The Rise of Political Islam

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To my son, Mert

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Foreword

In the face of increasingly evident rise of political Islam in the Middle East region in the post-Cold War era, a necessity arises to understand the nature of the phenomenon, as political Islam tends to challenge the status quo culturally, socially, and more important, politically. This study is an attempt to explore the issue by focusing particularly on real or perceived external threats to social identity, a rather neglected dimension of political Islam. Three cases are examined, Turkey, Egypt, and Algeria, where political Islam has challenged, sometimes quite seriously, the secular state structure. Even though a three-case study is not sufficient enough to reach generable results, many policy implications, nevertheless, can be drawn from the study in terms of more effectively coping with the religious challenge in the twenty-first century.

Prof. Dr. Muzaffer Ercan Yilmaz

Introduction

In the post-Cold War era, the world has begun to witness a fresh resurgence in religious faith, often manifesting itself in a wide variety of cognitive, social, and political conflicts. Until recently, the common assumption concerning the role of religion in the modern world has been that as a result of great advances in science and technology, religion would become less and less important, that modernization and positivist thought would gradually replace mystic, religious beliefs. This assumption was shared by both the vast majority of scientists and many lay people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who thought that religion had no future, since scientific truth would explain the mysterious, create necessary conditions for satisfying human needs, and eventually turn the world into a paradise (Sorell, 1991; De Vries, 1999).

During the Cold War, the shocking Islamic religious revolution in Iran in 1979, however, took the world by surprise and forced the general public, as well as experts and scholars, to reevaluate their common assumptions. At the time of the formation of the Islamic Republic in Iran, the new interest in religion was largely limited to Islam; today, however, the careful observer of current events and trends can find ample evidence to suspect a fresh resurgence of religion in other faiths as well. In the West, for example, an enormous variety of sects and cults have emerged, such as the Children of God, Jesus People, Divine Light Mission, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Scientology, Rastafarians, and so on. Likewise, Asian countries are now less inclined than they once were to acquiesce to Western norms. There, too, religious / nationalist movements and cults are increasing in number. In such an atmosphere, some analysts contend that it is now culture rather than ideology that divides the world, and that religion fuels the conflict in a special way by inspiring intolerant and

irreconcilable images of identity and commitment among competing civilizations.

In the face of increasingly evident religiously driven conflicts around the globe, a necessity arises to understand the nature of such conflicts. This necessity emerges not only from pure scientific curiosity but also from practical concerns regarding the crucial question of how to manage and resolve these conflicts. This study is an attempt to explore such issues by focusing on religious revivalism in the Islamic world, which here refers to predominantly Muslim-populated countries. There are two main reasons why the Islamic world has been chosen as the research area. First, despite lack of adequate data to make general comparisons, it seems that religious conflicts are more evident and palpable in Muslim countries. From Morocco and Egypt to Turkey and Malaysia, governments have denounced religious extremism and have been challenged, sometimes quite seriously, by Islamic oppositions. Radical Islamic groups in Algeria, Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Pakistan, and Afghanistan have waged battles in which other Muslims, non-Muslims, as well as foreigners have been victims, killed in streets, public places, schools, and mosques.

Second, the widespread image of Islamic movements in the West, and to some extent in home countries as well, is such that the movements are almost identical with terrorism, posing a major threat to national, regional, and international peace and security. Some years ago, the secretary general of NATO referred to Islam as the new form of communism. The United States labeled the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sudan terrorist countries and exporters of revolutionary Islam. The term “Islamic fundamentalism” is frequently used to imply terrorism, evoking a powerful image of persons who are irrational, immoderate, and violent. Many have even come to believe that Islamic ideology, in the name of jihad, encourages the use of violence against those who deviate from the moral and social requirements of Islamic law.

Perhaps, at times, value-driven motivations do play a role in the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and resulting conflicts. For instance, the Quranic concept of jihad may be interpreted in a way that makes it appear that struggle against perceived non-Muslims by all means is obligatory. Likewise, many Muslims may believe that they are rightfully entitled to have an Islamic state, since Islam historically did not separate politics from everyday life. However, looking at radical Islamic movements through such a lens might be simplistic, for, there is no reason to assume that the same Islamic rules, which have not changed for centuries, suddenly began to motivate a large number of people towards a certain direction.

A wiser assumption, thus, would be to view Islamic movements as a series of revolts expressing societal, as well as psychological, discontent. In fact, this has been another, and perhaps the most popular, paradigm used to interpret the phenomena. Previous research pointed a wide variety of factors ranging from simple individual psychic discontent (Marx and Ellison, 1975) to more societal issues of poverty (Gunay, 1997), lack of distributive justice (Toprak, 1998, 1990), and lack of religious freedom in the public sphere (Smith, 1974) as the primary sources of the fundamentalist challenge. However, the shortcoming of this paradigm is that while such issues may have played a role in the emergence of revolutionary Islam, past conditions in Muslim countries were perhaps no better than the present ones, and may have been even worse. Hence, we should expand our scope of research towards areas not explored comprehensively before.

In light of these considerations, this study attempts to explore the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism through the lens of *concern for preserving social identity against perceived external threats*, a dimension that has not been well explored, and that might increase our understanding of the neglected link between individual perception and macro level dynamics. To define these terms, social identity refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in

their social relations with other individuals and collectivities (Jenkins 1996, 4). It is the systematic establishment and signification between collectivities of relationship of similarity and difference. Cognition-based explanations of social identity (i.e., Pryor, 1987) emphasize the idea that human social life is unimaginable without some sense of who others are and some sense of who we are.

The formation of social identity is rooted in early socialization. Because of this, constructed social identities can be said to be more robust and resilient to change. Despite the fact that change and mutability are endemic in all social identities, some identities are less mutable than others. The primary identifications of religion, kinship, and ethnicity are definitely embodied and, therefore, more resistant to change.

According to H. Tajfel and J.C. Turner (1986), the formation and maintenance of social identity involves two underlying processes: (1) Categorization (i.e., nationality, religious affiliation), which identifies intergroup boundaries by producing group stereotypical and normative perceptions and actions, and assigns people, including self, to the contextually relevant category. (2) Self-enhancement, which guides the social categorization process such that ingroup norms and stereotypes are largely ingroup-favoring. It is assumed that people have a basic need to see themselves in a relatively positive light in relation to relevant others, and that in group contexts, self-enhancement can be achieved through comparing the ingroup positively in relation to relevant outgroups. If comparison with outgroups is unfavorable, then group members experience a negative social identity. Individuals experiencing negative social identity are likely to attempt to make their group "better," which frequently involves causing them to engage in competition with relevant other groups. Turner (1975) has long argued that competition among groups is motivated as much by the self-evaluation needs of the members as by real conflict of interests.

In this respect, perceived external threats to social identity can be specified as:

1. Unwanted influences of outgroup norms as such norms that blur the boundaries of the ingroup shake group unity and cohesion.
2. Perception of relative weakness in socio-economic status in comparison with relevant outgroups resulting from unfavorable intergroup comparisons.

In this framework, the study attempts to explore:

1. The correlation, if any, between perceived external threats to social identity and Islamic religious revivalism, and
2. The role perceived external threats play, if any, in different manifestations of Islamic revivalism ranging from violent actions to nonviolent protest movements.

The social identity context outlined briefly above suggests that groups tend to react to outgroup norms with a feeling of dislike and are often motivated to eliminate them from their ingroup norms. This way, they aim to preserve group unity and purity, and ultimately, due to the self-attachment to the group, self-purity.

In the Muslim world, outgroup norms, in a generic sense, refer to perceived non-Islamic values. In particular, however, the expression can be specified as Western values as such values are entering into Muslim-populated countries much more than any others through the media and advanced ways of communication and transportation. In addition, Western power and dominance in military, economics, and other technologies influence Muslim nations to follow many Western norms in order to cooperate with the West. In the face of increasing Western cultural influence, we hypothesize that people in Muslim countries have become concerned about preserving their ingroup norms and thus their national/religious social identity. This concern then has been translated into Islamic fundamentalism, as the

movement eagerly values certain ingroup norms and expresses a rigid dislike of certain Western values, promising the public to get rid of the offending values when political power is obtained.

Regarding the second aspect of threat, competition with relevant outgroups, we assume that advanced communication and transportation have made inter-group comparisons much easier than ever before. Modern media have played an especially significant role in bringing Western prosperity and luxurious lifestyles (sometimes greatly exaggerated) to the eyes of the people of Muslim countries. Getting acquainted with Western prosperity and dominance and looking at their poorer conditions, it is likely that most Muslim peoples experience a sense of relative weakness in comparison with their more developed Western counterparts. Expressed in the social identity context, they experience a negative social identity, and thus a low level of self-esteem. As a result, they have been motivated to make their group better to overcome the inferiority complex. In this respect, it is likely that religious fundamentalism has been utilized by Muslim nations for the purpose of achieving rapid socio-economic development, since fundamentalist religious ideologies offer tight, authoritarian control over populations, and at the same time, encourage values and behaviors that are likely to lead to competence in economics, military organization, and other technologies (Gellner, 1984).

As for the methodology, the work utilizes a case study methodology in exploring the research questions. The cases examined and compared include Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, and Iran, respectively. The research starts with the Turkish case, to which primary attention is paid, and continues with the other cases selected for comparison purpose. Turkey particularly offers a valuable case study due to the fact that although Islamic religious revivalism in general has attracted scholarly attention, there are not so many studies regarding the Turkish case. The studies that have paid some attention to the case focus largely on the role of Islam in the political process, such as

political party activity and events that have attracted foreign media attention. The recent Islamic upsurge and its conflict-producing consequences have not been studied comprehensively, especially from the social identity perspective. Part of the study aims to fill this gap

The selection of the other cases, Algeria, Egypt, and Iran, are not based on probability sampling either, but on the unique value of these cases to the research. Specifically, Algeria and Egypt were selected, for these countries have been an area where violent conflicts between the Islamists and governments, resisting an Islamic state, more evidently took place and are still continuing to a certain extent. On the other hand, Iran was selected, since the country offers a success story of revolutionary Islam. Conditions giving rise to the emergence of political Islam, as well as conditions leading to a successful transformation of the political structure, from monarchy to theocracy, were thought quite valuable to the study and eventual comparison among the cases. In addition, the choice of selecting these countries lies in the fact that Islamic revivalism in each of them manifested itself in different ways, ranging from extreme violent confrontation, as in Algeria, to less violent conflict, as in Egypt and Turkey, and political success, as in Iran. This variance was considered particularly valuable in understanding the conditions of political Islam.

Chapter 1
The Rise Of Political Islam in Turkey: An Overview

Historical Background in Brief

A quick look at the Ottoman period suggests that although the Ottoman Empire may not be considered a fully Islamic state,[1] Islam significantly affected the political and social life of the empire's peoples as the dominant religion. In the nineteenth century, Ottoman reformers, faced with the threat of European economic and political expansion and a shrinking empire, determined to modernize the state by abandoning Islamic political principles for a Western model of enlightened despotism. Throughout the century, in most areas of public and political life, ideologies other than Islam were pursued, and social life, including political life, was secularized (Berkes, 1964; Hanioglu, 1995).

Donald Smith (1974) identifies five types of secularization process a society can experience. Four of these took place during the latter stages of the Ottoman Empire, namely: (1) *polity separation secularization*, meaning the institutional separation of religion and the polity, and the denial of the religious identity of the polity; (2) *polity expansion secularization*, meaning the expansion of the political system into areas of society previously regulated by religion; (3) *political culture secularization*, meaning the transformation of values associated with the polity, and the replacing of religious by secular notions of politics, political community, and political legitimacy; and (4) *political process secularization*, meaning the decline in the political saliency of

[1] At times, the Empire was governed by a body of traditional law (*orfi hukuk*), which did not necessarily derive from religious law (the Sharia), and which was developed by the Ottoman rulers as a necessity to hold a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire. Nevertheless, care was always taken that

religious leaders, interest groups, and issues. The fifth, *polity dominance secularization*, that is, the initiation of an open governmental attack on the religious basis of general culture, and the forcible imposition of secular ideology on the political culture would await Mustafa Kemal's coming to power.

Succeeding in founding today's Turkish Republic, following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal wanted to redefine Islam. He was not content with separating Islam from politics, but wanted to remove its power base and subordinate it to the state because of the concern that Islam would become a major nest for resistance against the republican ideology and socio-economic reforms he was planning to implement (Ozdemir and Frank 2000, 17-18). Hence, shortly after the founding of the Republic, a major campaign was launched against the institutional and cultural basis of religion in society. In 1924, the Caliphate was abolished, and the Sharia was abandoned (to be replaced by the Swiss code in 1926). The next year witnessed the closure of the *tarikats* (religious cults) and the adoption of Western forms of hats, clothing and calendar. Islam was deleted from the constitution in 1928, and the state was officially declared secular in 1937 (Berkes 1964, 461-479). Accordingly, during Kemalist period, which continued until the late 1940s,[2] further and more radical secularization occurred. Laicism emerged as one of the key principles of the new state, and religious expression came under strict government supervision and control.

The new center-right Democrat Party government, elected in 1950, widely supported by the Anatolian peasantry and small townspeople, whose religious lives had been less affected than those of city-dwellers, brought an easing of the repressive attitude to religion. The Democrat Party was actually secular in political orientation but was responsive to the pragmatic needs of the population, including those of the religious domain (Toprak 1981, 85-88). Over the following two

[2] Mustafa Kemal died in 1938 but his successor, Ismet Inonu, continued his policy until he lost the national elections in 1950 (Pitman 1988, 53-54).

decades, when the Democrat Party and its successor Justice Party were mostly in power, there was a growth in manifestations of popular religious sentiments, evidenced both in the building of mosques and religious schools, and in the semi-clandestine activities of mystical groups, whether the older Sufi *tarikats*, such as the *Naksibendis* and *Kadiris*, or the more recent *Nurcu* and *Suleymanci* movements (Tapper 1991, 2-3).

Religiously-based political ideologies began to proliferate towards the end of the 1960s. In 1970, the first Islamic party came into existence under the name of the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*). However, the party was closed down one year later, in 1971, by the Constitutional Court for having used religion for political purposes. It re-emerged before the 1973 national elections under the name of the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*), and gained a position such that no parliamentary majority could form on either right or left without its support, giving it considerable leverage. The party was dissolved once again after the 1980 military intervention, which banned all political parties for three years.

Nevertheless, the resurgence in religious consciousness and activity continued and became more evident in the 1980s, with an apparent shift in government attitudes and a remarkable proliferation of religious newspapers, periodicals, and other literature (Kaytaz, 1997). With the center-right Motherland Party government, elected in 1983, the *tarikats* and other religious elements began to enter into the military, the bureaucracy, education, and government. Particularly prominent were the Intellectual Hearth (*Aydinlar Ocagi*) and the movement known as the Turkish-Islam Synthesis, which wished to bring supposedly traditional shared values to the surface, to peel away the false Western veneer, and to recognize a national synthesis of fundamental values (Gunduz, 1997).

In the late 1980s, the Islamic Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*), established in 1983, following the removal of the ban on political parties, managed to become the most representative party of the Islamist movement,

also cooperating with similar movements in other Muslim-populated countries. By mid-1995, the party became the largest political party in Turkey, sweeping municipal elections and gaining 150 seats in the 550-seat National Assembly. It was closed down, however, by the Constitutional Court in January 1998 for pursuing anti-secular political activities. Shortly after the ban, the Welfare Party was succeeded by another party, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), which came into existence in the same year, 1998. Yet the new party could not escape the same fate and was closed by the same court in June 2001, for the same reason, or claim, to use a more accurate. This final ban, which was largely unexpected for most Islamists, led to a split in the popular support of legal political Islam and gave birth to two Islamic parties, the Happiness Party (*Saadet Partisi*), which apparently follows the orthodox ideology of the Welfare Party, and the White Party (*Ak Parti*), which represents a more moderate and inclusive understanding of Islam. The former is led by Recai Kutan, a close friend of Necmettin Erbakan, the banned leader of the Welfare Party, and the latter by Recep T. Erdogan, former mayor of Istanbul.

As the state and especially the military have increased pressure on religious activists since the Welfare party came to power in 1996, the more extreme proponents of political Islam began to organize themselves abroad. The two significant organizations highly active and militant in Europe, in general, and in Germany, in particular, include AFID (the Federated Islamic State of Anatolia) and AMGT (The European Organization of National Idea) (Narli, 1997). At the domestic level, several small Islamist groups wage occasional terrorist campaigns.

Toward a Comprehensive Understanding of Islam in Turkish Society

Actually, the way Islam is perceived in Turkish society is not a monolithic phenomenon. Some Islamic outlooks are quite pacific. To many believers, indeed, Islam is not related to politics at all. It is a

subjective connection between God and the individual. The extreme proponents of this view see true happiness to derive from detaching oneself from mortal concerns. Others more moderate identify Islam with traditional lifestyles and take a rather indifferent attitude toward politics. Then there are those who perceive Islam as a view critical of modernism. Discontent is expressed especially toward the perceived moral erosion in the society, manifesting itself in crime, increasing selfishness, and decreasing communal relations. Finally, there exists a perception of Islam regarded as an alternative ideology to the secular-republican state structure, with a promise and challenge suggesting that the application of Islamic law is the ultimate cure to all types of social, political, and economic problems, real or perceived.

These three broad categories capture, in general, the primary understandings of Islam, although there are several other interpretations as well. I wish to call the first category social Islam, the second critical Islam, and the last political Islam. Regarding the general issue of Islamic revivalism, it can be said that it is evident in all three types but that the real challenge comes from political Islam, since this movement, unlike the others, aims to regulate the secular status quo according to Islamic principles. Before exploring this phenomenon in detail, however, let us make a brief visit to social and critical Islam in order to give a broader view of political Islam and to increase our understanding of the interaction between them.

Critical Islam

Critical Islam, in a generic sense, is an intellectual challenge to non-Islamic ways of life. While valuing Islamic norms and Islam-fed traditional values, it severely criticizes the Western world, which it regards as materialistic and immoral. To critical Islam, the forceful replacement of Islamic norms with Western values, which has been done by the secular elite monopolizing political power since Kemal Ataturk, led to a moral erosion in the society, which, in turn, constituted the main source of present socio-economic problems, including widespread poverty, unjust distribution of national wealth,

criminal and other types of deviant behavior, as well as political weaknesses and dependency on the West. To overcome such problems, critical Islam underlines the necessity of returning to Islamic norms. With this feature, it influences political Islam to a great extent, but, nonetheless, it is not directly related to active politics. Its challenge remains essentially at the intellectual level.

Critical Islam can be said to have born during early republican period with the writings of Necip Fazil Kisakurek, who established the "Great East" movement in September 1943 in Istanbul. The movement published *Ideolocya Orgusu*, the first Islamic journal in Turkey. Until the early 1980s, there were no other major religious journals, but only a few rather small publications. But in the 1980s and 1990s, a large number of religious publications joined the movement, including *Icmal*, *Altinoluk*, *Yeni Zemin*, *Birikim*, *Izlenim*, *Nehir*, and *Dergah*, to mention a few. This trend itself indicates a sudden increase in the popularity of critical Islam at a time when social and political Islam also began to receive greater acceptance from the society. In order to give a broader view of critical Islam, one of the lately-emerged monthly journals, *Icmal*, was examined in terms of its content.

Icmal values Islam in comparison with the West and by criticizing it. It treats Western civilization as a historic product in the sense that its genesis and development mark the disappearance of various institutions and structures and their replacement by new ones. The two major institutions considered in this context are feudalism and Christianity. Each was despotic in its own right; feudal landlords exploited and tortured people arbitrarily, whereas Christianity was a distorted religion very different from the original form. Christian religious courts were instruments of repression and torture throughout the medieval era. The religious institutions actually took part in the economic exploitation of people so that members of the Church led extravagant lives in contrast to the widespread misery and poverty of the people.

At this stage, for *Icmal*, Islamic civilization was in its golden age. Europe eventually turned to the Islamic world to emulate its success and reap its fruits. The scientific method, Islamic principles of justice, liberty and equality were all borrowed, one after the other. Then feudalism and Christianity were destroyed through four major steps: the Renaissance, the Reform movement, the French Revolution, and finally the Industrial Revolution. Yet Western people were to fall prey to a new form of tyranny. The reason was that the West borrowed from the East only the form, not the essence of civilization, which was nothing other than Islam. Eventually, the vacuum was filled by materialism. The term (materialism) is used generically to cover a wide variety of Western philosophical schools. The vantage point of materialism was to take sensual experience as the ultimate basis of knowledge and to recognize no reality other than the material. The universe was believed to be composed of matter in its various physical and chemical states, and matter was supposed to exist as objective reality that could be seen and studied as independent from spiritual essence.

According to *Icmal*, Darwin's theory of evolution, in this context, was a deliberate attempt to reduce man to the status of an animal. Freudian psychology served exactly the same purpose by defining man as an aggressive sex-maniac motivated only by his instincts. Finally, there was Marxism, which reduced human life to economic motives. As materialistic premises were gradually adopted by the Europeans, social and economic systems were oriented to the satisfaction of man's untamed appetites, and capitalism served this end.

At the cultural level, the capitalist system made men forget death and the other world by bringing heaven down to earth through increased material prosperity. This is suicidal, however, for the accumulation of material wealth signifies the increased alienation of man from himself. Man is actually searching for himself, not for any external object of discovery. Under capitalism, he is increasingly oriented to the market to look for what he has lost.

At this point, *Icmal* argues that there exists a relationship between a particular civilization and a personality type: the corrupt capitalist system and mentally sick Western man. The increase in property and material prosperity made Western man ever more greedy and insatiable. Having no higher values, aims and ideals, he is totally bewildered and lost. A deep spiritual crisis, grounded at the very roots of civilization, is leading to its collapse. Western civilization is producing ever-increasing numbers of mentally sick people and as a result, the whole society has become a huge mental hospital. This system is now being exported by the West to Islamic countries under the guise of world system and world culture. In this regard, *Icmal* also criticizes the Turkish democratic system, claiming that it was imposed on the people by the Westernized elite, especially after the War of Independence, when people were worn out by the conditions of war.

After making this highly comprehensive -and of course selective- analysis of the West and Western civilization, *Icmal* argues that the Islamic revival in Turkey and elsewhere should be looked at as a response to a huge moral decline and understood as the fight of humanity and spiritualism against unlimited greed, consumption and materialism. The emphasis on control of desires is, according to *Icmal*, what distinguishes Islam from systems of thought which assume that human needs are unlimited. Once this assumption is made, all human activity becomes oriented to the satisfaction of needs and leads to a system marked by the anarchy of endless wants. In contrast, Islam makes a first-order distinction between wants and needs, asserting that only the former are limited. Thus, whereas endless human desires are suffocating capitalism, Islam is teaching man how to get his life under control and to discipline himself.

In addition to criticizing the West, Western-imported secular ideology, and the secular elite itself, proponents of cultural Islam also questions the *ulema* (traditional Islamist intellectuals) by arguing that these people became integrated with a non-Islamic political system and adopted modernity characterized by separation of Islamic principles

from social life. For the supporters of cultural Islam, the hope for an Islamic society lies in educated young generations that are ultimately expected to criticize secularism and other Western imported norms. The cognitive conflict between traditional Islamic values that the young have been socialized into and Western norms that are learned through state-controlled formal education is believed to end in favor of the former (Duman, 1997).

To conclude, critical Islam makes the point that the Muslim world, in general, and Turkish society, in particular, are at present under the influence of the Western world, which itself is in a deep moral crisis. For Islamic societies to rise again, it is necessary to abandon Western norms and return to Islam. Blame for the negative influences of Western values is mostly directed toward the secular ruling elite, while hope is expressed in younger generations that are believed able to re-discover the virtue of Islam by seeing and eventually rejecting ever-increasing moral erosion. Although cultural Islam is not active at the political level, its doctrine inspires political Islam.

Social Islam

Social Islam is a rather hard-to-define concept, as the scope of the term is broad. In a generic sense, the term refers to loose and ordinary expression of Islamic faith in daily life without necessarily a political connotation. In fact, the vast majority of Turkish people believes in Islam and at least partly practice it in their lives. For instance, the visitor to Turkey, particularly one who is learning Turkish, may quickly become aware of how ordinary speech is infused with religious expression, such as *insallah* (if God wills), *masallah* (God has willed), *vallahi* (by God), *elhamdulillah* (Thank God), *bismillahirrahmanirrahim* [I begin (to start doing something) in the name of God)], and so on. Similarly, during the year, there are several evenings that are thought to be specially blessed. Among these are the eve of the Prophet's birthday, the eve of the Prophet's night journey to Jerusalem, the night of forgiveness, and the night of power and destiny. On these evenings, there are nationally televised preaching

and *mevlut* (the poem celebrating the birth of the prophet) broadcast from major mosques. People also gather in neighborhood mosques for the same purpose. Homes are cleaned and foods or sweets are served to neighbors. Likewise, after the marriage contract has been signed, but before the couple has first slept together, it often happens that the male relatives of the groom escort him to the mosque for the sacrament of canonical prayer. Before the first sexual intercourse, the couple is supposed to conduct two sets of stations of the sacrament of canonical prayer. If they fail to do so, it is believed that something will go wrong with their firstborn child. Most families in Turkey also hold a special naming ceremony for a newborn child. A religiously learned person, usually a local imam, is called to the home. There the imam recites from the Quran, which supposedly brings blessings on the household. He quietly says the call to prayer (*ezan*) in the child's ear. Then, having been informed by the parents of the name, he whispers it into the child's ear. [3]

As these few examples indicate, both secular and non-secular Muslims participate in the varied practices of Islam in Turkey, to varying degrees. Islam is part of everyday life and for most Turks, it is identical with tradition. While believing and practicing Islam, however, people may vote for a leftist political party instead of an Islamic one.[4] Thus, social Islam is not really related to political Islam whose ultimate aim is to set up an Islamic state and to re-arrange all elements of the society in accord with Islamic principles.

In a more specific sense, social Islam involves those who often pacifically dedicate themselves to living their religion partly or completely in isolation from earthly activities. Such people mostly come together under the roof of Islamic religious orders, known as *tarikats*. The term *tarikat* comes from the Arabic word *tarika*, which

[3] For further information about such understanding of social Islam, see Ozdemir, Adil and Kenneth, Frank. *Visible Islam in Modern Turkey* (London: McMillan Press, 2000), pp. 41-64.

[4] Especially the Alevi population in Turkey mostly supports left-wing political parties (Ayata 1993, 42-45).

literally means path. Not every Muslim in Turkey belongs to a *tarikat*, but many do. For them, *tarikats* are the vehicles of purification, self-sacrifice, reaching God, and full exercise of Islam ultimately.

Actually, *tarikats* were outlawed by the new republican government in 1924. For one thing, members of religious orders, being obedient to their masters, were seen by the Kemalists as beyond the authority of a new government that was struggling to establish its own control. More important, the republican secularists understood the nature of *tarikats* to be utterly contrary to the individualist, scientific spirit of the modern age.

The original ban still exists on *tarikats*. But the *tarikats* have carried on anyway, going underground as necessary. They are groups unto themselves, existing without regard to whatever government is in power. Whereas in Ottoman times, they were publicly obvious and distinctive civil organizations, in the republic of Turkey, they have had to close their formal institutions and operate semi-secretly. But their unceasing activities are so tolerated today that the ban has little practical meaning. Some of the major *tarikats* include the following:

The Nursis

The Nursi group is said to be one of the largest and most influential *tarikats* in Turkey, although there is no reliable statistical data to confirm this. Consisting of several branches and divisions, the Nursis all look to the works of the twentieth century mystical writer Bediuzzaman Said Nursi as the spiritual guide to contemporary life. Nursi, who spent many of his 87 years in jail because of his anti-secular orientation and influence, left behind a collection of about 130 works entitled *Risale-i Nur* (The Tractates of Light). His views on humanity, society, the destiny of the world, and his interpretations of the Quranic verses in light of modern science powerfully impress his followers. The Nursis, at present, are believed to have a mission to enhance their influence through education. For this purpose, they build and operate private schools throughout Turkey, as well as other

countries, such as the Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union and Australia. They make their appeal to the youth, especially the brighter, academically talented young people. They run youth camps, maintain student dormitories, and provide poor students with scholarship and other facilities.[5]

The Nakshibendis

This group is composed of the followers of the fourteenth century Islamist thinker Nakshibend of Bukhara (died in 1389). In general, the Nakshibendis are known as anti-reformist and anti-innovationist. They are interested in preserving the superiority of Sunni Islam. Many of Turkey's large upper class families are said to be under the influence of the Nakshibendis. A famous contemporary case involves the family of the deceased President Turgut Ozal. The Nakshibendis are also commonly believed to be connected to student dormitories, principal Islamic publications, and small businesses in major cities.[6]

The Bektashis

The Bektashi groups are a set of *tarikats* that feel close to the Shiite branch of Islam. Their distinct characteristic is the freedom from ritual Islamic law, from things such as attending the prayer sacrament in the mosque, fasting, and the prohibition on drinking alcohol. At the time other Muslims are engaged in these practices, the Bektashis may make it a point not to be so engaged. It is not that they object to these prescribed practices but that they wish to show their distinctive spiritual strength and knowledge in transcending them. Hence, the Bektashis can be said to be the least rule-bound of these groups we are discussing. They are famous as lovers of stories, wisdom, and poetry.

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[5] On the Nursis, see Beki, M. Akif. "Turkiye'de Nurculuk" (The Nursi Movement in Turkey), *Turkiye'nin Sorunlari Dizisi*, No: 9, 1997. See also Isik, Ihsan. *Bediuzzaman Said-i Nursi ve Nurculuk* (Istanbul: Unlem Yayinlari, 1990).

[6] For further information on the Nakshibendis, see Beki, M. Akif. "Turkiye'de Naksiler" (The Nakshibendi Movement in Turkey), *Turkiye'nin Sorunlari Dizisi*, No: 21, 1997. See also Mardin, S. "The Nakshibendi Order in Turkish History," *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd. Publishers, 1991).

The basic Bektashi principle is the call for people of all stripes and persuasions to come together, to put aside differences, and to share the best each has to offer the other. Every August, at the town of Hacibektash in Nevsehir, Bektashis from Turkey and other countries gather for three days to celebrate the figure for whom they are named, Haji Bektash Veli.

The Alevis

As a branch of the Shiite Islam, the Alevis grant special status to the family of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed. The belief is that Ali, as the successor to the Prophet, inherited his esoteric knowledge, giving Ali's family a surpassing spiritual and political significance. The Alevis are known in Turkey for their particular ritual, the Jem ritual, conducted wherever possible in their own special houses of assembly. They are sensitive to what they see as baseless prejudices manufactured against them by the Sunni majority and complain vigorously to the government about mistreatment. On the other hand, the Sunnis are unhappy with the close-knit group psychology of the Alevis and the way the Alevis seem to nurture a centuries-old anger against the Sunnis. The antagonism between the two sides itself is an interesting area for further research, but this is beyond the aim of this work.[7]

The Mevlevis

This group takes for their founding figure Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi (1207-1273), known in short by his title, Mevlana, the chief interpreter of Islam, for such Turkish tastes as embodying love and tolerance.[8] Over the centuries, the Mevlevis have maintained at their center in Konya, a

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[7] On the Alevis and the Alevi – Sunni conflict in Turkey, see Olsson, Ozdalga T. and Raudvere, C. *Alevi Identity* (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions Vol. 8., 1998.); Bender, C. *12. Imam ve Alevilik* (The Twelfth Imam and the Alevis) (Istanbul: Berfin Yayinlari, 1993); and Bozkurt, C. *Aleviligin Toplumsal Boyutlari* (Social Dimensions of the Alevi Movement) (Istanbul: Tekin Yayinevi, 1990).

[8] For the life and teachings of Mevlana, see Barks, Coleman. *The Illuminated Rumi* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997).

striking way of calling on and remembering Allah, a striking *zikir*. They train from an early age to do a whirling sort of dance suffused with spiritual meaning. It consists of a constant turning or twirling of the body, lasting for almost an hour. The repetitive turning recalls the circumambulation of the Kaaba in Mecca during the pilgrimage, the motion of the planets in their orbits, or the repetitive cycles of nature. At present, the Mevlevis are allowed to perform their dancing for interested audiences at home and abroad despite the existing ban on tarikats.

The Ishikchis (People of the Light)

This economically powerful group concentrates on Islam as it has been traditionally practiced by Sunni Muslims. Their outlook is more mystical and privatized. They are known for their emphasis on the earlier mystical masters and their wonders and miracles. They emphasize business and provide particular support to small business people. The Ishikchis are believed to own a major TV station, and several newspapers, radio stations, and periodicals.[9]

The Refais

The Refais are organized among the educated and stress academics. They seem to confirm the secular order in allowing for the uncovering of women and their acceptance of mixed male-female social gatherings. The Rifais support the Anatolian-Islamic cultural arts, especially music, literature, calligraphy, and theater. They tend toward modernist interpretations of the traditional materials.[10]

[9] Information presented here was gathered from an interview with Dr. Hasan Onat, Ankara University, Faculty of Divinity, Ankara, Turkey, May 12-13, 2001.
[10] Ibid.

The Melamites

These people are mystics who stress humility, love, self-denial, and singing. They are less formal than the Rifais but do emphasize master-disciple tie as the way to true knowledge.[11]

The Rufais

The Rufais have a unique corporate *zikir*, or particular ritual manner of remembering and focusing on the name of Allah. They demonstrate Allah's power in the annihilation of the self. They will cut or apparently harm their bodies but, in the faith that there is no harm to self, emerge uninjured from the experience. The purpose is to praise Allah, to show the power of faith (Ozdemir and Frank 2000, 73).

The Suleymanis

These are another active religious order working half-hidden, often in rural areas, on the Quran courses. They stress traditional Islamic education and, to this end, arrange such courses. Their unique form of *zikir* is silent mediation on Allah through the channel or meditation of their master, Suleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888-1959). Among Turkey's religious functionaries in the mosques are many Suleymanis. They have a strong master-disciple structure. Suleymanis are often in conflict with official religious organizations and schools in that they distrust modern ways of teaching the Quran and Islam. They are believed to be successful in appealing to villagers, townspeople, and the middle class of the cities (Akdogan 2000, 78-92).

Common Characteristics of the *Tarikats*

The above-mentioned major *tarikats* share some common characteristics. To begin with, they exhibit a strong group mentality. Members staunchly support and promote one another. They help each other with common daily problems. In return, the group expects

[11] Personal interview with Dr. Hasan Onat, Ankara University, Faculty of Divinity, Ankara, Turkey, May 12-13, 2001.

complete loyalty from its members, who pledge allegiance to the group's charismatic leader. They submit much of their time and energy to the will of the master (Narli, 1997).

Second, with few exceptions, the members of religious orders commonly participate in universal Islam. That is, despite their different viewpoints on various issues, they practice the canonical Islamic sacraments of prayer (*namaz*), fasting, pilgrimage, animal offering, and almsgiving. They cultivate admiration for the Islamic and Ottoman past, and see themselves as preserving the Islamic heritage. They are also very cautious of Western influence and quick to defend religion (Onat, 2001).

Third, there exist particular procedures, or habits, which are peculiar to each group. They have differing emphases in social outreach, or in rituals, or in forms of internal discipline and education. These differences ultimately relate to the temperament and experience of the founding master. Each group has its own *zikir*, or way of remembering and saying the name of Allah. The *zikir* of the religious orders is usually a repetition of certain verbal formulas composed essentially of the name of Allah or the attributes of Allah. Accompanying the repetition of these words is a ceaseless, bodily, rhythmic movement that, with the words, nourishes the soul and body, and purifies the heart. Normally, the members of the *tarikat* do their *zikir* corporately, in a circle, although individual practice is also the case for some *tarikats*. The result of the word-body repetition, the *zikir*, is to fill the person with remembrance of Allah, to keep the heart alive to Allah, to awaken it to Allah. The individual is absorbed in Allah and reaches a state of trance or ecstasy. Each group keeps to itself the manner of its *zikir* (Ozdemir and Frank 2000, 75- 76). The only exception is that of the Mevlevis. Today the whirling dance is performed publicly in spite of the official ban on *tarikats*.

Fourth, *tarikats* are pretty much structured through charismatic leadership and obedient discipleship. That is to say, they are personalist organizations with similar Sufist disciplines. As long as a

strong and influential leader is present, the group loyally coheres around that person. But when the leader dies or is otherwise weakened, the question of succession arises. In many cases, the master designates his successor. Otherwise, the group itself implicitly acknowledges one. As the master was revered when alive, so he is visited at his grave or tomb when dead. There is a popular belief that these tombs should be carefully maintained, since it is in the miraculous nature of the Sufi masters that their bodies do not decompose. People visit these tombs to pay homage to the departed master, to present their petitions, and to the master's blessings (Ozdemir and Frank 2000, 76).

Finally, *tarikats* mostly organize themselves internationally, or cross-culturally. They do not consider themselves limited to Turkey, as Turkey is considered only a small part of the Muslim world. As a matter of fact, there are groups of Nursis, Mevlevis, Bektashis, Alevis, and others in Europe, the US, Turkic Republics of the former Soviet Union, and various Muslim-populated countries (Shankland 1999, 83-86).

The Situation and the Issue of Revivalism

It is widely believed that *tarikats* in Turkey have grown stronger since the 1980s in terms both of their number of participants and of their influences. It is hard to refer to confirming data, however, due to the fact that such organizations operate entirely or semi secretly, as the official ban on them still exists. In fact, several interview attempts, via snowball sampling, to get an idea about their approximate size, the change in the size over the years, and their activities were largely unsuccessful. Respondents were either reluctant to talk or did not have any reliable knowledge. During such attempts, it was observed that group adherents had two sets of behavior, one for insiders and one for outsiders. While they tended to be warm, welcoming, and friendly toward an insider, they were more aloof, even cold to an outsider. Perhaps more reliable data could have been collected through the method of participant observation, but this was not tried