

# Cleansing Islam from the Public Sphere<sup>1</sup>

M. HAKAN YAVUZ

---

*“Modern Turkey, like a transgendered body with the soul of one gender in the body of another, is in constant tension.... The soul of white Turkey and its Kemalist identity is in constant pain and conflict with the national body politic of Turkey.”*

---

In order to understand state-society relations in Turkey, it is first necessary to understand the relationship between Turkish nationalism and Islam. Although Turkey is a national and secular state, religion lies at the core of its political landscape and identity.<sup>2</sup> Islam has always played an important role in the vernacularization of Turkish nationalism; Turkish nationalists, in turn, have redefined Islam as an integral part of national identity. Turkish nationalism is essentially based on the cosmology of Islam and its conception of community. The patterns of collective action, the meaning of justice, community, legitimacy and organizational networks in Turkey are very much informed by Islamic practices and organizations. Islamic activism has emerged as a result of the expanding market and the changing patterns of religious authority, political liberalization and interaction with Europe. It is, therefore, an attempt to re-imagine and renegotiate the Islamic aspect of Turkish identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> This article emerged out of my research while I was a resident fellow at the University of California Humanities Research Institute. I thank the Institute for its support and Paul Lubeck, Edmund Burke III, Eric Rouleau, Bekim Agai and Hüseyin Sentürk for their comments.

<sup>2</sup> Mustafa Erdogan, “Islam in Turkish Politics: Turkey’s Quest for Democracy without Islam,” *Critique*, 15 (1999) pp. 25-50; Nustafa Erdogan, “Religious Freedom in the Turkish Constitution,” *The Muslim World*, LXXXIX (1999) pp. 377-88.

After Islam was ripped out of Turkey's social fabric by the reforms of Mustafa Kemal in the 1920s, the rhythms of this religio-political activism have been modulated by the changing policies of the Turkish state. These centralizing and homogenizing reforms divided Turkey into zones of prosperity and zones of conflict. The zones of prosperity are concentrated around the "white Turks," or governing political elite, who are at the center of state power, while the zones of conflict are centered around the poor and marginalized sectors of the population—"the black Turks."<sup>3</sup> Religion, as a residual variable of the category of the black Turks and Kurds, became the basis for the exclusion of the majority of the population by the hegemonic Kemalist discourse of the white Turks. Islam has become the oppositional identity for the excluded sectors of Turkish society.

Cultural cleavage is the basis of Turkish politics. Political divisions, which formed as a result of secular nation-building reforms, reflect such splits. The purpose of this paper is to examine the discursive origins and historical paradox of the cultural cleavage between Turkey's Muslim masses and its pseudo-Westernized elite, and the power struggle between them. The first part of this article analyzes the irresolvable paradox of the Turkish Republic by examining the process of "othering" Islam. It identifies Kemalism, an authoritarian Westernization project, as the source of the contemporary crisis. The second part examines the politicization and the fragmentation of Islamic social movements by focusing on the Sufi-centric movements and the political Islam of the National Order Movement. The final sections of the article examine the transformation of the National Order Movement and the socio-political implications of the February 28th process.

#### BLACK VS. WHITE TURKS, ISLAM AND NATIONALISM

Turkey embodies an irreconcilable paradox established during the foundation of the Republic in the 1920s. On one hand, the state used Islam to unify diverse ethno-linguistic groups; on the other, it defined its progressive civilizing ideology in opposition to Islam. It called upon the men and women of Turkey to participate

<sup>3</sup> This descriptive category of the "black" Turks and Kurds includes socially conservative, pious Muslims; a large sector of the Kurdish population whose identity has been denied by the Kemalist system; the economically excluded sector of the population who live in the shantytowns of major cities; and Muslim merchants and industrialists in Anatolia who run small and medium-sized enterprises, and are also excluded by the big corporations.

in a *jihād* to liberate their homeland and Caliphate from the occupying European armies. The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) stressed the common religious identity of Turks and Kurds as Muslims and referred to non-Muslims as a "minority." Turkey thereby refused to accept ethnicity as the basis of its national identity, referring instead to religio-territorial identity as its standard for unity. Islamic identity, based on religious devotion, ritual practices and a set of historically structured socio-political roles and schematic frames,<sup>4</sup> served as the integrative glue for the establishment of the Turkish Republic.<sup>5</sup>

Turkish national identity was modeled on the Islamic conception of community and was disseminated through Islamic terms.<sup>6</sup> The incorporation of religious vocabulary helped to nationalize Islamic identity. Examples of this include the incorporation of words, such as *millet* (referring to a religious community in the Ottoman empire, appropriated by the Republic to mean "nation"), *vatan* (homeland), *gazi* (the title of Mustafa Kemal, referring to those who fought in the name of Islam) and *şehid* (those who died for the protection and dissemination of Islam), into the nationalist lexicon. In another instance, the Caliphate was not abolished, but rather its authority was merely transferred from an individual to the National Assembly. After 1925, multiple identities that had coexisted freely during the Ottoman period officially coalesced into secular ethnic Turkish nationalism. The historians of the Kemalist period and the official Turkish Historical and Language Society redefined identity in terms of ethnicity and language. The state used the army, schools, media and art to consolidate Turkish national identity and break away from Islam and the Ottoman legacy. Nevertheless, during the formative Kemalist period between 1922 and 1950, two versions of Turkish nationalism actually competed: secular ethno-linguistic nationalism and religious communal nationalism.

The Kemalist elite presented themselves as secular, progressive and in opposition to Islam.<sup>7</sup> The Westernization project was

<sup>4</sup> Schematic frames signify and modulate events, experiences and objects.

<sup>5</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Movements, Agents, and Processes*, Unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Gökhan Centinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' of Modern Turkish Political Thought," *The Muslim World*, LXXXIX (July-October 1999) pp. 350-76.

<sup>7</sup> Hilmi Yavuz, "Aydınlanma Batı-Dışı Kültür ve Özne," *Zaman*, 10 March 2000.

presented as emancipatory and anti-religious, without the critical post-Enlightenment thought on tolerance, liberalism and democracy. The Kemalists imagine themselves as secular, rational and Western in their encounters with Islamic forces, though they have very little knowledge of the West or of what it means to be truly secular. While it would be difficult to maintain that the Turkish version of secularism is Western, it is true that Turkey's Westernizers always present themselves as religiously secular. Abdulhak Adnan Adivar argues that the Kemalist conception of secularism, similar to the positivism of the West, became the "official dogma of irreligion" and was "imposed on [Turkish society] just as Islamic dogma had been imposed in the past."<sup>8</sup> Kemalism, a form of authoritarian Westernism, not only became the ideology that created a new "white" Turk but was also deeply involved in the establishment and regulation of a state-monitored public sphere. This secular and national public sphere provided the arena in which to display the Western roles, attire and habits of the new white Turk, defined in terms of his or her ability to imitate external European appearances. By organizing the public sphere around the ideology of Westernism, the state was able to incorporate whatever it imagined constituted Western-ness into its display. For instance, during the 1930s and 1940s, villagers with traditional clothing were not allowed to enter the major streets in Ankara and were relegated to the less conspicuous back streets.<sup>9</sup> The Turkish project of modernization has been characterized more by concern for its Western appearance than by the actual social and philosophical roots of modernity. Modernity, for the Kemalists, was a product to be rented or bought.

After the Kemalist reforms, the public sphere had narrowed to the point that Muslims felt there was no longer any common public culture that would provide a context within which they could engage in communication and debate to exert influence over a newly emerging polity that would hold itself accountable to their opinions. In a real sense, the state was attempting to create its

<sup>8</sup> Abdulhak Adnan-Adivar, "The Interaction of Islamic and Western Thought in Turkey," in *Near Eastern Culture and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951) p. 128.

<sup>9</sup> Mehmet Altan, "Türk modernleşme hareketi ve Salvar," *Sabah*, 11 March 2000. According to Altan, on 8 March, the official Women's Day, a group of Turkish women were not allowed to enter certain places in Ankara, including the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal, because they were wearing traditional dresses.

own public sphere. In response to this forced exclusion, many Muslims began to establish their own informal networks and education system to preserve and protect their sacred realm from the reaches of the radical Republican state. The mystical networks of Naqshbandis and the writings of Said Nursi, the founder of the most powerful faith movement, known as the Nurcu movement, became a counter-public sphere, and the incubator for the evolution of a more popular Islamic identity.<sup>10</sup> However, Islam remained imbedded both inside and outside the public sphere and continued to underscore the hidden identity of the Kemalist state.<sup>11</sup> Edmund Burke III aptly describes this paradox, stating that "nationalists are inside-out orientalists," who adopted the Orientalist critique of religion and "sought to portray themselves as secular, in opposition to the retrograde forces of religion."<sup>12</sup>

The hidden face of the Republican-imagined Turkish identity has always been Islam. As might be expected, this has created a sense of deep existential unease. Islam, excluded from the construction of Turkish identity, has come back to haunt the Kemalist imagination and disturb the Republican peace of mind.<sup>13</sup> It has created fear in the minds of the guardians of Kemalism and in their view, has polarized society into separate secular/Kemalist and Muslim/Islamic factions. The *raison d'être* of the Kemalist establishment is to keep the Islamic "other" at bay, and this struggle is what unifies the Kemalists military-bureaucratic establishment. The major consequence of the transformation Turkey underwent in the 1980s was the recognition that the Kemalists themselves play the role of the "other" among others, namely the Islamists, Kurds and Alevis.

Modern Turkey, like a transgendered body with the soul of one gender in the body of another, is in constant tension. White Turks regard themselves as Western souls in the body of a foreign socio-political landscape. Its body is native to the land, but its soul is

<sup>10</sup> See Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989) or M. Hakan Yavuz, "Print-Based Islamic Discourse and Modernity: The Nur Movement," *Third International Symposium on Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözler, 1995) pp. 324-50.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Burke III, "Orientalism and World History: Representing Middle Eastern Nationalism and Islamism in the Twentieth Century," *Theory and Society*, no. 27 (1998) pp. 485-507.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>13</sup> I thank Edmund Burke III for helping me to organize my thoughts on Turkish nationalism.

alien. The soul of white Turkey and its Kemalist identity is in constant pain and conflict with the national body politic of Turkey. Each side has its own discursive field. For the white Turks, identity is based on the ideology of militant anti-religious secularism, known in this case as Kemalism, or *laïcism*. Islam, on the other hand, has provided the vernacular for the marginalized majority, who were excluded from the top-down transformation. While secular discourse seeks to empower the state, Islamism empowers the excluded black Turks and Kurds. The black Turks and Kurds use a shared religious tradition to mobilize against exclusion and marginalization by the white Turks, and they use other strategies, techniques and ideas to enhance their own consciousness against the hegemony of Kemalism.

The Kemalist version of secularism has become the basis of identity for the white Turks. The opposing ideology provided by Islamic networks serve as a foundation of identity for the black Turks. Democratization empowers the black Turks and Kurds, yet they are then forced out of power in the name of protecting the state—ironically, the very democracy that gave them a voice. According to Yasin Aktay, a Turkish sociologist at Selçuk University, “the more democracy grows, the more religious resurgence is likely to increase” in Turkey.<sup>14</sup> This resurgence, in turn, leads to politics conducted through military intervention in the guise of protecting Kemalist purity. Thus, the pendulum of Turkish politics swings back and forth between democratization (or, the vernacularization of politics) and military intervention.

At the core of the contemporary crisis in Turkey lie three socio-political aspects of Kemalism: 1) its uncritical modernization ideology prevents open discussion that would lead to a new and inclusive social contract that recognizes the cultural diversity of Turkey; 2) it does not tolerate the articulation of different identities and lifestyles in the public sphere since they undermine the Kemalist vision of an ideal society; and, 3) it treats politics as a process of guiding political development and engineering a new society.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Kemalism

<sup>14</sup> Yasin Aktay, *Body, Text, Identity: The Islamist Discourse of Authenticity in Modern Turkey*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Middle East Technical University, 1997, p. 242.

<sup>15</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “Turkey’s Fault Lines and the Crisis of Kemalism,” *Current History*, 99 (January 2000) p. 34.

does not see social, cultural and political differences as integral to democracy, but rather treats such differences as sources of instability and threats to the national unity. Members of the current ethnic (Kurdish) and religious (Sunni Islamic and Alevi) movements seek to redefine themselves as Muslims, Kurds and Alevis, and seek to globalize their movements. These identity and justice-seeking social movements are in direct conflict with the Kemalist project.

The modern Turkish socio-political landscape lies between two poles: Western culture, as understood by the Kemalist elite, which orients the future of Turkey, and Ottoman/Islamic culture, with its own latent practices and roles. To a great extent, these two competing and conflicting sources of culture, images, institutions and practices are used selectively to patch together a modern identity of Turkey, one that is hybrid and continues to evolve.<sup>16</sup> The identity of Turkey is therefore neither Ottoman/Islamic nor European but incorporates elements of both. Prime Minister Turgut Özal’s burial ceremony reflected this duality. Members of Turkey’s elite and foreign dignitaries marched to Chopin music, while the masses marched to Qur’anic chants. Those who were excluded from the officially sanctioned cultural and political landscape marched with Islamic symbols to bury “their” president, one had who shared “their” taste in art, music and everyday practices.

Following the neoliberal economic policies of Turgut Özal in 1983, the division became unmanageable within the Kemalist framework, and culminated in the February 28th coup, which was launched in order to cleanse the public sphere of the contamination of the black Turks. It was the fourth military coup to protect the state and “democracy” from the people.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds. *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Mehmet Ali Kışlalı, “TC’yi kim koruyacak?” *Radikal*, 7 March 2000. In this essay, Kışlalı, who has close ties with the military, offers two ways of protecting the Republic against the political parties: a) empowering the Constitutional Court and banning those parties which seek to change the Kemalist order; or, b) protecting the Republic with “extrajudicial means” such as direct military intervention. In other words, the task of the “white” Turks is to protect the Republic from the people at all costs.

## THE IDEOLOGY OF THE BLACK TURKS: ISLAM AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The Turkish experience is a "secular skin around a pious fruit which harbors at its core a rapturous duo—[and] leaves the notion of a monolithic fundamentalism in fragments."<sup>18</sup>

Turkey's Islamic movement is a sector of activities, actors, discourses, syndicates, unions, networks and groups that have all come together in the desire to resist the totalitarian and homogenizing policies of the Kemalist state. The movement seeks to carve out an alternative moral order based on its conception of Islam. An important aspect of Islamic activism in Turkey is that its crucial impact is on personal and social values. The Islamic movement is both a source of power for the powerless and an instrument of social control over the body politic and society. The Islamic sector in Turkey constitutes an archipelago of autonomous yet related entities which carve out a space for marginal groups in society. For instance, the Naqshbandi, Süleymanci and Nurcu religious networks constitute distinct identities, with their own unique characteristics, but which are framed in terms of the Islamic vernacular. There is an uneasy tension between solidarity and fragmentation within Islamic movements. The major factor uniting the diverse Islamic groups is their shared resistance to the Kemalist hegemony of the white Turks, who have ruled the country throughout the history of the Republic (with some democratic interruptions under the leadership of Adnan Menderes from 1950 to 1960 and Turgut Özal from 1983 to 1993). The fragmentation of the Islamic movement is the outcome of democratization, expanding market forces, the introduction of alternative worldviews and increased education. Religious pluralism is becoming the major trend in the evolution of Turkish Islam.

The Turkish religio-political landscape, which is rooted in Sufi Naqshbandi networks, and shaped by changing state policies and economic opportunities, is dominated by several groups. Below, I seek to disaggregate these groups in the following manner: State-Islam; socio-cultural Islam, which is either Sufi or moderated by

<sup>18</sup> Richard Brookhiser, "Islamic Fundamentalism Revisited," *National Review* (November 1993) p. 63.

Sufism, particularly Naqshbandi Sufi orders<sup>19</sup> and the political Islam of the Virtue Party.

### State-Islam

In order to subordinate religion to the political establishment, as was done in the Communist Eastern bloc, the new Kemalist Republic created its own version of Islam by establishing the Directorate of Religious Affairs with a budget exceeding that of five combined ministries, reaching 172.6 trillion Turkish Lira in 1998. The main task of the Directorate is to control and domesticate Islam in accordance with the needs of the state.<sup>20</sup> For instance, Article 136 of the constitution states that the "Directorate shall exercise its functions and duties in accordance with the principle of *laicism*." The state controls all eighty-thousand mosques in Turkey and employs the *imams* as state functionaries. The Directorate of Religious Affairs recognizes the Sunni but not the Alevi interpretation of Islam as legitimate.<sup>21</sup>

### Socio-Cultural Islam: New Religious Consciousness

One of the most powerful religious groups has been the Nurcu movement, founded by Said Nursi, a Turkish Kurd, who lived from 1876 to 1960 and authored several volumes of Qur'anic exegesis known as *Risale-i Nur Killiyati* (The Epistles of Light).<sup>22</sup> The Nurcu movement has played an important role in institutionalizing a new moral language for the preservation and reconstruction of Muslim personality and a new understanding of science.<sup>23</sup> The connection between its printed and oral tradition

<sup>19</sup> For more on the Naqshbandi movement, see Elisabeth Özdalga, ed., *The Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia* (London: Curzon Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> For more on the Directorate of Religious Affairs, see İsmail Kara, "Diyaret İşleri Başkanlığı," in *Seyh Efendinin Riyasındaki Türkiye* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1998) pp. 79-94.

<sup>21</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "Media Identities for Kurds and Alevis in Turkey," in Dale F. Eickelman and Jon Anderson, eds., *New Media and the Politics of Civil Society in Muslim Societies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) pp. 180-200; for more on the Alevis, see Yasin Aktay, *Türk Dîminin Sosyalistik İnkarı* (Istanbul: İletisim, 1999); Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Türk Süfiliğine Bakışlar*, 3rd edition (Istanbul: İletisim, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> For a short and succinct analysis of Nursi, see İsmail Kara, "Bediüzzaman Örneği," *Seyh Efendinin Riyasındaki Türkiye* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1998) pp. 16-22. Some scholars, without fully understanding the writings of Said Nursi, have characterized his faith movement as "fundamentalism," see Paul Dumont, "Disciples of the Light: The Nurcu Movement in Turkey," *Central Asian Survey*, 2 (1986) p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the Nurcu derşhanes, see M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Assassination of Collective Memory: The Case of Turkey," *The Muslim World*, 99 (1999) pp. 193-207.

is protected in *dershane* (reading circles). Nursi argues that, "No doubt, mankind will, in the future, turn to science and technology. It shall take its strength from science. Sovereignty and force will pass into the hands of science."<sup>24</sup>

Nursi used print media and traditional networks to create "counter-publics,"<sup>25</sup> opposing the reforms of Mustafa Kemal. In spite of Nursi's exile and the constant court cases waged against him in an attempt to silence the ability of his distinctive voice to raise Muslim consciousness, his ideas spread throughout Anatolia through personalized networks of distribution and interpretation. Nursi's writings were interpreted in different ways after his death, and each variant reading has resulted in the formation of a separate Nurcu group; each of these groups has managed to shape a different sector of Turkish/Kurdish society. The Nurcu movement is a truly Anatolian-based faith movement whose goal is to break away from the pedagogic stranglehold of dogmatic religious leaders whose only interest was to maintain the religious status quo. The *Epistles of Light*-based reading circles, *dershanes*, transmit emotional energy and cultural capital through personal contact. Through *dershane* networks, Islam is not passively received but actively constructed through prayers, discussions and forming a pattern of conduct in public space. By stirring up the inner self, the Nurcu movement raises a number of critical questions that challenge Kemalist visions of modernity.

Nursi's writings seeks to reinterpret the Qur'an in light of modern science and rationality, and to breathe life into the imitative and claustrophobic society of Anatolia. His main concern is the rejuvenation of the Muslim community through radical interpretation of the Qur'an. The goals of this faith movement are: the synthesis of Islam and science; an acceptance of democracy as the best form of governance within the rule of law; raising the level of Islamic consciousness by indicating the connection between reason and revelation; and, achieving this-worldly and other-worldly salvation within a free market and through quality education.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Mardin, *Religion*, p. 203.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the idea of counter-public, see the special issue on "The Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture*, 7, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>26</sup> Dale F. Eickelman, "Qur'anic Commentary, Public Space, and Religious Intellectuals in the Writings of Said Nursi," *Muslim World*, LXXXIX, nos. 3-4 (1999) pp. 260-69.

Due to competing market forces, educational differences and political involvement, there are more than 10 separate Nurcu communities. One of the most powerful Nurcu communities is led by the intellectually dynamic Fethullah Gülen.<sup>27</sup> The Gülen-led neo-Nurcu community seeks to improve Turkish society by using education and information technology to raise a new generation with heightened patriotic and moral consciousness. Gülen's community has distinguished itself from other faith movements through its soft and conciliatory voice on most hotly debated subjects, such as *laïcism*, the Kurdish question and the headscarf issue. The Gülen-led community seeks to redefine *laïcism* along more Anglo-Saxon lines, and to form a shared language by organizing high-level conferences. For instance, the Gülen-led Abant Declaration of July 1998 not only sought to redefine the meaning of *laïcism* in accordance with the way it is practiced in Europe, but also reinterpreted Islamic theology to respond to contemporary challenges. The Declaration's main points were that revelation and reason do not conflict; individuals should use their reason to organize their social life; the state should be neutral on beliefs, faith and the philosophical orientation of society; governance of the state cannot be based on the dominance of one religious tradition and secularism should expand individual freedoms and rights and should not exclude any person from the public sphere. After the Abant meetings, the Foundation of Journalists and Writers, along with the Ministry of Culture, organized an international conference on the inter-religious dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam by stressing Prophet Abraham as the shared foundation of the three monotheistic belief systems. Gülen-led inter-religious dialogues seek to develop an ethic of engagement with the other religions in an expanding, transnational public sphere.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> For more on Gülen-based movement, see M. Hakan Yavuz, "Search for a New Social Contract in Turkey: Fethullah Gülen, the Virtue Party, and the Kurds," *SAIS Review*, 19, no. 1 (1999) pp. 114-43; M. Hakan Yavuz, "Towards an Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gülen," *Middle East Journal*, 53, no. 4 (1999) pp. 584-603; Gabriel Piricky, "Some Observations on New Departures in Modernist Interpretations of Islam in Contemporary Turkey: Fethullah Gülen Cemaati," *Asian and African Studies*, no. 8 (1999) pp. 83-90; Bekim Agai, "New Aspects of Islamic Thinking and New Ways of Islamic Self Organization in Modern Turkey: The Case of Fethullah Gülen" (in German), Unpublished MA Thesis, Bonn University, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmet Tulgar, "Harran'da dinler diyalogu," *Milliyet*, 14 April 2000; "Dinler Barışın Garantisi Olmalı," *Zaman*, 14 April 2000.

Gülen's immediate concern is not to achieve changes on the macro level; rather, he focuses on the spiritual and intellectual consciousness of the individual, seeking to form an inner self that will empower one to struggle against oppression by economic and political forces. He stresses the role that technology and new global networks can play in articulating a newly formed Muslim consciousness. For Gülen, a mission is inherent in this new Muslim consciousness. He is extremely optimistic about the impact of new information technology of empowering people and consolidating democracy. As one who is deeply rooted in the Islamic/Ottoman tradition, and who has gained familiarity with the structural and discursive aspects of modernity as well, Gülen is a religious modernist and a social innovator. His movement is not reactive but pro-active. He seeks to promote the "true" Islam of Anatolian Sufism and to establish the idea that it is not in contradiction with the modern world. One of his main objectives is to synthesize reason and revelation, religion and science, individuals and community, stability and change and globalization and nationalism. Gülen is fully aware that it is Islam that provides the ethical dimension to everyday life in Turkey, and constitutes the basis of Turkey's social and cultural identity.

One of the main features of the Gülen-led movement is that Gülen does not only mobilize the hearts and minds of millions of Turks, but he also succeeds in convincing them to commit to the mission of creating a better and more humane society and polity. The Gülen-led movement has four coordinated tiers: businessmen, teachers, students and journalists. Significantly, it also runs one of the most extensive educational systems found in Turkey and many neighboring countries.

Due to his statist and nationalist tendencies, Gülen searched for legitimacy at the state level. In keeping with his pro-state-for-the-sake-of-stability motivation, and to avoid the ongoing Kemalist oppression that followed the February 28th process, Gülen's community could not openly initiate a debate within civil society or organize a resistance against the draconian anti-religious edicts of the military. Gülen's followers, therefore, pursued two contradictory policies: a) mobilizing private communal channels and educational means to expand their base within society by appealing to religio-nationalistic ideals; and, b) searching for legitimacy at the state level by accommodating the draconian directives of the February 28th process. Nevertheless, Gülen's

policies only increased the military's contempt for his own accommodating actions. On 21 June 1999, the military-dominated media launched a fierce attack on Fethullah Gülen, accusing him of engaging in activities that were reactionary and a threat to the secular nature of the Turkish state. For the first time, this attack was met with an equally fierce and hitherto unprecedented counter-attack by major media outlets controlled by Gülen's group. The anti-Gülen campaign had been orchestrated by a power-hungry and militantly anti-religious clique in charge of the notorious West Working Group, which had acted aggressively to push the elected civilian government of the Welfare party from power and kept all faith-based activities under strict scrutiny. The anti-Gülen campaign forced Gülen and his group to respond aggressively to certain elements of the Kemalist establishment—a confrontation he had always judiciously sought to avoid.

The latest attack on Gülen was also directed against civilian authority, particularly the popular leftist Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit. According to many journalists and members of Gülen's inner circle, the radical clique within the Turkish army is behind this latest attempt to further curtail civilian authority. Some military circles feel uncomfortable about Gülen's external connections and his cooperation with other Ottoman and Turkic communities, particularly in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. They see these ties as a potential threat to the authority of Kemalist ideology in Turkey and fear that Gülen will organize a powerful lobby abroad against the decaying and oppressive establishment.

Gülen's community, rooted in conservative Turkish-Islamic culture and motivated by new economic and media opportunities, has established a number of foundations and associations that seek to attract and co-opt more secular intellectuals. The goal of the Nurcu and Naqshbandi groups is to construct a new form of modernity that is consistent both with the fundamental precepts of Islam as well as with the emerging global paradigms of democracy and respect for individual human rights.

#### *Political Islam: The National Outlook Movement*

Political Islam constitutes one of the key fault lines in the Kemalist conception of *laicism*. The dominant representative of political Islam in Turkey has been the National Outlook Movement, which successively morphed into the National Order, the National Salvation, the Welfare and the Virtue parties, each

of which were shut down by the Kemalists.<sup>29</sup> In the 1990s, the National Outlook Movement transformed itself from a strictly religious-right to a center right party. This process was halted by the military-led February 28th process in 1997. The National Outlook Movement was the party of a new Anatolian bourgeoisie, the urban poor and excluded Kurds.<sup>30</sup> The party's support remains rooted in the relationship between the modernizing state and the Muslim periphery.<sup>31</sup> The "ideal state" of its political imagination is not the regime of the period of Muhammed but rather that of the Ottoman classical period. One might argue that the National Outlook Movement, unlike other Islamic movements, has not negated tradition but has sought rather to traditionalize the past by creating an invented ideal Ottoman society that would serve as a model for restructuring the present and the future. Although the National Outlook Movement's ideology has been a mixture of Ottomanism, nationalism, modernism and Islamism, it originally emphasized ethics and industrialization from 1973 to 1980, then justice and identity from 1983 to 1998 and then democracy and the rule of law from 1998 to the present. In other words, the National Outlook Movement was the movement of the periphery, the excluded segment of the Turkish society—the black Turks. The National Outlook Movement later became the party of "exit" from the periphery.

Between 1983 and 1998, the National Outlook Movement was organized as the Welfare Party, which utilized modern methods and concepts to reframe the socio-political problems of Turkey in terms of Islamic idioms and concepts. A closer examination of the Welfare Party's identity indicates that it was based to a large extent on the binary opposition of West versus East.<sup>32</sup> Its rejection of "the West within," namely the Kemalist modernization project

<sup>29</sup> For more on the evolution of the National Outlook Movement, see Süleyman Arif Emre, *Siyasette*, 35, no. 1-111 (Istanbul: Akabe, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> For more on the relationship between Kurdish and Islamic identity, see Burhanettin Duran, "Approaching the Kurdish Question via Adil Düzen: An Islamist Formula of the Welfare Party for Ethnic Coexistence," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 18, no. 1 (1998) pp. 111-28.

<sup>31</sup> Menderes Çınar, *Republican Aspects of Islamism in Turkey from the Perspective of "the Political"*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Bilkent University (Ankara), 1998.

<sup>32</sup> For more on the Welfare Party, see Ziya Öniş, "The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly*, 18, no. 4 (1997) pp. 743-66; M. Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey," *Comparative Politics*, 30, no. 1 (1997) pp. 63-82.

to create a new Turk, manifested itself in the Welfare Party's foreign policy outlook as well.<sup>33</sup> In short, the Welfare Party leadership was very much dependent on a perception of the West as colonial, unjust, oppressive and, ultimately, Christian. The Welfare Party's identification of the Muslim-Turkish self as Ottoman-Islamic was designed in direct opposition to the West within the country. The Welfare Party's Islamic agenda was nationalistic and homogenizing, seeking political power to transform society. It succeeded in becoming an ideology of opposition, but never achieved a position as an ideology of liberation and was unable to establish itself as an alternative civil society movement. It remained statist and constantly defined itself as "other."

After the 1996 national election, a new coalition between the two center-right parties (True Path Party and Motherland Party) formed a government on 3 March 1996, in response to pressure from the military, media and major business corporations.<sup>34</sup> The primary goal of the post-election politics was to exclude the Welfare Party from the government. In support of this aim, İhsan Çiller of the True Path Party and Mesut Yılmaz of the Motherland Party agreed on a rotating prime minister position despite their traditional rivalry over agenda and supporters. This persuaded some Welfare Party followers that they would never be able to gain access to institutional means of affecting political change. The evident closure of the system against the largest party in Parliament agitated a large segment of the electorate, and the Welfare Party became resistant.<sup>35</sup> The political rivalry between Yılmaz and Çiller opened a new window of opportunity for the Welfare Party. In accordance with the coalition agreement, Yılmaz became prime minister first and immediately began to search for evidence of corruption allegedly carried out by the Çiller family. Since Yılmaz's primary goal was to prevent Çiller from becoming prime minister in January 1997, as the coalition's agreement

<sup>33</sup> İhsan D. Dağı, *Kimlik Söylem ve Siyaset: Doğu-Batı Ayrımında Refah Partisi Geleneği* (Ankara: Simga, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Pope, "Islamists Come First," *Middle East International*, 5 January 1996, p. 10. The Turkish Businessmen's Association (TÜSIAD) made its position on the Welfare Party very clear with an advertisement in the press, and asked the two center-right parties to ally their forces against possible Islamist involvement in the government.

<sup>35</sup> I examined the negative implications of this exclusion on Turkish politics and indicated the advantages of inclusion in "Refah Partisi: Modernleşmenin İçinde, Batılılaşmanın Dışında; Sistemin İçinde, Hükümetin Dışında," *Türkiye Günü*, no. 38 (January-February 1996) pp. 45-50.

would require, and to either remove Çiller as head of the True Path Party or divide the True Path Party, he leaked some documents showing evidence of corruption to the Welfare Party, which was the main opposition party in Parliament. The Welfare Party used these documents, not to attack Çiller, but to assault the government as a whole. On 6 June 1996, Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz resigned and opened the door for the Welfare Party to form a coalition government with Çiller's True Path Party.

On 28 June 1996, the Turkish Republic for the first time had a prime minister whose political philosophy was based on Islam. This marked a psychological break in Turkish history that was the outcome of an ongoing search for new state-society relations. The new coalition raised some Western concerns over the impact of Turkey's foreign policy orientation. The Turkish military, which considers itself the sovereign guardian of the Kemalist covenant of state, refused to cooperate with the government on some matters, in spite of Erbakan's earnest attempts to carry out virtually all of its demands.<sup>36</sup> For example, the military completely ignored the government in dealings with Israel. In May 1997, the military engaged in a massive military operation in northern Iraq without notifying the civilian government.

Since 1995, one of the major trends in Turkish politics has been the militarization of domestic politics, which has led to the erosion of the two major center-right parties and has weakened the religious right, preventing the democratic transformation of Turkey.<sup>37</sup> The final blow to the coalition government took place when the military unilaterally declared political Islamic movements and Kurdish separatist movements to be enemy number 1 of the state. The National Security Council, which is made up of the president, the prime minister, the foreign minister, the defense minister, the minister of internal affairs and five top generals, allowed the military to institutionalize its supervisory role over all major domestic and foreign policy decisions made by

<sup>36</sup> Abdelwahab El-Effendi, "From Istanbul with Love and Fear: The Trials and Tribulations of Turkish 'Secularism,'" *Muslim Politics Report*, no. 13 (May/June 1997) pp. 3-4, 7.

<sup>37</sup> The civilian-military cartel presented Islamic identity claims as an existential threat to justify actions outside the democratic means. For more on the theoretical literature on securitization of domestic politics, see Ronnie D. Lipschutz, "On Security," *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) pp. 1-23. For more on the securitization of Turkish politics, see Philippos Savvides, "Legitimation Crisis and Securitization in a Modern State: The Case of Turkey," *Critique* (Spring 2000).

the civilian government. The military increasingly used the NSC in governing and disciplining anti-Kemalist identity claims.

Since 1995, a Kemalist coalition that includes businessmen, powerful media forces and the military has hardened its position, using the media along with the court system to maintain its dominance in society.<sup>38</sup> Politics by other means, such as the military and the court system, has been the standard method of governance in Turkey. For instance, the State Security Court sentenced Necmettin Erbakan, former prime minister and the head of the Welfare Party, to one year in prison for a speech he gave in 1994. In that speech, Erbakan argued that "Turkey [had] drifted away from its Islamic roots," and that "secular politicians [had] driven a wedge between ethnic Kurds and other citizens."<sup>39</sup> To a very real extent, public criticism of secularism in Turkey remains illegal. In this manner, the hardline guardians of the Kemalist order used the National Security Council to maintain their war against pious Muslims and Kurdish identity movements. Kemalists justify their oppression by claiming that they must keep the state pure from societal penetration.

#### THE CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FEBRUARY 28TH PROCESS

In 1997, the generals decided to cleanse the public sphere of the growing Muslim presence. The military once again intervened directly in the civilian sphere, declaring peaceful and democratic Turkish Islamic and Kurdish identity aspirations to be national security threats, and orchestrating a soft-coup against the pro-Islamic Welfare coalition government by forcing the government to engage in the cleansing of Islamists from the public sphere.<sup>40</sup> In brief, the plan called for a) full implementation of the "Uniformity of Education" law, including the closure of the religious seminaries and the Preacher schools; b) prevention of anti-secular acts against the state, including outlawing such acts with new laws that would protect the secular nature of the state; c) a halt to the recruitment of Islamists into government jobs; and d) careful observation of the economic activities of Islamic groups. After some resistance,

<sup>38</sup> Mehmet Barlas, a leading Turkish columnist, regularly examines the connection between the media, the military and privatization in his column in *Yeni Safak*.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "Ex-Turkish Leader Is Sentenced for Speech," *New York Times*, 11 March 2000.

<sup>40</sup> John Doney, "A 'Soft Coup' in Turkey," *New Leader*, 10 March 1997, pp. 12-14.

Erbakan signed the directives on 5 March 1997 and asked the cabinet to implement them. President Demirel justified the directives by insisting that they were necessary to protect democracy and the secular nature of the Republic.<sup>41</sup> On 18 June 1997, the military campaign forced the Welfare Party-led government to resign. In January 1998, the Constitutional Court bowed to the wishes of the powerful military and shut down the Welfare Party. In its decision, the Turkish court argued that *laicism* is not only a separation between religion and politics but also a necessary division between religion and society. This justified regulation of social life, education, family, economy, law, daily code of conduct and dress-code in accordance with the needs of everyday life and the Kemalist principles.

The February 28th process was an attempt by the white Turks to protect and preserve their political and economic hegemony against the black Turks and Kurds and to exclude them from the privatization process. Two major reasons explain the February 28th coup: First, the military wanted to protect the state from the black Turks and Kurds and cleanse the public sphere of Muslim presence; and, second, the Istanbul-based media cartel and bourgeoisie's determination to gain the lion's share of benefits from the IMF-required privatization by creating a more dependent government. Andrew Finkel, a prominent, independent journalist, who covers Turkish society and politics and worked as a columnist for *Sabah*, an Istanbul daily, before losing his job due to his critical writings, aptly argues that "the media cannot act as watchdog while they are bartering political support for financial advantage."<sup>42</sup>

The Turkish media, particularly the Doğan Media Group (DMG), which owns the string of papers *Milliyet*, *Radikal* and *Hürriyet*, has become a major locus of corruption in Turkey. When POAŞ, the state-owned energy company, was privatized, the DMG paid just US\$1.26 billion for it though it was worth US\$4.3 billion.<sup>43</sup> None of the DMG's columnists dared to question the corruption of their company and instead, they demonstrated their

secular and nationalist qualifications by attacking Kurdish ethno-nationalist and Islamic movements. Finkel suggests that the overwhelming constraint on the Turkish media is that they are compromised by the financial interests of their proprietors. The DMG has become the primary supporter of the February 28th process, with the expectation of receiving significant financial benefits from the privatization process. The policies of the Welfare-led coalition ironically played a decisive role in facilitating the process of cleansing the public sphere. Erbakan's rhetoric about building a mosque in Taksim, his visit to Libya and his vow to pursue a policy "with or without blood" elicited great anger and mobilized the military establishment against all Islamic movements, and the Welfare-led coalition government in particular.

The February 28th process has used the media, the court and the military for its "cleansing" of the public sphere. The short-term goal of the process was the protection of the state and the white "democracy" from the black Turks and Kurds. The media and business cartels was to gain financial benefit from the privatization of the state companies. The Welfare Party was the only popular force to resist this sell-out of the state companies, and the Istanbul-based bourgeoisie and the media cartel therefore used all means at their disposal against the Welfare Party.

The process had a number of political consequences. To a great extent, it signified the end of the policy promoted by the military after the 12 September 1980 coup, which used Islam as an instrument of social control against the forces of the leftist ethnic (Kurdish) and religious (Alevi) political movements. Moreover, by ending the liberal era toward Islam started by Özal, the coup also ended the coalition between the conservative center-right and the state. Many Sunni-Turks have begun to see the army not as the army of the entire nation but rather as the guardians of the privileged white Turk. The credibility of the Turkish military has been eroded more than any other institution in the state.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> For more on the causes and implications of the February 28th process, see M. Hakan Yavuz "Türkiye artık ev değil, oteldir," *Zaman*, 28 February 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Finkel, "Caught in the Muck of Turkey's Media 'Reform,'" *Washington Post*, 12 March 2000.

<sup>43</sup> "Tehlikeli Satışlar," *Yeni Şafak*, 4 March 2000. This article examines the connection between the major media companies and the privatization process.

<sup>44</sup> In Turkey, one of the major sources of insecurity is the army itself. It uses 4 percent of the GDP—which does not include the full cost of the war in the Southeast, which runs to another US\$7 billion. It spends a large portion of its GDP on defense and has the largest army of any European country. Its officers are usually drawn from the lower-middle classes and indoctrinated in Atatürk's vision of politics and religion, and in his Jacobin conception of the West. The army has become an exclusive enclave in Turkey with little connection with its own people.

With the closure of the Welfare Party, the pro-Islamic parliamentarians formed the Virtue Party. Even though the Virtue Party constitutes the third largest party in parliament, it has been domesticated in accordance with the precepts of Kemalism. The Virtue Party has failed to transform itself into a dynamic alternative party willing to tackle the problems of Turkey, preferring instead to assimilate itself into the present political structure to maintain its legal existence. Virtue Party-led political Islam is no longer an agent of change but rather is subject to it. Fear of being shut down is the main political concern of the Virtue Party. This fear, in turn, prevents the Virtue Party from engaging in politics and has forced it to become a party without politics. For instance, in the recent debate in Parliament over changing the constitution to keep Süleyman Demirel, who embodied the February 28th process, as president, Bülent Ecevit asked the Virtue Party to vote for the three-item constitutional amendment, in which party closure by the constitutional court was made more difficult. Ecevit asked the Virtue Party parliamentarians to vote for the change or face the closure of the Virtue Party by the court.

After the February 1997 coup, all major Islamic groups, including the National Order Party, have shown clear signs of becoming increasingly pro-European and Westernized.<sup>45</sup> The groups have supported Turkey's full integration into the EU, along with the establishment of closer ties between Turkey and the EU, for four reasons. One of these is economic and the other three are political: 1) the rise of a new bourgeoisie within the National Outlook Movement which is involved in the textile industry; 2) the belief that religious rights in Turkey would be better protected under the EU than they are currently, under the Turkish constitution; 3) the encouragement of the National Outlook Movement by Turks in Germany to support Turkey's integration into the EU; and 4) the increasing power of the new generation of National Outlook Movement politicians. One of the major consequences of the February 28th process has been the transformation of the Virtue Party's ideology, leadership and organization. The party has been forced to reconsider modernity, democracy and multi-culturalism as universal values rather than

<sup>45</sup> For more on the reaction to the Helsinki Decision, see "Merak Edilen Görüş," *Zaman*, 23 December 1999.

treating these values as an extension of European domination.<sup>46</sup> In a sense, the coup helped the Virtue Party to rediscover Europe as a place of democracy rather than the source of Kemalist authoritarianism. The party, however, is undergoing a difficult period of rethinking and fragmentation. It will likely take a decade for the Virtue Party to recover and come to terms with a new vision and new leadership.

In any case, the transformation of the Virtue Party did not stop a Kemalist fundamentalist attack on the party's program. Vural Savaş, the chief prosecutor, opened the case against the Virtue Party at the Constitutional Court on 7 May 1999. Savaş argued that "the Virtue Party has become the extension of a banned political party and is also becoming a focal point for criminal activity against secularism," citing statements made by Virtue Party figures concerning Merve Kavakçı's headscarf controversy. Indeed, the Virtue Party has been under the remote control of Necmettin Erbakan, who runs the everyday affairs of the Virtue Party through Recai Kutan and Oguzhan Asiltürk.

While the Constitutional Court was examining the case in order to determine whether the Virtue Party is constitutional or not, the media initiated a new debate over how to define Islam in accordance with the needs of the state. The state seeks to define Islam by redefining the Virtue Party.<sup>47</sup> Some prominent Virtue Party members, known as reformists, have issued opinions about the failure of political Islam and the virtues of secularism in Turkey. The reformist wing of the Virtue Party displayed its growing power at the first Virtue Party Convention on 14 May 2000 despite the defeat of Abdullah Gül, the leader of the reformist wing. Gül, who received 521 votes out of 1154, lost the leadership to Recai Kutan, a close ally of Erbakan. A narrow margin of the conservative victory proved that the pro-reform movement within the Virtue Party is fermenting. The party is destined to become an Islamic form of the Christian Democratic movement in Europe, assuming the Constitutional Court does not ban the party outright.

<sup>46</sup> For a clear analysis of the impact of the February 28th process on the Islamic discourse in Turkey, see Buchanettin Duran, "Islamist Intellectuals, Democracy and the Recent Elections in Turkey," Paper presented at the International Conference, ISIM, Leiden, 10-12 December 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Ahmet Taşgetiren, "FP ve İslam yorumu," *Yeni Şafak*, 11 February 2000; Fehmi Kuru, "Müzmün bir sorun," *Yeni Şafak*, 11 February 2000.

Despite the socio-economic transformation of Turkey, the Kemalists remain determined to maintain their dominance at all costs. The Kemalist exclusion of Muslims and Kurds in the public sphere has been the major reason for the de-consolidation of democracy in Turkey. The Virtue Party is forced to shed its Islamism to become part of the system, and this, in turn, caused the Virtue Party to lose its distinctiveness vis-à-vis other parties. Today, the Virtue Party has no identity or vision that would distinguish it from other parties. The power of the party stems rather from the weaknesses of other parties as well as from its image as a victim of the oppressive state.

#### CONCLUSION

Modern Turkey is more divided today than it was a decade ago. The only force unifying the "white and black" Turks and Kurds is their common fear of each other. The war against Kurdish nationalism has destroyed the humane nature of the state. It has become a faceless machine operating against its own people.

Men and women in Turkey today live with only a dim memory of the past, no faith in the present and only limited faith in the future. Nevertheless, Turkey's struggle to become a member of the European Union and its attempts to domesticate the state structure in accordance with the European norms, its burgeoning civil society and expanding market have created a momentum to create a new social contract in which ethnic and religious diversity will be respected. For those excluded Turks and Kurds, Islam remains the imagined "native home" of co-existence and the source of ethics. The struggle, as in much of the rest of the Islamic world, between the defenders of authoritarianism and privilege in various forms, and the excluded majority of various backgrounds aspiring for liberty and social justice will doubtlessly shape the future of Turkey, and Islam. The underlying Islamic vernacular of Turkish society will continue to play an important role in the future evolution of Turkey's intrinsic character. ❧