows for the public visibility of religion and requires that the state play a “passive” role in avoiding the establishment of any religions. See Kuru (2012).

² France is also considered to be using assertive secularism and the state has played an assertive role in confining religion to the private sphere.

new economics to build up a new national identity. The “neighbourhood pressure” (*mahalle baskısı*) would be eliminated and individuals would control their own destinies. The new society would be a modern society in which women and men would be considered equal. The idea behind the reforms and revolutions was the main principle of Enlightenment philosophy: individuals must decide their own destinies. Republican elites chose the centre (the state) to be a counter to the periphery (rural areas) in a “great equaliser” role. And that was the beginning of eradicating from the public sphere the traditional, religious, ethnic groups who were supposedly incapable of coping with the modern society since they belonged to an ancient history (Mardin, 2003:65). The Republican governance rapidly became “positivist authoritarian” and this caused the inversion of values, codes and the conceptual understanding of the people.

Since the foundation of Turkey, its political history has reflected two key aspects: a strongly secularising and centralising state and the political domination of the military (Haynes, 2009:96).³ Although the dominant ideology has been strong or “assertive” secularism and secularisation has been at the centre of attention, religious networking has always been a very important component of the socio-cultural and economic system in Anatolia. The state sought to obstruct the development of Islamic networking in Anatolia. Nevertheless, the Islamic religious orders have exerted a significant influence over the Anatolian masses; they developed as the opposition to the Kemalist nationalist view of modernisation. Though religion as a factor had been excluded from the public sphere and limited to the private sphere during the Kemalist regime, it retained the power to shape the beliefs, contribute to a sense of safety, and give the believers a feeling of power.

After the Second World War, critiques of the secularist education policy were placated in 1948. The ruling party, CHP (Republican People’s Party), which was the representative of the “assertive secularism”, launched religious education in the public schools. Such reforms included the offer of ten-month Imam Hatip courses to junior high school graduates as well as the establishment of a Faculty of Theology at the University of Ankara in 1949 (Cakir et al., 2012). The number of Qur’an schools increased rapidly to 99 in 1946 and 118 in 1948. The centre-right party DP (Democrat Party) defeated the CHP in the elections in 1950. The DP

³ We may say that the military’s political domination has ended due to the rise of political Islam and the AKP in the 2010s, although Turkey is not strongly secularist but still a strongly centralising state at present.

government continued the re-opening of the *Imam Hatip* schools; made religious education compulsory in state schools; expanded it in primary and intermediate schools; and legislated the Arabisation of *ezan*.⁴ Since 1950, the centre-right/conservative parties, such as the DP (1950–1960), the *Adalet* (Justice) Party (1961–1980), the *Anavatan* (Motherland) Party (1983–) and the *Doğru Yol* (True Path) Party (DYP) (1983–2007) have been some of the main opponents of “assertive secularism” in Turkey.⁵ These parties generally opposed such policies and tolerated the public visibility of religion (especially Sunni Islam) (Kuru, 2012). One of the other sets of opponents has been the political Islamist *Milli Görüş* (National View) movements, such as the *Milli Nizam* (National Order) Party (1970–1971) and the *Milli Selamet* (National Salvation) Party (1972–1980), the *Refah* (Welfare) Party (RP) (1983–1997), the *Fazilet* (Virtue) Party (1997–2001), the *Saadet* (Felicity) Party (2001–) and the *Adalet ve Kalkınma* (Justice and Development) Party (2001–). The last of these, the AKP, declined to be defined as Islamist (they defined themselves as “conservative democrat”) and defended Turkey’s membership in the EU (especially in the period 2002–2005) when the founders of the party (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, Bülent Arınç) had shaped their political identities within the *Milli Görüş* movement. All the other opponents have been religious orders or movements (the Nurcu movement, the Gülen movement,⁶ Naqshibandi and other tariqas).

In the process of restructuring which came with the 1960 military intervention, Islam’s political appeal increased. One of the reasons was the Cold War. The Muslims of Turkey supported Turkey’s entry into NATO and when the leftist movements became powerful in the 1960s and 1970s, the state used the Islamic groups as an antidote to leftist ideologies and activism (Yavuz, 2004:222). The other reason was the emergence of the new forms of cultural, economic and societal life in Anatolia (the

⁴ *Ezan* is the Islamic call to Muslim prayers recited by the muezzin who calls the faithful to prayer five times a day.

⁵ During the Cold War, with the rise of the leftist challenges (in the ‘60s and ‘70s) to the Turkish state (which has been a NATO member since the 1950s), the state (the ruling centre-rightist/ conservative parties) co-opted Islamic movements.

⁶ The Gülen Movement is an important actor and plays a leading role in Turkish politics and civil society. The movement is organised around the religious leader Fethullah Gülen and several media outlets, including newspapers and television stations, and it controls charities, real estate, companies, and more than a thousand schools internationally.

periphery). The *Milli Nizam* (National Order) Party was established under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan in 1970 but was closed down the following year by the Constitutional Court as it was considered to be exploiting religion for political purposes. In 1972, the *Milli Selamet* (National Salvation) Party (NSP) was established, again under the leadership of Erbakan. The party became an important political actor in Turkish politics and increased its percentage of votes in the 1973 and 1977 elections. It largely represented Anatolian cities controlled by religiously conservative Sunnis and the small traders and artisans (*esnaf*) of the hinterland who had long waited to benefit from the state's modernisation policies but had rarely done so, partly due to their own resistance to modernisation in the name of religion and tradition (Narli, 1999). Anatolian capitalist groups (called "Anatolian Tigers" – Anadolu Kaplanları – in the 1980s in reference to a number of cities in Anatolia which have displayed impressive growth records and which could be divided into two groups: conservative, religious businessmen and companies owned by religious orders or *tariqats*) were to be strongly supportive of political Islamism (Milli Görüş movement, Refah Party, Fazilet Party and AKP) in Turkey.

Upon the retreat of the radical left following the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey and the collapse of state socialism worldwide, the recently radicalised ideological line of the political Islamists became the most attractive choice for subaltern populations, as a result of which the main support base of the party shifted from the conservative provinces to urban poor areas in the metropolitan centres (Tugal, 2002). The goal of the military regime (1980–1983) was a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" (*Türk-İslam Sentezi*) aimed at implementing "controlled" Sunni Islamism against the leftist political threat⁷ by "Sunnifying" Alevi as well as "Turkifying" Kurdish citizens through compulsory religious education and a pro-active

⁷ Turkish Islam is in constant evolution as a result of the tension between heterodox and orthodox interpretations of Islam. Orthodox Islam (Sünni İslam) sees the existence and preservation of the "powerful state" and "stable political authority" as a vital instrument for the existence of Islam and the Muslim community. Due to the search for security and stable political authority, Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire (and also in Republican Turkey) remained loyal to the state as long as it was benefiting from such loyalty, and it has been in a symbiotic relationship with it. Unlike Sünni Islam, heterodox Sufi Islam (*Alevi*) has an ambiguous and confrontational relation with the state. See Yavuz, 2010. During the military regime (1980–1983), *Alevi* pupils were obliged to attend mandatory (Sunni) religious education, and state-funded mosques were constructed in *Alevi* villages.

Presidency of Religious Affairs, thereby paving the way for further Islamisation of Turkish society (Karakas in Gulmez). The 1982 Constitution strengthened the power of “controlled Sunni Islam” and the governments of the 1980s restored mandatory (Sunni) religious education in secondary schools, removed controls on Islamic orders and *tariqas*, and increased the number of the *Imam Hatip* schools (from 72 in 1970 to 382 in 1988) (Cakir et al., 2012). The military regime granted Sunni Islam an important role in the country’s socio-political development.

However, we cannot explain “the rise of political Islamism in Turkey” solely by the restoration of mandatory religious education, the loosening of state control over Islamic movements, and the increasing number of Qur’an or Imam Hatip schools, etc. We need to consider the underlying features of the new global context: globalisation and the global economy. Until the 1980s, there was a substantial state monopoly on economic, political and socio-cultural life in Turkey. The state was using import-substituting industrialisation, controlling the market and even controlling the socio-cultural life of the citizens. There was also a monopoly of the one-channel state-controlled public television.

With Prime Minister Turgut Özal’s neoliberal economic policies between 1983 and 1993, the advent of new mass communication networks in the 1990s further contributed to the weakening of the overpowering role of the state, which created a link between the public sphere and the market. The emergence of a new *bourgeoisie*, along with new global consumption patterns, led to the proliferation of independent TV, radio, and newspaper outlets, which in turn blurred the boundary between the local and the transnational (Yavuz and Esposito, 2003). The neoliberal economic and social policies promoted religious interest groups and the development of an Islamic business world and a religious or conservative “Anatolian bourgeoisie” (Anadolu Kaplanları). Furthermore, a new conservative “petite bourgeoisie” emerged whose members originated from the provincial towns of Anatolia. Small and medium-scale enterprises at local levels have formed a new business community by improving their business practices, acquiring technology, and searching for new markets, and even without direct support from the government, the advantages brought about by openness have triggered a process of production and capital accumulation in Anatolia (Demir and Toprak). The new Anatolian business elite desired to assert their provincial identity and preserve their values and traditions and were differentiating themselves from the more urban, secularist, Westernised business elite represented by TUSIAD (the Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists’ Association) (Narli). This has been the

main difference between the centre and the periphery in Turkey, starting in the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire and continuing during the Republic. It refers to the centre as representing the urban, secular and more Westernised part of the country occupied by military and bureaucratic officials, whereas the periphery is religiously oriented, agricultural, traditional and far removed from Western principles, being divided into religious and region-based groups of people (Mardin, 2003).

This cleavage is seen as the main explanatory factor of political preferences. The religiously oriented people (and the new conservative Anatolian middle and upper-class) have been strongly supportive of the centre-rightist/conservative parties (until the 1990s) and the political Islamist parties (RP, FP and AKP) since 1994. Meanwhile, the urban, secular and more Westernised people (with the military and the Kemalist bureaucracy) vote for the Kemalist (especially CHP – the Republican People’s Party) and liberal (especially the *Anavatan* – Motherland – Party) parties.

In 1983, the National View (*Milli Görüş*) movement founded the *Refah* (Welfare) Party (RP), which was strengthened by the rise of Islamic movements throughout politics in the 1990s. The RP became successful in local elections in 1994 and won the mayoral seats in Istanbul and Ankara. In 1995, it increased its share of the votes to 21.4% to become the leading party. In Turkish politics, this was the first time an Islamist party had won a national election, and it formed a coalition government with Tansu Ciller’s True Path (*Doğru Yol*) Party and Erbakan became prime minister in 1996. Political Islamism was shaping the National View movement and Erbakan’s viewpoint towards an attitude opposing globalisation and Turkey’s membership of the EU (the RP saw the EU as a “Christian club”). The movement’s basic doctrine in the 1970s was “leading the country’s development of heavy industry “The ideological core of the National View was a combination of a traditionalist discourse and a modern, defensive, positivist conception of so-called Western science and technology, the latter being readily welcomed through its naturalisation by reference to its Islamic roots (Yildiz, 2003). In the 1990s, even the National View had a political Islamist and anti-Western agenda; its second discourse on welfare policies like “just order” (*adil düzen*) and promising to end corruption in Turkish politics was gaining ground.

The RP succeeded in winning over the social-democratic and centre-left’s traditional suburban voters who had religious beliefs and cultural roots in Islam and had migrated to the cities because of globalisation. The call for “just order” was the key to the RP’s popularity among the working class in

the context of the collapsed welfare state, a worsening distribution of income, a continually high rate of inflation, and constant rumours of government corruption. The discourse that identified the exploiters as those who rely on the state and its Kemalist ideology won significant support from the working class (Gulalp, 2001). Moreover, the party brought under one roof both the peripheral segments of the business class and people from the working class and attempted to unite them around a common Islamic identity (ibid.). The emergence of the rise of political Islamism was the sign of the new sociological paradigm in the 1990s. The centre-periphery paradigm shifted into the global-local conflict paradigm due to the fact that economic and social demands in Turkey were expressed through cultural and political identities (Bayramoglu, 2001).

As part of the Milli Görüş (National View) political Islamist and anti-Western agenda, the RP was planning to establish an international organisation among Muslim countries. The party aimed at gender-segregated buses and the prohibition of alcohol in government facilities (cafes, restaurants, etc.) using the explicit language of political Islam. Erbakan advocated sharia law in 1994, stating *“Of course it will be back; the only question is whether the process will be bloody or bloodless”* (Radikal, 2000). The RP’s policies and the Prime Minister’s discourse provided an excuse for the military to stage a “soft” (so-called postmodern) coup d’état on February 28, 1997, which brought an end to the coalition and Erbakan was forced to resign in June 1997. Six months later, the RP was closed down and Erbakan was banned from politics by the Constitutional Court.

With a nationwide campaign against Islamism in full swing following the coup in 1997, the closure of the Welfare Party and the ideological wavering of the new *Fazilet* (Virtue) Party did not favour the small religious revolutionary groups who were themselves under severe scrutiny in this period (Tugal, 2002). The 1997 coup crucially affected the direction of political Islam in Turkey. This was due not only to the reaffirmation of the guardianship role of the military in Turkish politics but also to the lack of appeal of any Islamisation programme to the vast majority of the people (Carkoglu and Toprak, 2007:17). The soft coup was not limited to the removal of the Welfare Party-led government but also ushered in a process of monitoring, controlling, and criminalising all Islamic activity as a security threat and institutionalising a permanent legal framework for ostracising devout and active Muslims from the commercial, educational, and political spheres (Yavuz, 2004). The goal of the “February 28

Process” was to construct a monolithic, united and homogeneous identity in the political public sphere.

Following the February 28 coup, the National View divided into two groups. The traditionalists, led by Erbakan, founded the *Fazilet* (Virtue) Party (FP) in 1998. Its programme placed great emphasis on democratisation and the need to foster closer relations with the EU; it emphasised individual and human rights, and attached importance to decentralisation and a commitment to privatisation and reducing the economic role of the state. In contrast, the RP’s programme had explicitly ignored any references to issues involving individual rights and the deepening of liberal democracy (Onis, 2001). Despite the FP’s “moderate” discourse, the Constitutional Court dissolved the party in 2001 on the grounds that it was promoting an anti-secular agenda, which included the freedom to wear headscarves in the “public sphere”. Following the closure of the FP, the followers of Erbakan founded the Saadet (Felicity) Party (SP), while the reformers’ younger generation led by Erdoğan, Gül, and Arınç established the *Adalet ve Kalkınma* (AKP) (Justice and Development) Party in 2001. Thereupon, the SP returned to its traditional anti-Western and anti-EU discourse.

In the general election of 3 November, 2002, the AKP obtained 34% of the votes and won nearly two-thirds of the seats in parliament. The party defined itself as a conservative democratic party and emphasised the democratic character of its party organisation. Although it entered politics through Erbakan’s pro-Islamic National View movement, its leaders have constantly denied any connection with Erbakan’s Islamic agenda. Yalçın Akdoğan, the ideologist of the AKP, has denied party links with political Islam and rejected the label of “Muslim Democratic” party. He introduced the term “Conservative Democracy” – which the AKP claims as its official identity – and argues that this implies that politics should be based on reconciliation and tolerance rather than conflict and polarisation. It requires the exercise of a limited form of power and the popular sovereignty of political legitimacy (Akdogan, 2010). As Erdoğan noted, the AKP discourse has been to support a system that incorporates local and traditional values and principles and the universal trends of conservatism (Erdogan, 2004).

After taking over power in 2002, the AKP started negotiations for accession to the European Union. The majority of the Turkish people were supportive of the prospect of EU membership (especially between 2002 and 2005). Despite the fact that Islamic political identity in Turkey was

traditionally constructed in opposition to the West and Western values, the AKP leadership realised that they needed the West and modern/Western values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in order to build a broader front against the Kemalist centre and to acquire legitimacy through this new discourse in their confrontation with the secularist establishment (Dagi, 2005). And economically, Turkey's financial crisis in 2001 had completely eliminated any possibility of upholding an anti-Western and anti-globalisation discourse when the country had to adhere to a strict IMF programme and was in desperate need of foreign investment (Aydin and Cakir, 2007). The AKP's discourse and politics of human rights can be understood in the context of the movement's experience of permanent insecurity. Due to the "February 28 process", two previous political parties (RP and FP) of the founding leaders had been closed down by the Constitutional Court: one of the leaders of the movement, Tayyip Erdogan, had been imprisoned and banned from active politics, and the Kemalist/secularist centre represented by the military and the judiciary had displayed a determination to eliminate any Islamic networks. In the face of this, the AKP has developed a three-way strategy: first, to adopt a language of human rights and democracy as a discursive shield; second, to mobilise popular support as a form of democratic legitimacy; and third, to build a liberal-democratic coalition with modern/secular sectors that recognise the AKP as a legitimate political actor (Dagi, 2006). Thus, the February 28 coup played a key role in the transformation of the political Islamist movements (especially *Milli Görüş*) to search for alternative opportunities. One of the international opportunities was the start of EU negotiations, and the prospect of EU membership provided the AKP with a secure political climate against any intervention by Kemalist juridical, military and bureaucratic elites in Turkish politics.

Despite the AKP having used the EU project as a means to ease secularist restrictions on the public expression of Islamic belief, the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights to legitimise the headscarf ban in Turkey and the EU's greater sensitivity to the religious liberties of Alevi and non-Muslim minorities has led the party to distance itself from EU membership ideal (Gülmez). Its liberal-democratic discourse is becoming statist when it requires the upholding of the freedoms of disadvantaged groups (such as ethnic Kurds, women, gays, or the Alevi minority) who are demanding rights. Despite the fact that the AKP party programme embraced secularism as a principle that "maintains peace among diverse beliefs, schools of thoughts, and perspectives", so that the government cancelled "the state surveillance over non-Muslim citizens by abolishing

the subcommittee for Minorities which had been monitoring non-Muslim citizens for 42 years” (Kuru, 2012), when it came to the “Alevi question”, the government’s passive secularism – which is depicted as “an assurance of the freedom of religion and conscience” in the party programme – became “assertive Sunnism”.

On 24 April, 2007, a crisis occurred when Erdoğan announced his decision to support the candidacy of Abdullah Gül for the office of the Republic’s President. Secularist media and civil society objected to the candidacy of Gül. The 1982 Constitution had strengthened the power of “Presidency”, which is why the presidential post was so vital in Turkey. The Presidency played a key role in the preservation of the “assertive secularist domination” in state institutions, since the President is the one who signs the appointment of high-ranking generals and top civil servants, as well as appointing high court judges and presidents of universities (Kuru, 2012). Secularist associations organised demonstrations and meetings in the major cities (Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, etc.) and millions of Turkish citizens demonstrated to prevent the AKP from imposing the new President. On 27 April, the military issued a statement on its website and intervened in the political arena by publishing a memorandum accusing the AKP government of violating the principle of secularism. The government responded by declaring that the army was constitutionally under its control and the memorandum was unacceptable.

The presidential election polarised Turkish politics and the political intervention of the army caused a serious political crisis. The CHP (the major opposition party) did not object to the intervention of the army and applied to the Constitutional Court, which supported the CHP’s claim and cancelled the presidential election, making the election of Gül by the parliament impossible. The AKP called for early elections and a constitutional referendum for the election of the president on 22 July, 2007. In these elections, the AKP recorded another victory, increasing its share of the popular vote to over 46%. The voters condemned the intervention of the Turkish army and bureaucracy into politics. After the general election, the new parliament reinstated the presidential election and Gül became President of Turkey. On March 14, 2008, the Public Prosecutor forwarded an application to the Constitutional Court, requesting the closure of the AKP and accusing it of having become a “centre of anti-secular activity”. The Court’s decision in July 2008 was to adopt the argument of the Prosecutor but not to close down the party. The 22 July, 2007, and Gül’s election as president on August 28 were the turning points of modern Turkish politics. For the first time in the history

of the Turkish Republic, a non-secularist was elected President and this broke an important political tradition (Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008).

The security-oriented actors who traditionally claimed to be the guardians of Kemalism certainly sustained a defeat in 2007. Following the general and presidential elections in 2008 at the demand of the Public Prosecutor, several high-level retired military officers were arrested for being involved in illegal activities against the AKP government. Many active officers were also arrested or detained during the process. By 2011, over 500 people had been taken into custody and charged with membership of what the prosecutors described as “the Ergenekon terrorist organization” which they claimed had been responsible for virtually every act of political violence against the AKP government (Jenkins, 2011). At first, in 2008, many writers, intellectuals and artists, etc. were supportive of the investigation and called for it to go deeper. There was an initial wave of optimism about the indictment and trial proceedings. They issued a declaration regarding deepening “the Ergenekon investigation” and stated that the real winners in this case would be the Turkish citizens, democracy and the future. Thus, they invited everyone who wanted to live in a country where democracy, freedom and the rule of law were upheld to follow the case closely (Bianet, 2008).

After a while, however, many citizens (especially writers and intellectuals) questioned the indictment and trial proceedings of *Ergenekon*. They questioned the manner in which the investigation was being conducted, citing in particular the arbitrary arrests and detentions, the long prison sentences, the length of the indictment, the illegal collection of evidence, the breach of the rule of law and proceedings, etc. In particular, many secularist and Kemalist organisations have believed that the trials are being used to suppress the opponents of the AKP government. However, this cannot be considered completely true. There are serious claims that the “Ergenekon” organisation is part of the “deep state” with possible ties to some members of the country’s security forces and Operation Gladio’s Turkish branch.⁸

⁸ “Operation Gladio” is the codename for a clandestine NATO behind-the-scenes anti-communist network existing in all NATO countries; the Italian branch of it was the first one to be discovered. See Tugal, 2008.

It is a fact that the trial proceedings of Ergenekon and Balyoz (Sledgehammer)⁹ etc. demolished the last strongholds of *l'ancien régime*. Nevertheless, the trial proceedings violated the rights to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, the rule of law and other civil rights. “February 28”, 1997, was a process of monitoring, controlling, and criminalising all Islamic activity as a security threat and likewise the trial proceedings – not only the trials of Ergenekon and Balyoz, etc. but also the ongoing wave of arrests – have been criminalising all activities of government opponents since 2009. Many opposition politicians, trade unionists, journalists, artists, students, human rights activists and their lawyers have been arrested since 2009.

According to the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) report in 2012, the number of journalists imprisoned in Turkey has nearly doubled (95 journalists are in Turkish prisons today, up from 57 in 2011) and the journalists often face several trials and are often convicted for several offenses such as media outlets reporting on sensitive issues. And, as mentioned above, the Courts often impose long prison sentences and do not tend to grant the pre-trial release of defendants (OSCE, 2012). Similar to the report above, according to the EU Commission Progress report for Turkey in 2012, there are serious concerns about the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials persisting over the rights of the defence, with lengthy pre-trial detention and long indictments, and they have been overshadowed by real concerns about their wide scope and the shortcomings in judicial proceedings. The report also indicates that the authorities need to uphold the rule of law in the anti-KCK investigations and ensure that there is an effective public inquiry into the Uludere airstrike and that the country must amend its penal code and anti-terror legislation to make a clear distinction between incitement to violence and the expression of non-violent ideas (EU Commission, 2012).

In conclusion, despite the AKP abandoning the political Islamic state project, there are serious problems concerning fundamental human rights, liberal democratic principles, and rule of law, etc. Even though the AKP's motto has been “progressive democracy” since 2010, it has not been able to establish a pluralist public sphere as a solution for the problems related

⁹ The “Balyoz” (Sledgehammer) is the name of an alleged Turkish secularist military coup plan which reportedly dates back to 2003. In the ‘Sledgehammer’ trial, a first instance court on 21 September, 2012, sentenced a total of 324 suspects to 13–20 years’ imprisonment on charges of attempting to remove or prevent the functioning of the government through force and violence.

to the public visibility of identities, diverse beliefs, schools of thought and perspectives in Turkey. Instead, the administration has shown an antagonistic approach toward journalists, student protests, human rights defenders, artists, intellectuals, and minorities critical of government policies, etc. Conservative practices have been applied by several AKP-led municipalities, including an alleged ban on alcohol in the cities of Anatolia and some parts of Istanbul and putting pressure on shopkeepers selling it (*Radikal*, 2008).

The French political philosopher, Olivier Roy, whose area of study is political Islam, has stated that Islamist movements are running out of revolutionary steam. They will either become normal political parties, as in Turkey, or they will prefer to become “born-again Muslims” and concentrate on social, ethical, and lifestyle issues rather than on political change or the creation of an Islamic state (Roy, 2003:7-9). Roy uses the term “neo-fundamentalism” in order to explain the new phenomena. The “neo-fundamentalist” society attempts to promote the moralisation of society, alcohol is banned, daily life is adapted to the practice of Islam, there is the adaptation of the school system to Islam, and prohibitions and restrictions on leisure-time activities are enforced, plus a focus on moral issues. The new approach is based not on sharia law but on the moral values of the society (ibid.:8, 17, 40). However, it is not entirely correct to argue that the AKP is neither a “neo-fundamentalist” movement nor is Turkey becoming a completely “socially Islamic society”. Serif Mardin used the term “neighbourhood pressure” (*mahalle baskısı*) in order to explain how the periphery imposes its communitarian social values upon the society (Mardin, 2007). Nilüfer Göle has even labelled the era “Post-Kemalist secularism”, which opens up a space for religious social mobilisation, increasing the visibility of religious symbols in the public sphere and refusing to consider them as a “threat” to the secular foundation of the regime.¹⁰

In my view, the phrases “creation of the new Islamic social spheres” or “moralisation of the public sphere” are more explanatory models of how the new policies intervene in individuals’ lives in an authoritarian way. Nevertheless, “the assertive secularist public sphere” in Turkey was elitist and closed to otherness (especially on the Kurdish issue, the civil rights of

¹⁰ Interview with Nilufer Gole by Juliana DeVries, “Shifting Identities and the Stakes of Turkish Democracy,” Eutopia Institute of Ideas, October 19, 2011, <http://www.eutopiainstitute.org/2011/10/shifting-identities-and-the-stakes-of-turkish-democracyinterview-with-nilufer-gole/>. Accessed: 11.12.2012.

the non-Muslim minorities, and the religious liberties of Muslim people, etc.) and because of the “delimiting of the scope of modernity”, it was by no means sufficiently respectful to individual autonomy. However, it is a fact that authoritarianism in the country has been increasing over the past two years. For example, the censorship of freedom of speech in the form of arresting journalists who are critical of Turkish politics (such as the journalists Ahmet Şık and Nedim Şener who were both arrested in March 2011), and the other methods that have been used in large media corporations (such as opposition journalists Can Dündar, Ruşen Çakır, Banu Güven and Nuray Mert leaving the news network NTV and the columnists Ece Temelkuran and Yıldırım Türker leaving their newspapers, etc.); the loss of freedoms associated with a modern and liberal way of life (such as restrictions on public behaviour, limitations based on sex, gender roles, gays, lesbians and women’s rights, the segregation of men and women in the public sphere, the prohibition of drinking and selling alcohol in public areas); the government control over media outlets and most of the television and radio stations; intervention in socio-cultural life (such as the government’s intervention with regard to the TV drama “The Magnificent Century” which is about the life of Suleiman the Magnificent); charges of obscenity, immorality and clashes with Turkish morals and values against books (such as William Burroughs’ “The Soft Machine”, Apollinaire’s “Adventures of the Young Don Juan”, Chuck Palahniuk’s “Snuff”, Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men”, and Vasconcelos’ “My Sweet Orange Tree”, etc.); and the controversial “top-down” process of the new education system known as “4+4+4” (which includes “The Qur’an and The life of the Prophet Mohammed” as an elective course in the secondary-school curriculum), etc.

Turkey could be characterised as a *sui generis secular state* and it is still far from institutionalising democracy in a relative manner with democratic consolidation. Furthermore, this situation has created a serious obstacle to the process of democratisation. Therefore, in order to end the new authoritarian political culture and state repression, the political parties and civil society must recognise the virtue of fundamental human rights, democratic principles, pluralism and liberal versions of secularism. They need to build a consensus around goals such as a new liberal-democratic Constitution, economic development, a revival of Turkey-EU relations and the establishment of a pluralist, tolerant society.

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