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POLITICAL ISLAM

Kristin Fabbe and Efe Murat Balıkcıoğlu

Introduction

In Turkey, the terms *İslâmcılık* or *siyasal İslâmcılık* are used to describe the agenda and activities of political Islamists, whose primary objective has been to defend the religious sphere from various forms of encroachment. In this chapter, we trace the evolution of political Islamist currents in Turkish politics from the late Ottoman and early Republican period up until the present. We also link the broader historical narrative to recent social science debates and approaches to the study of political Islam in Turkey, especially as they relate to issues of mobilisation, moderation, inclusion, development, and democracy.

From Empire to Republic: religion and state building in the late Ottoman era

Political Islam in contemporary Turkey cannot be understood without appreciation for what Şerif Mardin calls the 'long-range influence of an Islamic voice in Turkey' (Mardin 2005, 146). The late Ottoman writer Ziya Gökalp observed that modernisation (*muasırlaşmak*), Islamisation (*İslâmlaşmak*), and Turkification (*Türkleşmek*) emerged as dominant political trends in the Empire's final years (Gökalp 1918; Safa 1958). Indeed, the interplay among these processes – and the ideologies behind them – provide a window into understanding the social dynamics and lineages of political Islam in modern Turkey, for they were not mutually exclusive (Berkes 1964; Kara 1986). As Brian Silverstein has documented, the *cilmiye* (Islamic scholarly hierarchy) became increasingly intertwined with the Ottoman state in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and so too did the Empire's Sufi religious orders, which also underwent bureaucratisation and eventually many sufis became bureaucrats themselves.¹ Furthermore, Sultan 'Abdulhamîd II (r. 1876–1909) simultaneously employed Islamism and Ottomanism as political discourses in an effort to strike a societal balance and ward-off the

¹ Whereas the Bektaşî order had gained ascendancy as result of its ties with the Janissary corps, these two groups were abolished in 1826 and the Mevlevî order subsequently enjoyed a period of Imperial sponsorship. The Mevlevî's privileged role came to an end with the reign of 'Abdulhamîd II (r. 1876–1909). See Silverstein (2009).

impending dissolution of the Empire during his long one-man rule (Silverstein 2011, 77). Nonetheless, despite being associated with policies of pan-Islamism (*İttihād-ı İslām*), 'Abdulhamīd II was also instrumental in diminishing the autonomous influence of medreses (religious schools), limiting their number and replacing them with reformed schooling systems for training civil servants, the military, and judicial functionaries (Somel 2001). The tensions that arose as a result of these policies – embracing Islamist rhetoric and certain segments of the religious class while diminishing the autonomy of key religious institutions – developed into one of the defining characteristics of the Hamidian era and significantly shaped processes of late Ottoman reform and state building.

'Abdulhamīd II's policies also produced divergent factions among the late Ottoman ulema and the religious orders, which are sometimes characterised as reform-minded vs. conservative. These groups were not always as cohesive, coherent or long lasting as such a dichotomy implies, however, for alliances shifted and the views of key figures morphed in unpredictable ways during the transition from Empire to Republic. Generally speaking, however, the reformists were those medrese scholars of the Second Constitutional era that supported the reforms initiated by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). They included figures like Mūsā Kāzım (1858–1920) (Koca 2002) and Ürgüplü Muştafâ Hayrî² (1867–1922), both of whom served as *Şeyhülislām* after the removal of 'Abdulhamīd II. These scholars worked with the CUP and even provided religio-legal justifications for their social, political, and educational policies. *Sebilü'r-reşād*, a journal that was published by Mehmed Âkif (1873–1936) and Eşref Edib (1882–1971), served as their primary media outlet.³ Senior Naqshbandīs also embraced the constitutional movement and initially supported the CUP against the Sultan (Kara 2001). The other, so-called conservative ulema typically adopted a more royalist attitude and wanted the Sultan and his cabinet to remain as the primary locus of political authority (Bein 2011). Generally speaking, this second group criticised the accelerated modernisation agenda forged by the CUP and positioned themselves against certain social and intellectual aspects of Western society.⁴

Kemalist Turkey: religion becomes a bureaucratic apparatus

Mustafa Kemal's new Republic was, above all, a nation-state with a particular emphasis on modernisation and Turkification. As such, Kemal's attitude toward Islam was shaped by these two discourses. Reform-minded figures' understandings of Islam often went hand-in-hand with a rising Turkish nationalist discourse. History-writing from the early Republican era redefined Islam as a national, that is, more localised, religion. Over time, this came to stand in opposition to interpretations of Islam espoused by thinkers such as Mustafa Sabri (1869–1954) and Mehmed Âkif, which aspired toward a broader Islamic community (*ümme*).⁵

2 Also see *İslâhât-ı Medâris Nizâmname*s prepared by the şeyhülislām Ürgüplü Mustafa Hayrî Bey, who introduced not only physical education classes, but also foreign languages such as Russian and French along with mandatory classes on mechanics, physics and philosophy (Ürgüplü, ed. 2015).

3 The journal disseminated reformist views early on and later supported Mustafa Kemal's 'national struggle' (*millî mücadele*) against the occupation of Anatolia by allied forces. See Bein (2011).

4 The demarcation between conservative vs. reform-minded religious scholars has persisted in Turkey, such as that between the theologians Hayrettin Karaman (1934–) and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk (1951–2016).

5 See the chapters on Mehmed Âkif and Mustafa Sabri in Kara's (1986) *Türkiye'de İslâmcılık Düşüncesi: Metinler, Kişiler*, volumes one and two, respectively.

The changes that Mustafa Kemal instigated in the religious establishment were increasingly met with opposition from some self-identified Islamists, though their criticism was, according to Tanıl Bora, largely reactionary and misconceived (2017, 438–439). Mustafa Kemal was often accused of working to abolish religion, but in actuality his early reforms merely sought to reposition the religious establishment as a weak and tightly controlled bureaucratic apparatus under the state hierarchy (Fabbe forthcoming). Laicism (*lâiklik*), one of the six founding ideological principles of the Kemalist Republic, was thus distinct from some conceptions of secularism in that it envisioned a separation of religion and state. As such, in 1924, with the abolition of the joint ministry of *Şer'iyye* and *Evkâf*, which had been in charge of the supervision of the judiciary as well as religious endowments, key institutions as well as a network of localised preachers and other religious agents were transferred to the newly created Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyânet İşleri Reisliği*).⁶ In the name of state building, the legal and educational components of the previous seat of *Şeyhülislâm*, now abolished, were subsumed under the separate ministries of Justice (*Adliye*) and Education (*Maârif*). In this way, the resources of the religious establishment were spread and distributed across the other components of the state, thereby diminishing its overall power.⁷

The Directorate of Religious Affairs was, and continues to be, employed as a tool to nationalise, regulate, supervise and instrumentalise many aspects of religion (Tarhanlı 1993). For example, some of Mustafa Kemal's most controversial decisions, such as the translation and the recitation of the Qur'an in Turkish, were initiated and supported through the cadres and efforts of the Directorate. Numerous religiously educated ulema supported Mustafa Kemal's early reforms and justified Kemalist changes by providing specific references to different aspects of classical Islam (Bora 2017, 419–421). Some ulema even wrote in favour of very controversial issues, including the abolition of the Caliphate⁸ and the translation and the recitation of the Qur'an in Turkish.⁹ One of the early supporters of the CUP, the religious scholar Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır (1878–1942), even prepared a modern exegesis and a Turkish translation of the Qur'an, a work that had initially been commissioned by Mehmed Âkif.

In the Republican era, Islamist critics who remained outside the institutional framework of the Directorate were stigmatised as pro-Sharia (*Şeriatçılık*), backward, and/or reactionaries (*mürteci* or *irticâ yanlısı*) (Maydan 2017). Some were sanctioned by the state accordingly. In part for this reason, some early Islamists remained ambivalent when it came to openly acting against Mustafa Kemal's government. One telling example of this ambivalence is documented by İsmail Kara in his article 'The Dream of a Shaykh' (*Şeyh efendi'nin Rüyası*). The article depicts a group of sheikhs and their disciples who unite to curse Mustafa Kemal and his reforms, especially the abolition of Sufi orders. The group later reverses its decision, however, as a result of one of the shaykh's dreams. In the dream, the Prophet Muhammad points at

⁶ See the document *Cumhuriyet Arşivi/Tarih*: 7/3/1924/*Fon*: 51.0.0.0/*Yer*: 2.1...34. This document states that the Ministry of *Şer'iyye* and *Evkâf* was abolished, and instead, the *Diyânet* was established. From now on, all the cadres of preachers (*vâ'iz*), chaplains (*mü'ezzin*), *imâms*, and *hafîbs* would be officers working for the *Diyânet*.

⁷ Several telegraphs about the future of the medrese buildings after the Ministry of *Evkâf* was reduced to a directorate are illustrative here: *Cumhuriyet Arşivi/Tarih*: 1/2/1925/*Fon*: 30.10.0.0/*Yer*: 192.313.9/ Documents 1–6. Documents 4–6 announce that some of the dilapidated and abandoned medrese buildings should be transferred to the Ministry of Education. Here we see Kemalist's early strategy of breaking down the overall structure of the *Evkâf* by conferring its property to other organs of the state (i.e. the Ministry of Education here).

⁸ See Ayni (1943, 385–409).

⁹ See Bayur (1958, 599–606).

Turkey on a map and says that this portion of the Islamic landscape was given to Mustafa Kemal, albeit, with a heavy heart (Kara 2017).

The emergence of Islamist dissent

It was not long after the Kemalists came to power, however, that certain religious communities began to collectively voice dissent. Early dissent was primarily polemic, providing a corpus of work from which later Islamic political activists would draw.¹⁰ The absence of widespread, religiously inspired social mobilisation can be attributed, in part, to the repressive nature of the Kemalist regime, which became increasingly intolerant of dissent and pushed any would-be activists underground. A case in point is Bediüzzaman Said Nursî (1877–1960), a Kurdish religious scholar associated with the Naqshbandi-Khalidi tradition who had supported Mustafa Kemal's national struggle during the War of Independence. Nursî recited the Qur'an during the opening of the first Turkish Parliament, but after the abolition of the Caliphate and the subsequent Kurdish-Islamist rebellion of Sheikh Said in 1925, the Kemalist regime interrogated Nursî and banned him from all political and social activity. As a result, Nursî went underground for decades and continued his teaching, inspiring a large number of reading circles dedicated to the study of his multi-volume exegesis, *Risâle-i Nûr*. Whereas Kuru and Kuru have described Nursî's work as 'one of the most influential apolitical interpretations of Islam' (Kuru and Kuru 2008, 100), others contested this view, especially as a result of recent political developments associated with another off-shoot of the Nurcu movement, the *Hizmet* (Service) movement of Fethullah Gülen (Kasaba 2014, 629).

Eventually both the aforementioned Eşref Edib and Mehmed Âkif, who earlier had supported and published the views of reform-minded figures, grew increasingly disillusioned. As the Kemalist state grew increasingly autocratic, they transformed into some of the staunchest critics of Mustafa Kemal and his Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Halk Partisi*, CHP). *Sebilü'r-reşad* was published again in 1948, but only supported the regime reluctantly. Instead, Mehmed Âkif's conception of Islamism congealed around the essentialist slogan that the Turkish people needed to return to the true essence of religion. Âkif's disillusionment with the Turkish Republic and Mustafa Kemal's reforms led him to imagine an idealised community of Islam (Bora 2017, 416–417). He was often criticised by later thinkers for ignoring *Realpolitik* and turning a blind eye to the religious values of common men during the early Republic (Bora 2017). Former Shaykh al-Islām Mustafa Sabri also developed into a staunch critic of Mustafa Kemal's statist policies, including the abolition of the Caliphate and religious orders (*tarikatlār*) as well as his social, educational and legal reforms.¹¹

Finally, and probably most consequentially, Mehmet Zahid Kotku (1897–1980), who had been initiated into the influential Khālidi branch of the Naqshbandi Order in 1918, took over leadership of the *cemaat* in 1952 and became an influential, state-sponsored prayer leader at the İskender Paşa mosque. Kotku became increasingly popular among student circles, growing a community of followers. In his *sohbets* (religious conversations) and teachings, Kotku encouraged his disciples to be active in worldly affairs, and he and his *cemaat* quickly emerged as the most influential informal leaders of Turkish political Islam. Kotku and his followers increasingly built political clout. Kotku

10 One of the foundational texts of the conservative right in Turkey is *İsyan Ahlâkı* (*Rebellious Morality or Conformism and Revolt—Esquisse d'un Psychologie de la Croyance* in its original French) by Nurettin Topçu (1909–75), published in 1934, which essentially provides a philosophical justification for advocating an Islamic polity based on 'the Muslim will to revolt' in concomitance with God's power.

11 See again the chapters on Mehmed Âkif and Mustafa Sabri in Kara (1986), volumes one and two, respectively. See also Ünsal (2005, 72–89).

did not shun the state entirely, nor did he 'hold esteem for more radical Islamists' (Mardin 2005, 158). Rather, he embraced a synthesis of Turkish nationalism and Islam and positioned his *cemaat* to help establish, support and promote political, economic, press activities (Mardin 2005, 153).

Islamists' early attempts to engage in institutionalised politics

In time, religiously based dissent found its way into the formal political arena, albeit in fits and starts. The Liberal Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*), which was first formed in 1930 with Mustafa Kemal's approval, was quickly shut down when it attracted religious adherents. From this date on, the idea of 'the religious reactionary' (*mürtece*) became increasingly salient in Turkish politics (Özipek 2005b). The first actual Islamic-leaning parties founded in Turkey were *İslâm Konuma Partisi*, which was closed by the government after two months in 1946, and *Millî Kalkınma Partisi* which was abrogated after its founder Nuri Demirağ's death in 1957. Eşref Edib pointed to a conservative Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) splinter group, the *Millet Partisi* (1948–53) as the most appropriate conservative–religious movement for Islamists to support; however, this party too was soon closed. Yet another attempt to form an Islamist party in the early 1950s with *İslâm Demokrat Partisi*, also resulted in closure after the party was accused of mixing religion and politics. Expressions such as '*dini siyasete âlet etmek*' (using religion as a political tool) and '*irticâyla mücadele*' (the struggle against reactionism) joined the lexicon of common rationales that Turkish governments and the army employed to shut down Islamic political formations (Özipek 2005a).

The general evolution of individual twentieth-century Islamist ideologues in modern Turkey also reveals that several prominent religious orders occasionally overlapped, shared a common community, did not shy away from politics, and increasingly showed concerted forms of engagement with various political parties and the Turkish state. For example, by the 1960s, Naqshbandî–Khālidî Shaykh Kotku's *sohbet*s began to take place in important institutions, including the State Planning Organisation (*Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı*), thereby signalling this *cemaat*'s willingness to participate in institutionalised politics. Pre-eminent figures that later came to dominate Islamist politics in Turkey, including Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011) and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (1954–), participated in Kotku's *sohbet*s in the 1970s (Silverstein 2011, 102–103). Meanwhile, a new off-shoot of Said Nursî's Nurcu movement called *Hizmet* emerged around the popular preacher Fethullah Gülen (1941–). *Hizmet* grew in popularity as a result of Gülen's oratory skills and, within a decade, recordings of his preaching began circulating widely. A staunch anti-communist, Gülen established the *Komünizmle Mücadele Demeği* (Association for the Fight Against Communism) in Erzurum in 1965 (Çakır 1990; Yavuz 2005).

Another case in point is Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–83), who was initially known as a bohemian poet during his youth. At the age of thirty, he met the Naqshbandî sheikh Ahmed Arvâsi and thereafter dedicated his life to the cause of political Islam (Mardin 1994). He published the influential nationalist–Islamist journal *Büyük Doğu* (Great East). Necip Fazıl proved to be a controversial figure.¹² Fazıl initially positioned himself as an avid supporter of Mustafa Kemal's reforms but later, when Adnan Menderes' Democrat Party came into power, he voiced severe critiques of early Republican reforms and political figures, often using Islamist discourse. He changed his political stance many times over the course of *Büyük Doğu* and never hid the fact that he received government funds to produce pro-Democrat Party and/or pro-Turkish-Islamist propaganda (Hür 2013). From time to time, the journal was supported by

12 Peyami Safa's *Türk Düşüncesi* and Nurettin Topçu's aforementioned *Hareket* were, however, probably the two most influential conservative-nationalist journals.

the political right, including the Menderes government. The journal was also known for casting vicious *ad hominem* attacks against certain political figures, derogatorily labelling them as Jewish, Armenian or Free Masons. This blend of the religious and the national positioned Fazıl as one of the key figures behind the emergent Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (*Türk İslâm Sentezi*), an idea later inherited in the late 1960s by Necmettin Erbakan's National View (*Millî Görüş*) cadres and the subsequent National Order Party (*Millî Nizam Partisi*). Gradually then, many Islamists adapted to the repressive political environment, marked by party closures and the like, by developing an increasingly nationalist and pro-Turkish (and often exclusionary) rhetoric. Such rhetoric mirrored the rhetoric of the state, and thereby incentivised Islamists to find allies in the political establishment to shield them from accusations of disloyalty. Although formal political participation via party politics was still largely out of reach, Islamist movements evolved by intertwining themselves with the state in these other less visible, but no less significant ways. With time, these interactions reinforced that the particular evolution of political Islam in Turkey had turned into a 'statist' movement, one that worked with and through the organs of state power as opposed to exclusively outside of them.

The Turkish Islamic synthesis begins to find its voice(s)

The 'statist' tendencies of political Islam grew more strident in the 1970s as Necip Fazıl had started to openly voice his calls for a Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. Although the Turkish Islamic Synthesis and newer manifestations of Turkish Islam are not always one and the same, as Şen argues, the legacy of the Turkish Islamic Synthesis 'set an ideological political framework that aimed at uniting two extreme wings of the Turkish right – Islamism and Turkish nationalism – around a common program in order to block the rise of the leftist movements' (Şen 2010, 64). The concept had roots in Ahmed Arvâsî's three-volume *Türk-İslâm Ülküsü* (Turkish-Islamic Ideology) (Arvâsî 1979). It was also being discussed among other conservative nationalists. For example, the historian İbrahim Kafesoğlu, known for his book *Türk-İslâm Sentezi*, founded a group called The Hearth of Intellectuals (*Aydınlar Ocağı*), which held discussions about the possibility of establishing a national culture (*Millî Kültür*) reserved only for Muslim Turks starting in 1970 (Güvenç et al. 1991). In his book, Kafesoğlu examines Turkish contributions to the Muslim world, concluding with the thesis that Turkic systems of belief and codes of living were suitable for adapting Islam both as a religious and political identity (Kafesoğlu 1985). Though with different emphases and priorities (Kafesoğlu placing more weight on Turkishness and Arvâsî-Necip Fazıl on Islamism), these different versions of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis converged during the 1970s.

It was also in the 1970s that the first umbrella party for Islamists was founded. The Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) led by Süleyman Demirel, which claimed lineage to the banned DP, came to power alone in 1965 and 1969, receiving the largest vote share in both elections (52.8% and 46.5% respectively). On the heels of these victories, an Islamist-leaning group within the party began criticising the leadership for failing to pursue a sufficiently conservative agenda. By this point, Necmettin Erbakan, the aforementioned political ideologue of the National View movement, had already spent a good part of the late 1960s increasing his sphere of influence in *Odalar Birliği*, an umbrella organisation for traders and industrialists. Building on this influence, and with Shaykh Kotku's blessing and backing, he joined with a group that splintered from the AP to found the National Order Party in 1970. The government dissolved the MNP only a year later on the grounds that it violated Turkey's constitutional commitment to *laïcité* after the second army intervention

with the 1971 Turkish military memorandum (Celep 2014).¹³ Erbakan's second attempt to form a party came a year later, with the National Salvation Party (*Millî Selâmet Partisi*, MSP), which was successful enough to form a temporary government in a very odd coalition together with Mustafa Kemal's CHP under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit in 1974. Erbakan had succeeded in courting key segments of the Nurcu community to support these early political endeavours, but relations quickly soured. The Nurcu-affiliated Members of Parliament in the MSP 'were uncomfortable with the way the party was being led by Erbakan and his close associates' and 'rejected the idea that the only way to serve Islam was to be under that particular party leadership ... and were against the formation of a coalition government with the CHP since it was considered as representative of communists' (Atacan 2005, 190).

Generally speaking, Erbakan was a divisive figure, and his religio-political doctrine, *Millî Görüş*, was shaped by his antagonism against global capitalism as well as Western values, including secularism. Erbakan saw the common financial market as a Zionist and Christian project to dilute Islamic ideology and placed specific emphasis on the importance of nationalising Turkish industry as well as hastening overall development, economic independence and social morality based on his concept of a Just Order (*Âdil Düzen*) (Çakır 1994, 131–139). Ruşen Çakır's study of the rise of political Islam in Turkey from the 1960s onwards concludes that Erbakan's *Millî Görüş* movement – as well as his influential Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) of the 1990s – made no claims in favour of democracy or Sharia (Çakır 1994). Instead, Erbakan's ideology was rooted in an alternative national identity based on Ottoman-Islamic history and a strong criticism of Kemalist reforms (Tepe 2008).

The chaotic politics of the 1970s came to an abrupt halt with the 1980 military coup, which, while negative in the immediate short term, had favourable consequences for political Islam in the long term. The threat of communism and the Soviet influence, as well as the rise of leftist separatist Kurdish movements, led the new military government to actively pursue a nationalist-Islamist approach to state identity. Such an approach was also in line with the US's green belt (*yeşil kuşak*) project, which aimed to empower and financially support local religious forces working against the threat of Russian influence (Çiğdem 2005, 31). Although Erbakan himself was banned from politics, other centre-right parties, together with the junta government, openly embraced the Turkish-Islamic synthesis and it became enshrined in culture and education policies (Eligür 2010), especially history text books (Özbaran 1992).¹⁴ Long-standing institutional arrangements around religion, including the *Diyanet*, the Divinity Faculties (*İlâhiyat Fakülteleri*), the İmam Hatip Schools, compulsory religious education in state schools, and official Qur'an courses, were expanded in ways that permanently enlarged the religious field, despite the ostensibly secular nature of the Turkish state.¹⁵ For example the 1982 military constitution strengthened the legal position of the *Diyanet* via Article 136, overtly tasking it with the goal of protecting 'national solidarity and integrity' (Gözyayın 2006). Article 24 reintroduced compulsory religious courses into the curriculum of state schools in what Kaplan has argued was an effort to homogenise conceptions of Islam and also securitise/militarise them (Kaplan 2006). In 'the Islamic boom years' of the 1980s about 1500 new mosques were constructed annually, reaching one mosque per 857 people by 1988 (White 2002, 113).

Also, in the wake of the 1980 coup, with Erbakan temporarily sidelined, Fethullah Gülen began working directly with the Turkish junta government, demanding that the religious community

13 Since 1961 the Turkish state banned 27 political parties for violating the principle of secularism or threatening national unity/territorial integrity.

14 For the image of Islam in Turkish history textbooks, see Yetkin (1998).

15 See Şen (2010) 59–84 and Fabbe (forthcoming).

comply with military directives and even providing a religio-legal opinion in favour of the *coup d'état* (Çakır 1990; Yavuz 2005). The demise of Turkey's statist economic policies in the 1980s also opened up space for Islamic civil society organisations. The Gülenists typically established individual foundations with no official link to one another, although they were all tacitly and ideologically connected to the religious leader's teachings. In this manner, the Gülenists developed a formidable network of subsidised private educational institutions, preparatory schools, and dormitories, which filled widening gaps in the state's developmental capabilities (White 2002, 207).

Despite having alienated many Islamist groups, Erbakan's political career was still far from over. The eighth president and the founder of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan*, ANAP) Turgut Özal (1927–93) transformed Turkey from a statist economy into a neoliberal one and was also known for his lenient and democratic policies towards the Kurds. After his sudden and suspicious death, a turbulent political climate characterised the 1990s as the Turkish state launched an aggressive policy against the Kurds and its fight with the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) grew more intense. A stint of weak, coalition governments with constantly changing partners and alliances dovetailed with an economic crisis and political instability that was punctuated by elections nearly once every two years. As a result, the two main centre-right parties, Tansu Çiller's True Path (*Doğruyol Partisi*, DYP) and Mesut Yılmaz's ANAP became mired in endless allegations of corruption, losing prestige and public trust. As the centre-right fragmented, a window of opportunity opened for Erbakan's recently formed RP. Political rising star Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who had climbed up the MSP and RP's ranks, was elected mayor of İstanbul in 1994. Then, in the 1995 parliamentary elections, the RP won the largest number of seats with 21% of the vote. Erbakan was only able to form a coalition in late summer of 1996 with Çiller's DYP, an odd alliance given that the DYP declared itself to be western-friendly and secularist. Çiller needed the support of Erbakan's RP in Parliament to avoid corruption charges (Akın 2012; Hürriyet 1998). The alliance did not last, however, as Erbakan was pushed out of power with the 1997 Turkish military memorandum (also known as the 'soft coup') and the RP was shut down in 1998 for posing a threat to *laïcité*, and that same year Erdoğan was sent to prison. In anticipation that the Constitutional Court would dissolve the RP, Erbakan had already pre-emptively created the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP), which spun its political agenda differently: more moderate, populist, pluralist, and environment friendly.¹⁶ Interestingly, the followers of the Gülen movement and many of the supporters of the RP/FP are documented as having 'few kind words for one another.' Each accused the other of secretive fanaticism (White 2002, 112).

Political Islam goes mainstream: the evolution of the AKP from 'moderate Islam' to 'Erdoğanism'

Although the FP faced external threats from segments of the military and derision from the Gülen movement, the real threat came from within its own ranks. Indeed, as political Islam moved into the mainstream, not only did its statist tendencies grow more obvious, conflicts *between* and *within* various Islamist groups began to have an increasingly pronounced impact on domestic politics. These intra-Islamist tensions are often glossed over, no doubt because of many scholars' insistence on analysing Turkish society through the prism of a Kemalist elite vs. Islamist outsiders. This tired, and oft-inaccurate dichotomy has distorted understandings of how Islamist politics have evolved.

A major intra-Islamist break came after the 1999 elections, when a vocal group within the FP (sometimes referred to as the 'innovators') began to criticise Erbakan's leadership. When

16 See Atacan (2005).

the FP was shuttered in 2001, the innovators, which included Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, and Bülent Arınç, capitalised on the opportunity and founded the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) instead of instead of joining the VP's successor, the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP). According to Altınordu, from its founding in 2001 until 2011, the AKP followed what he dubs an 'incorporationist strategy', which included symbolic gestures and policy positions that signalled a commitment to the founding values of the Republic. As he points out, it is worth remembering that:

The press conference that announced the founding of the party in August 2001 took place against the background of a massive portrait of Atatürk, and the attendees were asked to observe a minute of silence in his memory. After the event, the founders of the party visited Anıtkabir to declare their commitment to his legacy. The first party program praised secularism as a 'prerequisite of democracy' and a 'principle of freedom and social peace.' [...] the program stressed that it is unacceptable to make use of religion for political, economic and other interests, or to put pressure on people who think and live differently by using religion.

(Altınordu 2016, 163)

Early AKP discourse was notably pro-EU and supported liberal economic policies. As such it attracted not only Islamists,¹⁷ but socialist, new liberal intellectuals as well as the Gülenists, who played a substantial role in helping the AKP launch and succeed. The party also created an aura of pluralism, via both the 'Alevi opening of 2007' (Lord 2017) and initiating reforms for Turkey's Kurdish citizens.

Some scholars were sceptical of the genuineness of the AKP's self-proclaimed political objectives from the start, while others championed the party's 'moderating' moves, and the scholarly literature became deeply divided in its interpretations of the AKP's intentions (Çınar 2011). Also, given the statist nature of political Islam in Turkey, these debates quickly carried over into analyses of Turkish foreign policy. Scholars began scrutinising the turn toward Islamism and 'Neo-Ottomanism' as a foreign policy tool, focusing especially on the tenure of Ahmet Davutoğlu as foreign minister (2009–14). Davutoğlu's Neo-Ottoman/Pan-Islamic views shaped his geo-political worldview, which saw Turkey's regional ambitions as encompassing its former Ottoman sphere of influence (Kıvanç 2015; Kirişçi 2018). It was also during Davutoğlu's tenure that the Turkish media ran a vast number of pieces claiming that the AKP had begun establishing closer ties to other Islamic groups, ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to Islamic fundamentalists (*Hürriyet* 2013).¹⁸

In recent years, research documenting the ways in which the AKP has sought to undermine democracy have grown increasingly prominent. Some authors warned of a potential shift toward undemocratic tactics with the 'Ergenekon trials' (Fabbe 2011). The term Ergenekon referred to an alleged secret organisation with ultra-Kemalist leanings that was charged with inciting violence and plotting to overthrow the government. According to prosecutors at the time, members of Ergenekon planned to foment civil unrest through targeted assassinations and acts of terrorism designed to create chaos and instability, thereby setting the groundwork for an eventual military coup to oust the AKP from power. After the Ergenekon plot was 'discovered' in 2007, over 500

¹⁷ Tuğal (2011).

¹⁸ A car accident outside İstanbul in February 2013 – sometimes dubbed 'the second *Susurluk*' – is said to have revealed these ties. Usame Kutub, a Turkish-Egyptian businessman, the son of Sayyid Quth's brother, Yassin Abdullah Qadi, a Saudi Arabian businessman previously charged with funding al-Qaeda, and one of Erdoğan's bodyguards were reportedly all in the same car.

people were detained and nearly 300 charged with committing some crime in connection with the organisation, including top-ranking military generals, university professors, mobsters, editors, writers, and journalists. The highly publicised trial deeply divided the public. Those in favour of the prosecution believed that the trial marked a long overdue clean-up of Turkish politics and a welcome end to the so-called 'deep state' or 'state-tutelage' that had ruled Turkey from behind the scenes, and with support from the military, for decades (Fabbe 2011).¹⁹ Critics of the trial argued (and some later demonstrated) that most of the charges were fabricated and that the AKP and its then-supporters in the Gülen movement were unjustly using the judiciary to silence opponents and cement party authority (Jenkins 2009). Erdoğan's aggressive moves to silence the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013 only exacerbated concerns about the AKP's democratic commitments.

Although the AKP undoubtedly benefited from the silencing of these Kemalist voices with the Ergenekon trials, ironically it later alleged that it was Gülen-led groups in the judiciary and the security forces that started the Ergenekon (and Balyoz) trials. These allegations marked another moment in recent history in which intra-Islamic tensions have come to dominate domestic politics. The AKP has since pardoned many of the accused and split completely from the Gülenists. The reasons behind split between the Gülenists and the AKP are murky.²⁰ What began in 2013 as a seemingly innocuous disagreement between AKP leadership and the Gülen movement over its preparatory schools (*dershaneler*), quickly transformed into a fierce struggle among various branches of the Turkish state that threatened the country's stability. According to Ahmet Şık, the antipathy between the AKP and the Gülenists only started when the Gülenist group attempted to place cadres in the Turkish Intelligence Service (şık 2013). Realising that the Gülenists had gained an uncontrollable degree of power within the state, Erdoğan broke his covenant with this movement (T24 2014). The Gülenists are said to have retaliated first by disclosing secret negotiations between the PKK and the Turkish government to the media, and then by revealing corruption involving a gas-for-gold deal between Iran and Turkey, which breached US's sanctions against the Iranian regime.²¹

By 2014, observers were perhaps less concerned with the AKP's religious objectives than with their purely political ones.²² Taşpınar wrote in 2014 that 'the Turkish democratic model is not coming to an end because of a clash between Islam and secularism. Instead, the real conflict is between electoral democracy and liberalism' (Taşpınar 2014). Adding a set of astute historical and institutional observations about the wider political arena to the discussion, Somer argues that 'despite major achievements, democratisation remained ambiguous under the rule of moderate Islamists because they compromised and associated themselves with the semi-democratic centre, and secular-religious cooperation failed while some secular actors de-moderated' (Somer 2014). Altınordu, also faults the old guard to a certain extent, arguing that 'state elites failed to establish legitimate grounds for a political intervention, which in turn provided the party with the time and opportunity to remove the institutional barriers to its incorporation.'²³

Academic scrutiny of the AKP's turn toward authoritarianism has only intensified since the battle between the AKP government and the Gülenists culminated in a failed coup attempt that the

19 Interestingly, in a special issue of the *Sociology of Islam* from 2014 entitled 'Perspectives on the Gülen Movement' that includes seven articles, only a few mention the trials and none analyze them in-depth. See *Sociology of Islam* 1(3/4), 2014.

20 For recent efforts to explain the split see Taş (2017).

21 See Sloot (2017).

22 See, for example, Esen and Gümüşçü (2016).

23 See Altınordu (2016).

government says was instigated by Gülen-affiliated army officers (*New York Times* 2017). After enacting the state of emergency law (*Olağanüstü Hal* or *OHAL*), the Erdoğan government started the biggest purge and witch-hunt ever in Turkish history. It has removed nearly half a million alleged Gülenists (along with others opponents) from the bureaucracy as well as government and state offices (Kirby 2016; Hansen 2017). Erdoğan has also overhauled the political system, changing it from a parliamentary democracy into a presidential system marked by the concentration of executive power in his own personal authority. Having alienated many former coalition partners, the AKP has increasingly cozied up to the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), forming a coalition called the People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*) for the scheduled 2019 Presidential elections, which were brought forward with a snap election to 24 June 2018. Erdoğan even flashed the *Bozkurt* (Grey Wolves), historically a Turkish ultra-nationalist hand gesture (on top of his now-typical Muslim Brotherhood-inspired four-fingered *Rabia*) in a rally to signal his alliance with the MHP (*Yeni Şafak* 2018).

Conclusions

Generations of Sunni Muslim political Islamists in Turkey have made inroads in electoral politics, in part, by casting themselves as the victims of an illiberal and repressive secular state that has continually inhibited their freedom of expression. Although the repressive capacity of the Turkish state should not be underestimated – and that repressiveness was often bolstered by a general snobbery and prejudice within many secularist elites against their ‘backwards’ religious brothers – what often gets lost in this narrative is the fact that political Islam in Turkey developed largely as a statist phenomenon that engaged elements of the ‘secular elite’ in a multitude of ways. Many contemporary observers of Turkish politics thus have inadvertently got things backwards: it is not the rise of Islamist party politics that is reshaping the state; rather, the gradual and ever-closer intertwining of Islamist movements and the state has recently culminated in its ultimate political expression with the AKP.

With this in mind, there is an opportunity to re-evaluate the past in a way that renounces the overly simplistic dichotomy of a ‘secular’ Turkish state pitted against its ‘religious’ adversaries. If scholars of political Islam in Turkey want to know why politics are what they are today, we need a more comprehensive appraisal of how various organs of the state and political elite have engaged religious actors, institutions, rhetoric, and attachments over the last century. It will be especially important to turn a careful eye to the changing role of official Islam under the guidance of *Diyanet* as well as the state's evolving relationship with informal Islamic institutions and *cemaats*. The new AKP–MHP coalition represents a potent and popular blend of Islamism and statist-nationalism. With new police raids in July 2018 on the radical Islamist Kuytul Cemaatin (also known as Furkan Vakfı), a *cemaat* that openly criticised Erdoğan and his Islamism prior to the most recent elections, the evidence is growing that the AKP is making a concerted effort to crush all *cemaats* that challenge its statist authority (Çakır 2018a). Indeed, from these raids and the ongoing crackdown against the Gülenists to the more recent arrest of former financial supporter of Erdoğan (Çakır 2018b), televangelist Adnan Oktar, intra-Islamist tensions run high as the AKP's consolidation of state authority marches on.

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