

Revival and Reassertion of Islamic Institutions in Post Kemal Turkey

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The Western world applauded the fall of Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Republic (in 1923) and the founder of this Republic, Mustafa Kemal, was expected to cure “the Sickman of Europe”^[1]. Kemal and his other modernist-westernist elites sought a radical transformation of traditional Ottoman legacy and took the task of reforming, modernising and secularising the Turkish society.

Kemalism^[2] gave Turkey a new doctrine of Turkish secularism, which became its hallmark. The Turkish model of secularism introduced radical transformation both at executive and legislative levels and according to Earnest Gellner, it became ‘didactic secularism’^[3]. Ali Kazancigil asserts that Kemalist ideology that he adopted to reform his country was an amalgam of the ideas associated with laicism, nationalism, solidarist positivist political theory and 19th century scientism.^[4]

However, the Kemalist principles met with considerable resistance both within and outside the Turkish political system. Since secularism was implemented by an authori-tarian elite, a potential conflict between the progressive kemalists and the reactionary groups ensued ever since Kemal launched his programme. This article focuses on the gradual accommodation of religious elements and the reassertion of religious institutions in Turkish democracy in post Kemal Turkey.

State and Religion during the Multiparty Period

Although Mustafa Kemal adopted the form of parliamentary rule, he reigned as an autocrat. The Republican People’s Party led by Kemal Ataturk created the new Turkish government based on the ideas of its leader. His secularization and westernization drive included many points, the strongest of which were the abolition of the caliphate, the mass closure of Islamic schools, and the elimination of Islamic calendar and adoption of the Gregorian date system in 1925. Furthermore, in 1928 the consti-tutional clause calling Islam the state religion was eliminated and the Arabic alphabet was replaced by latinized Turkish alphabet created by Kemal himself. His Six principles or ideological tenets were officially drafted into the Trukish constitution and with these reforms Turkey as a nation emerged as the bridge between Europe and the West Asia yet as an entity belonging to none.^[5]

The autocratic style of rule that Ataturk practiced behind the façade of one-party government could not long survive his death in 1939. While each and every government which followed

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk adamantly proclaimed its adherence to Kemalism in general and secularism as interpreted by him in particular, but after the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1950, and with the coming of Democratic Party to power, many of the strictures were lifted against some religious practices like pilgrimage to Mecca (formerly restricted, supposed to protect the flow of hard currency) the call to prayer in Arabic and restarting of religious classes.[6]

It has been observed that in Turkey the role of religion began to expand gradually after 1950 and its influence went on increasing in the late 1980's and 1990's. Seeing the revivalism of the religion in every areas it has been rightly said that in the post Kemalist period, religion was not dead in Turkey, it was well embedded in the very society of Turkey, and what it needed to resurface was proper channelization, rehabilitation and patronage that it got in multiparty regime.

State Controlled Islamic Education in Turkey

There are three basic categories of Islamic education in Turkey, i.e., the schools for theology-teaching, the Quranic Schools, and the schools for Chaplains and Preachers. After 1980 all three multiplied inspite of state surveillance over the Islamic education. Theology departments have been established in eighteen universities in Turkey, fifteen of which are in the recent founded provincial universities[7]. The graduates of these universities take specialised Islamic courses in the schools for chaplains and preachers as well as a compulsory course in secular middle and high schools. According to the Directorate of Religious Affairs[8] in 1994 the Quranic schools in the country were 4,929 in number with 5,295 teachers and 176, 892 regular and 52,028 evening school students. The number of students attending summer courses reached 1,326,443.

The schools for chaplains and preachers were 466 in number, which were totally subsidized and controlled by the Government. The number of students in this school includes secondary and evening students with total number of 446,429 and with 14,995 teachers. The curriculum of this school is based on Quranic teaching, theology Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith (religious sayings) preaching and history of world religion. The curriculum also includes courses such as history, geography Turkish literature, mathematics, physics and chemistry. It is true that this type of curriculum lacks in any type of education based on fundamentalist instincts yet the factors such as classroom inter-actions, exchange of ideas among peers, and the collective religious identity conferred upon these schools make the products of these schools highly sensitive and responsive to all kinds of Islamic movements.

The Directorate of religious affairs until 1950 was not very significant department and its main function was to convey to public the officially approved version of Islam so as to reconcile the values of the nation and state with those of Islam. DRA work was confined to the publication of Quran and on a few basic sources of Islam and had a very limited staff. But in the past four decades the size, activities and responsibilities of the department have expanded enormously, with an increase in its number of personnel from only a few thousand in 1950s to 88,533. It has now more than a dozen departments and numerous sub units.[9] It has also been observed that the religious functionaries are putting their efforts to redefine the responsibilities of the

department so as to extend its sphere of influence from 'belief to worship' and to have a say in ethics and the definitions of the content of religion.

Normally the DRA personnel do not make specific pronouncements or interpret or legitimize the decisions of the parliament, the government or the bureaucracy, and generally remain silent over political matters. However, they respond to the grass root needs of the masses, which in turn make them more popular and respectable among these people in both rural and urban areas. This eventually helped them in strengthening their hold and influence on Muslim population. In order to strengthen their base among the students the schools for chaplains and preachers as well as other Islamic organization provides scholarships to the needy student, and dormitories for their lodging. They also help their graduates in seeking admission in universities. In this way the Islamist students are found almost in every field from engineering, medicine, public administration, law to social sciences and after leaving the universities they get appointed as engineers, judges, economists and on other ranks.

Religion and the Multiparty Period

Till 1965 there were only 26 Imam Hatip schools. The Justice Party supported and built new such schools. It opened 46 new Imam Hatip schools between 1965 and 1971 when it was in absolute power and 147 between 1975 and 1977 when it led the ruling coalition. Similarly during the Military regime of 1980 [10], new Quranic schools (*Kuran Kurskari*) were opened, religious courses were made necessary and new preachers (Imams) were employed^[11]. During the military regime and Motherland Party government state policy towards Islam underwent radical changes in style and substance^[12]. Religious instructions in primary and secondary schools were made mandatory in the 1982 constitution. During the rule of Motherland party contemporary Islamism emerged. Circulation of Islamic periodicals, newspapers and books catalysed intellectual debate in Turkey. Turgat Ozal of Motherland Party pursued a policy of Islamizing the educational system and his minister of education, Vehbi Dinserler, a member of Naksibendi Sufi order, prepared a new curriculum of national history and geography that constantly used "milli" in the religious sense.^[13] These new agents of change represented the move of Islam from the periphery of the system to its center and yet were themselves a product of that centre of its educational institutions and its urban life^[14].

The *Naksibendi* orders and *Suleymanci* were free to run unofficial Quranic courses and youth hostels to educate needy youngsters who came from provincial and rural areas for education in cities^[15]. Moreover, there was an abundant growth of the printing material and publications of Tarikats and other religions groups each disseminating its specific views on and methods returning to Sharia ^[16]. In short, a multitude of Islamist groups and networks especially the *Naksibendis* became firmly entrenched in both the state and civic society, their growing power and influence in one sphere facilitating access to the other^[17].

Islamism gained momentum and got incorporated into the political system of Turkey with the establishment of the Islamist parties, National Order Party and then National Salvation Party and Welfare Party ^[18] after 1970. These Islamic Parties regarded Turkey's problems and its solution

in Islamic terms. They took pride in the glorious Ottoman Islamic heritage and tradition and claimed that their party itself followed this tradition. Their dogmas appealed to those who had never felt comfortable and satisfied with new secular culture, which they found artificial and alien^[19]. Gradually Islam became a platform for rallying both socio-economic and cultural discontent and these Islamic parties voiced the protest of those who wanted a large political and economic role in expanding world of modernity^[20].

As a matter of fact all these Islamic parties had to deal with the nation, which was more oriented towards modern aspirations. Thus to bridge this gap between the traditional elements in society who had firm religious beliefs and a naturalist conservative outlook, and the modern aspirations of their diverse electoral bases both parties developed a double discourse by espousing a combination of religious and non-religious themes^[21]. At the one hand these parties fitted in with their advocacy of a return to a strict Islamic polity in terms of moral and religious values, while at the other hand they came with programs of scientific and technological development and industrialization. Nevertheless these parties rethinking modernity in light of Islamic maxims, adopted a reformist posture and operated within the system rather than trying to bring about a radical transformation of society along the lines of 'Sharia'.

Conclusion

In Turkey, after the institution of multiparty democracy in 1950, laicism was challenged by a number of groups. Even though the principal had rooted itself sufficiently firm never to be removed from Turkish constitutional practice. In fact, the Democratic Party that was often denounced and accused of having undermined Laicism, kept the principal in operation. However, since 1960, religious currents have not abated but they have become stronger in spite of the fact that the constitutional principal of laicism is still the foundation of Turkish constitutional law.

Nevertheless, the end of the one party rule and the transition to a multiparty political system marked the beginning of the re-inventing of Islamic value, which has continued until the present day. In the post-Kemalist Turkey there has been a series of complex interaction between Islam and state. And during the 1970s and 80s Islam experienced a kind of political rehabilitation. It has been found that apart from the rising religiosity of the masses it has brought more power to the religious functionaries of Islam.

This comprehensive study of multiparty period in post Kemalist republic clearly reveals that Islam was not banished and excluded from the official public sphere, rather Turkish State adopted a double discourse. On the one hand establishing rigid segregation between religion and the public political realm while on the other hand, accommodating and incorporating Islamic politics into the system in various ways. The ever-increasing activities of schools for chaplains and preacher have helped in imbibing the Islamic instincts among their students. In addition to providing them financial assistance, they along with other Islamic networks help their infiltration, after coming out of the universities, in the state bureaucracy. This results in the incorporation of Islam in the social, economic and political fabric of Turkey. This indeed results in gradually diluting the earlier stringent secular attribute of the state and ultimately Islamizing the very character of the Turkish Republic.

Endnotes

1. See [http:// www.turkishnationalism.com](http://www.turkishnationalism.com)
2. The term “Kemalism” was first used by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanglu on June 28-1929 and it referred to the new nation and state building ideology. The term referred to an intellectual will that was based on various compatible assumptions and manifested goals known as six arrows and these were adopted by the Fourth Grand Congress of the Republican’s Party in 1935 as principals of new regime.
Sabri M. Aktrual, “Kemalist views on social change” in *Ataturk and the Modernization of Turkey*, ed. Jacob M. Landau, Leiden: Ej. Brill; 1984, p.126.
3. Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981, p. 68
4. Ali Kazancigil “The Ottoman Turkish State and Kemalism” in *Ataturk; Founder of a Modern Turkey*, ed Ali Kazaragil and Ergun Ozbudin, London C Hurst, 1981, p. 37.
5. See “Islamic Rise in the Turkish Republic” [http:// www.mideastinfo.com](http://www.mideastinfo.com)
6. Feroze Ahmad observes that the multi party period ended the phase of militant secularism in Turkey in deed if not in word. However, the end of militant secularism did not mean the triumph of the Islamists. Ahmad Feroze, “Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol 27, No.1, 1991, p.10.
7. Ayata, Sencer, “Patronage, Party and State: The Politicization of Islam in Turkey,” *Middle East Journal*. 50 (1), 1990, p.47.
8. The Directorate of Religious Affairs has its headquarters at Ankara and has local branches in all provinces and sub provinces through out Turkey with 63,053 chaplains and preachers in the 68,675 mosques under its control. Directorate of Religious Affairs, 1994. Also see Statistics given in the booklet published under the title Turkish Republic: The Presidency of Religious Affairs, Ankara, 1989.
9. As quoted in Ayata, Sencer op cit p. 46.
10. The generals who came to power considered Islam a pacifying and submissive ideology preferable to the threat of communism. So instead of showing any disregard or even suppressing it, they took several steps to strengthen it.
11. Yavuz, M. Hakan, “Political Islam and Welfare Party in Turkey”, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30(1), Oct.1997, p.67.
12. Cizre Umit, “Islam – State Interaction in Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28 ** 1996, p.244.
13. Toprak, Bunaz, “The State, Politics and Religion in Turkey” in Martin Heper and Ahmet Eric (eds) *State Democracy and the Military*, Berlin, 1988, pp.131-32.
14. Gole, Nilofer, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites” *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51 (1) winter, 1997, p. 54.
15. Cizre, Umit op. cit.
16. Saudi money came in Turkey by means of finance companies and religious foundations for details see Jacob M Landen, *The Politics Pan- Islam, Ideology and Organization*, Oxford, 1990 pp.276 – 303.
17. Ayata Sencer op. cit. pp.44 – 45.
18. In 1970, the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party,NOP) was established by those who left the center right Justice Party. And after being banned by the Military coup in 1971, the NOP resurfaced in 1972 under the name of National Salvation Party (Milli Salamet Partisi)

which participated in two coalition governments from 1974 – 1975. With the military coup of 1980, political parties were banned and this Islamist Party reemerged under the name of Welfare Party (Refah Party) and in 1995 general election it won the largest single bloc of seats in parliament and led coalition government up to April 1997 when it was removed in a soft military coup and the party was banned in January 1998 by the constituted court. However leaders of Welfare Party immediately created a new party 'Fazilet' the virtue party. All the Refah deputed who were not deprived of their political rights joined Fazilet.

19. Ahmad Fatoze, Op.cit. pp. 13-14

20. Sunar and Toprak, "Islam in Politics, The case of Turkey", *Government and Opposition*, Autumn 1993, p.438.

21. Ozbudun Ergun, "Islam and Politics in Modern Turkey: The Case of the National Salvation Party", in *The Islamic Impulse*, Ed. Barbara Freyer Slowasser, London 1998, p.146