

Islam, Sovereignty, and Democracy: A Turkish View

Hakan Yilmaz

In this article, some conceptual and empirical relations between Islam, sovereignty, and democracy will be examined, with comparisons to Christianity. In the first part of the article, the historical conditions of the formation of the dualist (Christianity) and monist (Islam) political theories of the two religions will be examined. This will be followed by a conceptualization of the beginning and end of their respective “middle ages.” It will be argued that the end of the Islamic middle ages was marked, in some Islamic countries, by the following phenomena: the building of a secular state apparatus; the replacement of “religion” by “nation” as the basis of the sovereignty of the new state; the deportation of Islam from the state to society; and the re-birth of Islam in the hands of the social actors as a political ideology aiming at re-capturing the state it had lost. In the final sections, the problematic relationship between secularization and democratization in the Islamic world will be examined, and the experiments with secularization in the Islamic world will be compared with those of France. It will be observed that what made secularization and democracy compatible in France was a combination of historical factors (the existence of the Church that controlled the social manifestations of religion; the state’s success in nation-building; the efficiency of the secular judicial system; and the state’s satisfactory performance in the area of socioeconomic development), which were largely absent in the Islamic contexts, with the possible exception of Turkey.

The issue of Islam and democracy has become, once again, a hot topic since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The issue has not been confined merely to academic debates. Indeed, bringing democracy to the Islamic countries of the Middle East has now become perhaps the most important US foreign policy objective in that region of the world. Although many observers argue that there is some sort of incompatibility between Islam and democracy, not everyone agrees on what exactly is the source of this alleged incongruity. Some scholars have pointed out the contradictions

Hakan Yilmaz is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Bogaziçi University, Istanbul, and the executive coordinator of Bogaziçi University’s Master of Arts Program in European Studies. He has taught courses and published works in the areas of contemporary Turkish politics, culture and politics, European-Turkish cultural perceptions, and external-internal linkages in the processes of democratization. Dr. Yilmaz has recently completed a research project on the major variants of conservative thought in Turkey. He is currently conducting research into the political and cultural attitudes of the Turkish middle classes and the cultural determinants of French and German opposition to Turkey’s accession to the European Union. His most recent works are *Placing Turkey on the Map of Europe* (Istanbul: Bogaziçi University Press, 2005), “Turkish Conservatism and the Idea of Europe” (forthcoming in Paul Sant Cassia and Thierry Fabre, eds., *Between Europe and the Mediterranean: The Challenges and the Fears* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, summer 2007), and “Euroskepticism in Turkey: Parties, Elites and Public Opinion, 1995-2006” (forthcoming in *South European Society and Politics*, Fall 2007).

between the “text” of Islam (the holy book and the basic legal material) and the “text” of democracy.¹ Some scholars have argued that democracy has been a particular product of Western “civilization” which has originated from Christianity and that a similar notion of democratic government has simply not emerged from Islamic “civilization.”² Yet other scholars have underlined socioeconomic, rather than cultural, factors as the underlying causes for the lack of democracy in the Islamic world, putting the emphasis on rentier states holding themselves in power with the help of the immense oil revenues and the political and military support given to them by their Western patrons.³

In this article, some conceptual and empirical relations between Islam, sovereignty, and democracy will be examined, with frequent references to the experience of Christianity. The examination will proceed in four stages. In the first stage, it will be observed that Christianity was born in society and Islam in the state, and this difference between the historical contexts in which the two religions first emerged helps explain the political dualism in the doctrine of the former and the political monism in that of the latter. In the second stage, the concept of the “middle ages” of a religion will be introduced and defined as the period of doctrinal and institutional stability between the “end of philosophy” and the “age of reform.” Based on that definition, the distinguishing characteristics of the middle ages of Christianity and Islam will be compared. In the third stage, it will be pointed out that in some Islamic countries, such as Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Iraq, and Syria, the major outcome of the end of Islam’s middle ages by the early 19th century was a political reform in the form of the building of a modern state apparatus by the secularist-modernist forces, the banishing of Islam from the state to society, and the consequent emergence of Islamism as a political ideology in the midst of society, aiming at recapturing the state from which it had been banished. In the fourth stage, it will be argued that the secularist-modernist state builders redefined the basis of the sovereignty of the new state as being the nation rather than religion. However, in most cases national sovereignty remained merely as a legitimation formula for authoritarian rulers who claimed to govern “on behalf of the nation,” and it rarely gave way to the real sovereignty of the nation by means of a democratic regime. In the final sections, the problematic relationship between secularization and democratization in the Islamic world will be examined, and the various experiences of the Islamic world will be compared with those of France. It will be observed that what made secularization and democracy compatible in France was a combination of historical factors, which were largely absent in the Islamic contexts with the possible exception

1. By the term “text” or “textual definition” I mean a de-contextualized, formalized, essentialized, de-historicized definition of a social concept. An example of the “textual” definition of democracy is the famous formula “Democracy is government of the people, by the people, for the people.” For examples of various textual definitions of Islam, see Max Weber, “Religious Groups (The Sociology of Religion),” in Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds., *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, Chap. 6 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p. 626; and Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 3.

2. See Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbaum, *The Sociology of the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 87-88 and Samuel P. Huntington, “Will More Countries Become Democratic?” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 193-218.

3. See Lisa Anderson, “Lawless Government and Illegal Opposition: Reflections on the Middle East,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Winter/Spring 1987), pp. 221-222.

of Turkey. Those historical factors were: the existence of the Catholic Church, which controlled the social manifestations of religion; the effectiveness of nation-building and the replacement of religious identity by national identity; the creation of a secular legal system and the establishment of an efficient judiciary to enforce the secular laws; and the successful economic performance of the secularist state. Turkey was the only Islamic country in which those four factors were to some extent present, and it was therefore no coincidence that in Turkey real national sovereignty could replace the nominal one and that secularization and democratization went together well.

POLITICAL DUALISM VERSUS POLITICAL MONISM

Christianity was born within society, and only three centuries later did it become the religion of the state. Yet, even this assertion should be qualified. In 312 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, but soon afterwards, under the Emperor Julian the Apostate (ruled 361-363), persecution of Christians resumed, though on a much smaller scale than previously. In fact, one can argue that Christianity never did become a state religion in the western part of the Roman Empire. It was only after the Roman capital was moved to the east, to Constantinople, and within the context of the Byzantine Empire, that Christianity truly became the religion of the state. In the western half of the Empire, on the other hand, as state structures gradually collapsed, especially under military attacks from the north, the Christian church, centered in Rome, emerged as a state-independent organization coexisting with a decentralized polity consisting of feudal estates.⁴ In fact, the time span between Constantine's conversion to Christianity and the collapse of the Western Roman Empire less than a century later was so short (relative to the total life span of the Roman Empire) that its reasons became one of the central objects of investigation for Saint Augustine.⁵ There was a long-established state at the time when Christianity began to emerge; the precursors of Christianity were not state-builders. Using the terminology of modern political science, we can say that Christianity first became "hegemonic" within society, and then it rose to the status of "official ideology:" its rise followed an evolutionary path and can be portrayed as a wave coming from below.⁶ Moreover, when Christian belief was first formulated, there was, in addition to a long-established central state (the Roman Empire), an equally long-established legal tradition (Roman Law).⁷ In this context, we can argue that the dictum *Redde Caesari quae Sunt Caesaris, et quae Sunt Dei Deo*⁸ reflected a pact between the church and the state, according to which the church gained

4. Talcott Parsons, "Christianity," in David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 2 (New York: The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, 1968), pp. 433-434.

5. See Saint Augustine, *Concerning The City of God against the Pagans* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

6. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 27.

7. J.C. Bluntschli, "Christianity," in John J. Taylor, ed., *Cyclopaedia of Political Science, Political Economy, and of the Political History of the United States*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles E. Merrill & Co., 1893), pp. 418-419.

8. Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's: This is Jesus' answer to those who asked whether they had to pay the tribute to the Roman Emperor (Matthew 22:21).

the status of the supreme authority over spiritual matters but at the price of recognizing the authority of the state over temporal matters. Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbaum, in their analysis of the emergence of the modern state in western Europe, underlined the influence on state formation of a specific cultural context shaped by the Catholic dualism between *Temporalia* and *Spiritualia*, and pointed out the distinctions between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions as regards the relations between the realms of religious and political authorities.⁹

Islam, in diametrical opposition to Christianity, was first launched by state-makers. There was no state, in the Weberian sense of the term, in the Arabian peninsula at the time when the Prophet Muhammad and a few followers of his began spreading the Islamic creed. However, as some authors have argued, conditions were ripe for the establishment of a central and ethnically homogeneous state.¹⁰ The progenitors of Islam all belonged to one of the most powerful clans (the Quraysh) in that part of Arabia in the 6th and 7th centuries AD. The founding fathers of Islam aimed at building a central authority that would exercise its power over the various tribes of Arabia. Some of the tribes allied themselves with Muhammad and his circle (the Medina coalition) and some of them (the Mecca coalition) opposed this proto-state. As a result of various wars, the Meccans were conquered and forced into accepting Islam as their new dominant system of ideas *and* Muhammad as their new sovereign.¹¹ The core of Islam can be said to have been developed through a process of war making and state making, as described by Charles Tilly,¹² at the end of which the leaders of Islam became the leaders of the new state and Islam became the dominant system of ideas in the society; hence, the division of spiritual and temporal jurisdictions between God and Caesar was not a real question in that historical context.

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM DURING THEIR MIDDLE AGES: FROM THE END OF PHILOSOPHY TO THE AGE OF REFORM

Both Christianity¹³ and Islam, following their formative periods (which lasted approximately five centuries in both cases), passed through their middle ages, though at different time intervals. The middle ages of a religion can be characterized as the period of doctrinal and institutional stability, which extends from “the end of philosophy” to “the age of reform.” The middle ages of both religions started with “the end of philosophy,” that is, when critical philosophical currents, in particular those embedded in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, either dissipated or assimilated within the mainstream of the official theology. The age of reform, on the other hand, was typically precipitated by an external crisis, when changes in non-religious areas (domestic

9. Badie and Birnbaum, *The Sociology of the State*, pp. 87-88.

10. John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 7.

11. Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 624-625.

12. See Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169-191.

13. Throughout most of what follows, references to “Christianity” refer to western Christianity and the Christian civilization of western Europe. The very different historical environment of Eastern Orthodoxy made for a significantly different evolution.

politics, international relations, economy, arts, science, and technology) reached such revolutionary dimensions that religion, with its existing doctrinal and institutional configuration, could not cope with and account for them, thus calling for a rethinking and restructuring of its belief system and organizational makeup.

Symbolically, Christianity's middle ages started with the appearance of St. Augustine's *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* in the early 5th century; the Christian middle ages were ended by the Reformation in the 16th century, which was the outcome of the rise of commercial capitalism, geographical discoveries, and the emergence of absolutist states. Christianity went through its approximately 1,000-year-long middle ages before it faced the challenge of reform. The symbolic event that marked the beginning of Islam's middle ages was the writing of Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifa (Destruction of the Philosophy)*, translated into Latin under the title of *Destructio Philosophorum*, in the 12th century.¹⁴ After approximately 700 years (note that Islam's middle ages lasted 300 years less than that of Christianity), Islam's middle ages ended with the doctrinal and institutional crisis that was brought about by the challenge of Western colonialism in the early 19th century.

During its medieval era, Christianity, both doctrinally and institutionally, maintained its original separation between God's and Caesar's realms of power. In the early 5th century, Saint Augustine had demarcated the City of God from the City of Man (or the City of Flesh) and this formulation,¹⁵ which formed the basic tenet of the western Christian Church after the death of St. Augustine, was reaffirmed in the mid-thirteenth century by Saint Thomas Aquinas, in his doctrine of the two spheres of domination.¹⁶ This fundamental tenet of Christianity was left unchallenged by the Humanists (e.g., Gianozzo Manetti, Marsilio Ficino, Pico Della Mirandola, Desiderius Erasmus, and Thomas More)¹⁷ and the Reformers (e.g., Martin Luther, John Calvin, Philip Mornay, and Jean Bodin) of the 15th and 16th centuries.¹⁸ Beginning in the middle of the 16th century and continuing over several centuries of modernization, Christianity came under attack, on the cultural front, from Renaissance Humanism, the Protestant Reformation, Rationalism, the Enlightenment, Positivism, and Materialism. On the socioeconomic front, Christianity had to deal with the Commercial Revolution, discoveries of the new lands, the Industrial Revolution, and colonial expansion. On the political front, the most challenging facts were the rise of the absolutist states, national states, nations, nationalism, liberalism, and socialism. The rise of the absolutist state in Europe by the mid-sixteenth century was later on followed by the institutionalization of a limited form of popular (read bourgeois) participation in the exercise of political power, first

14. See Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. III (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1967), pp. 219-224.

15. See Saint Augustine, *Concerning The City of God against the Pagans*, Particularly Book XI (in which St. Augustine discusses the origin, progress, and destinies of the earthly and heavenly cities), and Book XVIII (where St. Augustine offers a parallel history of the earthly and heavenly cities from the time of Abraham to the end of the world.)

16. See Dino Bigongiari, ed., *The Political Ideas of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Hafner Press, 1953).

17. See Nicola Abbagnano, "Humanism," in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. 3, pp. 69-72.

18. See Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

in England in the late 17th century, and second in France in the late 18th century. The overall effect of all these secular changes was the enormous expansion of the scope and intensity of the authority of Caesar, and the relative decline of whatever control the Church had previously exercised over secular matters. For example, in England, during the rise of the absolutist monarchy, King Henry confiscated Church lands; a similar confiscation of Church lands occurred in revolutionary France. However, because of its inherent political dualism, Christianity could accommodate these secular changes while keeping its authority in the spiritual realm.

There were no radical social, economic, and cultural changes during the middle ages of either religion. As far as Islam is concerned,¹⁹ any such change had to be accounted for in Islamic terms. That is, if the authorities were going to issue a new regulation about any area (from commerce to sexuality), they had to “Islamicize” this regulation, i.e., they had to legitimize it within the main body of Islam. This process of government in accordance with the rules of Islam was called “statecraft within *Shari‘a*.” Islamicization of rules, or statecraft within *Shari‘a*, could take either one of the following forms. First, to prove that there was such a rule in the Qur’an or in the Sunna (the traditions of the Prophet), which will be referred to from now on as the First Order of Islam. Second, to show that this rule could be reasonably deduced from the First Order. Third, to demonstrate that this rule did not contradict the First Order. Once a new rule had been Islamicized in one of these three ways, then it was added to what can be called the Second Order of Islam.

THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES OF ISLAM, POLITICAL REFORM, AND THE EXILE OF ISLAM FROM THE STATE TO SOCIETY

When secular changes were slow, as they were during the middle ages of Islam, the Islamicization of rules regulating those changes did not pose insurmountable problems. Serious problems arose when secular changes gained unprecedented speed and scope, and this came with the end of Islam’s middle ages, that is, by the beginning of the 19th century when many Islamic countries began to experience direct or indirect colonial rule under the great powers of Europe. For the Islamic world, the end of the Islamic middle ages signaled the beginning of all sorts of crises. First of all, the speed and scope of secular changes rose to unmanageable levels; that is, it became very difficult, if not impossible, to devise Islamic rules to contain new problem areas. For instance, there was no easy way to Islamicize the concepts of “nation,” “nationalism,” and “nation-state,” since they challenged the fundamental Islamic tenet that a Muslim’s first and sole political allegiance is to the Muslim community. Attempts were made by some Muslim thinkers to do so, nevertheless. Secondly, legal reform in the form of the direct adoption of Western laws and political and civic institutions was openly heretical from Islam’s point of view. Beginning with the early 19th century a series of Islamic countries, notably the Ottoman Empire under Mahmud II and later rulers, Egypt under Muhammad ‘Ali, and Tunisia and Algeria under French colonial rule undertook major

19. Just as “Christianity,” in this article, refers to the experience of Christian western Europe, so “Islam” as used herein primarily refers to the mainstream Sunni tradition.

bureaucratic, and especially military, reforms.²⁰ This reform process culminated in the dismantling of the old state apparatus and its replacement by the modern state institutions that were usually copied from the Western models.²¹ Throughout this state-building process, there emerged a qualitatively new breed of westernized elite. Not only did this new elite control the critical positions of the new state, but they also formed the nucleus of an emerging public space in their roles as teachers, writers, journalists, engineers, translators, businessmen, sportsmen, and the like. One important issue on the new ruling elite's policy agenda was secularization. Secularization meant changing, for the first time in the history of Islam, the source of legitimacy and the basis of the sovereignty of state power from religion to nation. The success of secularization depended on several factors. First, in cases where the secularist-modernist elites had been the leaders of a successful anti-colonial war, their task, especially in the initial periods of their rule, was relatively facilitated due to the popular legitimacy they had acquired. A second facilitating factor was the material benefits that went to the people under the rule of the secularist-modernist elites. A third factor was the consistent, scrupulous, and efficient enforcement of the new rules of the game. In addition, a final factor was, no doubt, habituation with the passing of time.

The historic outcome of secularization, i.e. of denying the role of Islam as the basis of legitimation of political power and public order, was that Islam, for the first time in its history, found itself exiled from the state to society. To be sure, there were many Islamic sects and cults in the history of the Islamic world that survived in the depths of society, without being supported by the state and sometimes even challenging the very foundations of the state. Various brands of Sufism are examples of what can be called folk Islam or popular Islam. However, despite the existence of the various non-state or anti-state belief systems and ways of life within the general body of Islam, the state itself in Sunni Muslim countries always based its right to rule on its adherence to Islam and justified its laws, regulations, and actions with reference to the principles of Islam. In other words, if one root of Islam was branching out into society, the other root was firmly embedded in the state. When, during the process of political reform, the old state, with its institutions, cadres, and legitimation patterns, disintegrated and was replaced by a new one, the historic tie between Islam and the state was cut off.

To take the Ottoman example, in the Ottoman Empire, beginning with the *Tanzimat* reforms of 1839, and all through the 19th and early 20th centuries, a series of completely new state institutions were created on the European model, in many cases directly replacing and in some cases co-existing and gradually displacing the old ones. The establishment of a new army led the way, replacing the old Janissary corps, the latter having been destroyed in 1826 by the reformist forces during the so-called Auspicious Event. The new army was followed by the foundation of a new foreign service. The army and the foreign service, the most purely modern institutions of the Ottoman state, with no rival traditional bodies, have since then become the bastions of reform, with their special professional schools, cadres, codes of conduct, and worldviews. These two pioneering modern institutions were soon followed by others, from the judiciary

20. See Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya 1830-1980* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).

21. Badie and Birnbaum, *The Sociology of the State*, pp. 67-101.

to education, to the healthcare system, the postal administration, the police, and so on. In the span of less than a century, religious norms and values lost much of their importance and relevance in the organizational structure, appointment and promotion criteria, legitimation patterns, and most importantly in the worldviews of the new cadres of these new organs of the modern state.²²

Separated from the state, Islam soon re-emerged from the depths of society. However, in its second coming, Islam was neither in the form of a reformed religion like Protestantism; nor did it come back as philosophy. Rather, Islam re-emerged from within the society as ideology, or more truly as a political ideology that is now commonly referred to as Islamism. As Ingersoll, Matthews, and Davison put it:

An ideology ... attempts a meaningful analysis of the existing environment to discover real truths concerning humanity ... A major distinguishing feature of ideology ... is its *action* orientation. Ideologies provide a picture of a better ... life for humans — a *goal culture*. Moreover, they encourage mass political action to attain it ... Such ideological movements are similar to the religious crusades of the Middle Ages. Adherents believe their ideal state to be possible ... on earth rather than in some heavenly kingdom ... As systems of ideas based on certain assumptions concerning humans and their relationship to the world, ideologies ... perform at least three functions: (1) they simplify the view of the world into select categories; (2) they demand action for ... or against ... change; and (3) they attempt to justify the course of action taken as well as the view of the world established.²³

As a political ideology with many variations, Islamism focused on this world, defining problems that Muslims faced here and now, devising the possible ways of action for solving these problems, and imagining a better world in the future that would be brought to life by current political action. Islamism aimed at developing an interpretive framework and a guide of action to make sense and to find a way out of the multifaceted crisis that had been set in motion by the Islamic world's evident defeat and retreat in the face of the advances of the West. The West, on its part, assumed three faces: the Western world itself; the Western colonial officials and institutions in the Islamic world; and the Westernizing local elites which came to dominate the state and public life in many Islamic countries. Beginning with the first quarter of the 19th century, new political and administrative elites, raised in the newly established modern schools or in Europe, staffed the new institutions of the state in many Muslim countries. Admittedly, bureaucratic modernization and secularization did not proceed at the same scope and speed everywhere in the Islamic world. The change was most rapid and profound in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. French-administered Tunisia and Algeria, the Muslim-populated areas of British-dominated India, and some time later Iran, also joined this general movement of modern-state building. The net consequence of this phenomenon was the displacement of the traditional, religiously-oriented bureaucracy by its mod-

22. See Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

23. David E. Ingersoll, Richard K. Matthews and Andrew Davison, *The Philosophic Roots of Modern Ideology, Liberalism, Communism, Fascism, Islamism*, Third Edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), pp. 5-6.

ernist, secular-minded successor.²⁴

Islamism was attempting to make intelligible, within the conceptual makeup and meaning system provided by the core Islamic texts and the Islamic culture in general, the economic, political, technological, artistic, and other consequences of Islam's latter and bitter encounter with the West; to plan ways of action to stop and then reverse the decline of the Islamic communities; and to imagine the contours of a future world where Islam would reach equality with, if not supremacy over, the West.

In that sense, the Islamic ideology of the 19th and 20th centuries was radically different from the Islamic philosophy of the 9th to 12th centuries. Both the earlier Islamic philosophy and the later Islamic ideology were born as responses of the Islamic intellectuals to the challenges posed by the West. However, the West that the early philosophers had coped with had been an entirely different entity from the West that challenged the ideologues of the 19th and 20th centuries. The Greek and the Roman worlds faced by the Muslim philosophers of the 9th to 12th centuries were not in a dominating position with respect to the Islamic empires of the time; on the contrary, the Islamic world was expanding its frontiers and laying the foundations of its newborn civilization. In those early times, the challenge of the West was being felt primarily on philosophical grounds, and it took the form of a need of reconciling the Islamic faith with the great philosophical systems of Greece and Rome. Out of this reconciliation came the philosophical syntheses of such giant figures as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd. The West that imposed itself on the Islamic ideologists of the 19th and 20th centuries, on the other hand, was an overwhelming power, which came not only with its ideas, but also with its armies, officials, merchants, missionaries, schools, banks, and opera houses. The challenge of the West was being felt not just on the plane of ideas but at every point of life; and the challenger was not merely a distant competitor but an intervening, transforming force. The response to a challenge of this type and magnitude could not possibly be limited to the realm of philosophical interpretation and synthesis only. What the conditions of the colonial age were calling for was an ideology, that is to say a system of ideas offering explanations of the problems at wherever areas of life they were felt and, more importantly, suggesting actions that could solve these problems. Hence, the Islamic modernism of the colonial era, the Islamic fundamentalism of the post-colonial period, and the new Islamic currents of the age of globalization can be seen as the successive phases of the evolution of Islamism.

The secularists, after having denied the role of Islam as the basis of the sovereignty of the modern state, redefined sovereignty as belonging to the "nation." The nation was presented by the secularists as being as sacrosanct an entity as religion to serve as the new basis of the sovereignty of the state. Accordingly, the national community was considered to be the new ethical community, replacing the Islamic community, in which an individual would find his/her true identity and the real meaning of his/her life. The nation, for instance, was believed to be the cause to fight for and, if necessary, to die for, just as religion had been throughout the Middle Ages. Thus, the

24. See Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980*; Serif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962); and Robert Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives, 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000).

principle of national sovereignty replaced religious or divine sovereignty. It should be noted that this transformation of the basis of sovereignty from religion to nation in the land of Islam was quite in tune with the dominant Western ideas of the time, stemming from the American and French revolutions, German romantic nationalism, and liberal nationalism.

FROM THE NOMINAL TO THE ACTUAL SOVEREIGNTY OF THE NATION

National sovereignty did not always and necessarily translate from an abstract principle of legitimation into the actual practice of government by the nation within a democratic regime. Hence, in many cases, national sovereignty meant the rule of an autocratic group “on behalf of” the nation, resulting in authoritarian republics. The archetypical authoritarian republic was the one that existed in Turkey under Kemal Atatürk from 1923 to 1946 with the arrival of multi-party democracy. In the 1950s and 1960s, the number of authoritarian republics proliferated when the post-colonial states of Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia, as well as those of Iraq and Syria, adopted the same model of government. In this model, a secularist-modernist bloc (a revolutionary political party like the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), a charismatic leader like President Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir [Nasser] of Egypt, and the military in all the cases), put itself in the role of the liberator of the nation from its external enemies (colonialism) and internal foes (tradition based on religion). After independence had been achieved, the ruling bloc typically legitimated its domination on the basis of the principle of national sovereignty and ruled “on behalf of” the nation, without actually allowing the nation to take the reins of government into its own hands. In other words, secularization (changing the basis of sovereignty from religion to nation) in no way guaranteed democratization (self-government by the nation), as shall be discussed.

Among the Islamic countries that have gone through a secularist-modernist political reform, so far only Turkey has been able to make a meaningful transition from nominal to actual national sovereignty, and even in this country, after more than 50 years of democratic experiment, several key problems (such as the rule of law, individual rights and freedoms, the relationship between citizenship and ethnic and religious identity) still remain unsolved. The only major Islamic Middle Eastern country, other than Turkey, in which an authoritarian republic tended to give way to some degree of popular participation was Egypt. However, Egypt’s democratic development appears to have been stalled at a certain point and cannot proceed beyond it. It can be observed that most post-colonial authoritarian republics of the Islamic world (most particularly Iraq and Syria), rather than progressing towards a more participatory and accountable form of government, degenerated into sultanistic regimes of one type or another. Under these circumstances, and beginning with the 1970s onwards, all of them faced militant Islamic fundamentalist oppositions, from the Muslim Brothers in Egypt to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria. The Islamic fundamentalist challenge forced these regimes into even more authoritarian practices, pushing the opposition into even more extremist positions. This begat a vicious political cycle, the best example being the case of Algeria since the late 1980s, in which a democratization process led to elections won by FIS and the subsequent seizure of power by the military in 1992, followed by a long

period of violence.

THE PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECULARIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

On paper and in principle, secularization supplies a fertile ground for the achievement of real national sovereignty and, by implication, of democracy. National sovereignty requires that all the publicly-binding decisions be made by the national public itself, either directly or through its representative organs. The intervention of a religious authority in the public decision-making process restricts national sovereignty, and therefore hinders democracy, in two ways. The first restriction imposed by religion on popular sovereignty may be that decision-making regarding certain public issues are monopolized by religion; in this manner, those issues are moved away from the realm of public deliberation and turned into “non-issues” or “forbidden issues.” The second type of restriction may be that, though there may not be any particular issues monopolized by religion, it is still required that the decisions of the lay institutions (parliaments, courts, and others) conform to the letter and spirit of religious principles. In both of these cases, there typically exist religious “reserve domains of power” within the political system. Thus, an authority representing religion (such as the Church, a political party like the Taliban in Afghanistan, a constitutional body like the *velayat-e faqih* in Iran) is endowed with the power of determining which issues remain within the realm of religious decision-making and which ones are to be handled by lay institutions. On the other hand, such an authority also may be given the right of passing judgments on whether the public choices made by the lay institutions conform to religious principles or not. In the light of these observations, secularization cuts off the links between religion and public choice. Secularization eradicates the religiously reserved domains of power in the political system. Secularization widens the scope of public debate and the range of public choice. Secularization is, therefore, a necessary (though certainly not a sufficient) condition for the attainment of real national sovereignty, and, by implication, of democracy.

Given the theoretical complementarities between secularization and democratization, how can we explain the evident gap between theory and the historical experiences of the secularist states of the Islamic world? It seems that the problem lies not in secularism *per se*²⁵ but in the historical context and format in which this essentially French revolutionary idea was put into action in the Islamic world. In France, when Catholicism was detached from the state by the Revolution, it did not fall into a vacuum as there was a well-established social institution, the Catholic Church, which would offer it refuge. It was the clerics within the Church hierarchy who took over Christianity and established their intellectual control over its interpretations. In the Islamic world, on the other hand, there was no Church-like social institution.²⁶

Hence, when Islam was divorced from the state and “deported” to society, it fell into the hands of a variety of social actors, ranging from old and new religious broth-

25. There are many ways to define secularism; we are offering a view derived from the Turkish tradition of *laiklik*, literally, laicism.

26. Efforts to re-establish the Caliphate failed; the institution had long since been powerless.

erhoods to self-styled Islamic intellectuals. In its new social habitus, Islam entered into a process of decentralized, autonomous development. Among the social actors who embraced Islam, Islamic intellectuals came to play by far the most prominent and influential roles. Islamic intellectuals were not themselves men of religion by training and by profession. However, many of those intellectuals were educated in the modern sciences. Hence, compared to the traditional *'ulama*, they were better equipped to understand the causes of the crisis of the Islamic world and to find ways to overcome it. The rebirth of Islam as ideology, or of Islamism, was, in the Sunni world (though not the Shi'i), essentially the work of the lay intellectuals, for whom the driving goal was political and this-worldly rather than being spiritual and otherworldly.

A second distinction between the secularization experiments of France and the Islamic world was that in France the secular state mobilized its cultural and educational institutions in the service of nation-building, for the purpose of defining, refining, and spreading among the population the central ideas of secularism and nationalism. The secular states of the Islamic world never had access to such effective ideological state apparatuses and consequently in those countries national identity could never completely substitute for Islamic identity. As a result, there remained in the Islamic countries significant social groups for whom Islam continued to provide the primary axis of self-identification and who were therefore very receptive to Islamist ideologies.

Thirdly, post-revolutionary France witnessed the making of an extensive secular legal system and the construction of an efficient judicial apparatus to enforce the new laws. This secular legal system and judicial apparatus further eroded the regulatory power of religion in the public as well as private lives of the individuals. In the secularizing Islamic countries, on the other hand, many areas of life, and particularly private life, continued to be regulated by religious norms and regulations. Moreover, the secularist-modernist states could not build efficient institutions for the enforcement of the new, secular laws. Under these circumstances, religion retained much of its previous scope, influence, and relevance in the daily lives of individuals. Such critical legal concepts as justice, crime and punishment, and the ethical criteria of good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, continued to be defined in religious terms, and many individuals continued to refer their conflicts to the arbitration of religious authorities. Consequently, the Islamist proposal of bringing Islam back in found a sympathetic audience within the populations.

Finally, the secular French state delivered to the people better incomes, more jobs, expanded educational opportunities, and in general higher levels of material well-being. This successful performance in the area of economic and social development no doubt enhanced in the eyes of the French population the legitimacy of the French state and provided the state with a very persuasive argument in its competition with the Church for the loyalty of the people. The "national development" programs of the secularist-modernist states of the Islamic world, on the other hand, fell far short of initial expectations, sometimes even faring worse than the previous colonial administrations. The states' poor performance in the area of economic and social development drained their prestige among the populations and bolstered the position of the Islamist oppositions.

TURKISH EXCEPTIONALISM? WHY THE RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL BLENDING OF SECULARISM AND DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY?

These comparative observations also help explain the exceptional case of Turkey, where secularism and democracy could find a *modus vivendi*. Although the Kemalist state had purged Islam from the state and left it to society, it did not allow Islam to have an autonomous life in the hands of social actors. Instead, the Turkish state opted to “éta-tize” Islam, and built the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyaret Isleri Baskanligi), a state institution, which has functioned very much like a state church.²⁷ The Directorate of Religious Affairs, whose share in the budget has been larger than the budgetary allowances of some important ministries, has been bestowed with the legal monopoly over the organization, interpretation, and teaching of Islam. The social competitors of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, from the dervish orders to religious brotherhoods, were suppressed. The mosques have been staffed by imams and muezzins who were licensed and supervised by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Religious functionaries have become ordinary state employees, taking their salaries from the state and subject to the same codes of conduct that every other state employee had to comply with. On some occasions, the Directorate of Religious Affairs went so far as dictating to the imams the content of their sermons at the Friday congregational prayers. After banning private religious instruction in the early years of the revolution, the Kemalist state opened official institutions of religious education at the elementary, middle, and higher levels. Later on, the Directorate of Religious Affairs began to recruit its staff, as well as the imams and muezzins serving in the mosques, from among the graduates of the official religious schools. The creation of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, as a functional equivalent of a church, the state’s monopolization of religious instruction, and the suppression of the autonomous institutions and manifestations of Islam acted as an effective check against the formation of an autonomous Islamist intelligentsia which would interpret Islam in such a way as to produce a political ideology out of it. The social acceptance of the Directorate of Religious Affairs can be understood from the findings of a recent survey on the role of religion in Turkish society, where 81.7% of all the respondents said that they were opposed to the idea of abolishing the Directorate of Religious Affairs and delegating the task of regulating religious affairs to non-state institutions.²⁸ There were obviously Turkish intellectuals with Islamist leanings and sympathies, but unlike, for instance, Egypt and Iran, Turkey never had a significant Islamist intellectual tradition. Accordingly, it can also be argued that Turkey never had

27. See Istar B. Tarhanli, *Müslüman Toplum, ‘Laik’ Devlet, Türkiye’de Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi* [*Muslim Society and the ‘Secular’ State, the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey*] (Istanbul: Afa Yayinlari, 1993). For a good account in English of Turkish *laiklik*, with a good summary of the foundation and functions of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey, see Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a ‘Secular’ State? The Challenge of Description,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 337-338.

28. Ali Çarkoglu and Binnaz Toprak, *Türkiye’de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset* [*Religion, Society and Politics in Turkey*] (Istanbul: TESEV [The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation] Yayinlari, 2000), pp. 66-68. The 2000 results were confirmed in a 2006 survey, Ali Çarkoglu and Binnaz Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset* [*Religion, Society and Politics in a Changing Turkey*] (Istanbul: TESEV Yayinlari, 2006).

an authentic, homemade Islamist ideology and political program. Thus, most of the Islamist ideologies that enjoyed some currency in Turkey were adapted versions of their Arab or Iranian originals.²⁹

Very much like the French state, the Turkish state too mobilized vast amounts of cultural resources, including primarily the state education system, for the goal of socializing the people into the national credo. As a result, unlike in the other secular Islamic countries, “nation” has superseded “religion” as the primary identity of the majority of the Turkish citizens. Hence, according to a recent nationwide survey on religion and politics in Turkey, 54.1% of the respondents expressed their primary identity as “Turk” or “citizen of the Republic of Turkey,” as opposed to a group of 35.4% who said that their primary identity was “Muslim.” The same survey has found out that the ratio of those who expressed their primary identity as being “national” (Turk or citizen of Turkey) is positively correlated with the levels of urbanization and education.³⁰

In terms of the enactment and enforcement of a secular system of law, particularly in the area of the civil code (*medeni kanun*), Turkey’s performance has been more than satisfactory. Thus, in the above-mentioned survey on the role of Islam in Turkish society, most people who expressed moderate to strong Islamic feelings also said that they would prefer their private affairs, particularly as in relation to marriage and inheritance, to be regulated by the secular civil code rather than by the Islamic *Shari’a*. The survey has discovered that between 70-80% of the respondents, who said that they have a moderate, strong, or very strong attachment to Islam, also have found unacceptable such well-known Islamic principles as a man being allowed to marry up to four wives, divorce being a right within men’s will, and boys being favored over girls in the distribution of inheritance.³¹

Finally, as far as the economic welfare of its citizens is concerned, Turkey has performed relatively well. Particularly after the Özalist reforms of the 1980s, the opportunities for private economic activities and gains expanded in an unprecedented manner, spreading towards the peripheral areas of the Turkish society. Hence, a number of Anatolian provinces (e.g., Maras, Urfa, Çorum, and Konya) and some peripheral districts of the big metropolitan areas like Istanbul (e.g., Ümraniye), which had been previously living on the margins of capitalist development, began to be integrated into the networks of capitalist production, trade, and consumption. One major outcome of this capitalist diffusion was the appearance of business groups with Islamic leanings.³² A related outcome was the emergence of lifestyles that combined Islamic sensitivities and forms with modern consumption patterns, lifestyles, and worldviews. This phenomenon set in motion a process of the depoliticization of Islam. The depoliticization of Islam was best captured in the words of Ismet Özel, a leading Islamist intellectual

29. See Binnaz Toprak, “Islamic Intellectuals: Revolt against Industry and Technology,” in Metin Heper, Ayşe Öncü, and Heinz Kramer, eds., *Turkey and the West: Changing Political and Cultural Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), pp. 237-257.

30. Çarkoğlu and Toprak, *Türkiye’de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset*, pp. 26-31.

31. Çarkoğlu and Toprak, *Türkiye’de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset*, pp. 70-79.

32. See Karin Vorhoff, “Businessmen and Their Organizations: Between Instrumental Solidarity, Cultural Diversity and the State,” in Stefanos Yerasimos, Günter Seufert, and Karin Vorhoff, eds., *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism* (Istanbul: Orient Institut and Institut Français d’Etudes Anatoliennes, 2000), pp. 143-195.

in Turkey today, who said that nowadays it has become very difficult for Muslims to become Islamists because “Muslims are attracted to ‘sweet life’ opportunities.”³³

Nilüfer Göle, a leading analyst of Islam in contemporary Turkey, observes that there has occurred a momentous shift in the Islamic movements in Turkey, from the political Islam of the 1980s to a more private and civic Islam of the 1990s. In the 1980s, the adherents of political Islam set for themselves the task of an Islamic revolution. This meant conquering the state apparatus and transforming the society in line with the precepts of Islam. They disregarded, and were ready to sacrifice, their private lives for the sake of this higher purpose. Any manifestation of privacy and any sign of attachment to “this life” were looked upon with disdain. Their subjectivity was immersed and diffused in the political collectivity to which they belonged. In this regard, the Islamist revolutionaries of the 1980s were no different from the socialist revolutionaries of the 1970s.

In the 1990s, however, as can be observed in the proliferating Islamic novels, a new Muslim subject began to emerge. The new Muslim subject discovered his/her own self as distinct from the oppressive collective self. The recognition of the distinctive self then led to the discovery of the value of the private life, something that should not be sacrificed for a higher cause. The new Muslim subject, Göle argues, while distancing him/herself from political Islam and anti-systemic movements, still retained his/her Islamic identity. What the new Muslim subject wanted, Göle says, was not a total submission to modernism but a merger of modernity with his/her Islamic values.³⁴ If Göle’s observations reflect a lasting trend, then this signals a historic turning point in the process of democratization in Turkey. The depoliticization of Islam would mean that a major source of tension in the Turkish political system, the one between political Islam and the secularist establishment, would come to an end. The fading of a major anti-systemic movement would no doubt enhance the stability of the political system. However, there would still remain the equally challenging problem of integrating the Muslims, with their modernized Islamic identity, into the public sphere. The expansion of the public sphere in such a way as to include the performances of modernized Islamic identities would be the new test of the Turkish democracy. In this context, it may be worth examining the emergency of the AKP.

*POSTSCRIPT: THE AKP: THE STRATEGIC TURN OF TURKISH ISLAMIC CONSERVATISM TOWARDS EUROPE*³⁵

The outcome of the November 3, 2002 general elections in Turkey was an expect-

33. Televised interview with Ismet Özel by Ahmet Hakan (*Iskele Sancak*, the Kanal 7 TV station, June 1, 2001).

34. Nilüfer Göle, “*Modernist Kamusal Alan ve İslami Ahlâk*” [“The Modernist Public Space and the Islamic Morals”], in Nilüfer Göle, ed., *İslamin Yeni Kamusal Yüzleri* [The New Public Faces of Islam] (Istanbul: Metis, 2000), pp. 19-40.

35. All the data in this section, except for the electoral data, are drawn from “*Turkish Public Opinion Regarding the European Union*,” a research project supported by a joint grant of TESEV and Bogaziçi University Research Fund, and completed in December 2002. The opinion survey was conducted in May 2002, over a nation-wide random sample of 3,060 people and directed by Ali Carkoglu, Refik Erzan, Kemal Kirisci, and Hakan Yılmaz.

ed surprise for the observers of Turkish politics. It was “expected,” because the general ranking of the parties in relation to one another had been estimated by many people. It was, on the other hand, a surprise, because no one could predict with any precision the high performance of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the near annihilation of the parties of former Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit (the Democratic Left Party), and of the former Foreign Minister Ismail Cem (the New Turkey Party). Similarly, contrary to the estimations by many analysts, the secularist-social democratic Republican People’s Party (CHP) could not manage to make a big showing, despite its last-minute recruitment of Kemal Dervis, the much-acclaimed former economy minister, into its ranks. The AKP turned out to be the indisputable victor of the elections, with 34% of the votes and 66% (363 out of 550) of the parliamentary seats. It was followed, by a large margin, by the CHP, which won 20% of the votes and 34% of the seats (178 out of 550). No other party managed to top the national threshold of 10%.

The first remark to be made regarding the profile of the AKP supporters is that they perceived themselves as being “more Muslim” and “less Turkish” than the average Turkish citizen. Similarly, they manifested significantly more Euroskeptic tendencies when compared with the national average. In a striking opposition to its constituency’s Euroskeptic attitudes, the leadership of the AKP, right from the day they won the elections, committed themselves to the cause of bringing Turkey into the EU. Hence, the AKP turned out to be a party with the most Euroskeptic and isolationist constituency and the most Eurosupportive and integrationist leadership.

Admittedly, the pro-EU attitudes of the AKP elites had started as a tactical choice, as a matter of finding European protection against the suppressive policies of the Turkish secularist establishment. However, this tactical choice seems to have been evolving into a strategic one. This strategic choice also has to do with the defeat of Turkish political Islam, which has been traditionally represented in the political arena by Necmettin Erbakan and by the so-called “National Doctrine” parties he led, through the shock waves of the “post-modern” military intervention of February 28, 1997. Hence, anti-Kemalist revanchism, top-down transformation of the society along Islamic lines, using democracy as no more than an instrument to be able to come to power — this quintessentially political project — has proved to be futile. Erdogan, who was a radical Islamist in the pre-February 28 period, once said that democracy was but a train and that one should get down from the train at the right station. Once his party took power, the same Erdogan started to say that he and his party rejected any project of “social engineering,” that is to say using political power to change the society according to the precepts of a certain ideology, including the Islamist one. He also started to vehemently deny that his party was Islamist or even that it was a religiously-based party. In a quest for a more appropriate appellation that would better reflect the party’s new orientation away from political Islam and towards the center, the party ideologists came up with the term “conservative democrat.”

What can be said about the ex-Islamists’ strategic choice for the EU and how different is it from the earlier tactical rapprochement towards the EU? The strategic choice seems to involve the following dimensions. The first dimension has to do with delinking from political Islam, ideologically as well as institutionally, while the second one aims at Europeanizing the Turkish public sphere for it to accommodate the performances of Islamic identity, particularly by passing legislation that would allow

Muslim women wearing a headscarf to have a legitimate presence in the universities and government institutions. Here the issue is the compatibility of Muslim identity and European modernity. In this respect, a Kemalist-nationalist understanding of modernity is too restrictive, too exclusive for the desired integration of Islamic identity and modernity. Hence, a new, more liberal, more inclusionary version of modernity, one could say a more post-modern definition of modernity, such as the one that is upheld by the European Union, would offer a much better ground for that integration to take place. The Kemalist understanding of modernity is, paradoxically, too modernist, too much attached to an earlier, French revolutionary, 19th century definition of modernity as to allow the manifestations and performances of Islamic identity in the public sphere. On the other hand, the current European understanding of modernity is, again paradoxically, much less modernist than Turkey's. Therefore, a Europeanized public sphere in Turkey would more easily tolerate the free display of Muslim identity. Two forces will resist this project, however. The first of these is euroskepticism and nationalist isolationism in Turkey: Nationalist isolationists will not leave the battleground without, at least, a fierce last battle. Nationalists will particularly be willing to mobilize the public opinion against the government, whenever the latter attempts to touch upon such nationally sensitive issues as the Cyprus question and minority rights. The second force is likely to be Turkoskepticism and the exclusionism of Turkey in Europe. Hence, European exclusionists of Turkey, such as the newly elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy, sticking to theses of cultural and civilizational incompatibility between Turkey and Europe, will make it harder for Turkey to get integrated into European Union. This approach will alienate many Muslim supporters of the AKP, while at the same time playing into the hands of Turkish nationalist isolationists.

The success of the conservative democratic project for Europeanizing Turkey depends essentially on an external and uncontrollable factor, namely, the EU policy towards Turkey. Squeezed between Turkish Euroskepticism and European Turkoskepticism, the AKP project may very well fail. If it fails, then, Islamism, as a political ideology, will surely come back. Kurdish secessionism would most probably follow suit, as Kurds would lose their hopes of expanding their community rights in a democratic Turkey. As a result, Turkish politics would again revert to the battlefield, much the same as in the 1990s, of Islamism, Kurdish nationalism, and Turkish isolationism. If Turkey's integration into the EU makes a leap forward with the smooth progression of the accession negotiations that were opened in the fall of 2005, then the expected short-term consequence of this would be felt, at the political front, in the form of the consolidation of a more democratic and liberal atmosphere. In such an atmosphere, it would be easier for the AKP to build a wide-ranging consensus for the purpose of integrating Muslim identity into the liberalized Turkish public sphere. That would satisfy the party's more religious constituency and provide the party leadership with enough ideological ammunition to fight against, and detach themselves from, their Islamist critics. In this manner, the AKP could pass a critical threshold in its journey towards the secular center of Turkish politics, and this would surely make a significant contribution to the stabilization and consolidation of the democratic regime in Turkey.