

Islamism: A comparative-historical overview¹

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Islamism has been one of the most hotly debated political ideologies of the world for more than three decades. A series of significant political developments have kept Islamism in the headlines during the 1980s and 1990s, such as the Iranian Revolution (1979), the war between the Soviet Union and the Afghan mujahideen (1979–89), the emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon (1982) and Hamas in Palestine (1987), the Algerian Civil War (1992–97), and the Taliban’s takeover in Afghanistan (1996). Younger generations’ first encounter with Islamism was the suicide attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan. Islamism continues to be an important political subject in the twenty-first century. The war between the Taliban and the US-led coalition in Afghanistan is continuing. Different Islamist actors, ranging from the Islamic Republic of Iran to al-Qaeda-linked groups in Eurasia, pose a significant challenge to the United States

¹ This essay is an expanded and updated version of a book chapter with the same title (published in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, edited by Neşecan Balkan, Erol Balkan, and Ahmet Öncü, New York: Berghahn Books, 2015, pp. 13–40).

and other Western powers. The Palestinian question remains important, and Hamas continues to be a powerful force in the Palestinian national movement. Islamist movements have recently resurged in the Arab world in the process of the Arab Spring that started in December 2010. The electoral success of Ennahda in Tunisia in 2011, the victory of Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (the Muslim Brotherhood) in the presidential elections in Egypt in 2012, the killing of the United States ambassador to Libya by Salafists in 2012, and the shockingly rapid rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014 are different manifestations of this recent revival. Finally, cultural and political problems experienced by the Muslim minorities in Western Europe introduce a new spatial dimension to Islamist politics.

Islamism appeared with a new face in Turkey at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP), founded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his associates in 2001, gained an immediate electoral victory in the parliamentary elections on 3 November 2002 and became the ruling party with a clear parliamentary majority. The AKP successfully defeated the Turkish military's memorandum on 27 April 2007 and the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. The AKP's uninterrupted rule in the last fifteen years based on its hegemony over the working class is the peak of Turkish Islamism. This hegemony has led to hot debates in political, media, and academic circles about the character of the AKP (whether it is an Islamist or semi-Islamist party, or simply a conservative party like the Christian Democrats in Western Europe) and its similarities with and differences from the National Vision movement. The globally strong Islamist organization headed by Fethullah Gülen, which had supported Erdoğan's AKP until recent years and then entered into a serious conflict with it recently, has also been an important theme of research and debate.

Islamist ideology

In this essay, I define Islamism in line with Guilain Denoëux, as "a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives" (2002: 61). For Denoëux, Islamism "provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition" (2002: 61).² Therefore, instead of focusing on Islam as a religion, it makes more sense to focus on the political actors who have constantly reinterpreted Islam in different ways in order to achieve their particular cultural, economic, and political objectives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Ayoob 1979: 535–36; Mamdani 2005: 148–49; Bayat 2008: 105). Reinvention of the Islamic tradition to address modern problems is the basis of Islamist politics of all brands:

It is the invention of tradition that provides the tools for de-historicizing Islam and separating it from the various contexts in which it has flourished over the

² For another study following Denoëux's definition of Islamism, see Ayoob (2004).

past fourteen hundred years. This decontextualizing of Islam allows Islamists in theory to ignore the social, economic, and political milieus within which Muslim communities exist. It provides Islamists a powerful ideological tool that they can use to “purge” Muslim societies of the “impurities” and “accretions” that are the inevitable accompaniments of the historical process, but which they see as the reason for Muslim decline. (Ayoob 2004: 1)

This sort of invention of tradition lies at the heart of the political theory of all major Islamist theorists. They view the pre-Islamic history of the Arabs as an age of “ignorance” (*jahiliyya*) in which injustice and barbarism prevailed, and the history of the Arabs in the seventh century, when the prophet Mohammad (570–632) founded the first Islamic state, as an age of happiness. According to Sunnis, the age of happiness includes the period of the rule of the four caliphates after the Prophet, while Shiites limit this age to the period of the prophet Mohammad and the fourth caliph, Ali (599–661). Despite this significant disagreement on the history of Islam, since all Islamists see (at least parts of) the seventh century as an age of happiness, they all propose a “return” to the essence of Islam as experienced in its purest form in the seventh century. For instance, Mawlana Mawdudi (1903–79) argued for the necessity of a radical break from the past, which he saw as not Islamic enough, and the foundation of a truly Islamic state similar to the first one established in the seventh century. Famous Egyptian Islamist theorist and activist Sayyid Qutb (1902–66) took this call for a radical break from the not so Islamic past very seriously. He argued that the Muslim world was currently living in the age of the modern *jahiliyya* in which new ungodly idols such as nationalism and socialism had replaced the idols of the pre-Islamic past (Kepel 2002: 25–26, 34). The leader of Iran’s Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini (1903–89), interpreted the concept of the return to *jahiliyya* within a conceptual framework of Shiism. He argued that the history of the Muslim world after the death of the prophet Mohammad is an era of uninterrupted injustice and alienation from the real Islam (Harman 1994).³ In short, the definition of *jahiliyya* and the goal of overcoming it by returning to an essentialized version of Islam is the basis of Islamist ideology.

It is necessary to emphasize two issues regarding the idea of returning to the essence of Islam. First of all, with the exception of a few individuals and marginal groups, Islamist intellectuals and movements have never advocated wholly mimicking the Islamic practices of the seventh century. This type of an extremely antimodern interpretation of Islam has not received much credit, even in Saudi

³ The audiences of Khomeini, Mawdudi, and Qutb in the Muslim world are not isolated from each other. For instance, Khomeini influenced many Sunni Islamists in some countries, including Turkey, especially during the first few years following the Iranian Revolution. However, due to the historical significance of the Sunni-Shia divide within Islam, Mawdudi and Qutb had a much broader appeal among Sunnis, while Shiites remained as the main constituency of Khomeini’s politics.

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Arabia, where the Wahhabi branch of Islam, which – at least on paper- advocates such a practice, is the official ideology. Thus, Wahhabism could be incorporated into the Saudi regime, which is deeply integrated into the world capitalist system. Similar to other religious ideologies, Islamism takes a selective approach toward modernity in which it keeps a certain distance from a number of modern ideas and practices without rejecting modern technology and capitalism, both of which lie at the core of modernity.⁴ Second, despite viewing the seventh century as a century of happiness, some Islamist movements depart from Khomeini’s radical approach by embracing more recent experiences as political references. For instance, in Turkey the AKP and other Islamist parties view the Ottoman Empire as a positive historical reference. They advocate neo-Ottomanism, which aims to make Turkey an Islamic superpower that can act as a big brother of non-Turkish Muslims outside Turkey.

Mawlana, Qutb, and Khomeini proposed using state power to overcome *jahiliyya* and revive Islam. Putting the question of political power forward is as radical an intervention as the conceptualization of ignorance and has enabled Islamism to turn into a modern political movement. The question of political power inevitably brought the question of political organization to the agenda. Mawdudi, who founded the Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Community) in India in 1941, referred to the “vanguard” role of the first Muslims who accompanied the Prophet when he was moving from Mecca to Medina in 622. Qutb saw the solution to the question of political power in the organized struggle led by the “new Koranic generation.” Finally, Khomeini advocated the foundation of an Islamic state ruled by a leading Islamic jurist, for which he started an organized struggle (Kepel 2002: 26–40). Thus, Islamism is an ideology that attributes to *jahiliyya* responsibility for all the economic, social, and political problems that Muslims face in modern times and defines the return to the essence of Islam as a political project that can be realized through organized political struggle.

Leading Islamist theorist-activists like Qutb and Khomeini defined Islamism as an opposition movement against secular regimes. For this reason, despite all their differences regarding the strategy for taking political power, the political movements they inspired have aimed to change the status quo in secular countries. On the other hand, “Islamism in power” is as important as “Islamism in opposition.” As the cases of Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and (north) Sudan demonstrate, “Islamism in power” politicizes Islam for the sake of defending the status quo. Interestingly, “Islamism in power” may encounter opposition not only from secularists but also from Islamists. In contemporary Iran, a significant part of the opposition movement contains groups claiming to be the true heirs of Khomeini and utilizing Islamic themes and discourses. Today there are Islamist groups who aim to topple the Saudi kingdom, which claims to be an Islamic regime. Ironically, in the case of

⁴ For a similar emphasis on Islamists’ selective approach toward modernity, see Denoëux (2002: 58).

Saudi Arabia the ideological apparatuses once utilized by the regime to reinforce its political hegemony were later utilized by opposition groups in order to discredit the regime. Radical Islamist groups, whose leaders became familiar with the works of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) due to the enormous Wahhabist propaganda campaign generously funded by the Saudi regime in the 1970s and 1980s, called for overthrowing the Saudi kingdom in the 1990s due to its alliance with the United States (Kepel 2002: 72). The complexity and contradictory character of Islamist ideology and politics require us to define the concept of Islamism broadly. Therefore, my definition of Islamism includes all (mainstream and radical) political movements and regimes that make politics with reference to Islam and state their aim as reviving Islam regardless of their differences in terms of political positions (in opposition or in power), strategies of power (reformist or revolutionary), and means to make politics (armed or unarmed).

Class dynamics of Islamism

Although there have been numerous intellectuals and political movements that interpret Islam in an anti-capitalist framework, the great majority of Islamist movements do not aim to destroy capitalist relations of production. Regardless of the weight of state-owned enterprises in their national economies, all Islamist regimes have large private sectors in which the bourgeoisie owns the means of production.⁵ Even in the distinctive case of Iran, in which the strong mass appeal of the leftist interpretation of Islam had forced Khomeini to adopt a more leftist rhetoric, the Islamist revolution did not destroy the capitalist relations of production. It only eliminated the secular bourgeoisie around the shah and assisted the Islamist bourgeoisie in increasing its economic power. Islamist movements' ability to establish (complete or partial) hegemony over the working class in spite of their bourgeois character requires us to understand the class dynamics of the mass support behind these movements very well. Islamist movements are products of an alliance of the Islamist bourgeoisie and the working class. The hegemonic force of this alliance is the Islamist bourgeoisie, and the subordinate force is the working class.⁶ Similar to other capitalist states, all nation-states founded in the Muslim

5 Afghanistan under the Taliban requires a more nuanced analysis, since it was entirely devastated by unending wars, neither the state nor the private sector had any significant production capacity, and the only commodity produced in significant quantities was opium.

6 Despite his recognition of the coalition of the Islamist bourgeoisie and the lower classes as the backbone of all successful Islamist movements, Kepel tends to present it as a coalition without any hegemon by arguing that Islamist ideology cannot be reduced to the interests of a single social group (Kepel 2002: 9, 29). As the vast literature on political hegemony indicates, different classes can join political movements that represent the core interests of another class. In fact, it is possible to read the entire political history of the world as the history of the formation and disintegration of alliances that represent the core interests of one class over others. Kepel's study itself provides enough material indicating the Islamist bourgeoisie's quest to establish hegemony over the

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world in the twentieth century were based on a power bloc that included certain factions of the capitalist class while excluding others. Islamist movements, which emerge as opposition movements demanding a regime change in secular countries, politicize the demands of the capitalists outside the power bloc with religious rhetoric. For instance, in Iran before the Islamic revolution, the big bourgeoisie, which had close connections and shared the same secular culture with the Pahlavi dynasty, was well positioned to obtain significant economic opportunities due to its inclusion in the power bloc. On the other hand, the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie (which were known as the bazaaris, since most of their businesses were located in the Tehran marketplace called the bazaar) outside the power bloc became the hegemonic force of the Islamist opposition against the Pahlavi dynasty. In Turkey, the Islamist movement represented the Islamist bourgeoisie of Anatolia, which consisted of small-scale, non-monopolistic capitalists who were outside the power bloc, which was dominated by the monopolistic and secularist capital of Istanbul and İzmir (Gürel 2004: 88–91).

Similar to all bourgeois political movements, the success of Islamism depends on the Islamist bourgeoisie's capacity to establish hegemony over the lower classes. Despite their historical differences, the successes of Khomeini in Iran in the 1970s and the AKP in Turkey in the 2000s are both products of the Islamist bourgeoisie's ability to win the support of the lower classes. Conversely, the defeat of Islamists in Algeria in the 1990s stemmed from the Islamist bourgeoisie's loss of hegemony over the lower classes (Kepel 2002: 67). For this reason, it is critical to understand what circumstances lead the lower classes to support the Islamist bourgeoisie. In all successful cases in the last and the current century, the Islamist bourgeoisie won the support of two groups within the working class: the informal sector workers and the white-collar workers with a high school or university degree. In order to understand the political behavior of these groups, we need to examine the economic and demographic indicators of the Muslim world for the second half of the last century. Between 1955 and 1970, the population of the Muslim world increased by 50 %. By 1975, 60% of this population was under the age of twenty-four. The development of capitalist relations of production in the rural areas and the industrial and service sectors in the urban areas increased the pace of rural to urban migration. Unemployment increased as the speed of employment creation fell behind the speed of population growth. Since urban infrastructure could not be improved to the extent needed to provide decent-quality housing to the new urbanites, the number and the population of the shantytowns increased rapidly (Kepel 2002: 66). Although a part of the shantytown population could find jobs in the formal sector, the majority was employed in the informal sector, with low wages, without access to social security, and under constant threat of unemployment. In fact, the majority of the people who are counted as unemployed in national statistics constantly oscillate between

proletariat as the primary dynamic of the modern Islamist movements.

informal sector employment and unemployment. The informal proletariat, which is often called the “urban poor” in the academic literature, is the most important target population of the Islamist movements due to its numerical strength and mobilization capacity.

A significant source of the militant cadres of Islamist organizations is the workers and the unemployed who have received relatively higher education. Some commentators call them the “educated middle class” (Bayat 2008: 101) or the “new middle class” (Denoeux 2002: 62; Harman 1994), but it seems more proper to classify this group as the “educated proletariat” because of its economic distance from the higher echelons of white-collar workers and the middle class. Another significant transformation in the Muslim world in the second half of the twentieth century was the expansion of the middle and higher education so as to encompass lower classes. This transformation created a large educated segment within the proletariat composed of people who follow the outside world, popular lifestyles, and consumption patterns more closely than the less educated segments of the proletariat. This segment expected to find high-wage jobs providing the comfortable living standard that they think they deserve due to their higher educational credentials. However, since the speed of employment creation fell behind the speed of population growth, the unemployment rate of this group also increased rapidly. Moreover, most of the educated workers could find jobs that did not provide enough to let them achieve the high living standards they expected. The big disparity between the expectations and the actual results laid the groundwork for the crisis of hegemony of the secular (or partially secular) regimes in the Muslim world and ripened the conditions for the Islamist movements to gain the support of the educated proletariat (Harman 1994; Kepel 2002: 66; Bayat 2008: 101). On the other hand, these circumstances were no less advantageous for the Marxist organizations to win the informal and educated proletariat. In fact, Islamists were able to win the support of the working masses only with the decline of the radical left. Moreover, Islamist influence among the blue-collar workers in the formal sector is often much more limited than among the two groups mentioned above. This applies to the case of Iran, in which the Islamists had to carry out massive purges to eliminate Marxist influence among the factory workers (Poya 2002: 156–62). In order to establish hegemony over the informal and educated sections of the proletariat, Islamist movements adopted leftist themes as part of their political discourse. They blamed the *jahiliyya* as responsible for the existing economic problems and social injustice and argued that complete Islamization of the society and the state was the only way to bring welfare and social justice. Furthermore, they effectively utilized anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist slogans, which are always appealing to the masses. By doing this, they prevented the Marxists from becoming the only political actor representing anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism.

The crisis of secular ideologies and the rise of Islamism

The national liberation movements in the Muslim world in the twentieth century were led mostly by secular elites. It was these elites that determined the developmental path of their countries after independence. These postcolonial states promised the masses economic welfare and independence from imperialism. In the 1950s and 1960s, many countries in the Middle East and North Africa, both of which have central importance for the subsequent development of Islamism, were ruled by secular and nationalist parties that declared themselves “socialist.” These parties promised economic development and distributive justice to gain the support of the masses. The second important source of their mass support was their propaganda against imperialism, which retained its existence in the region both economically and militarily during the Cold War, and against Zionism, which became a strong regional actor after the foundation of Israel in 1948. The victory of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–70) over Britain and France in the Suez Crisis (1956) was the pinnacle of the power of secular nationalism in the entire region. However, it did not take long for the secular nationalist regimes’ decline from that pinnacle to begin. Their failure to bring economic welfare became apparent from the second half of the 1960s on. Growing mass disillusionment was due not only to economic failure but also to the awareness of a rising capitalist class well connected with the so-called socialist regimes. The demagogic nature of the socialist rhetoric of these regimes became visible. As the struggle against imperialism and Zionism failed, this disappointment turned into anger. The quick and disastrous defeat of the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian armies, which joined together under Nasser’s leadership, against Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967 was the second biggest trauma for the Arab world after the foundation of Israel. That trauma directly determined the course of the rise of Islamism in Arab countries and also made a less direct but still profound impact upon the masses in Iran, Turkey, and other non-Arab Muslim countries.

The Islamist movement was not the only potential beneficiary of the crisis of the secular regimes. Indeed, radical leftist movements gained some power in countries like Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, while they experienced a considerable rise in Iran and Turkey in the 1970s. However, these movements were soon defeated due mainly to their lack of a coherent strategy of taking political power that could end the bourgeois hegemony over the working class. Hence, the radical left in Muslim countries entered into a long-lasting crisis about a decade earlier than the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. In short, the crisis of the secular regimes and the radical left laid the groundwork for the rise of Islamism.

A brief history of Islamism

The great trauma of 1967 not only benefited the Islamist groups in opposition, but also Saudi Arabia, which was the most prominent Islamist regime at that time. The Saudi kingdom, whose economic power increased astronomically thanks to its

increasing oil exports, became a rising star almost simultaneously with the decline of secular nationalism. As mentioned above, the Suez crisis of 1956 symbolizes the rise of secular nationalism, while the Six-Day War of 1967 symbolizes its decline. It is possible to explain the rise and fall of Saudi prestige in the Muslim world similarly, with reference to two other wars. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) started an oil embargo to protest the support of the United States and Western European countries to Israel during the Arab-Israeli War in 1973. Saudi Arabia, a key OPEC member, gained twofold from the embargo. First, it increased its economic power thanks to increasing oil prices due to the embargo. Saudi capital effectively used the petro-dollars to expand the system of Islamic banking. The second gain from the embargo was political. The effectiveness of the embargo created an image that the Saudis could find more effective solutions to the Palestinian question than the secular Arab regimes. The new international landscape after the oil embargo appeared as a golden opportunity for the Saudis, who intensified their propaganda campaign, already begun in the 1960s, to spread Wahhabi ideology in the Muslim world. During the 1970s and 1980s, generous Saudi funds helped establish numerous Islamic institutions wherever there was a sizeable (Sunni) Muslim population, from Southeast Asia to Western Europe. Among many activities, these institutions distributed a vast amount of Wahhabi literature for free. Saudi influence among the Sunnis thus increased considerably.

However, given the continuation of the US-Saudi alliance and the remaining severity of the Palestinian question, the resilience of the Saudis' prestige remained contested. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, which quickly enabled the new Islamist regime of Iran and its revolutionary discourse to earn high prestige among Muslims, increased that uncertainty. It soon became clear that the Saudis could not easily break Iranian influence only by anti-Shia propaganda. The occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in the same year as the Iranian Revolution gave the Saudis an opportunity to divert the attention of the Muslim masses from Iran and Palestine to Afghanistan. They quickly seized that opportunity by establishing a triple alliance with Pakistan and the United States in order to start an anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan.⁷ In addition to vast economic and military aid given to different groups in Afghanistan, commonly referred to as the Afghan mujahideen, the Saudis effectively mobilized their global Wahhabi network in order to recruit volunteers to join the Afghan mujahideen. As a result, Saudi Arabia succeeded considerably in portraying the Soviet Union as the greatest enemy and the Afghan war as the greatest jihad. This success translated into the peaking of Saudi prestige in the Muslim world in the 1980s. Everything seemed pretty positive for the Saudis by the year 1989. The Afghan jihad had finally succeeded. Islamic banks and the Wahhabi network, which played important roles in that outcome, were strengthened.

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the formative role of these three countries in the Afghan jihad, see Mamdani (2004).

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However, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 turned the Saudi project of hegemony in the Muslim world upside down. The Saudi elite could find no other option but to seek the support of the United States and accept the deployment of tens of thousands of foreign troops in their country. Although Iraq's disastrous defeat in January 1991 relieved Saudi Arabia, deployment of Western troops on the holy lands of Islam played into the hands of Iran, which attacked the Saudi regime for its alliance with imperialism. More importantly, the alliance of the Sunni jihadists and the Saudi regime received a serious blow from the presence of foreign troops in Saudi Arabia. Many jihadists who fought in Afghanistan started to question the legitimacy of the Saudi regime. The most prominent figure among them was Osama bin Laden (1957–2011), the leader of al-Qaeda, who left Saudi Arabia and declared the Saudi regime illegitimate in 1991. In short, Saudi Arabia's star, having risen during the Arab-Israeli War in 1973, quickly fell after the First Gulf War in 1991. The Arab Spring that started in December 2010 has already approached the shores of Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi elites are extremely nervous about the unfolding of those events. They are currently implementing a variety of policies in order to defeat the Arab Spring. They have increased the level of economic aid given to ordinary citizens in order to prevent the radicalization of the masses. Saudi Arabia is currently providing military assistance to other countries like Bahrain in order to crush the revolution outside its borders. Finally, it is trying to transform the ongoing revolutions into sectarian bloodshed by playing into the Shia-Sunni divide, as clearly seen in the ongoing civil war in Syria.

Pakistan is an example of semi-Islamism in power. It is a product of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 on the basis of the Hindu-Islam divide. Two of the most popular (and competing) Sunni Islamic currents in contemporary Pakistan, the Barelvi and the Deobandi schools, are all rooted in the pre-partition period. While the Barelvi school embraces popular devotion and mysticism and is closely associated to Sufism (White 2012: 182), the Deobandi school represents an interpretation of Islam that has certain similarities with Wahhabism in the sense of a strong emphasis on the return to seventh-century practices and a strong hostility toward heterodox interpretations of Islam such as Sufism (Kepel 2002: 58). Mawdudi, one of the principal ideologues of modern Islamism, was a member of the Deobandi school. Although Deobandis are numerically weaker than Barelvis, they have dominated Islamist politics in Pakistan (White 2012: 184).

Pakistan's character as an extremely diverse country both in terms of ethnicity and language forced the founders of the country, most of whom were secular (Noman 1990: 3-8), to construct the national identity mainly around religion. Although the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 after a national liberation war against Pakistan showed the limits of religious identity to maintain Pakistan's national/territorial unity, without any other effective tool to serve this end, emphasis on Islam was reinforced even further after 1971. Islam continues to be the only unifying element

in Pakistan, which lives in a state of permanent crisis.⁸ That is why the secular elites did not repress the Islamists in Pakistan as harshly as they did elsewhere, for instance, in Egypt (Kepel 2002: 59). Similar to Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere, Pakistan's secular elites have utilized Islamic discourse especially when repressing the radical left. Although the religious establishment (which is made up of religious scholars – the *ulema*-, personnel, and institutions) has failed to make Pakistan a completely theocratic state like Saudi Arabia, it has preserved its power relatively better than in many countries in the Muslim world. Moreover, ordinary people have viewed secularism as a manifestation of Western influence and elite domination. For these reasons, Pakistan has never undergone a fundamental secular transformation (Noman 1990: 33-34).

Hence, the further Islamization of Pakistan progressed on a different path. Due to the growing economic influence of Saudi Arabia over Pakistan's economy following the post-1973 oil boom and the pressure exerted by the Islamist organizations, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1928–79), a secular politician by Pakistani standards, made a number of sharia laws part of the legal system. Official declaration of the heterodox Ahmadiyya community as non-Muslim (a key Islamist demand rejected by the government in 1952) was also accepted by Bhutto in 1974 (Noman 1990: 7, 109). General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq (1924–88), who overthrew Bhutto in 1977, put several Islamic policies into practice. Zia supported the Afghan mujahideen enormously. He made *zakat* (a religious rule that requires better-off Muslims to give 2.5% of their wealth to poor people as alms at the end of the month of Ramadan every year) official by taxing 2.5% of all bank deposits during Ramadan every year. Those taxes funded the madrassas (schools where classes on religion make up the bulk of the curriculum), which provide meals and accommodation to their students, most of whose families were displaced and lost their sources of livelihood during the process of agrarian transformation (Alavi 2009). Zia also changed the laws to allow madrasa graduates to take teaching posts in public schools (Kepel 2002: 59). These policies of Islamization aimed to decrease the further radicalization of the poor and strongly tie the religious establishment to the regime. However, the Pakistani ruling elite did not entirely eliminate secularism in the country. For this reason, despite the significant erosion of secularism in daily life and politics, the Pakistani regime should be defined as semi-Islamist. This is one of the reasons why alongside the secular and semi-secular parties there are still many Islamist parties

8 In an essay written in 1973, Waheed-uz-Zaman, a well-known scholar of the time, illustrated well the logic of the renewed emphasis on Islam in Pakistan in the post 1971 period: "If we let go the ideology of Islam, we cannot hold together as a nation by any other means... If the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, God forbid, give up Islam, the Arabs yet remain Arabs, the Turks remain Turks, the Iranians remain Iranians, but what do we remain if we give up Islam?" (quoted in Richter 1979: 550). On the other hand, as the growing hatred and violence against the Christians and Shia Muslims by the Sunni extremists demonstrates, the Islamization process since the late 1970s has become a factor that threatens the national unity of Pakistan significantly.

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in opposition in Pakistan today.

The case of Iran makes possible the analysis of the transition of Islamism from opposition to state power. The Iranian Revolution (1979) is so far the only case in which an Islamist movement took power through a revolutionary overthrow of a secular regime by the masses. Although the revolution was a joint product of many Islamist, liberal, and radical leftist groups, the supporters of Khomeini succeeded in establishing hegemony over the liberal and the leftist opposition right before the revolution and destroying them after the revolution. For this reason, without forgetting the heterogeneity of the opposition that overthrew the Pahlavi monarchy, it is possible to define the period between 1979 and 1982 as a process of Islamic revolution.

The secular prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddeq (1882–1967), was overthrown in 1953 by a military coup backed by Britain and the United States. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–80) returned to Iran after the coup and ruled the country on the basis of a secular monarchy until 1979. During the 1960s, Pahlavi implemented fundamental reforms, popularly known as the “White Revolution,” which triggered Iran’s capitalist transformation. Pahlavi faced opposition from three different social groups during the reform process. First, the religious establishment, led by prominent religious scholars, felt uneasy about the erosion of their cultural and economic power by the shah. For instance, the Iranian clergy fiercely opposed the Land Reform Law of 1962 that threatened to undermine the economic power of the landowning clergy and the religious institutions, which are financed by land-based income (Keshavarzian 2007: 238–39). Khomeini, the leader of the clergy, was sent into exile in 1964 after giving a speech condemning the shah for destroying national sovereignty by allowing US military presence in Iran. After that point, the religious establishment became a major force of opposition. The second major opposition group was the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie (the *bazaaris*), which started to feel alienated from the monarchy because of its nurturing of the big (and secular) bourgeoisie at their expense. In addition to this discriminatory treatment of the *bazaaris*, the Pahlavi regime also took openly hostile measures against them. For instance, in 1963, the state started stricter tax audits against the merchants who were refusing to pay taxes and threatened to launch an anti-speculation campaign (Keshavarzian 2007: 240). These policies forced the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie to join the opposition almost simultaneously with the religious establishment under Khomeini. The continuing expansion of the Iranian economy until the mid-1970s prevented further radicalization of the *bazaaris*, whose income kept increasing despite their decreasing share in the national economy. However, following the sudden decrease in oil prices and rising inflation in 1975, the shah started a massive anti-speculation campaign that hit the *bazaaris* hard: two hundred and fifty thousand businesses were fined or closed down, eight thousand businessmen were jailed, and twenty-three thousand businessmen were expelled to remote areas of Iran (Keshavarzian 2007: 242). After that point, the

bazaaris became increasingly radicalized and enormously supported Khomeini.⁹

Finally, all parts of the working class were antagonized by the Pahlavi regime during the 1970s. While Marxist groups such as the Tudeh (the Iranian Communist Party; the name means “masses” in the Persian language) became stronger among the formal workers than other parts of the proletariat, Khomeini’s movement won the support of the informal workers in the shantytowns of Tehran and other big cities. In addition to liberals and leftists, Islamists also gained ground among the well-educated proletariat, whose expectations rose during the White Revolution but were not fulfilled in the subsequent period. As mentioned above, the Iranian Revolution is the historical period in which the Islamists utilized leftist discourses and slogans to the utmost. The situation was not born in a vacuum. Tudeh and the leftist guerilla organizations such as the People’s Fedayeen were strengthened in that period. This overall rise of the radical left in Iranian society gave way to an Islamist-leftist hybridization. By reinterpreting concepts in the Koran such as *mostakberin* (oppressors) and *mostazafin* (oppressed) with reference to Marxist concepts of “exploitation” and “class struggle,” the Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati (1933–77) became the leading theorist of the leftist version of Islamism. Shariati’s works inspired groups like the People’s Mujahideen, which played a crucial role in the Iranian Revolution (Kepel 2002: 72).¹⁰ After recognizing the strong influence of this leftist interpretation of Islam in Iran in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Khomeini also used the concepts of *mostakberin* and *mostazafin* quite often until his death (Abrahamian 1993: 47–51; Harman 1994; Kepel 2002: 39–41). The leftist turn in Khomeini’s political discourse did not scare the Islamist bourgeoisie much because it was instrumental in channeling the anger of the proletariat only toward the secular bourgeoisie and saving the Islamist bourgeoisie from that anger (Kepel 2002: 122; Poya 2002: 138).

Khomeini was equally careful when dealing with the secular opposition against the shah. He refrained from using a strictly religious language in order not to alienate the liberal opposition, which led the first big wave of protests against the shah in 1977. In November 1978, the leaders of the liberal opposition visited Khomeini in France and expressed their support to him. At that moment, Khomeini was declaring his goal as founding “an Islamic republic which would protect the independence and democracy of Iran.” A few months later, political circumstances

9 This does not mean that all bazaaris were Islamists supporting Khomeini. There were three sections of bazaaris in the opposition before the revolution. One section was composed of Khomeini supporters; the other two supported, respectively, the Liberation Movement of Iran and the National Front (Keshavarzian 2007: 247). This shows that the Islamist small and medium-sized bourgeoisie and the religious establishment constituted the core of the Khomeini movement, which hegemonized the other sections of the bazaaris in the process of hegemonizing the entire opposition. Similar to other supporters of the secular organizations, many bazaaris were suppressed by the Islamist regime in the early 1980s (Keshavarzian 2007: 254–55).

10 For more detailed information on the People’s Mujahideen, see Abrahamian (1989).

changed in his favor to such an extent that the liberals' support became less useful than before. Khomeini then declared democracy as "alien to Islam." Similarly, the Tudeh leadership declared Khomeini to be their guide before the revolution (Kepele 2002: 122). Khomeini was careful to preserve this support from the left until the revolution, but did not wait long to attack the leftists after the revolution. The ability to encourage secular political actors to participate in the revolution under an Islamist leadership while preparing to crush them when the circumstances ripened demonstrates Khomeini's political genius.

After the fall of Pahlavi in February 1979, Khomeini at first allied with the liberals to attack the radical left. After getting the first successful results, he then turned against the liberals. In fact, the taking of the US embassy personnel hostage by Khomeini supporters was a well-crafted tactical move against the liberals. Challenging US power with such a bold act was enough to convince the majority of the Iranian left once again to support Khomeini, who had attacked them only a few months ago, and made discrediting the liberals easier. The hostage crisis, which lasted 444 days, was the turning point in the transformation of the heterogeneous revolution into an Islamic revolution. After the end of the hostage crisis, Khomeini made another move, this time against the left, and destroyed all leftist organizations in the country, many of which backed him during his campaign against the liberals.

The Islamic revolution destroyed the secular bourgeoisie associated with the shah. The Islamist bourgeoisie filled the vacuum left behind. The state sector, which expanded by expropriating the wealth of the Pahlavi family and the secular bourgeoisie, became another key actor in the Iranian economy. The private sector, controlled by the Islamist bourgeoisie, and the state sector, controlled by the Islamist bureaucrats, some of whom became capitalists later by acquiring significant amounts of personal wealth, determined the capitalist character of the Islamist regime. The regime consolidated itself during the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988. In addition to the United States, Saudi Arabia also supported Iraq during the war in order to weaken the influence of the Iranian model in the Muslim world. Hundreds of thousands of Iranian soldiers died in the war. During the war, the Islamist regime established an extensive social security system, including numerous foundations and social aid organizations. The biggest of these organizations was the Foundation of the Oppressed and War Veterans (Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan; its current name is the Mostazafan Foundation of Islamic Revolution), a hybrid of a state-owned corporation and a social assistance organization, whose name itself shows the goal of the Islamist regime to establish hegemony over the lower classes. These organizations put the families of the soldiers who died or were wounded in the war on salary and distributed scholarships to their children. Today, young people from such backgrounds constitute the human source of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij organization (Basij-e Mostazafin; Mobilization of the Oppressed).

The first period of the Islamist regime ended with the death of Khomeini in 1989. Despite all its efforts to export its model to the Muslim world during the 1980s, the

Iranian regime ended up in relative isolation. Moreover, serious economic problems and the coming of a new generation who did not witness the revolution and the war challenged Islamist elites in their quest to preserve their hegemony over a rapidly changing society. Policies of privatization and opening up the economy started to be implemented under the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani between 1989 and 1997. Efforts to democratize the political system took place during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami between 1997 and 2005. However, those efforts failed to solve Iran's economic and political problems or bind younger generations to the system. The failure of those two politicians, considered the liberal faces of the Islamist regime, paved the road to the election as president of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an economically more populist and politically more authoritarian figure, in 2005, with the support of the lower classes. However, Ahmadinejad also failed to come up with any permanent solution for the problems of the regime. This failure became visible immediately after the presidential elections of 2009. The Basij militia attacked mass protests carried out by the supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi, the candidate of the alliance known as the Green Movement, who claimed that Ahmadinejad got reelected through a massive election fraud. The regime managed to repress the protests, but its crisis of hegemony became more difficult to hide. The landslide victory of Hassan Rowhani, a centrist figure between Ahmadinejad's authoritarianism and the Green Movement's reformism, in the presidential election in June 2013, with the support of Khatami, Rafsanjani, as well as many supporters of the Green Movement, is another indication of the Iranian regime's crisis of hegemony. It remains to be seen whether Rowhani will be able to overcome or at least alleviate this crisis and protect the regime from a popular revolt similar to (or even stronger than) the revolt in 2009.

In contrast to the successful revolutionary takeover of political power by Islamists in Iran, Islamists' attempts to take power in Algeria failed in the 1990s. Similar to the Khomeini movement in Iran, the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS), founded in Algeria in 1989, quickly grew in strength by establishing an alliance between the lower classes and the Islamist bourgeoisie (Kepel 2002: 168). The FIS received 48% of the votes in the parliamentary elections in December 1991. A military coup aiming to stop the FIS's march to power took place in January 1992. A bloody civil war between the Islamists and the military started. More radical elements within the FIS, which were less assertive before the civil war, suddenly became more active and independent. While the Islamic Salvation Army (Armée Islamique du Salut, AIS) fought as the military front of the FIS, radicals who split from the FIS fought under the banner of the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA). Militants who previously fought in Afghanistan played leadership roles within the GIA. In its initial period, the GIA gained the support of the shantytown population who voted for the FIS in the elections. The class alliance that underpinned the FIS's success thus crumbled. The horror of the bloody civil war, which took one hundred thousand lives within

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only five years, and the GIA's increasing influence over the lower classes forced the Islamist bourgeoisie to recognize the fact that it could not gain anything from a continuing civil war. The military regime initiated a dialogue with the FIS leadership at that crucial moment, and the AIS finally quit armed struggle. The GIA, which faced increasing isolation thereafter, divided into different wings and became less effective.

Egypt has a long history of Islamist politics. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded by Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) in 1928, became a source of inspiration to the Islamists worldwide mainly due to Sayyid Qutb's theory and practice. Nasser's secular regime executed Qutb in 1966. Nasser's repression also led many members of the Muslim Brotherhood to leave Egypt and go to Saudi Arabia. Some of them assumed prominent positions in Saudi universities and contributed to the development of Islamist ideology. Others played key roles in the establishment of the Islamic banking system and accumulated capital (Kepel 2002: 51). Islamists started to reclaim their influence in Egypt after the trauma of 1967. That process quickened with the presidency of Anwar Sadat (1918–81), who took office after the death of Nasser. Sadat made peace with the Islamists in order to overcome the regime's crisis of hegemony and to counter the influence of the radical left, which was a result of that crisis.

Islamists started to organize openly on the university campuses in 1973. They assisted the state security forces in repressing the leftists on the campuses. At the same time, Muslim Brotherhood members who got rich in Saudi Arabia were allowed to return to Egypt and join the ranks of the Egyptian bourgeoisie (Kepel 2002: 83). Different Islamist groups soon went outside the campuses and started organizing in the shantytowns. The honeymoon of Sadat and the Islamists did not last long. Islamists declared Sadat a traitor when he signed the Egypt–Israel peace treaty (1979), by which Egypt gave diplomatic recognition to Israel. The Islamic Jihad organization assassinated Sadat in 1981.

The new president, Hosni Mubarak, started a witch-hunt against radical groups. Although Mubarak put certain limitations on the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, he refrained from completely repressing it because of the organization's strong influence in society and conciliatory attitude toward the regime. Groups more radical than the Muslim Brotherhood regained their strength in the shantytowns in the 1990s. The Imbaba shantytown, home to one-tenth of the population of Cairo, became a liberated zone for those radicals. While the civil war was continuing in Algeria, some groups resorted to armed struggle in order to start a similar war in Egypt. Similar to Algeria, the Islamist bourgeoisie of Egypt, having lost control over the radicals, made peace with the secular regime in the Nonviolence Initiative of 1997. Radicals tried to sabotage that initiative by massacring sixty-two foreign tourists in the Luxor Temple on 17 November 1997. Increasing unemployment caused by the damage to the tourism sector due to that incident led to the isolation of the radicals from the masses. Subsequent state repression weakened the radicals

further.

The determined struggle of the masses gathered in Tahrir Square overthrew Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt by dictatorship for thirty years, on 11 February 2011. Islamists, having at first refrained from participating in the revolution developing outside their control, joined the revolution when it became clear that Mubarak's downfall was inevitable. Islamists of all brands, from liberal Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood to Salafis and the Gamaa Islamiya, have participated in the post-revolutionary political process and gained strength. As the oldest and most experienced Islamist organization of the country (and probably the entire region), the Muslim Brotherhood was more prepared than others to make a bid for political power. Over the years it developed an extensive social assistance network serving basic social service needs of a large number of people. For instance, the Islamic Medical Association run by the organization was serving approximately two million people annually by 2013 (Brooke 2015: 2). Mohammad Morsi, the candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party (the legal political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood), was elected president with 51.7% of the vote in the second round of elections in June 2012. Morsi's increasingly authoritarian rule and failure to meet the economic demands of the lower classes quickly led to mass disillusionment. Mammoth demonstrations that started on 30 June 2013 in Tahrir Square and the Ittihadiya district in Cairo as well as squares in major cities throughout Egypt demanded Morsi's resignation and opened up a new wave of the revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood did not give up and organized counterdemonstrations. On 3 July 2013, the Egyptian army staged a coup in order to prevent a popular revolution and to restore the power it lost in the post-Mubarak period by receiving the support of the revolting masses. The military regime killed more than one thousand and arrested thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members after the coup. It also seized the economic enterprises and social service organizations run by the Muslim Brotherhood (Brooke 2015). Similar to the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood by the Nasserist regime in the 1950s and 1960s, which led to the formation and spread of more radical Islamist groups such as the Islamic Jihad and Gamaa, the current wave of repression of the Muslim Brotherhood seems to be leading to a new wave of radicalization among its young supporters (Yenigün 2016: 2315).

Islamism has been important for Turkish politics not only due to the relatively recent international context that is discussed throughout this essay, but also because of Turkey's own experience with politics with Islamic references at least since the late nineteenth century. Islamism became a political alternative for the first time within the context of the existential crisis of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many intellectuals and political elites supported the idea of reorganizing the empire along more religious lines in order to overcome its apparent decline. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey (1923), the relationship between Islam and politics quickly transformed into a hotly contested terrain involving the secularist elites ruling the

new republic and the Islamist opposition. The contestation between the secularists and the Islamists increased especially during times of political reform, such as the abolition of the caliphate (1924), the abrogation of the constitutional provision that mentioned Islam as the religion of the state (1928), and the introduction of the principle of secularism into the constitution (1937). This contestation has evolved with the transition to a multiparty system after 1946, in which electoral competition between political parties made religious discourse and reforms related to religious education and practices crucial elements in Turkish politics. The legalization of the Arabic-language *azan* (Islamic call to prayer) is a prime example of this transformation. The Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP), then the ruling party of the single-party regime, had banned the Arabic-language *azan* in 1932 and replaced it with a Turkish-language *azan*. The Demokrat Parti's (Democratic Party, DP) election victory in 1950, which ended the 27-year-long single-party rule, ended the ban. Ironically, alongside the DP deputies, the deputies of the CHP, the party that had established the ban in the first place, also voted in favor of lifting the ban (Bardakçı 2006; 2010). This case demonstrates that even the CHP, the most secular establishment party in Turkish politics, could not ignore the mass appeal of religious motifs in the new political playground defined by electoral competition. The approach to Islam in public life retained its importance as a theme of political contestation between different (more or less) secular political parties in the first two decades of the multiparty system. There was not any Islamist mass party in Turkey in the 1950s and 1960s.

Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011) turned Turkish Islamism into an independent and stable political movement in the 1970s.¹¹ Erbakan was elected to the presidency of the Union of Chambers in Turkey with the support of small and medium-sized capitalists from Anatolia, but was soon deposed from that post by the center-right Adalet Partisi (Justice Party, AP) government. Erbakan's subsequent application to the AP to present his candidacy for the 1969 parliamentary elections was also rejected. He then got elected to parliament as an independent deputy from Konya, a traditional stronghold of the Islamists. He founded the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party, MNP) in 1970. The MNP and the subsequent parties founded by Erbakan are branded as the National Vision movement (Milli Görüş). The MNP soon became a representative of the small- and medium-scale, non-monopolistic capitalists of Anatolia, who felt alienated from the AP's policy of supporting big capital against them. The party was banned in 1971 on grounds of its activities against the constitutional principle of secularism. Erbakan soon founded the Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party, MSP). The MSP won 11.8% of the votes in 1973 and 8.5% in 1977. It participated in coalition governments with the CHP in 1974 and with the AP and the Nationalist Action Party in 1975 and 1977. Radical Islamism became more popular in Turkey after the Iranian Revolution. On

¹¹ For a detailed investigation of different Islamic circles before 1990, see Çakır (1990).

6 September 1980, six days before the military coup, radical Islamists turned the MSP's "Save Jerusalem Meeting" in Konya into their own show of strength. That event demonstrated that Erbakan did not have total control over the more radical elements within the MSP.

The MSP was banned after the military coup of 12 September 1980. Nevertheless, the military junta made religion classes compulsory in secondary education and also dramatically increased the number of religious vocational middle and high schools known as İmam Hatip schools. By doing so, the military junta hoped to decrease the ideological influence of the Marxist left in Turkish society by utilizing religion. The generals thought that they would be able to keep the Islamization process under their control. They certainly did not expect that these policies would play into the hands of the Islamists in the long run. When the military junta allowed the establishment of political parties in 1983 as part of a controlled transition back to parliamentary rule, the supporters of Erbakan founded the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP). The ban on the political leaders of the pre-1980 period was lifted in 1987, which allowed Erbakan to become the leader of the RP. The party benefited tremendously from the political vacuum in the shantytowns created by the repression of the Marxist left by the military dictatorship. It gradually won the support of the shantytown populations of the big cities like Ankara and Istanbul in the 1990s by effectively using populist slogans such as the "Just Order" and regularly distributing significant quantities of social assistance, including both cash and in-kind transfers. The RP successfully kept together the Islamist bourgeoisie and the proletariat as well as different types of Islamist activists. This success bore its first positive results in the municipal elections in 1994, when an Islamist party won the municipalities of Ankara and Istanbul for the first time. That was the first big shock to the secularists in Turkey, who eventually witnessed electoral victories of the Islamists in (almost) every election after 1994. In the parliamentary elections of 1995, the RP received the most votes (21%) of any party.

During the rise of the RP in the 1990s, Islamist capital underwent a significant transformation. Some Islamic companies captured the opportunities that emerged out of the neoliberal transformation of the Turkish economy and transformed themselves from medium-scale capital to big capital. The term "Anatolian tigers," an analogy made between the East Asian tigers and the rising capitalists of Anatolia, became popular during that time. Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, MÜSİAD), was founded in 1990 as the representative of the Islamist bourgeoisie, which was able to compete somewhat with the secular bourgeoisie represented by Türkiye Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, TÜSİAD), albeit still much weaker than the secular bourgeoisie. The MÜSİAD supported the RP (and is currently supporting the AKP).

The RP formed a coalition government with the center-right party Doğru Yol Partisi (True Path Party, DYP) in 1996. Erbakan became the first Islamist prime

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minister of the Republic of Turkey. The secular capitalists and the military generals, who felt very uneasy about the political situation, soon started a coordinated attack against the RP. The decisions made during the meeting of the National Security Council on 28 February 1997 meant a military memorandum against the RP-DYP coalition. The coalition government was forced to resign six months after the 28 February memorandum. Soon after, the Constitutional Court shut down the RP and put a political ban on Erbakan for violating the constitutional principle of secularism.

Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party, FP) soon replaced the RP. In the parliamentary elections of 18 April 1999, the FP took 15.4% of the popular vote and became the third largest party in the parliament. Recai Kutan and Abdullah Gül competed for party leadership in the first congress of the FP in 2000. That was the first leadership competition in the National Vision movement, which developed for almost thirty years under the undisputed leadership of Erbakan. The leadership competition was seen by many as a battle between the “traditionalists” (represented by Erbakan’s close aide, Kutan) and the “reformists” (represented by Gül) within Turkish Islamism. It certainly reflected the Islamist bourgeoisie’s search for an alternative leader. During the 1970s, when it lacked sufficient capital accumulation to transform itself into big, monopolistic capital, the Islamist bourgeoisie supported Erbakan. Erbakan’s economic policy was to carry out “state-directed industrialisation whose benefits would accrue to the small businessmen of small towns” through “measures to disperse capital accumulation geographically and to reverse the tendency of economic concentration” (Keyder 1987: 213). As it started down the path of becoming monopolistic finance-capital through a deeper integration with the capitalist world economy in the late 1990s, the Islamist bourgeoisie started to view Erbakan’s line as old-fashioned. It started searching for a younger and reformist leader who could represent their interests better than Erbakan.

Although Gül lost the leadership race in the FP, reformists soon prevailed in the entire movement. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emerged as a perfect candidate for a new Islamist leadership. Erdoğan had enough charisma and political experience to gain the support of the masses living in the shantytowns. Moreover, partly due to his own business experience, he had a clear understanding of the Islamist bourgeoisie’s new requirements in the age of neoliberalism. Erdoğan and his associates founded the AKP in 2001 and won a quick victory in the parliamentary elections of 3 November 2002, taking 34% of the popular vote. Erdoğan was the prime minister of the country between 2003 and 2014, winning significant victories in each new election. The AKP defeated the military memorandum of 27 April 2007 against Abdullah Gül’s first bid for presidency by taking 47% of the total vote in the parliamentary elections of 22 July 2007. Gül was elected to the presidency after the elections and became the first Islamist president of the Republic of Turkey. The AKP took 50% of the popular vote in the parliamentary elections of 12 June 2011.

Turkish economy and society has been experiencing a significant Islamization process, especially since the AKP’s landslide victory in the elections of 22 July 2007.

While supporting the Islamist capitalists generously by mobilizing all economic means within the reach of the state, the AKP government has used a series of punitive measures (such as handing down huge tax fines, reduction of state support, and exclusion from big government contracts) against secular capitalists such as the Koç and Doğan holdings. Although these policies have not ended the secular bourgeoisie's dominant position in the Turkish economy, they have nevertheless managed to dramatically improve the position of the Islamist bourgeoisie as opposed to the secular bourgeoisie. The government budget allocated to the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Directorate of Religious Affairs) has increased astronomically, and the institution has become increasingly assertive in cultural and political affairs (Peker 2012). The recent education reform that seemingly increased the years of schooling in fact allows students to pursue religious education after primary school. It also permits families to pull their children out of formal schooling after primary education, which could harm the educational attainment of girls from poorer sections of the Islamist constituency (Finkel 2012). Astronomical tax hikes on alcoholic beverages and administrative restrictions upon alcohol consumption are other manifestations of the ongoing Islamization process (Çağaptay and Ersöz 2010; Gürsel 2013). Overall, as a successful case of an emerging Islamist bourgeoisie challenging the secular bourgeoisie by establishing a clear hegemony over the poorest segments of the proletariat, the AKP experience has gained a special place in the global history of Islamist movements.¹²

Despite this success, however, recent developments have indicated that the prospects of AKP rule are far from clear. A small-scale, local protest against the destruction of Gezi Park (near Taksim Square at the center of Istanbul) for the construction of a shopping mall designed like an Ottoman-era army barracks, a project designed by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the AKP government with close supervision and advocacy by Erdoğan himself, turned into a nationwide popular revolt on 31 May 2013 against the neoliberal, authoritarian, and Islamist policies of the AKP government. Although the revolt, which mobilized millions of people all over the country in June 2013, could not topple the AKP government, it nevertheless made clear that the AKP has lost the ability to rule

12 The Islamist bourgeoisie has always been the hegemonic force within the Islamist movement in Turkey from its time of inception in the early 1970s. The transition from the RP to the AKP reflects the transition of the Islamist bourgeoisie from small- and medium-scale capital to large-scale finance capital. My analysis is therefore entirely different from Cihan Tuğal's argument that the Islamist bourgeoisie became the hegemonic force within the Islamist movement only during the AKP period (2009: 8). The empirical material in Tuğal's study can be interpreted well within the framework that I propose here. In his new book, Tuğal correctly suggests that Erdoğan defended "the economic interests of provincial businessmen and traders" (Tuğal 2016: 68). However, elsewhere in the book Tuğal talks about "the absorption of Islamism into capitalism" in Turkey since the mid-1990s (Tuğal 2016: 122). These two arguments are obviously contradictory. Since the Islamists have clearly defended the economic interests of a section of the bourgeoisie, arguing that it was later on absorbed into capitalism does not make any sense.

Turkey with stability. The strengthening of the perception of Erdoğan as a source of instability produced two important results. First, the United States, which already had disagreements with Erdoğan regarding his attitudes toward Israel and the crises in Syria and Egypt, distanced itself further from him and started to give stronger signals of support to the mainstream political actors that are alternatives to Erdoğan. The second outcome, related to the first one, is the worsening of the relations between the Erdoğan leadership and Fethullah Gülen's organization.¹³ Gülen's network has been sharing the United States' criticism of Erdoğan's foreign policy for a long time. Moreover, there had been serious contradictions between Gülen and Erdoğan regarding important internal affairs, such as Erdoğan's plan to close down the private educational institutions that prepare students for university entrance examinations (which have provided a significant financial and organizational source for the Gülen network for a long time) and Gülenist cliques within the police forces and the judiciary. Erdoğan's weakening after the popular uprising encouraged the Gülenists to take a much firmer stance against Erdoğan. This has led to the giant anti-graft and anticorruption operations against the AKP government on 17 and 25 December 2013, which were carried out by Gülenists within the police and the judiciary. After the operation, Erdoğan declared the Gülen organization an internal enemy. The group was then officially declared as the Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü (The Fethullahist Terrorist Organization, FETÖ). This is the largest split within Turkish Islamism in its recent history. Despite being weakened by the popular revolt and the anti-graft operation, Erdoğan's AKP managed to take 43% of the total vote in the municipal elections on 30 March 2014, thus remaining the largest party in Turkey. On 10 August 2014, in the first round of Turkey's first presidential elections by a popular vote, Erdoğan was elected president with 51.7 % of the vote. In addition to the secular-left opposition (symbolized by the Gezi revolt) and the Erdoğan-Gülen split and animosity, the Kurdish movement has also posed an enormous challenge to the AKP's attempt at hegemony.

The general election of 7 June 2015 was a turning point for the AKP and all other political actors in Turkey. The AKP received 40.87% of the votes (9% less than the general elections in July 2011 and 2% less than the local elections in March 2014) and lost its parliamentary majority for the first time. Another historic aspect of 7 June 2015 was the success of the Halkların Demokrasi Partisi (People's Democratic Party, HDP) which is composed of the Kurdish movement and various leftist groups. The HDP obtained 13.12% of the total vote. This was an alarming outcome for the AKP.

Nevertheless, the incompetence of all of AKP's opponents was (once again) proven by the post-election developments. Erdoğan managed to marginalize all voices within the AKP (especially prevalent among the Islamist capitalists) supporting the formation of a coalition government with the CHP for the sake of

13 For an introductory (and journalistic) account of the Gülen organization see Filkins (2016).

overcoming the political instability. At the same time the so-called “solution process”, referring to the negotiations and *de facto* ceasefire between the government and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), was declared null and the war restarted. Two suicide attacks of the ISIL against the demonstrations organized by the Kurdish and socialist movements (massacring 33 people in Suruç town near the Syrian border on 20 July 2015 and 103 people in Ankara on 10 October 2015) accompanied this process. A new general election was scheduled for 1 November 2015. This election was organized under exceptional circumstances and a *de facto* – not *de jure* yet-state of emergency. With the exception of the AKP, no party was able to carry out a real nationwide election campaign. Having been released from the burden of the so-called “solution process”, which did not pay well in terms of votes, the AKP carried out an effective campaign with a heavy dose of Turkish nationalist discourse. The party received 49.5% of the popular vote. While a small portion of this 8.7 percentage point increase in the AKP vote (compared to the election five months ago) came from the Sunni Kurds, the majority of it came from the Sunni Turks, which previously supported the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party) and several small rightist and Islamist parties. This shift was massive enough to compensate the Kurdish votes lost to the HDP.

Similar to the previous election victories, the AKP’s victory on 1 November 2015 did not bring political stability. On 15 July 2016, Gülenist officers and (probably) some secular and pro-Western elements within the military made a coup attempt. Compared to all previous coups and coup attempts in the history of the Turkish Republic, the coup attempt on July 15 seems amateurishly organized and therefore quickly failed in a few hours. Putschists killed 248 people who resisted the coup attempt including civilians, policemen, and soldiers. The government declared a state of emergency on 20 July 2016. So far over 85,000 people have been fired from state institutions including the army, police, the judiciary, public schools, and universities (Öztürk 2016). This number will probably keep increasing in the coming months. Some of the people fired have links with Gülen. On the other hand, a large (and rapidly expanding) portion of the public employees fired consists of HDP supporters and socialists who have no relationship whatsoever with the Gülenists. The members of the Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of the Public Workers’ Unions, KESK), the only pro-labor, leftist, and relatively combative public sector union of the country, have been specifically targeted.

The coup attempt demonstrated that the AKP is still unable to control the state apparatus entirely. Given the increasing political instability, mounting economic problems, and successive foreign policy failures, it is too early – and therefore wrong- to declare the AKP triumphant for the coming years. However, the AKP’s success (especially in terms of establishing hegemony over the Sunni Turkish workers) should be taken very seriously in discussions about Turkey’s future. AKP’s uninterrupted rule in the last fifteen years demonstrates Turkish Islamism’s

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success in transforming the state and society.¹⁴ The AKP is currently working on a constitutional amendment for the transition to a super-presidential system without any significant mechanism of checks and balances.

Conclusion

Islamism is a political ideology that attributes the socioeconomic problems of the Muslim world in the modern era to an alienation from Islam and a return to *jahiliyya*. It proposes the establishment of a new state and society that are thought to fit Islamic principles. It is the political expression of the Islamist bourgeoisie's quest to become the dominant class by establishing hegemony over the proletariat. Islamists can take a revolutionary or a reformist stance while in opposition. They quickly become a force of the status quo after taking political power. The crisis of the secular regimes and the radical leftist movements that started in the mid-1960s provided the background to the rise of Islamist movements of different types. While Islamists successfully established hegemony over the proletariat and took power with a revolution in Iran, they lost their hegemony and the struggle for power in Algeria in the 1990s. Islamists have recently entered into a new struggle for political power in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria in the wake of the Arab Spring, which started in December 2010. By simultaneously adjusting to neoliberalism and establishing hegemony over the proletariat, the AKP has come a long way in terms of the Islamization of the state and society in Turkey. However, recent developments in the region indicate that the future prospects for the Islamist movements and regimes are far from certain.

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