

ISLAM OUTSIDE THE ARAB WORLD

edited by

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ABSTRACT

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Today about 85 per cent of the world's Muslim population live outside the Arab world and due to population growth, 'missionary' (*dawa*) endeavours, and migration, the number of Muslims in non-Arab nations is rapidly increasing. Yet many people in the West conceive of Islam as an 'Arab' religion and it is only recently that a more thorough scholarly interest in other parts of the Muslim world has emerged. This volume presents the spread and character of Islam in many non-Arab countries in Africa (south of the Sahara), Asia, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas. It focuses particularly on the contemporary situation, but also presents an historical background. Much attention is devoted to Sufism, which appears to be the predominant form of Islam in most non-Arab countries, as well as to the growing significance of Islamism, which challenges both secularism and the Sufi forms of Islam. An extensive introduction provides a general background account of the origin, expansion, and characteristics of Islam.

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Chapter Six

Turkey

Svante Cornell and Ingvar Svanberg

The events from 1994 to the present day have accentuated the inherent difficulties of the Turkish state's relationship with religion. First of all, religion has re-emerged in the open in society in a way unseen since the republic was proclaimed in 1923. The tension between secularists and Islamists in the political sphere has increased, and polarisation seems on the increase throughout society. Deeper in society, the sectarian fragmentation of Islam is possibly growing, and certainly more publicised than ever. The Turkish public, which on the whole – this is especially true for the secular establishment – has a poor knowledge of Islam both generally and in Turkey, is suddenly exposed to extensive media coverage of the activities of Islamist groups. Moreover, the existence of a non-Sunni minority of Alevis which may compose up to one third of the population of the country was news to many Turks, not to mention foreigners. As mainly foreign observers are warning of an Islamic revolt or a development of the Algerian type, Turks are quick to explain that Turkey is not Algeria. However, there is a very poor awareness of Islam in Turkey, as well as in Europe, although scholarly interest is increasing. In Turkey, this ignorance has led to the spontaneous support for the military-led efforts to suppress religious radicals and conservatives, which many secularists adopt without questioning its virtues and drawbacks.

Historical background

Since 1923, Turkey has been a heavily Western-orientated secular republic. The role of Islam in society has varied with the political leadership of the state. However, in general it can be said that the main tendency has been a constant pressure from large parts of the population to lend more importance to Islam, whereas this has been resisted by the secular élite, a policy warranted by the strongly secularist army. In terms of history, Turkey's relation to Islam can be called a U-turn. Turkey is the main successor state of the Ottoman Empire, which was based not on an ethnic identity but on the religious identity of Islam. The sultan of the empire was also the caliph, the spiritual leader of all Muslims in the world. By contrast,

the republic founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 was based on the concept of Turkish ethnicity and staunchly rejective of religion.

However, the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic cannot be termed a 'U-turn' of the 1920s. The Westernisation of the Ottoman Empire began in the middle of the nineteenth century. Throughout the century, the empire had suffered an increasingly rapid disintegration, with not only its European parts but also subsequently its Middle Eastern provinces rising up in nationalist rebellions, eagerly supported by its numerous enemies; and nationalism was a concept the Ottoman Empire was particularly ill-fit to tackle. It recognised minorities – but only religious minorities – through the *millet* system, whereby the religious minorities had a significant level of autonomy. As an answer to these developments, an awareness grew in the empire that it had lagged behind the West. An urge for modernisation emerged, as the empire was seen to be in rapid decay. This urge for modernisation was paralleled by a movement which saw reform as necessary not only in regard to the state and military but also to the entire society. A national project was necessary to prevent the total dissolution of the empire. Among the military élite, a movement known as the 'young Ottomans', or later 'young Turks', emerged, which sought a thorough transformation of the society and state. Ziya Gökalp, the author of *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (The Essence of Turkishism), is often credited as one of the earliest and most influential theorists of Turkish nationalism. His motto was 'Turkify, Islamise and Modernise', a blueprint for a modern Turkish identity, still heavily coloured by Islam. However, inspired by European practices, Gökalp also promoted the separation of Islam from the state. This illustrates the fact that modernisation in Turkey since the times of the Ottoman Empire has been equated with Westernisation.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of confusion, where the social structure of the empire was challenged by refugee flows and a generally chaotic external environment. As nationalist, separatist forces among minorities were strengthened, Islamic militancy increased among the Muslim population; and as tensions between religious groups grew, Russia, France and Great Britain claimed a role as protectors of religious minorities in the empire – a notable humiliation for the sultan. Furthermore, with the dismantling of the European parts of the empire, large refugee flows of Muslims from these areas were migrating to the Anatolian heartland, which increased the Islamic demographic character of Anatolia, which until then had been largely multi-cultural. The official Islam of the empire was Hanafi Sunni. The religious hierarchy was strict and represented a normative Sunnism, which guided education and the judiciary. Sufi orders were viewed with suspicion and resisted by the state. Nevertheless, their strength increased during the last decades of the empire. This was particularly true for the Naqshbandi, Qadiri, Bektashi and Rifai orders.



Kurdish-speaking Muslims in a Central Anatolian village (photo: Ingvar Swanberg, 1990).

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was heavily influenced by the young Turk movement, but he differed from it, and from Ziya Gökalp, in one decisive respect – he saw Islam as one of the main obstacles in Turkey's Westernisation and modernisation – leaving 'modernisation' and 'Turkification' from Gökalp's motto, two paths on which Atatürk capitalised. The Ottoman empire was thus transformed into a modern, secular nation-state: the Turkish republic. With the proclamation of the republic, the sultanate was abolished, and so was the caliphate in March 1924. The educational system was immediately affected, and religious education was successively abolished in the country. Atatürk was also very suspicious of Sufi orders, which he saw as potentially subversive, and prohibited them from operating. This was unsuccessful, however, largely due to the secret and

underground nature of these associations. Hence the orders hibernated and have recently seen a resurgence. Atatürk's reforms have often been interpreted as an attempt to eradicate Islam from Turkish society, which is far from the truth. Even more far-fetched are comparisons with Albania's Enver Hoxha period or Stalinist Soviet Union.

Turkey under Atatürk was not an atheist regime. As İlber Ortaylı has rightly observed, Turkish leaders have always been buried with religious funerals, as opposed to the leaders of the French revolution or Bolshevik Soviet Union. Religious holidays were always observed, and mosques have always existed. Atatürk's objective, though, was clear: to prevent religion from being used for political purposes. To this end, the Directorate for Religious Affairs, *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, was founded with the aim of ensuring a state monopoly and control over religious affairs, and to subordinate the mosques to the state, thereby pre-empting anti-state propaganda. Similarly, theological faculties were introduced at universities. Atatürk's brand of Turkish nationalism was in retrospect a masterpiece of nation-building. It was not based on ethnicity as such, but was inclusive of all nationalities and minorities residing within the territorial boundaries of the republic. According to the parole *Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*, 'happy he who calls himself a Turk', whoever was willing to take part in the nation-building process was welcome to do so. To a remarkable extent, considering the ethnic and cultural melting pot that Anatolia was, Atatürk succeeded in his endeavour. The one and only exception was the 'feudal' Kurdish society in the southeast which remained unintegrated, whereas Kurds all over Turkey were assimilated into a Turkish identity. The official history-writing sought to stress the link to Central Asian nomadic tribes, and to minimise the historical links to the Islamic world as well as the Byzantine heritage. As a corollary, the centre of gravity of the Islamic world moved from Istanbul towards the Arab heartlands of the Middle East, which was going through a re-Islamisation. Hence Kemalism sought to give primacy to nationalism over religion, and Turkish identity came to be associated with language and territory instead of religion. This necessitated a gigantic effort in terms of popular education. As Anatolia was heterogeneous in terms of language and culture, the 'second army' of teachers would socialise the young into a strong Turkish national identity. However, this task proved to be more difficult than expected. The country became increasingly divided between a secular élite and a conservative rural mass. Social change proved distinctively slower than political change.

Hence, as multi-party democracy was permitted in 1946, the first free elections led to the victory of the Democratic Party which eased the harsh restrictions on religious life. This amounted to an Islamic revival. In the 1970s a religious party emerged in parliament, and reached the government through coalitions, which extended Islamic influence in the state. During the 1980s, Özal's liberal policies toward religion led to the building of



Slaughtering a sheep in connection with the *Id al-Adha* festival in a suburb of Istanbul (photo: Ingvar Swanberg, 1979).

thousands of mosques and religious schools (*İmani-Hatip*). Finally, the 1990s saw the dramatic increase in popularity and power of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), which culminated in it becoming the senior partner in a coalition government in the summer of 1996. Before moving to the role of religion in Turkish politics today, however, it is necessary to see the structure of Islam in the country.

Religion and political culture in Turkey

Despite the clearly secular character of Turkish society, this image is blurred in certain respects. To the foreign observer, a striking relationship between

the concepts of 'Turk' and 'Muslim' is present. In this context, it is interesting to note that when confronted with a foreign practitioner of another religion, Turks, including Islamists, have no prejudice but are only interested in learning about foreign religious practices. On the other hand, Turkish converts to Christianity, especially, are viewed as traitors and persecuted to an extent which has forced most of them to leave the country, according to the observations of several Catholic and Protestant priests. This circumstance seems to fit badly with the generally secular and tolerant character of the Turkish society, particularly as it is not paralleled in many Muslim societies. Indeed, many states with Muslim majority have no difficulty harbouring linguistically similar but religiously differing minorities. Examples are the Christians in Indonesia or in Palestine, or the Hindus and Christians in Bangladesh. In Turkey, however, there seems to be a reigning paradigm that a 'Turk' is by necessity a 'Muslim' – and indeed, 99 per cent of the population are nominally Muslims. Non-Muslims are not viewed as Turks, even if they are Turkish citizens.

This attitude is interesting in historical view as the Ottoman Empire never was a fully Islamic state, but rather a flexible system able to respond to the needs of a multi-religious empire. As Ilter Turan has noted, 'Turk' designates an ethno-linguistic characteristic of the political community. Further, he notes that the concept of 'Muslim' is not related to whether the person is a believer or not, but to an Islamic ancestry, hence a cultural tradition. Even with the creation of the secular republic, perhaps even strengthened by it, the religious appartenance was a necessary condition for membership of the political community. This factor is one which should be recalled when analysing the Islamisation of Turkish society. Indeed, although it might seem paradoxical in view of recent events, this tendency was strengthened and given official sanction by the military coup in 1980. As the military were determined to crush left-wing extremism and weaken right-wing nationalism, it encouraged the moderate increase of Islamic observance. This has been called a 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis'.

Sufism

Sunni Islam is the majority form of Islam in Turkey, thought to be the belief of 70 to 80 per cent of the population. The bulk of the remaining 20–30 per cent is made up of by the Alevis. Smaller religious minorities are, in particular, Greek Orthodox (2,500), Armenians (40,000), Assyrian Christians (10,000) and Jews (19,000–26,000). Within the majority religion, Hanafi Sunni Islam, the importance of Sufi orders is not to be underestimated, notably not in politics. The main Sufi order is the Naqshbandi, in Turkish Nakshibendi. The Naqshbandi order posed from the early years of the republic a direct threat to the state. In fact, Sufi orders

were banned largely due to the identification of the Shaykh Said rebellion of 1925 with the Naqshbandiyya.

The Naqshbandi order differs from many other Sufi orders in its relative lack of mysticism. Rather, it is characterised by sobriety and discipline. It is known for an 'inward-looking attitude' which differs significantly from smaller groups like the Aczmeni, whose *zikir* (Ar. *dhikr*) forms of prayer are characterised by a significant level of mysticism. Simultaneously, as far as activism is concerned, the Naqshbandis are more active than other Sufis. This is the case precisely because other Sufi brotherhoods are largely interested in achieving closeness to, or even unity with, God by mystical means on an individual level. The Naqshbandis, on the other hand, follow the teachings of the Prophet more strictly and are more susceptible to politicisation. As the sociologist Şerif Mardin argues, 'the Naqshbandiya order has always been alert for opportunities to use power for what is considered the higher interests of Muslims'. It has also always had elaborate instruments for political mobilisation. The Naqshbandi order, moreover, is not a homogeneous unit. It is split into several wings, and this fragmentation is not totally counteracted even by its leaders. Rather, initiative by local leaders is encouraged and is one of the strengths of the order. The main sections of the order, believed to be followed by 2.5 million people, are the reportedly statist and nationalist Mensil (the aim), which is active in western Turkey; Çarsamba (Wednesday), active mainly in Istanbul and in organising religious education; and Iskender Pasha, reportedly critical of Erbakan, in central and western Turkey, which aims to infiltrate the administration in order to Islamise it.

During the twentieth century the Naqshbandi order in Turkey has been represented by two main figures. One was Mehmet Zahid Kotku, a follower of the powerful nineteenth century Shaykh Ziyaeddin Gümüşhanevi. Kotku's circle in the 1960s included a number of key figures in Turkish society of later decades, including the Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan and president Turgut Özal's brother Korkut Özal, as well as Hasan Aksay and Fehmi Adak. Kotku died in 1980 and was succeeded by Esat Çosan, a high-ranking professor of theology. The second main figure was Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1874–1960), who established relations with the Young Turks during the early part of the century. Nursi was, thus, very politicised to begin with, a circumstance which changed later, as he abandoned politics, believing that in any case religious mobilisation would have direct political consequences. Nursi was a travelling preacher, who realised that traditional theology was not relevant enough. He developed an interest in science and capitalised on education as the key to his movement. Said Nursi interpreted the Quran in the light of modernity in his *Risale-i Nur* (the Epistle of Light). Through this work, which is also disseminated through audio tapes, his teachings are spread. Associating with modernity, however, did not mean accepting the secular republic. In fact, Rainer Herrmann

illustrates the Turkish contradiction between Atatürk, the seculariser and Westerniser of the country, and Nursi, the representative of 'the believing countryside'. Nursi was, then, the founder of the Nurcu, and a constant source of unease for the secular state, which led the government to send him into years of internal exile. The Nurcu has today developed into a brotherhood of its own, separate from the Naqshbandiyya. One main difference lies in the perception of modernity and science. In fact, the Nurcu has become known as an order advocating the union of Islam with modernity. This does not prevent it from being anti-capitalist, promoting Islamic social justice in its place.

The so-called Fethullahis, founded and led by Fethullah Gülen, is the clearest focus within the Nurcu movement. Fethullah Gülen, as Rainer Herrmann states, one of the most powerful figures in the Turkish society, is a person whose photograph did not appear in the media until 1994. He is widely known as Hojaefendi in Turkey. Gülen's understanding of Islam, inherited from Said Nursi but altered, preaches allegiance to the state and support for democracy, modernisation and even closer relations with Europe. Allegiance to the state, however, does not necessarily mean allegiance to all principles of Kemalism. Further, Gülen's Islam is different from that of the Naqshbandiyya by being nationalistic, explicitly advocating a Turkish Islam. It should also be noted that Gülen implicitly claims descent from the Prophet himself, although he prefers not to address the issue openly. Gülen publicly proposes a more liberal version of Islam, emphasising rather the need for societal consensus. Hence he displays no enmity towards Alevis, and regards the issue of women's wearing of headscarves as 'peripheral'. For Gülen, Islam is not static, but rather a religion in evolution.

In 1971 Gülen was apprehended and put on trial for his activities. In his biography, he expresses surprise that he, who had always preached obedience to the state, was tried along with subversive extremists. Politically, Gülen has traditionally supported the largest party on the centre-right, except for a short period in the 1970s when he lent support to the National Salvation Party (Millî Selamet Partisi) of Erbakan. During the military coup of 1980 and its aftermath, Gülen continued his preacher travels throughout the country, although he was officially wanted by the authorities. From 1983 onwards, he had increasingly close relations with Turgut Özal and his Motherland Party (MP). During Özal's time as prime minister, Gülen opened innumerable schools and study centres all over Turkey, also investing in the media, to a degree that he today commands, among other things, one of the largest-selling newspapers in the country, *Zaman*, and a private television channel, Samanyolu TV. With the death of Özal, Gülen moved closer to the True Path Party/Dogru Yol Partisi (DYP) of Tansu Çiller. Çiller, concerned over the increasing popularity of Erbakan's Welfare Party, wanted to ensure Gülen's support for her party.

1995 was the year Gülen chose to go public. He hit the headlines of most major newspapers, gave interviews, appeared on state television and met with all major political leaders, including those on the left. The military, nevertheless, remained wary of Gülen. In the 1980s the army was purged of 'Fethullahis' and the military warned of the strength of his followers, estimated then at 4 million. In 1995 he was again investigated by the state security court. The military suspects Gülen of planning to establish an Islamic state, based on *sharia* (Islamic law), but for the time being applying *taqiyya* (concealment), the primarily Shiite practice of dissimulation in a hostile environment, an accusation that has also been directed against Erbakan whenever he has pledged allegiance to the republic.

What, then, are Gülen's aims? What kind of a society does he want for Turkey? If one is to trust his own words, and those of most secular observers, Fethullah Gülen wants a modern, pluralist society open to the West but which does not suppress or ignore 'Anatolian' traditions, where a modern, Turkish Islam is dominant. Naturally, once in a dominant position, Gülen might change his rhetoric, but on the ideological level, the Nurcu form of Islam is distinctively more apt for a conciliation with the secular state than is the Naqshbandi. However, in practice, Naqshbandiyya elements have infiltrated the state to such a degree that a glorified president and at least one prime minister have been known to be very close to the order. Nevertheless the Islamisation of the state has been kept in controllable proportions.

Other brotherhoods and movements

Besides the two major currents, less important Sufi orders exist, most of them with uneasy to conflictive relations with the state. A strictly radical and militant order active mainly in the 1950s was the Tijaniyya (Ticani), which earned fame by destroying Atatürk's statues all over Central Anatolia. This order found its supporters among the urban lower class as well as the rural population which saw Kemalist reforms as atheistic and corrupt. However, the order's leader, the lawyer Kemal Pivaloglu, was subsequently apprehended and incarcerated, after which the Tijanis seem to have totally disappeared from public life.

Another, more important group is the Süleymanli movement. Founded by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888–1959), a son of a Naqshbandi *shaykh* who immigrated from Silistria in Rumania in the 1930s. The Süleymanli movement is profoundly radical and comes close to the original meaning of the term 'fundamentalist'. It accepts no other writings or norms than the Quran and the Sunna, and hence seeks to reinstate *sharia*. The Süleymanli movement is seen in Turkey as extremely anti-intellectual and opposed to science, as it is in outright opposition to public schools, including the religious education given by the Directorate for Religious Affairs, and seeks

to forbid civil weddings, to replace the Latin alphabet with the Arabic, and to consider Turkey a country of *jihad* ('holy war'). Moreover, the order is profoundly suspicious of other Islamic organisations (particularly the Nurcu), seeing them as non-Muslim. This suspicion towards outsiders, the rumour goes, leads members to change the formulation of the greeting from *selam aleykümü* (peace be upon you) to *sami aleykümü* (curse be upon you). The Süleymanlı movement spreads through an organisational system on a par with the Naqshbandiyya or Nurcu. The founder, Tunahan, instructed every disciple to open a Quranic school wherever he settled in the country, and to ensure that five further were opened. This has led to the order growing enormously not only in Turkey but also, for instance, in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Since Tunahan's death, the order has been led by his son-in-law, Kemal Kaçar, a former parliamentary deputy.

Another, less-known order is Isikçilar (followers of the light, or the enlightened). Like the Süleymanlı, Isikçilar emanated from the Naqshbandiyya, and polemises against secularism. Moreover, its founder Abdülhakim Arvasi paid special attention to strict Sunni belief and therefore polemises against Shiism, Wahhabism and reformist tendencies within Islam.

Istanbul is the centre for another order, the Khalwatiyya Jerrahi (Halveti Cerrahi) order which attracts many Western converts. Musafer Özak travelled all over Europe and in the United States and founded Khalwati circles. Traditionally, the Khalwati order has been very influential on the Balkan peninsula and during the twentieth century many members have been initiated into the order in *tekkes* (convents) located in Macedonia. Most famous are the whirling *dervishes* of the Mevleviyya, which have their *tekke* in Konya.

In the last few years, a hitherto unknown group which has surfaced publicly is the Aczmenci. The Aczmenci are originally a part of the Nurcu, but in comparison to the Fethullahis they are distinctively more radical. Like many other orders, the Aczmenci drew their main support from eastern Turkey. It has been militantly opposed to Turkey's relations with the United States and has been accused of the murder of secularists. The order gained fame during 1995–96 very much due to the televised apprehension of their leader, Müslüm Gündüz, undressed with a young woman. Gündüz and an associate, Ali Kalkanci, who later was found to be a fraud, were blatantly exposed in national television. The young woman in case, Fadime Sahin, explained in a live broadcast how youngsters like herself were attracted to the order, and fooled into believing that having sexual intercourse with leaders 'would bring them closer to God'. As this scandal was unveiled, the Aczmenci mystical forms of worship, including collective head-shaking, one form of the *zikr* rites which aim at causing a state of trance, were shown on video recordings of those rites. Furthermore, connections between senior members of the Welfare Party such as the Istanbul mayor Recep Tayyip

Erdogan and the parliamentary group leader Temel Karamollaoglu and the Aczmenci *shaykhs* were discovered, as both Kalkanci and Gündüz were arrested for rape and antisecularism respectively.

As Turkey watched with confusion, the overwhelming majority of the citizens were surprised, not to say shocked, by the very existence of these groups and their 'alien' form of worship. The representatives of official Islam such as the head of Diyanet, Mehmet Yilmaz, in a genuine reaction discarded the Aczmenci rites as being non-Islamic. A debate subsequently emerged around the question of 'what is and is not Islam?', while the Aczmencis, dressed in long robes, turbans and equipped with walking sticks and occasionally swords, increasingly showed themselves in public. The issue has somewhat been shoved aside in the shadow of other political developments, but its impact on Turkey was great. Not only did Turks get exposed to an unknown variant of Islam, they also understood how little they knew about Islam in general.

In sum, religious orders play a role in modern Turkish society which is far greater than has been generally known both in the West and in Turkey itself. As we shall see later, these sectarian divisions have entered politics and directly affected the situation of the country.

The Alevis

The term 'Alevi' is thought to refer to *Ali evli* or 'the house of Ali', the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the founder of Shia Islam. The belief of the Alevis is related to that of the Alawites in Syria – the main difference being cultural, as the Alawites are an Arab phenomenon and the Alevis distinctively Anatolian. However, it has to be noted that the Alevi belief is far from traditional Shia Islam, so far that the question is often raised as to whether the Alevis are in fact Muslims at all. As has already been mentioned, the Alevis are by far the largest religious minority in Turkey, possibly numbering some 20 million. This is a fact that is surprisingly unknown, as Turkey is known as a country with a homogeneous Sunni structure. The Alevis have historically been found mainly among the rural Central Anatolian population. Among these are outcaste groups like the Abdals, the itinerant Tahtaci in the south who specialise as lumberjacks, and a group of shepherds known as Karapapah or Terekeme in northeastern Turkey. It is notable that there are both Kurdish- and Arabic-speaking Alevis, the former mainly in the province of Tunceli but also in Bingöl.

The religious origin of the Alevis is disputed and the discussion about the place of Alevism in Islam has led to a large variety of interpretations. The most extreme views are those which see Alevism as the belief of Anatolian Turks who adopted Sunni Islam in an insufficient and incorrect manner, and those which see Alevism as an extreme form of Shia where Ali is seen as God. Ismail Engin divides the interpretations primarily between those that

problem' surfaced in the spring of 1995, for example, after violent riots in the Istanbul district of Gaziosmanpasha. However, the same publicity had not been given to previous suppression of, or violence against, the Alevis. A recent example was the hotel arson in July 1993 which resulted in the death of thirty-seven leftist intellectuals, mainly Alevis, in Sivas in Central Anatolia. The main target of the Islamists who organised the fire was the late Aziz Nesin, a then 78-year-old writer who has allegedly translated excerpts of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* into Turkish. Nesin miraculously survived the fire, but an aggravating factor was that the local mayor, a Welfare Party member, did not act to prevent the demonstration which led to the arson, nor was the fire brigade sent in immediately. In the late 1970s, amid the general violence throughout Turkey, hundreds of Alevis were killed in riots in Kahramanmaraş and Çorum.

However, the suppression of the Alevi is a centuries-old phenomenon. As early as the sixteenth century, an Alevi mystic, Pir Sultan Abdal, led a rebellion against the Ottoman state and was executed. He is still seen as a central figure, and a statue of his was to be raised in Sivas the day after the 1993 arson. In fact, the Alevis were blamed for supporting the Shiite Persian empire against the Ottomans, and were unwillingly incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in 1514. During republican times, the Alevis wholeheartedly supported Atatürk's reforms and may have been the most loyal population group on which Atatürk could count. Since then, they have mainly supported the Republican People's Party, which Atatürk founded. In the 1950s, as the Democratic Party opened the gates of Sunni renewal, the Alevis felt threatened and rallied around the Republican People's Party, which they perceived as a guarantor of their rights. With the polarisation of Turkish society in the 1960s, and particularly in the 1970s, the Alevis came to be identified with the left, and as the main basis for extreme-leftist organisations. Alevism can be thought to have been attracted to communist ideas partly because of their historical opposition to the state as such, as well as their quest for an identity among Alevis that had recently moved to the urban areas and lost contact with their community. The military were ambivalent in the confrontation between leftist, pro-Soviet, Alevi recruited groups and extreme-rightist Sunni groups with a heavy religious influence. In the end, fear of the Soviet Union led to a crack-down concentrated on destroying the leftists, while the rightist groups were allowed to continue. This fear of communism also prompted the coup makers to create the 'Turkish-Islamic' synthesis, including obligatory religious education in schools, which was intended to prevent communism from spreading in the young generation.

The religious revival sponsored by the state had no place for the Alevis, however. The Directorate for Religious Affairs, which has been the financial sponsor of, among other things, new mosques and *imams*, although not theoretically designed only for the Sunni majority, has not profited the

Turkey

treat Alevism under Islam and those that do not. Among the former, one finds views that see Alevism as

- a) the true form of Islam, the other forms originating in the Umayyad dynasty being untrue and divisive, a view taken by certain Alevi religious leaders;
- b) a form of Islam separate from Sunnism, either as a Turkish religion based on Islam or as a 'Turkified' belief (these views emphasise the difference towards Sunnism);
- c) a form of belief uniting Islam with Turkish identity;
- d) a part of Sunni Islam, either as 'a Turkmen form' of Sunni, or as a Sufi order within Sunnism;
- e) a heretic belief which can and must be brought back to the original belief;
- f) an Anatolian cultural synthesis which comes close to the core of Islam;
- g) a form of Islam different from Sunnism or Shiism, although with its roots in the latter, but with increasing differences since the sixteenth century;
- h) a syncretistic belief with its origin in Islam;
- i) a non-Islamic belief created by Jews to divide Islam;
- j) a Kurdish philosophy rather than religion; and
- k) an Anatolian religion in its own right.

From the outline above, it seems clear that defining Alevism is a difficult task, far beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is safe to say that there are strong arguments for its inclusion within Islam. The Alevis accept the basic Islamic creed: 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his Messenger'. At the same time, many elements of Alevism are alien both to Sunni and Shia Islam. For example, Alevis have no mosques but community houses, *cemevi*; do not pray five times a day but only when they feel the urge or need; do not practise the pilgrimage to Mecca; do not fast during Ramadan; women do not wear veils; worship and prayer are carried out by men and women together; initiation rites contain alcohol, similar to the Christian communion; do not apply *sharia*; do not seem to view the Quran as God's word. The Alevi perception of the *sharia* is particularly interesting. In principle, *sharia* is the law to be followed by everyone. However, through initiation the individual Alevi can reach a higher Sufi religiosity, whereby the dogmatic elements of *sharia* do not have to be obeyed to the letter. Mystics can reach two higher levels, *marifet* and *haqiqat* (truth), which imply union with God.

Closer studies indeed give the impression that Alevism is a syncretistic belief proper to Anatolia with elements of both Islam and Christianity but also of Zoroastrianism and Central Asian Shamanistic traditions. Due to their dubious identity and suspected heresy against Islam, the Alevis have faced and still face many difficulties in the Turkish society. The 'Alevi

Alevi. On the contrary, mosques have been built in Alevi villages whereas Alevi community houses and religious leaders are not supported by the state. Religious life, then, especially since the 1980 coup, has been monopolised by the Sunni majority. This has led to a situation where the Alevi, who traditionally have not been prone to mobilisation around their religious community, are becoming increasingly frustrated, in particular as the state's negligent and occasionally hostile attitude showed no tendency to change until recently. Alevi frustration reached a peak when, in conjunction with the trial of the perpetrators of the Sivas arson, the state security prosecutor charged Aziz Nesin with having acted in a provocative manner, an accusation which set a precedent both legally and socially, and was utterly explosive. The situation seemed to improve in the middle of 1997, however, with the coalition led by Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz openly stating that one of its aims was to ameliorate the situation of the Alevi, including the financing of study centres and university activities related to Alevism.

One can only become an Alevi by birth, a fact which distinguishes the faith from most others. However, the Bektashi order is closely related to Alevism and a gateway for non-Alevi who share their beliefs. The Bektashis have been termed the intellectual superstructure of the Alevi, and were also active during Ottoman times. In particular, the Bektashi order was responsible for the religious education of the Christian-born children raised to serve in the Ottoman bureaucracy through the *devşirme* ('blood tax') system. In the Hatay province along the border to Syria, and in the provinces of Adana and İçel, there is an Arabic-speaking population of Nusayrites, calling themselves Alawites. Their number is estimated at around 200,000. They regard themselves as separated from the Alevi of Turkey by better knowledge of the doctrines and an emphasis on the divine aspects of Ali. There are several orders within the Nusayri group. Most important are the Haydariyya and Kiliziyya.

Islam in Turkish politics

Islam can be said to have disappeared from the political sphere with Atatürk's consolidation of power. However, it staged a come-back in 1950. After the Second World War, Turkey's firm Western connection encouraged it to democratise society. Hence Celal Bayar, a former prime minister, broke out of the ruling Republican People's Party and formed the Democratic Party. As this party appealed to rural interests and traditional values, it captured power by a landslide in the first free election in 1950. As a result, İsmet İnönü resigned from presidency and was succeeded by Celal Bayar, who named Adnan Menderes as prime minister. The one-party regime of the Republican People's Party between 1946 and 1950 occurred immediately after the Second World War, which, although Turkey had not participated, had inflicted additional hardships on the population, in the

form of rationing and taxation. The regime further attempted to fulfil Atatürk's ideals and embarked on a process of transferring the functions of religious communities and leaders to new, civilian institutions. The overwhelming effect of the aftershock of the U-turn, or to use a term from another context, the great leap forward, of Turkish society also led to a reaction and an increasing distance between ruler and ruled.

Centre-right parties have been in power in Turkey for the better part of a half-century of multi-party democracy. During this time, they have managed to transform the role of religion in society. The Democratic Party government had a mixed record. Its popularity increased due to its easing of restrictions regarding Islam, but huge agricultural subventions and other economic policies led to an economic debacle. As the regime's popularity started dwindling compared to that of the Republican People's Party, the government tried to resort to authoritarian measures, making even the fatal mistake of asking the military to help suppress the Republican People's Party. The response was a coup in May 1960 staged among others by Alparslan Türkeş, a coup which has been called the Colonels' coup in contrast to the 1980 Generals' coup. The military intervention was based mainly on defence of the secular state, against the far-reaching religious reforms initiated by the Democratic Party, but also against the emerging authoritarian attitude of the civilian leaders. The military felt the need to set an example, executing Menderes and two other ministers, but not Bayar who was spared due to old age.

The 1960 constitution, enacted to replace the 1923 one, was significantly more liberal and democratic than its predecessor – or for that matter, than its successor. In fact the 1960 constitution was the most democratic blueprint for social structure Turkey has ever had. The question is whether Turkish society was prepared for it. In retrospect, it would appear that it was not. After 1960, politics continued to polarise between 'left' and 'right'. Notably, the rise of the left led to a reaction from the right, and instability in the political sphere translated into violence throughout society. In the end this led to the 1971 military ultimatum and a slight revision of the constitution. The 1970s only meant a worsening situation, with chronic political instability, where the smaller parties, religious and nationalist, had a disproportionate influence as neither of the two larger parties in parliament, the centre-left Republican People's Party and the centre-right Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, the continuation of the Democratic Party) ever achieved a majority. Hence the extremist parties were necessary for coalition building, and consequently all governments of the 1970s had a rightist element, which was pro to the religious revival.

The first outright religious party was founded in 1967 by a group of Islamically oriented politicians within the Justice Party, the latter already under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel. In 1969, Necmettin Erbakan, one of the students of Kotku, was thrown out of the chairmanship of the

chamber of commerce, perceived as a political threat by Demirel. In spite of this, Erbakan applied for membership of the Justice Party and wanted to run for parliamentary elections the same year. As Demirel vetoed Erbakan's candidature, the latter stood as an independent and was easily elected. This was a great victory for Kotku, who had been looking to establish an Islamic party and had capitalised on believers' disappointment in Demirel. As an informal section of the Justice Party centred around religious figures had formed in 1967, a good number of parliamentarians were in favour of Kotku's plans. In January 1970, Erbakan and seventeen colleagues founded the National Order Party (Millî Nizam Partisi), which claimed to be founded on the heritage of the Ottoman Empire and of Atatürk's war of liberation as well as on the just order preached by Islam.

However, the military ultimatum of 1971 led to the closure of the recently founded National Order Party. Erbakan fled to Switzerland, fearing a fate similar to that of Menderes, but was asked to return by the military, mainly as he was useful as an instrument in weakening Demirel's standing in the right. Hence in October 1972 the National Salvation Party (Millî Selamet Partisi) was founded, although Erbakan did not assume the role of leader until the 1973 elections. These elections can be termed the breakthrough of political Islam, as the National Salvation Party received over 11 per cent of the votes. Still, the rise of the Islamists was not among the principal factors in Turkish politics of the time. Rather, it remained a peripheral factor as the country was hit by an economic and social crisis in the aftermath of the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, which was executed by a coalition government led by Bülent Ecevit. Ecevit, chairman of the Republican People's Party, had staged an electoral success by re-orienting the left to a more standard social democratic rhetoric, gaining 33 per cent of the votes. However, Ecevit lacked a majority in parliament and could not form a government until the beginning of 1974 – with Necmettin Erbakan as his coalition partner. This coalition was one of necessity, and as the political scientist Elisabeth Özdalga quotes an Islamic writer of the time, it resembled a dish made out of honey and garlic, original but not particularly tasteful.

The economic and social crisis of the country only deepened with the loss of foreign aid and the increasing political and social instability. Erbakan managed to enter a new coalition in 1977 with Demirel and the nationalists, but his influence remained limited. The real struggle in Turkey was that between the extreme left and the extreme right. This controversy spilled over into street violence throughout the country which in its heyday claimed over twenty lives a day. The political instability with short-lived governments meant that the state power necessary to keep order was absent. This led to the military intervention of 1980, which was greeted with relief by the population. As mentioned above, the military administration saw the extreme left as the most dangerous threat to the republic, and to counteract the rise of leftist forces hoped that a moderate revival of

religion would counterbalance this tendency. Hence religious education was made obligatory in schools and the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis' was born.

The man to carry it into practice turned out to be Turgut Özal. He was an engineer and economist of Kurdish origin who had been a candidate for the National Salvation Party in the 1970s. Özal managed to win the trust of the military authorities and was allowed to found an independent party, the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi) in time for the first free elections of 1983. In contrast, the Welfare Party, the continuation of the National Salvation Party, was not allowed to appear, and many of its supporters took a Motherland Party ticket instead. Özal engineered the Turkish economic boom of the 1980s, and was known as a taboo-breaker in all fields except one: religion. Coming from a family close to the Naqshbandiyya, Özal paid considerable attention to religious issues and, not unlike Menderes in his time, sponsored the Islamic revival of the 1980s. Unlike Menderes, however, Özal worked wonders with the economy, which might be one reason for the military toleration of his overtly pro-Islamic activities.

The representation of Islamic interests within the Motherland Party led to difficulties for the Islamists in organising themselves into a separate party. Hence the Welfare Party received less than 5 per cent in the municipal elections of 1984. Another reason, naturally, was that Erbakan was banned from politics like all major political leaders, including Demirel and Ecevit. This ban was only lifted by a referendum in 1987, and immediately the Welfare Party won over 7 per cent of the votes in that year's parliamentary election – but did not gain representation in parliament, as a 10 per cent threshold had been adopted in order to prevent small parties from playing the role they had played in the late 1970s. By now, the strategy of the party had changed. Both the National Order Party and the National Salvation Party had used a clearly religious discourse, which was still defended by traditionalists within the Welfare Party. However, this discourse was not particularly attractive to new voters, and was too abstractly ideological to bring the party beyond an electoral support of 10–12 per cent.

In the 1980s, however, the Islamist leaders started to deal increasingly with worldly issues, such as administration and economics. At the same time, the party created a country-wide organisation which was neither challenged nor paralleled by any other party. Moreover, the party adopted a political agenda based on the concept of just order, *adil düzen*. On closer scrutiny, the concept of an Islamic social justice shows clear socialist undertones, notably in its criticism of the society created by the secular parties. The aim of this new image was clear: to create a popular movement, not an élite party with an ideological base. This process has proven fruitful, but has also blurred the identity of the party, and come under criticism from the traditionalists. Hence the party has won tremendous support from the urban poor, a support which it has earned by truly humanitarian actions, which in turn have been made possible by its

The table above suggests that half of the Welfare Party sympathisers clearly defined their political identity as Muslim. This corroborates the accepted view that the core Islamist support group hovered around 10 per cent of the population. However, it is the other half, those who describe themselves as Muslim Democrats (a term which deliberately parallels West European Christian democracy), that brought the Welfare Party to its position as the largest party in parliament and to power in the summer of 1996.

Once in power, the Welfare Party dropped most of its professed ambitions to revolutionise the state. Erbakan did sign several military agreements with Israel, probably in order not to alienate the military at an early stage, although before the elections Welfare Party officials had harshly criticised cooperation with Israel. However, once in power, the Islamisation of the state started. This had already occurred in the municipal administrations under Welfare Party control after the 1994 elections and had led to widespread protests from the secular establishment. As the level of Welfare Party domination in the coalition government, which was formed with the True Path Party (Dogru Yol Partisi, the heir to Demirel's Justice Party) led by Tansu Çiller, increased, the military took up its role as watch-dog of the secular republic. In February 1997, after a *pro-sharia* demonstration in the Ankara suburb of Sincan, growing resistance to the Islamist-led government led to a mass movement orchestrated from military headquarters and supported by the secular establishment to oust the Welfare Party from power. In a remarkably well-planned flow of events during the spring of 1997, the government was finally forced to resign in August. Furthermore, the Welfare Party was banned by the constitutional court in January 1998 for agitation against the secular republic. Apparently, Kemalist forces have now secured their hegemony in Turkish politics.

However, the question is what will become of the genuinely popular movement that was the Welfare Party? The Welfare Party has indeed been abolished, but this does not mean that political Islam has been defeated in Turkey. The Islamic renaissance remains a fact, and some voices fear that the Islamist quest for power will be transferred from the parliament to the streets, and that Turkey would see a new era of near civil war as in the late 1970s. Others maintain that the Welfare Party will be resuscitated under a new name with a more centrist perspective, and will become a true Muslim democratic party like the Christian democratic parties of Western Europe. As this would lead to the alienation of extremist elements in the party, it would mean that the problem of religious extremism would persist or perhaps even increase. However, if this were to be the case, the extremist elements would be more of an irritation in society than a direct threat to the republic as the National Salvation Party and Welfare Party were perceived to be.

From another perspective, the Naqshbandi variant of political Islam can be said to have failed to consolidate its position in Turkish politics. During

Özal's era it acquired a significant position behind the scenes; and during Erbakan's time it achieved this position in the open, but through its impatience it failed to sustain its position and experienced a substantial setback. Meanwhile the Nurcu movement is growing in strength and can be expected to profit from the failure of the Welfare Party, as Gülen's model constantly has been to seek accommodation with the secular state, not to act against it either openly or subversively. If the military is interested in perpetuating the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, it would seem logical for it to use Gülen as a partner. Perhaps this can be the solution to the severe troubles regarding Islam's place in Turkish society and politics. Yet some observers doubt Fethullahis' real aims. Is the rhetoric of accommodation with secularism only a case of *taqiyya*? Is it, in other words, a tactic of dissimulation which will be reversed once the movement's power has increased? The answer to this question falls beyond the scope of this chapter, but the problem remains that Turkey has to find a way of reconciling the secular identity of the state with the Islamic traditions espoused by substantial sectors of its population. A perhaps simplistic approach, which nevertheless makes a great deal of sense in the conceptual sphere, was proposed by the political scientist Bassam Tibi: 'In Turkey there is a contradiction between Secularism and Islamism. If you manage to remove the "isms" from the two terms, you may have come a long way in solving the contradiction'.

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Chapter Seven

Turkic Central Asia

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Until 1991 the region which comprises the five now independent republics Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan (Kyrgyzstan), Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan was known as Soviet Central Asia. Since independence the Central Asians have had to find new ways of thinking of their relationship to their own nationals and to one another as well as to the world at large. Consequently Central Asian interest in the region's history and culture is flourishing. The focus of this chapter is Islam in the Turkic republics of Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan, which according to the traditional Soviet classification system did not belong to Central Asia, was formally declared to be part of that geographic region in the 1993 Central Asia Summit. The Kazak president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, actively fought for the maintenance of some form of the Soviet Union, but after Russia, Ukraine and Belarus established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on December 8, 1991 Kazakhstan had no choice but to declare its independence, which it did on December 16, 1991. Shortly thereafter, on December 21, 1991, Kazakhstan joined the United Nations. President Nazarbayev still (1998) remains in power. Independent Kazakhstan is the largest Central Asian Republic with an area of roughly 3 million square kilometres. Largely made up of steppe-lands with mountains to the east and to the south, Kazakhstan also has pasture lands to the north which, in the twentieth century, have been cultivated mostly by Russian and Ukrainian farmers. Kazakhstan is an important producer of cereals and has a major mining industry. As it straddles China and Russia, it is of considerable geopolitical significance. To the south, Kazakhstan borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan and to the east the Caspian Sea. The Kazak capital was until the autumn of 1997 Almaty (Alma Ata) when it was replaced by Aqmola in the northern part of the country. The republic has severe environmental problems and the health situation is alarming in many areas. The Kazakstani population of 17 million is far from homogeneous. According to the 1989 census it was made up of 39.7 per cent Kazaks and 37.8 per cent Russians. This vast number of Russians as well as proximity to Russia have made the repatriation of Kazakhstan into a larger Russia a recurring theme for the