

Influence of Pluralism and Electoral Participation on the Transformation of Turkish Islamism

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Abstract. Similar to other Islamists, Turkish Islamists have also used intolerant and exclusivist rhetoric. They have used religion in a heavy-handed manner as the dominating parameter of their political ideology and have confined religious concepts and values to a certain group, nationalizing, modernizing, secularizing and politicizing them. Turkish Islamists have also envisaged taking over the state and using it to socially engineer a top-down Islamist transformation in society through state centralism. Political science literature argues that via electoral participation, radical, extremist and even anti-systemic parties may moderate their agendas in order to benefit from opportunities created by a pluralist democracy. This paper argues that the opportunities provided by the pluralist tradition and the democratic experience of Turkey from Ottoman times to present have helped Turkish Islamists to transform their ideology into post-Islamism. Thanks to this pluralist experience Turkish Islamists have not only participated in elections, competed for median voters, and even democratically come to power but have also discursively and physically interacted with various Muslim groups, intellectuals, scholars, businessmen, communities and so on, in a pluralist setting. As a result, Turkish Islamists have been able to modify their ideology in tune with pluralist and democratic ideals.

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Introduction

Democratic learning in nondemocratic settings can be propelled by a mix of regime accommodations and constraints. Over time, radical party opposition to authoritarian restrictions and constraints have metamorphosed into a principled opposition to authoritarian restraints on pluralism and political

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freedom (Wickham, 2004: 224). In other words, limited political openings, even those that fall far short of democratization, can induce radical opposition leaders to forego seeing themselves as victims of authoritarianism and to moderate their public goals, and eventually to value pluralism and democracy.

In a democratic and pluralist political setting, radical, extremist and even anti-systemic parties may moderate their agendas to exploit the new opportunities for electoral participation created by a pluralist democracy. There are three ways in which political participation in a well-entrenched democracy may moderate extremist and radical parties: 1) by causing them to converge toward a moderate, average voter of the centre; 2) by redirecting their focus from recruiting radical party supporters to recruiting qualified bureaucrats and party officers; and 3) by forcing them to spend their time and energy to deal with potholes, sewage and garbage rather than preaching intolerance, radicalism and so on (Berman, 2008: 5-18).

In the Turkish context, we see that Turkish Islamists have used intolerant and exclusivist rhetoric. They have used religion in a heavy-handed manner as the dominating parameter of their political ideology and have confined religious concepts and values to a certain group, nationalizing, modernizing, secularizing and politicizing them. Similar to the worldwide Islamist discourse, Turkish Islamists have also envisaged taking over the state and using it to socially engineer a top-down Islamist transformation in society through state centralism.

Claims of universalism and monopoly of religious truth, exclusivism, obligation and responsibility are the main tenets of Islamism while inclusion, compromise and tolerance are anathema to Islamist ideology. Islamist ideology does not accept the pluralist notion that human values are irreducibly multiple, potentially conflicting, and sometimes incommensurable. In theory, Islamists stay away from the notion of *modus vivendi* as a means of adjudicating conflicts among competing understandings and ideologies and do not look for opportunities for constructive and creative interactive relations within a pluralist setting. Yet, in practice, Islamism has become compelled, both by its own internal contradictions and by societal pressure, to reinvent itself, but has done so at the cost of a qualitative shift from Islamism to post-Islamism that is expressed in the idea of fusion between Islam (as a personalized faith) and individual freedom and choice within a pluralist setting. Post-Islamism is an attempt to fuse religiosity with rights, faith and freedoms, Islam and civil

liberties and focuses on rights instead of duties, plurality instead of singular authority, historicity rather than fixed and rigid interpretation of scriptures, and the future rather than the past.

This paper argues that opportunities provided by the pluralist tradition of Turkey and the experience of electoral participation starting from Ottoman times helped Turkish Islamists to transform their ideology to post-Islamism. Thanks to this pluralist experience Turkish Islamists have not only participated electorally, competed for average voters, and democratically attained power but have also discursively and physically interacted with various Muslim groups, intellectuals, scholars, businessmen, communities and so on in a pluralist setting. As a result, the Turkish Islamists have been able to modify their ideology in tune with pluralist and democratic ideals. After a brief theoretical discussion of the concepts Islamism and post-Islamism, this paper analyzes the evolution of Turkish Islamism to post-Islamism by looking at the first generation Islamists, the New Ottomans, who emulated western concepts and shows that the second generation Turkish Islamists represent both continuity and change from that first generation.

1. Islamism with Tolerance towards Pluralism: Post-Islamism

In this study we use the term post-Islamism to mean “a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives... [which] provides political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition” (Denoeux, 2002: 61). It should be underlined that these political objectives and political responses are openly voiced by actors who are involved in daily politics in the name of Islam. This study uses Islamism and political Islam interchangeably.

The Islamists endeavor to articulate an Islamic ideology that can respond to their societies’ current political, economic and cultural deficits. They imagine Islam as a complete and ready-to-use “divine system, with its superior political model, cultural codes, legal structure and economic arrangement – a system that responds to all human problems... [and offers] Muslims a sense of self-respect, self-confidence, and a discursive autonomy” (Bayat, 2007a: 14). Islamists argue that contemporary Muslims must return to the roots of their religion and be united politically. Islamism “entails a political ideology articulating the idea of the necessity of establishing an

Islamic government, understood as government which implements the shari'a" (Ismail, 2004: 616). Islamists aim to apply shari'a in full and to eliminate western influences in the "Muslim World" especially in the areas of politics, economy, society and culture, which they consider to be incompatible with the "true and authentic" Islam.

As an essentially modern movement Islamism developed very much in reaction to Western hegemony. Young Ottomans were the first to respond to the western hegemony, superiority and institutions by trying to formulate Islamic answers from the original Islamic sources. Islamists' reinvention of religion as a political ideology and not a theological or socio-cultural construct provides the tools for dehistoricizing Islam and to separate it from the various tempo-spatial contexts in which Islam has been practiced over the fourteen hundred years. By this decontextualization of Islam, Islamists conveniently ignore, if only in theory, the social, economic and political milieux within which Muslim societies operate (Ayoob, 2005: 952). In practice, nevertheless, political manifestations of Islam are dependent on local cultures and contexts. For instance, in contrast to the Middle Eastern experience, many Turkish Islamists are either close to or informal members of officially outlawed Sufi orders. Despite the Islamists' attempts to decontextualise Islam, there are as many different versions of political Islams as there are different socio-political contexts (Ayoob, 2005: 953). As a matter of fact, non-essentialist scholars who focus on culture, such as Clifford Geertz (1968), argue that underneath the similarities of Islam there were such profound socio-cultural different contexts as to make one ask the question whether this is one religion with different aspects or different religions sharing some common features.

The term post-Islamism was first used by Asef Bayat (1996) referring to the Iranian context. He stated that "[b]y "post-Islamism" I mean a condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, symbols and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters. As such, post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic, but rather reflects a tendency to resecularize religion. Predominantly, it is marked by a call to limit the political role of religion" (Bayat, 1996: 45). In Iran, "post-Islamism is expressed in the idea of fusion between Islam (as a personalized faith) and individual freedom and choice; and post-Islamism is associated with the values of democracy and aspects of modernity" (Bayat, 1996: 45).

Since then, a number of European, mainly French, writers have

employed the term, if often descriptively, to refer to what they consider a shift in attitudes and strategies of Islamists after the so-called failure of Islamism (Schulze 1998, Roy 1999, 2005, Kepel 2002). Unfortunately, these writers presented post-Islamism “primarily as an historical rather than an analytical category” (Bayat, 2007a: 17). Used thus, the term can be criticized on the basis of its premature suggestion of the end of Islamism. The critics argued that political Islam, doing politics in an Islamic frame, is not changing, but rather that its revolutionary, top-down, version has become defunct. Thus, they argued that post-Islamism is only a variety of Islamism (Ismail 2001, Burgat 2003 cited in Bayat, 2007a: 18; see also Lauzière 2005 and Sinanovic 2005).

For more than a decade now post-Islamism has been at the center of a major debate especially in French academia regarding the historical evolution of Islamism (Lauzière, 2005: 241). Olivier Roy and other like-minded French scholars have argued that Islamism – that is, according to their definition, the holistic, populist, and often revolutionary ideology whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic state and the governance of all aspects of society according to Islamic principles – has reached a dead end. An era of post-Islamism was dawning (Lauzière, 2005: 241). Roy (1998; 2004) claims that the reorientation of Islamists toward religiosity and away from politics is a sign of the failure of political Islam. As Lauzière (2005) argues, Roy’s conceptualization of post-Islamism does not stand up to empirical scrutiny. Lauzière (2005: 257) shows that “[a]lthough post-Islamist theory is an attempt to systematize empirical data from the past thirty-five years into a coherent historical pattern, it relies on a narrow and selective definition of Islamism that cannot account for the particularities of the Moroccan context... It also seems better suited to cases in which the rise and failure of revolutionary Islamism has been overt and pronounced.” The same could be said with regard to the Turkish context. In the case of Turkish Islamism, religiosity has always been important. Besides, there were already many observant Muslim individuals who did not see Islam in political terms. There is no reason to call these people post-Islamist as Roy does as these people were never Islamists in the first place. Roy also argues that the Islamists’ abandonment of transnational solidarity and their new centeredness on national politics is yet another indication of failure. Again, as we discussed above, despite the rhetoric, this has more or less always the case and as far as the rhetoric is concerned it is still espoused by Islamists, of course at a rhetorical level.

In Bayat’s (2007) formulation, post-Islamism refers to both a

condition and a *project*, which may be embodied in a master (or multi-dimensional) movement. In the first instance, post-Islamism refers to a political and social condition, in which after a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted even among its once ardent supporters. Islamists become aware of their paradigm's anomalies and inadequacies as they try to rule. The continuous trial and error make the system susceptible to questions and criticisms. Eventually, pragmatic attempts to maintain the system reinforce abandoning certain of its underlying principles. Islamism becomes compelled, both by its own internal contradictions and by societal pressure, to reinvent itself, but does so at the cost of a qualitative shift (Bayat, 2007a: 18). It is clear that post-Islamist condition can only be relevant in the contexts where Islamists could come into power.

Bayat (2007a: 18) further notes that post-Islamism is not only a condition but is also:

a project, a conscious attempt to conceptualize and strategize the rationale and modalities of transcending Islamism in social, political, and intellectual domains. Yet, post-Islamism is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic or secular. Post-Islamism represents an endeavour to fuse religiosity with rights, faith and freedoms, Islam and civil liberties and focuses on rights instead of duties, plurality instead of singular authority, historicity rather than fixed and rigid interpretation of scriptures, and the future rather than the past. Post-Islamists eagerly join a cosmopolitan humanity, link up with global civil activism and endeavour to work for global co-operation and solidarity. It wants to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom, with democracy and modernity, to achieve what some have called an "alternative modernity". Post-Islamism is expressed in acknowledging secular exigencies, in freedom from rigidity, in breaking down the monopoly of religious truth. In short, whereas Islamism is defined by the fusion of religion and responsibility, post-Islamism emphasizes religiosity and rights.

As nothing intrinsic to Islam – or any other religion – makes it inherently democratic or undemocratic, the question is no longer whether Islam is compatible with modernity but rather how Muslims can make these concepts compatible (Bayat, 2007a: 10).

In our conceptualization, post-Islamism denotes a departure, albeit in diverse degrees, from an Islamist ideological package that is characterized by universalist claims, monopoly of truth, exclusivism, intolerance, and obligation, towards acknowledging ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion and compromise. The terms Islamism and post-Islamism are “primarily as conceptual categories to signify change, difference, and the root of change. In the real world, however, many Muslims may adhere eclectically and simultaneously to aspects of both discourses. On the other hand, the advent of post-Islamism as a real trend, should not be seen necessarily as the historical end of Islamism. What it should be seen as is the birth, out of Islamist experience, of a qualitatively different discourse and politics. In reality we may witness simultaneous processes of both Islamization and post-Islamization” (Bayat, 2007a: 20). As a matter of fact, similarly with multiple-Islamisms, we can also talk of multiple post-Islamisms. Let us now elaborate on in detail the evolution of Turkish Islamism from Ottoman times up to the present post-Islamist times.

2. Evolution of Turkish Islamism

Many Young Ottomans were among the first generation students that were sent to study in Europe with a hope that upon their return they would help reforming the State. They developed a respect for western political institutions and affirmed that the state would never be modernized unless it adopted a democratic government and constitution. They demanded a constitutional government and a parliamentary regime. They offered a constitutional project with an Islamic foundation (Mardin, 2005: 150). In their writings, they recruited their base paradigm from first-century Islam. They tried to legitimize their discourse by a constant endeavor to prove that the essentials of the major Western institutions were already present in the authentic sources of Islam. This textual construction is a prelude to modernist and fundamentalist readings of Islam in the face of the challenges posed by modernity.

One important difference between the first-generation Islamists and contemporary Islamists is that the earlier generation is “an intellectual elite operating as part of the establishment whereas the contemporary group is one of persons of modest origins whose position in society is less assured” (Mardin, 2005: 160). Ottoman rulers tolerated them to a great extent and any punishments that were meted out were either light or were pardoned afterwards. These precedent-setting features of the first-generation Islamists were important for keeping Turkish Islamism free of radical overtures.

Young Ottomans had a chance to put their ideas into practice in 1876 when a junta composed of reformist statesmen, military officers and *ulama* took advantage of the chaos in the country and pressed for a constitutional government. The first Ottoman constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*) was promulgated on 23 December 1876, starting the period known as the First *Meshrutiyet*, or First Constitutional Period, a period of rule by a liberal constitutional monarchy. For the first time in Islamic history, all subjects were declared to be Ottomans regardless of their religion. All subjects were equal and all were to enjoy liberty. The basic concept in the 1876 constitution is that, although somewhat restrictive in the exercise of powers, it recognized a legislative assembly partially elected by the people. However, Sultan Abdulhamid II dissolved the parliament in 1878 and ended this period. The Young Ottomans did not challenge the Sultan and eventually their group was dispersed but the influence of their proto-liberalism and constitutionalism continued and eventually the Sultan was forced to restore the Constitution in 1908 and the Second *Meshrutiyet* period began. In 1909, the 1876 Constitution was substantially amended to increase the powers of the legislature and restrict those of the Sultan and the Young Turks' party, the *Ittihat ve Terakki* (Union and Progress) Party, came to power. The Young Turks were the secularist and more nationalist successors of the Young Ottomans. The Young Turks' republican successors, the Kemalists, did not also allow pluralism and democracy to operate until 1950. During these four decades a positivist and staunchly secularist elite ruled the country. The identity and discourse of the Ottoman Islamists were to a great extent de-legitimized and marginalized by the Republican Kemalist elite. The role of Islam in the public sphere has been radically marginalized and the state attempted to confiscate and monopolize even this marginal role, leaving no official room for private interpretations of Islam. Thus, the Islamists had to keep a very low profile.

With the closing down of every Sufi brotherhood and lodge by the Turkish Republic, Sufis no longer made an effort challenge the state, following the Sunni understanding that even a bad state is better than anarchy, chaos and revolution. However, they maintained their existence, unofficially and a low key manner by opting out of public or official roles. In return, the officials turned a blind eye to their existence. Among them, the Nakshbandi brotherhood, the closest Sufi brotherhood to the Ottoman establishment, was prominent and all of the successful elements of modern Turkish Islamic politics are branchings of that extraordinarily resilient brotherhood (Mardin, 2005: 152).

Nakshbandi Sheikh Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1897–1980) preached that it was the duty of observant Muslims to take an active interest in national affairs (Smith, 2005: 316). He did not perceive the secular state as an absolute enemy and, in that sense, did not hold much esteem for radical Islamists in the Muslim world (Mardin, 2005: 158). Kotku created an “operational code” of the brotherhood, one of constitutional legitimacy, and this synchronized with the political code promoted by the secular state (Mardin, 2005: 158). By the 1970s, Kotku started promoting political institution building as a second layer of legitimacy, working in tandem with Islamic legitimacy (Mardin, 2005: 158).

The first prominent Islamist parties in Republican Turkey, the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*) (1970–71), and the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*) (1972–81), were established through Kotku’s promotion and support. He also supervised their activities (Cakir, 1994: 22 cited in Mardin, 2004: 157). The leader of these parties, Professor Necmettin Erbakan, was a disciple of Kotku. Most of the leaders of Erbakan’s National Order Party were also disciples of Kotku and political parties founded by the leadership of Erbakan always carried a deep communitarian identity (Yildirim et al., 2007: 6).

Erbakan’s Islamist movement was *Milli Görüş* (the National Outlook). It embraced a set of aspiring yet ambiguous references to the Ottoman past and directed criticism against “cosmopolitanism” as opposed to “nationalism” (Dağı, 2005: 24). Here, nationalism, a primary motto of the secular Turkish Republic, promoted as religio-nationalism by Erbakan’s parties, was not an obstacle but a shared feeling of pride – first “Ottoman” then “Turkish” – that had been building since Abdülhamid II (Mardin, 2005: 157-158). Erbakan considered his Islamist parties “as the political expression of the Turkish part of the *umma* or global Muslim community” (Yildiz, 2004: 187). Moreover, in Erbakan’s view, Turkey’s identity and future was with the Muslim world, rather than with the West.

The party was shut down after a military intervention in 1971 on the grounds that it was against secularism. The National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*) was founded in October 1972. The NSP’s ideology was almost the same as the closed National Order Party. Erbakan envisaged that, based on Anatolian heavy industry, a stronger Turkey would loosen its ties with the West and would become the leader of the Muslim world under the umbrella of a Muslim Common Market, with the Islamic *dinar* as its

common currency. Also, a Muslim Defense Alliance would be developed. After the military coup in 1980, the NSP was also closed down along with all other political parties. When the army returned back to its barracks in 1983, Erbakan founded a new party under a new name: the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*). The Welfare Party's ideology was not different from that of the NSP. The Welfare "was a protest movement; it successfully mobilized the reactions of those voters who saw themselves deprived by the privileged class of so-called 'White Turks'" (Yildiz, 2003: 188). The core audience of the Welfare Party's discourse was basically the entire population of the socio-politically and economically deprived (Yildiz, 2003: 188). With the Welfare Party, the Nakshibendi influence within elite cadres of the party lost its determinative impact and party affiliation became the main source of political identity (Yildiz, 2003: 196). An important indicator of the Welfare Party's discontinuity with NSP was their moves to distance themselves from the appearance of being controlled by a certain Sufi order, or for that matter, any religious community (Yildiz, 2003: 196).

The Welfare Party had steadily increased its share of votes after the 1994 local elections. In 1996, as the bigger partner of a coalition government with the True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi*), Necmettin Erbakan became Turkey's first Islamist prime minister. The Turkish military eventually forced Erbakan to resign in June 1997 in what has been called a "post-modern" coup. In January 1998, the Constitutional Court closed down the Welfare Party and banned Erbakan from politics for five years. Acutely aware of historical repetition, Erbakan had already founded a new party, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), before the closure decision. The Virtue Party continued operating under the leadership of Erbakan's close friend Recai Kutan until it was also shut down by the Constitutional Court in June 2001. The Virtue Party was a post-Islamist party which we will analyze in the next sub-section. For all of the parties Erbakan formed and led, serving religion was a crucial factor. These parties used religion as the dominating parameter of their "political discourse, among the characteristics of which were: confining religious concepts and values to a certain group, nationalizing, modernizing, secularizing and politicizing them, making use of political opinions held by Muslims in the generic sense as the criterion for the religious brotherhood, the sectarian possession of its contributions to religious life and hence causing people of different political convictions and preferences to feel cold against the religion and making them hold anti-religion attitudes, functioning as a non-systemic party while operating within systemic boundaries, if necessary, by instrumentalizing the religion" (Yildiz, 2003: 200). Erbakan used intolerant and exclusivist rhetoric. His discourse

justified itself by the alleged existence of a monolithic “other”. He constantly blamed all others as blind imitators of the West. He was upset with many religious brotherhoods and communities that never voted for his parties and he did not think they were good Muslims as he believed politics was based on “truth versus wrong”, with him representing the truth. He was of the opinion that “‘the political party means the religion’ and, accordingly, those Muslims who have not belonged to the party or lent support to it have been warned that they may be subject to spiritual sanctions/hazards” (Yildiz, 2003: 193). In Erbakan’s view elections are tantamount to “the counting of Muslims in Turkey” (Yildiz, 2003: 193). Similar to the worldwide Islamist discourse, the Turkish Islamists have also envisaged capturing the state and using it to socially engineer a top-down Islamist transformation in society by adopting the centralism of the state. Thus, the parties of Erbakan have faced many legal obstacles which have constrained the political representation of Islam. Charges against his parties were frequently made by secular adversaries and an ideological, anti-systemic, state bureaucracy with a secret agenda (*takiyye*) (Yildiz, 2003: 191).

To be able to continue participating in elections, Erbakan gave primary importance to keeping his own discourse and his parties’ political positions within the constitutional framework and legal boundaries, as opposed to directly clashing with the establishment. Erbakan “ascribed precedence to change in the socio-economical and cultural realms in order to legitimize its very political existence and to try to keep Muslim radicals from causing trouble” (Yildiz, 2003: 197).

3. Tolerating Pluralism: Post-Islamist Virtue Party

After the Welfare Party was ousted from power, many younger members of the Islamists began thinking that the only way they could succeed was to avoid confrontation with the Kemalist establishment and to stay away from the instrumentalist use of religious rhetoric in politics. This started an internal debate among the Islamists. Thus, a schism emerged within the movement and two different groups emerged. The “traditionalists” (*Gelenekçiler*), centered on Erbakan and the party leader Recai Kutan, opposed any serious change in approach or policy, while the younger group of “renewalists” (*Yenilikçiler*), led by Tayyip Erdoğan, the mayor of Istanbul, Abdullah Gul and Bulent Arinc argued that the party needed to revise and renew its approach to a number of fundamental issues, especially democracy, human rights, and relations with the West.

The influence of this internal debate was reflected in the platform of the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*). The Virtue Party (VP) represented a partial rupture from the Islamism of *Milli Görüş*. The VP's discourse differed from Islamism. The VP's discourse regarding political Islam and Islam in the public sphere was similar to that of a centre-right economically liberal and socially conservative party. The legal and political constraints undemocratically enforced by the establishment during the February 28 dissolution of the coalition government headed by Erbakan, and the ensuing assault against Islamic social and economic networks were influential in the VP's modification of its discourse about the relation of politics and religion (Yildiz, 2003: 198; Dağı, 2008: 27).¹ The VP also advocated pluralism and the democratization of everyday values in order to democratize politics, abandoning the nationalist and state-oriented model of economy preached by Erbakan for decades, in favor of free-market economy with an emphasis on social justice. The VP also renounced categorical anti-Westernism and embraced European Union membership, previously thought to be a Jewish conspiracy by the NOP, NSP and WP (Yildiz, 2003: 198).

Essentially the Virtue Party was “not a party of political Islam but a liberal-conservative party with a powerful ‘social state’ inclination and a strong interest in nationalism” (Yildiz, 2003: 199). According to the Virtue Party, “the *raison d’être* of a state that was based on human rights was to protect liberties. Therefore, the misuse of the state as an instrument for discriminating against a certain religion, sect, ideology or belief could not be justified on any grounds. Rejecting the use of both religion and laicism as instrumental in politics, VP disapproved of political understandings based on the exploitation of religion or religious symbols” (Yildiz, 2003: 199).

¹ The Turkish military, which perceives itself as the guardian of secularism, voiced its extreme uneasiness about the Erbakan government's policies at the National Security Council (NSC) meeting of 28 February 1997 (Guney and Baskan 2008: 267). The ensuing coup d'état began at this meeting and the Erbakan government “was forced out of government without direct use of arms, by the military commanders forcefully making demands from the civilian government” (Carkoglu 2007: 505). Several years later, the retired Chief of General Staff General Hilmi Ozkok implied that this process paved the way for Erdoğan's tremendous success at the November 2002 elections, with 34 of the votes and an almost 2/3 majority of the parliament. He stated that “I have seen, looking back at the events of the past, that when the military touches politics, this causes ‘tremendous benefit’ for politics and politicians in this country”,

<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link =162357>.

Yenilikçiler (renewers) began constantly airing their renewed views on several fundamental issues and also declared the failure of Islamism. They confessed that they were under the influence of the Middle Eastern Islamists and they confused the conditions of Turkey with those of the Middle East. In spite of the movement's tradition, they openly criticized the Welfare Party on the ground that it made a mistake by using religion. Tayyip Erdoğan emphasized that state could not and should not have a religion; it is individuals that have religious affiliation. He also emphasized the importance of democracy, free-market economy and human rights. Another *yenilikçi*, Bulent Arinc, stated that respect for other people's views and beliefs is at the core of democracy. Abdullah Gül, who contested the Virtue Party chairmanship against the Erbakan-supported Recai Kutan, concurred with these new ideas and underscored that their demand was religious freedom not an Islamic state and declared that the best way of government is democracy as it is a system that does not stop in its search for good. The discourse of the young generation showed all the signs of a more sophisticated approach, avoiding confrontational rhetoric and opting for a message of democracy and human rights instead (Yilmaz, 2000: 12). The young generation have also developed a new and "tolerant normative framework" (Kuru, 2005: 273).

4. Acceptance of Pluralism: Non-Islamist JDP (AKP)

Even though the Virtue Party employed a pluralist, pro-EU and pro-human rights discourse, the traditionalists' turn to pluralism and acceptance of the other did not really involve any self-criticism and was designed only as a reaction to the undemocratic constraints imposed by the establishment during the 28 February process (Cinar, 2006: 473). On the other hand, the younger generations' discourse on pluralism, Turkey-West relations, acceptance of the other and secularism was more comprehensive and consistent as "they hoped to be able to fill the political vacuum created by the 28 February process, to make inroads into Turkey's power structure and to better represent the interests of Islamic identity without risking their own political survival" (Cinar, 2006: 474).

The renewalists of the Virtue Party continued to adhere to their renewalist discourse and after the closure of the Virtue Party by the Constitutional Court they did not joined the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*) founded by the traditionalist and established non-Islamist Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*). As JDP leaders, they have frequently asserted universal values and value-based discourses such as

human rights, democracy, and free market principles (Yildirim et al, 2007: 17). As they parted their ways with the Islamist wing of the Virtue Party, their new discourse is no longer a hybrid – post-Islamism of the Virtue Party – form of Islamism and liberal democratic values. While acknowledging the importance of religion as personal belief, they accommodated themselves within the secular constitutional framework (Mecham, 2004: 350). They completely jettisoned the Islamist elements in their previous post-Islamist rhetoric and underscored a non-Islamist, as it were, liberal democratic discourse.

Erdoğan frequently states that his party is a conservative democrat party, implying a Muslim democrat party similar to Christian Democrats in Western Europe in which an Anglo-Saxon type passive secularism is espoused; public visibility of religion is tolerated but religion is only a cultural backdrop not an active part of the Islamist discourse. In direct contrast to the Islamist formulation of political identity based on opposition to the West, the JDP has steadily emphasized Western political values. At the same time, the party has viewed the West, especially the EU, as an important ally in the democratization of Turkey. The party “successfully linked traditional identity and issues of social and distributive justice to a global ‘Third Way’ between a statist economy and unfettered capitalism” (Smith, 2005: 322). The party is “a non-ideological, non-Islamist political party aiming to serve the people in general but not restricting its horizon to religious issues or religious people only” (Cinar, 2006: 475).

The JDP has attracted the votes of a broad constituency, cutting across class, gender, and ethnic (and religious) lines and consisting of people who previously had voted for mainstream right and Islamist parties. In the 3 November 2002 election, the JDP won 34 per cent of the votes and then increased its share of the votes to 47 per cent in 22 July 2007 elections, with the main opposition party receiving only 21 per cent. In the 2007 elections, many Turkish-Armenians reportedly voted for the JDP as well.

5. Pluralism’s Influence on the Transformation of Turkish Islamism

Some of the external or non-domestic factors that influenced Turkish Islamists to change their discourse include globalization, international opportunity structures, the failure of Islamist governments in countries such as Sudan, Pakistan and Iran, and the awareness that some Islamists who

severed ties with tradition and bypassed several centuries' experience have lost their way and become extremely radicalized.

In the domestic context, there are two major factors that contributed to the change. First is the desire to avoid confrontation with the aggressively laicist establishment as this would prevent Islamists from staying in power even if they were to gain it, as the Welfare Party government experience showed. Constraints imposed by the laicist establishment and state "structure have limited Islamist actions and provided distinct opportunities for the emergence of a brand of reformist new thinking" (Cavdar, 2006: 480).

The second major factor is the emergence of a tolerant normative framework of Turkish Islamists. This emergence of a tolerant normative framework is a result of Turkey's pluralism.

The legacy of the Turkish pluralist political history, going back to Ottoman times, in terms of constitutional practice and democratic experience, has contributed to the moderate and less reactionary nature of Turkish Islamism. In this pluralist environment, several Islamic groups found opportunities to emerge and develop. These groups have been able to freely and creatively interact in the pluralist socio-political sphere. Both the physical and discursive interaction of Islamic groups is a major factor in the transformation of Turkish Islamism. Whilst it is difficult to establish casual relationship between different social phenomena, it is still possible to underscore correlations. A number of academics (Yilmaz 2000, 2003, 2005; Kuru 2007; Maigre 2007) have argued that the Islamists' "transformation was not an isolated event, but part of a larger experience that several other Islamic groups took part in" (Kuru, 2007: 141). In the words of Elisabeth Maigre (2007: 42) "[w]hile it is quite difficult to tell which group has had the foremost influence, researchers and academics have outlined the inter-connexion between the Islamic bourgeoisie, the moderate Islamists, and the Gülen movement. It is noteworthy that many of these business people as well as some Virtue and later JDP politicians sent their children to Gülen's schools. Furthermore, *Zaman* is the second largest daily newspaper, the largest in Anatolian towns, and the majority of Virtue & JDP's supporters, including the businessmen, are regular readers" (Maigre, 2007: 42). Fethullah Gülen's competitive Islamic discourse, which is tolerant, pluralistic, politically and economically more liberal and not anti-Western, has weakened the influence of Erbakan's Islamism on the wider socially conservative masses of Anatolia including the nascent Anatolian elite. This social base was much larger than the base of Milli Görüş and has become

more open to Gülen's discourse.

The export-oriented and liberalizing reforms of Turgut Özal, which assisted Turkey's integration with global structures and trends, have also made it possible for Anatolia's culturally conservative, religiously observant but economically liberal burgeoning bourgeoisie to be major players in the Turkish domestic scene. These new classes are more liberal and pro-pluralism than the Istanbul bourgeoisie because unlike Istanbul businesses they are export-oriented.

The new elite have sent their children to secular educational establishments where they can learn European languages, instead of sending them to madrassas or state Imam-Hatip schools. In most cases, as only Gülen movement schools could provide this opportunity, most of the new elite's children, and thus indirectly the new elite themselves, have become acquainted with the movement and its worldview.

Turkish Islamists, other religious groups, scholars and intellectuals could freely interact in the pluralistic public medium. For instance, as Kuru (2007: 145) underlines, the Abant Platform think tank and the Gülen Media were the two major public mediums through which the younger generation Milli Görüş politicians and the Gülen movement were able to discursively interact:

For example, in February 2000, Erdoğan and Arınç first publicized their new discourse in *Zaman*. In two separate interviews, these two leaders emphasized democracy as their priority and embraced (passive) secularism while criticizing the idea of an Islamic state. These two interviews received the attention of other newspapers. Assertive secularist *Hürriyet* positively announced them in its headline "Political Islam at the Crossroads," while Islamist *Vakit* criticized them arguing that *Zaman* corrupted Erdoğan and Arınç's mind. (Kuru, 2007: 145)

Among the attendants of the Abant Platform meetings were several leaders, founding members and ministers of the JDP such as Abdullah Gül, Bulent Arınç, Cemil Çiçek, Ali Coşkun, and Nevzat Yalçıntaş. Moreover, the chairperson of the meetings, theology professor Mehmet Aydın, and some frequent participants, such as associate professor of political science Hüseyin Çelik and constitutional law professor Burhan Kuzu, joined the new generation former-Islamists when they founded the JDP (Kuru, 2007: 145-

146).

The transformation of Islamic and Islamist intellectuals is another important factor that influenced the paradigmatic shift in the minds of Turkish Islamists. After the 28 February 1997 post-modern coup aimed directly at terminating all Islamic activities, groups, social projects and bourgeoisie, these intellectuals stated that under the new post-28 February domestic and post-9/11 global “conditions, the old discourse and actions of the previous parties had become ‘useless,’ and they called for an accommodationist rather than a confrontational approach” (Cavdar, 2006: 482). As the most prominent of these Muslim intellectuals, Ali Bulac, affirmed long ago, these intellectuals now accept that “if the meaning of political Islam is to establish a theocratic state, it is finished”, pointing out that from once being a cause for conflict and polarization, Islam is now a base for conciliation (Bulac, 2000). Bulac also writes that:

There is no contradiction between Islam and secularism if the latter is defined as “the protection of religious freedom and freedom of consciousness; prevention of domination by a certain religious group over the others; ensuring that people from every religion and faith freely express themselves; absence of domination by a religious elite in the governance; recognition of the right to be present in the public domain to the individuals; and ensuring that state is equally distant to all religious, philosophical and ideological groups.” This sort of definition provided for the concept of secularism is consistent with Islamic precepts and the historical experience by the Muslims (Bulac, 2007).

These “intellectual leaders of post-Islamism have been searching for a rapprochement with the West, but not out of necessity to form a temporary alliance to confront the Kemalist state apparatus. Rather, this rapprochement is part of an effort to rethink modern political notions like democracy, human rights, and integration into the globalization process, including Turkey’s membership in the European Union” (Dağı, 2004: 136).

The governmental experience of Turkish Islamists, a result of Turkish political system’s pluralism, has been very crucial in the Islamists’ transformation. As Aktay (2003: 139) underscores:

Until the Refah Party came to power in 1996, it had relied on a

complex conception of the body politic. For a significant number of people, however, Refah's governmental experience brought about a decrease in the diasporic discourse. They saw that the existing system—that is, the current tacit or implicit social contract—indeed did include sufficient possibilities for others than the political elite to represent the national body politic of Turkey. From the Islamists' point of view, this realization presented some peace with the existing political apparatus that had been injurious to them since the 1920s.

Turkish society's pluralistic attitudes have also influenced the transformation of the Turkish Islamists. Despite the widespread impression that Turks are becoming more religious, surveys show that the vast majority of Turks oppose a state based on religion: 76 percent of the respondents opposed the implementation of *shari'a*, while only 9 percent were in favor of it. This contrasts to 1995 where 27 percent were in favor. Among the JDP voters, 70 percent opposed *shari'a* and 14 percent were in favor of it. This was a higher proportion than among the population at large, but still a small minority. Turks do not see a contradiction between being a good Muslim and being secular. This is consistent with the Turkish conception of what a Muslim is, which involves high tolerance. Of the surveyed respondents, 66 percent agreed that those who drank alcohol were Muslims (although 71 percent agreed that alcohol should be banned during Ramadan); 85 percent considered an uncovered woman a Muslim; 29 percent said they would be disturbed if mini-skirted women were in the majority in the neighborhood, while 66 percent were undecided; 13 percent said they would be disturbed if covered women were in the majority in the neighborhood, with a large majority (84 percent) undecided; 89 percent thought that there can be "good" people among believers of other religions, but only 42 percent believed that non-Muslims could go to heaven (provided they have not sinned) (TESEV 2006, cited in Rabasa and Larrabee 2008: 26).

Conclusion

Turkish Islamism has always differed from the other Islamist experiences as a result of the historical and contextual reasons arising from the Ottoman experience of pluralism, democracy and electoral participation. Thus, Turkish Islamists focused on a bottom-up transformation of society. They were never revolutionary, domination-oriented and supremacist. They have always been content with democratic methods, perhaps simply because they were available. Despite this, their parties have been shut down by the

establishment several times.

Opportunities provided by the pluralist tradition of Turkey and the democratic experience going back to Ottoman times helped Turkish Islamists to transform their ideology to post-Islamism. Turkish Islamists have not only experienced participation in elections, democratically gaining state power and ruling, but have also discursively and physically interacted with various Muslim groups, intellectuals, scholars, businessmen, communities and so on, in a pluralist setting. The former Islamists have directly and normatively been influenced by the new Anatolian elite, the Gülen movement, its schools and media, and the post-Islamist intellectuals. As a result, Turkish Islamists have been able to modify their ideology in tune with pluralist and democratic ideals and thus they now acknowledge that the current democratic system and pluralist environment could indeed be sufficient for Muslim individuals to live and observe their religion, completely jettisoning Islamism.

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