ILLIBERAL SECULARISM TO ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY: TURKEY’S EVOLVING LAIKLIK AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON MUSLIM POLITICS

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Fatima Abushanab, B.A.

Georgetown University
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ILLIBERAL SECULARISM TO ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY: TURKEY’S EVOLVING DEFINITION OF LAIKLIK AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON MUSLIM POLITICS

Fatima Abushanab, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: John Voll, PhD.

ABSTRACT

In an increasingly desecularizing world the discussions that surround the role of religion in public life continue to pose fundamental questions to the process of democratization in general and to the matters pertinent to civic engagement, rights discourse and equality, in particular. Turkey, in this context, heeds attention as a uniquely positioned secular Muslim democratic nation-state. This thesis questions both the secular and democratic traits of the Turkish state to show that it is neither secular nor democratic in the way that both of these concepts are widely accepted. The thesis first deconstructs the concept of Turkish secularism to show the illiberal nature it assumed over the decades. It goes on to explain how this particular take on secularism became the main leverage used for the state’s existentiality, longevity and empowerment. The thesis argues that the very nature of secular illiberalism played an important role in Turkey’s lingering democratization process giving way to the rise of an illiberal democracy.
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Thank you to all.
DEDICATION

To my mom

Who is a friend, a hero and a role model
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the recent decade, scholars across the field of social sciences have been debating on the issue whether religion constitutes a de-stabilizing threat to the foundation of a civil society and the modern state. This concern has especially heightened in the recent years where we witness a rise in Islamist politics post-Arab Spring. The varying degrees of Islamization wave sweeping the political scene across major Muslim societies like Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt and Tunisia offer a new lens to analyze religion-oriented movements becoming more widespread not limited to the MENA and Eurasia region but also across the West.

This argument is particularly pertinent to Turkey’s political evolution since 2002 where the Justice and Development Party enabled religion to reclaim a public role in the political domain by challenging an outdated vanguard type of secularism. The transition that seems to have occurred is the removal of applying a strict separation of church and state rule while supplanting it with a reversal of the process by way of cross-fertilizing religion and state to cooperate on mutual terms. In a broader framework, Peter Berger’s explanation of a global desecularization phenomenon is illustrated in Turkey’s case where political trends are causing a blurring of the lines between secular and sacred. In tandem to Asef Bayat’s argument on the coming of a post-Islamist society, we find that Turkey’s social and political trends are a testament to the erosion of classical understanding of secularism. Religion’s role is gradually morphing into a proactive and public role that can no longer be confined by the staunch purview of Kemalist ideology.

Based on the above argument, this thesis will examine how secularism evolved since its adoption to the Turkish Constitution in 1937 ensued by the 1961 and 1982
Constitutions re-drafted in the aftermath of military coup d’états. The critique I intend to develop in this thesis will be based on the premise that governments throughout the history of modern Turkish Republic have been operating within the framework of illiberal secularism used as an authoritative approach to restrain society from overlapping religion and politics. The coming of Islamists to political fore in the 21st century, however, demonstrates a re-configuration of secularism to open space for religion as a significant variable in the formulation of new approaches to domestic and foreign policies. Thus, Turkey’s new image from within and without presents a culmination of societal debates ranging from ethnic and religious identity and human rights questions to heated political discussions surrounding a potential change in the presidential system.

Harsh criticism directed toward such pivotal changes in the public discourse requires analysts to probe the long-term historical implications of Muslim politics. This raises the following questions that this research aims to answer: what consequences will result from using the political method of “co-opting secularism?” And to what extent there will be a shift away from Western liberal democratic norms? Answering these questions relies on a speculation of a new paradigm in a failed post-secularization thesis.

In hopes of outlining a discussion of the political history surrounding the construction of secularism in Turkey, this thesis aims to accomplish two goals. The first task is to provide a condensed understanding of the broader phenomenon of how

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1 Due to the contesting definitions of what an Islamist is, many disagreements have risen. In this thesis, Islamist is defined as a politician who promotes democratic values within the realm of Islamic value system.

2 An example of Prime Minister Erdogan’s fueled reaction to the Israeli President at Davos was undoubtedly a religiously motivated “One-minute” refutation.
secularism was shaped amidst the political events of the 20th century. The second task will be to draw a correlation from the past to concurrent shaping of secularism in the 21st century. A contemporary analysis of today’s dynamic discussion on re-defining “laiklik” will be argued on the grounds that “the once illiberal secular Republic” is now trending toward falling within the spectrum of what Fareed Zakaria argued as the rise of illiberal democracies.

**Thesis Structure**

The foundational concepts for this thesis will be introduced from an amalgamation of disciplines ranging in sociology, political history, political science, political anthropology and political philosophy. The theories used to formulate the conceptual groundwork of the research are based on an interdisciplinary discourse analysis, which enables the researcher to explore a particular phenomenon through different lenses. According to Jorgensen and Phillips, all discourse analytical approaches draw on structuralist and post-structuralist theory in which “no discourse is a closed entity: it is, rather, constantly being transformed through contact with other discourses.” The authors go on to argue that this process creates discursive struggle whereby discourses compete “to represent particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world…”

The central aim of constructing a coherent theoretical framework for this research is to investigate the change that has occurred in the time period since secularism was adopted as the dominant principal of the Turkish nation/state system. In the broader set

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3 Secularism in Turkish vernacular.

of social and intellectual processes that parallel across academia, theorizing and debating the origin and development of secularism renders a complex challenge in the educational terrain. This task is most difficult when attempting to create a boundary between the secular and religious realm of human existence. By exploring the different discourse angles represented in the discussions of Talal Asad, Asef Bayat and Fareed Zakaria, I will selectively draw from particular texts to shape a broader explanatory discourse that could be used to unpack the complexities of Turkey’s changing trend of secularism. Fairclough identifies this approach in discourse analysis as the concept of “intertextuality,” which allows an individual to investigate existing “texts,” while producing a discursive change through new combinations of discourse. My intention here is to build a multiperspective framework to illustrate Turkey’s case of an evolving secularism from an epistemological premise. All five of the listed theoretical perspectives, I believe, represent a discourse with a capital “D” and a lower case “d” in which, the reader can perceive both the globalized at the same time localized discursive pattern of secularism in relation to the changing role of religion in society. The ensuing discussion of theoretical overviews will reflect on various modes of interpretation while at the same time accommodate new arguments to the question facing the future of secularism in Muslim-majority countries.

The analysis entailing Chapter 2 will consist of a longitudinal historical analysis of Turkey’s constitutional changes beginning with the initial draft in 1924 followed by the 1961 and 1982 modifications made to the Constitution after the military coup d’état.

5 Although Niyazi Berkes’ book on Development of Secularism provides a large ontology of Turkey’s secularization case, this thesis will focus on particular aspects of nation-building reforms of 20th century that set the stage for a resurgence of Muslim politics.

A concise overview of the introduction, adoption and “Turkification” of secularism along with the military guardianship of laiklik will set the stage for the broader discussion of the consequences burgeoned by an illiberal secular system. Chapter 3 will utilize the theoretical and historical framework to discuss the contemporary change of Islamist methodology while reflecting on its implications to Western understanding of liberal democracy as a causal link to the re-formulation of the meaning of secularism. Finally, Chapter 4 will conclude the discussion by providing a comprehensive picture of how the continuity of tradition and modernity in a competitive intertwined path has produced a new relationship between religion and secular state in the 21st century. This reality, in the broader theme of Turkey’s transition from illiberal secularism to illiberal democracy, illustrates a profound change in the re-imagining of “a new modern trend” as a product of “a new kind of secular.”

**Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus my discussion to the recent turn toward an updated secularization thesis in light of a new paradigm. In attempt to make sense of the dynamic relation between religion and state, we must observe and analyze the changing meaning of old institutions within a contemporary “post-secular religious” framework. Dressler and Mandair in *Secularism and Religion-Making* refer to this process as a “social and cultural phenomena configured and reconfigured within the matrix of a world-religion discourse that is historically and semantically rooted in particular Western and predominantly Christian experiences, knowledge and institutions.”7 By resisting the concept of religion as universal, the authors suggest the

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discovery of alternative epistemologies in the aim of formulating a post-secular religious theory. Using their suggestion of a critique of conventional understanding of religion and secular, religion-making theory can serve a useful purpose in understanding how the sacred is incorporated and re-structured in a post-secular public sphere in Turkey.

The concurrent discursive competition over the construction of meaning is an underlying theme of this thesis. The several methodologies that I would like to utilize from different disciplines help unfold various approaches of deconstruction. I believe this would allow us to move away from narrow linear explanations toward an academic Weltanschauung that combines several disciplines toward the formulation of a multivariate approach; one that is not through a monolithic lens but an intellectually complex mosaic of diverse perspectives with a particular focus on a global phenomenon i.e. the dynamic relation between secular and sacred or religious.

One of the contemporary scholars who has come to close grasp in tracing the development from “secular” to “secularism” and the onset of secularization is political anthropologist, Talal Asad. In the *Formations of the Secular*, Asad’s main concern is in addressing the issue of how “the secular” came about conceptually before political structures adopted the concept “secularism” as a doctrine. In three sections of the book Asad traces a genealogy of the way in which “a variety of concepts, practices, and sensibilities have come together to form the secular.” His anthropologist-based approach renders a conceptual analysis that is rooted in time and space capturing an “on the ground reality” of how a society’s environment shapes a concept. This approach is especially useful for a contemporary analysis of Turkey’s case in the way secularism is

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dynamically defined in current public discourse.

On the other hand, we find a linear intellectual approach in the extensive volume of Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*. Taylor’s approach in mapping out a historical narrative of secularization is faced with the difficulty of how we can define the secular and religious in the contemporary. The focal point of his historiographical narrative is to make sense of the changing conditions of belief in a Western context and to bridge the gap between Christians and Secular humanists where “both emerge from the same long process of Reform in Latin Christendom.” He says, “We are brothers under the skin.” However to come to this conclusion after a long discussion on the historical construction of secularity, Taylor distinguishes between the pre-modern enchanted period and the modern age, in which he seeks to understand “why it was virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”

His intricate analysis goes hand in hand with Peter Berger’s de-secularization theory where a religious resurgence seems to engulf many nations across the globe. Berger’s thesis, “Secularism in Retreat” discusses the nature of resurgent religions. In an updated edited volume titled “The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics,” Berger along with other authors point to a counter-secularization process that will likely render an immense social change to varying degrees depending

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on the society. Without going in-depth the authors present unique case studies of societies within the realm of historical construction of institutions, customs and mythologies. Their attempt to unpack the de-secularization trend does not refer to a particular definition due to a variety of variables that differ according to the country. The only assumption we can make from such cases is an apparent trend of counter-secularization along the same process of de-secularization.\textsuperscript{12}

In specifically observing Turkey’s case we find that before coming to the counter-secularization/de-secularization stage in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century there is a condensed list of intellectual and military events that marks the history of modern Turkey. The ensuing chapter will unpack some of these major events to set the groundwork for this thesis and reflect on how social engineering and assimilation became the hallmarks of a modernizing Kemalist ideology.

CHAPTER 2

INTELLECTUAL-MAKING OF SECULARISM IN 20TH CENTURY TURKISH CONTEXT

An Illiberal Secular Era: Christian European Secularism Toward a Turkish-Islam Synthesis of Secularism

In academic discourse, the term “secularism” is used to identify a particular field that allows individuals to construct a narrative for the origins of a globalized social phenomenon. It entails an intellectually stimulating exploration of secularism as a term, a concept and an historical and current phenomenon. Such an intricate and complex process undertaken from different perspectives results in unclarity as to what exactly the secularization thesis embodies. According to what philosopher W.B. Gallie has described, the terms “secularism” or “secularization” is a “concept the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users.”¹

For any student studying the relationship between secularism and religion, this makes it all the more difficult to pinpoint which discipline or philosopher one would accept as the sole interpreter of such a multifaceted social process. Much of the debate in the academic terrain still revolves around 19th century discussion of religion’s role in constructing a socio-moral society in in addition to the concurrent debate on what direction secularization is heading. This debate is especially rooted in the early sociological purview of Durkheim and Weber who represent the modernist tradition in conceptualizing “religion” within sociology. Durkheim’s positivist approach and functionalist stance renders him to define religion as a set of collective representations,

which provide moral unity to a society with an “interinstitutional system.” Durkheim asserts religion as “first and foremost, a system of ideas by which men imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure yet intimate relations they have with it.”\(^2\) Religion, in this sense, serves as a cohesive tool that binds society based on common values and practices to promote a sense of belonging and maintaining collective human consciousness.

From another methodological perspective, Weber conceptualized religion as a body of belief and practices concerned with salvation. In the *Sociology of Religion*, the core of his argument is based on religion’s role as an important factor for stability and social change. His description of the systematization of symbols via revelation and leadership of prophets has over time led to a rationalized and established bureaucratic system. Providing this epistemological inquiry and narrative allows one to grasp the broader pattern in which religion served as a foundation for law and ethical standards in the gradual formation of modern industrial societies. Despite the different sociological approaches in Durkheim and Weber’s views, both theorists took a different angle in interpreting the advantages and consequences of a rationalized modern world, especially in the way it constituted a process of secularization.

Both theorists’ seminal works provide an in depth and overarching epistemology in the way secular and sacred interacted within a predominantly Christian European world. However, we find throughout time and place, secularization process varied according to different degrees in the West and especially in the Muslim world. For the purposes of this thesis, the key challenge in going about this process is acknowledging

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that Turkey’s foundational case encapsulates a rigorous top-down westernization/modernization project rooted in Christian-European Reformist framework. The vulnerability of the Ottoman state and the increasing bureaucratization in the last century of the Empire has produced interesting intellectuals like radical scientific materialist Abdullah Cevdet whose thoughts later influenced the founder, Mustafa Kemal. As part of the small elitist movement known as Les Jeunes Turcs, offshoot of the larger movement of the Committee of Union and Progress, social and political reformers displayed an aggressive approach by envisioning and realizing a Republic similar to the French model. The goals of the organization summed up in two steps first required the eradication of the Ottoman Caliphate and Sultanate system followed by a series of constitutional and social reforms.

Turkey’s case is one out of many unique experiences among the post-empire nation-building projects in which secularism and religion have competed to prevail over the other. Since the onset of Enlightenment in 16th century Western Europe followed by gradual modernization process accompanying a declining Ottoman Empire in 18th century, the recurring debate between secular and sacred continues to be the focal point of dynamic political developments across many societies. In the path toward forming the Turkish Republic, the secularization movement became the core machine for “aesthetic modernity” and social modernity at the same time. Ataturk’s attempt at such a paradigmatic reform rendered a success in the nation-building process despite the political elite’s reactionary approach to religion’s overwhelming influence over society and law. It was, however, a failure in its staunch aim to eradicate the role of din as a dominant factor in the socio-political sphere. Secularism in this sense could never hold the same place as religion.
One way of describing this institutional phenomenon is the attempt at a social construction of reality. As Nikki Keddie points out, it was “only in the 19th century did secular come to be associated with secularists who espoused a doctrine of secularism—the belief that religious institutions and values should play no role in the temporal affairs of the state.” In the same vein, the secularization process in Turkey illustrates an elitist and doctrinarian formulation of secularism that went hand-in-hand with the top-down westernization project through series of reforms. Religion, in this context, was regarded as the antithesis of secular doctrine whose proponents came to hold an elitist position. It was a privileged position, which paved the way for a group of intellectuals to determine the boundary between secular and sacred, and to what extent religion would be subservient to state-control.

Among the 19th century Ottoman intellectual circles, there was already a contentious clash of modernist and traditionalist discourses debating on the compatibility of Islam and modernity. The Ottoman-modernist intellectual movement known as Garbiçilik (westernism) represented the epitome of radical social reform in early Republic of Turkey. The movement idealized the creation of a new set of ethics for Muslims similar to the reforms initiated in the Christian world.

A radical free thinker and an ideologist of Young Turks named Abdullah Cevdet was among the influential thinkers of Garbiçilar, who opted for a “modernized” anti-
religious stance in lieu of scientific modernization. His theory of creating a fusion of Islam and materialism appeared in numerous publications including one controversial piece, *Funun ve Felsefe*. His essays premised on ideas of social, economic and political reform were noted in his famous journal series, *Ictihad*, "which became the first journal in the Ottoman Empire to openly criticize Islam."\(^6\)

Cevdet understood that a society could not evolve or move forward without a certain set of beliefs and values, and with this acknowledgement he sought to use certain principles of Islam. This idea was driven from the similar rational approach in Auguste Comte's positivism "which suggested a new system of common beliefs based on rational methods of mathematics and the natural sciences to society, and develop a rational sociology which should also be a rational system of social morality, a norm of social action and a science of human happiness."\(^7\) It was believed that such a method could be achieved through empirical research via formulation of theories and methods to find an encompassing body of civil code. A civil code, that is, which includes certain values, extracted from faith as well as scientifically developed mores that would equate to a content rational-society.

Many of the principles promoted by the *Garbcilik* movement and especially by Abdullah Cevdet, were picked up by the founders of the Republic after some modifications and manipulations, eventually leading to a "form of scientific Turkified Islam."\(^8\) The influence of post-Enlightenment European intellectualism coupled with the

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\(^6\) Ibid., 140.

\(^7\) Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 140.

\(^8\) Hanoğlu, “Garbeçilər: Their Attitudes toward Religion and Their Impact on the Official Ideology of the Turkish Republic,” 148.
expansion of technology and science led to a movement of its own kind that targeted for a “social evolution” among the lay. For the pious and subservient members of religious communities, a trend that ushered in European values was seen as antithetical to the Ottoman-Islamic culture and practice. The discrepancy and growing chasm between the progressive West and the static position of the Muslims in the Islamic societies had penetrated a sort of agony for the Western intellectual Muslims who (were traditionally and culturally Islamic,) but at the same time desired to catch up with post-enlightenment Christian Europe’s achievements (socially, economically, and politically).

Scientific modernists and materialists like Abdullah Cevdet and for many others among the Young Turk movement, who were frustrated with their society, attributed their lack of progress to their religious heritage. The change they desired was based on an urgent demand. They believed that the Muslim society was inept to progress and move forward to become like the European civilization. The intellectual elitist initiative taken to educate the masses with an aim to create a social elite was reflected in the idea of Cevdet’s most famous publications known as *Funun ve Felsefe*. In this work, Cevdet used a method, which combined various texts and ideas driven from the New Testament and the Holy Book of *Qur’an* along with philosophical ideas from Aristotle and Plato and Thomas Carlyle, Friedrich Schiller, and many other poets, philosophers and thinkers.\(^9\) The intellectual foundation that drove the early modern Republic project was therefore embedded in a radical Protestant Ethic framework with particular focus on scientific progress and evolution. However, the scientific change was not acquired so easily due to the insistence and stubbornness of a short and quick revolution, which

\(^9\) Ibid.
might be aptly dubbed as a “shortcut” revolution, to catch up with the rest of westernized European club members.

20th Century Vanguard Modernization/Westernization Initiated through Series of Reforms with Established State Religion\(^\text{10}\)

The Turkish Republic was born out of the remnants of Ottoman Empire that reigned over one of the largest parts of the world for approximately six centuries. The peoples living under the rule of the Ottoman considered themselves as a part of the larger Muslim population of the world, namely the global Muslim brotherhood. When it was time for Turks to establish a new union, which they would call the “Republic” they decided to break away from the understanding of being affiliated with other Muslims across the board. Instead, they introduced a national identity that would promote unity amongst people within the Republic based on “Turkishness.” In the process of establishing a new nation-state, the leaders such as Ataturk, who was the Founding Father of the Republic, decided to limit the role of religion in peoples' lives with the intent to bring about more uniformity. They also pointed to the negative consequences of having religion in public affairs during the Ottoman Empire. They believed that the reason behind the collapse of the empire was the religious exploitation and the belief that religion impeded the progress of the Ottomans, leaving it behind the rapidly growing Western counterparts. Hence, they wanted to put a cap on religious affairs and keep it under their sustainable control. This was an extremely comprehensive and complicated project. The leading elite group, on one hand, prepared the intellectual foundation of the project by coming up with arguments to legitimize their stance. On the other hand, they put forth an implementation process in order to actualize the project. They conducted

\(^{10}\) Fatima Abushanab, *Contesting Policies on Religious Education* (Research paper presented at Georgetown University, December/12/2011).
various propaganda techniques to show that there was a direct correlation between the religious basis of the Ottoman Empire and its decadence. In their reading of history, they did not address the earlier empirical period during which the empire bourgeoned and strengthened under the flag of Islamic identity. They attacked empire's vacillation period instead.

The founding members of the new nation state also embraced Europe as their role model. They believed in Western superiority, praised the Western cultures and emulated Western appearance from clothing to daily life habits. Progress, in their mind, was directly associated with adoption of the values of Western civilization. They made it very clear to the nation's people that Turkey was going to be part of the European club. And in order to succeed in this mission, Turks needed to limit religion's role in public life in the same way that Europeans did for themselves. This was a main incentive behind changing Islam's place in Turkish people's lives. Turks were going to usher into their self-proclaimed enlightenment.


15 Hikmet Kirik, Kamusal Alan ve Demokrasi: Ortanın Sorununu Yeniden (Istanbul: Salyangoz Yayinlari, 2005), 125.

This change came with the adoption of secularism in the Republic. Although secularism and laicism are in some limited senses used synonymously, they have different etymologies and theoretical implications.\(^\text{17}\) The word secular means “of this world” and refers to the opposite of religious.\(^\text{18}\) French word “lai,” means “of the people” as distinguished from “the clergy.”\(^\text{19}\) In the publication, Religion and Secularism in Turkey: The Dilemma of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Ufuk Ulutas distinguishes between the terms in which secularism “tries to establish an autonomous socio-political sphere, where the sphere of religion and the sphere of state affairs are totally separate.”\(^\text{20}\) In this distinct style of separation of church and state, the Turkish Republic adopted a “literal” definition of keeping religion out of state affairs. Consequently, the ideologues of the Republic modified the definition of laicité and molded the term into a “Turkish-style laicité.” This new form of secularism not only allowed the state to keep religion out of state affairs but gave the state the right to interfere with religion’s place in the public sphere and sometimes the private sphere as well.\(^\text{21}\)

It can be said with certainty that Turkish secularism was seen as the most important part of the westernization project.\(^\text{22}\) Therefore, it is clear that adoption of

\(^\text{17}\) Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a ‘Secular’ State? The Challenge of Description,” The South Atlantic Quarterly 102, no.2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003): 333.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid.


\(^\text{22}\) Roger Owen, “Modernization Projects in Middle Eastern Perspective,” in Rethinking Modernity
secularism was seen as a “final break with the past and the East” to integrate Turkey into Western culture. In the following few sections, our discussion will focus on the repercussions that followed in the attempt of this phenomenal break from the East. Although it may be seen as a break, the Turkish case renders an interesting example of a re-formulated illiberal secular nation that has been built from scratch with the remnants of its detachable past.

While the founding elite under the command of Ataturk endeavored to find justifications for their approach, they rolled up the sleeves to push for implementation of changes that would marginalize religion at various stages of human life. The first step in the process was to get a hold of religious knowledge. If information about a particular enterprise could be controlled then it could also be contained at a particular realm. Thus they controlled production of religious knowledge and its dissemination. The changes that would be introduced were carried out through republican reforms. They were introduced without seeking any consensus and were expected to be welcomed. The reforms were the product of the discussions emanated from Ataturk’s dinner functions held on daily basis at the presidential palace. None of the practicing Muslim cohorts of his were present at these gatherings, historical documents recount. The religious who were by his side during the national independence war were not present for two main reasons. Either they were not among invitees, all of whom were men and women of westernist view, who would engage in non-Islamic, Western habits that included consumption of alcohol, dancing, etc. with him. Or they had already separated their

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23 Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 279.
ideological paths with Ataturk as we had seen in the example of Kazim Karabekir, Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Fevzi Cakmak.

This picture was utterly different than that of the public. It remained as such for some time. On one hand, there was the preaching of values of religion while on the other hand there was the passing of reforms to marginalize religion. Ataturk’s Balikesir Sermon was very well recognized as a religious address. He ordered that the first parliament open with the recitation of the Qur’an. In fact, on the wall of the first Meclis (parliament gathering) they put a verse from the Qur’an that reads, “And they conduct their affairs through consultation.”

Throughout the country, in all cities with his command, Qur’an was recited in celebration of moving into a new era for the nation. The first three parliament sessions did open with the recitation of Qur’an. As much as religion appeared to be pivotal in these actions, this was more of an indication of how the founding elite was preparing itself to “wield” religion, and that it would become a part of state affairs. Gradually, Ataturk who appeared to be an advocate of Islam to be central to state affairs, would change into an uncompromising westernist with a distance to Islam. In the following two sub-sections, I will be discussing the enforcement of laws regarding private community practices and gatherings and, how the suppression of private religious practice and education was paralleled with the alphabet reform.

Closure of Tekke and Zaviyes

As the Turkish society witnessed the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, the newly formed nation state had, no doubt, faced drastic reforms in the “role of religion” in

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public and private space. Reforms were not just an attempt to limit religious practice but it was a bold strategy to contain religion, worship and education to a certain level. The Republic positioned itself to be a watchdog over all religious affairs in the citizens’ lives. Immediately after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, in order to break the influence of religion over the state affairs and to replace Ottoman Islamic civilization with its Western counterpart, the Republicans introduced a series of laicizing reforms pertaining to civil law, education and social life.

Sufi and other mystical, religious-social orders, brotherhoods (tariqas) and lodges (cemaats) were banned under the “Law on the Closure of Religious Shrines and Dervishes Convents and Prohibition of Some Titles” of November 30, 1925, but tariqas and cemaats have nevertheless remained active and widespread.²⁵ That is to say, while the Republic had been continuously using military power to suppress the practice of Islam in private circles, there was a continuous struggle to maintain the integrity of tariqas and cemaats. During the early republican period, the state assumed an intransigent approach to close not just tekke and zaviyes but many of the mosques as well. The political pressure reduced the appearance of cemaats on the surface. However, gatherings, communication amongst members of various cemaats and practices were continued relentlessly in an informal way, over the years. Various orders of mystic traditions such as Naskhi order, Kadiri order, Cerrahi order sustained prominence among the masses. They continued their activities under the radar. At the aftermath of each military intervention, they faced pressure from state institutions, their leaders were imprisoned and their activities were halted. Nonetheless the state, most of the time with

an exception of the early republican period up until 1950s, looked away in order to allow their activities. After all, the state did not want to take on the religious enterprise to dismantle it altogether since the state acknowledged that this would be a disservice to its own wellbeing. Instead the state saw that religion could be utilized as a unifier whenever it was necessary, hence it allowed religion’s existence under its supervision.

**Alphabet Change**

One of the most significant steps that the Republic put forth in respect to controlling religious education as part of the larger project of westernization came with the change of letters. The transition from Ottoman Turkish, based on the Arabic alphabet, to modern Turkish established on the Latin alphabet was swift. To ensure that people learned the new system and did not use the old one, security forces were employed. They would investigate the ones using the old alphabet punishing them at Independence Tribunals.  

Alphabet change that took place in 1928 was an organic move toward separating the past from the present and the future. With this new development, access to the information about the past was going to be limited to the ones who were able to read the old alphabet. After a generation or two, the number of people who could read and understand the documents of the Ottoman period would decrease dramatically. Also the number of people who could read original Arabic texts of religion would decimate as well. This would enable the state to control the religious educational enterprise. The state could filter religious knowledge and weed out what it might have deemed hazardous to national identity before people would have access to it. The alphabet change was also emblematic of how the Republic envisioned itself as part of the

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Western culture. The rest of Europe was using the Latin alphabet thus modern Turkey had to follow suit. Turkish people, without respite, learned the new letters. The government launched teaching campaigns under the Republican People’s Party to expedite the process.

**Introduction of Laiklik and Diyanet**

As the establishment of the Republic was taking shape in the developmental stages, initially, “Muslim” identity of Ataturk quickly eroded. His speeches, behavior, and actions demonstrated dissidence to the Islamic values held by the larger public. In the compilation of his speeches between 1919 and 1938, one of the radical proclamations includes the statement: “We get our inspirations not from the heavens or invisible things but directly from life.”27 There is no doubt that Mustafa Kemal was interested in using Islam as a fulcrum for a project of civil participation.28 Ataturk and his colleagues were well aware of the significance of Islam in the public square. It would not be possible to create a society without religion's presence. One of the reasons for that was the fact that an attempt to dissipate religion would create chaos in the society. They wanted a unified mass, as much as possible, to support the process of nation-state building. However, they also wanted to see religion confined to a limited space within the society. They were cognizant that religion was an important element of the Ottomans' lives. Now, in modern Turkey they wanted to rearrange the place of religion and ensure that this rearrangement would be preserved. They wanted to keep religion in private and create a separate space for public affairs bereft of religious expression.29 In order to succeed in this endeavor,


28 Mardin, Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey, 278.

29 Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish*
Ataturk introduced the Turkish version of secularism, laiklik, in 1937.\textsuperscript{30} The word “Islam” was already removed from the Turkish constitution as the official religion of the state in 1928.\textsuperscript{31}

Turkish secularism was seen as an important part of the westernization project.\textsuperscript{32} Therefore adoption of secularism was seen as a “final break with the past and the East” to integrate Turkey into Western culture.\textsuperscript{33} The major institutions of the Republic that controlled religious education such as Diyanet, i.e. the Directorate of Religious Affairs and Imam Hatip schools were established as a result of the implementation of laiklik.

In the effort to introduce secularism and ‘secure’ its position in the society, the political elite, which were primarily formed of the People Republican’s Party, introduced several legislations:

One of the most important legal tools in this context was the Act dated 3rd March 1340 (1924) no. 429 on the Abolishment of The Ministries of Seriyye (Religious Affairs) and Evkaf (Pious Foundations). The new legislation preferred to place the management of religious affairs in the hands of an administrative bureau, not to a ministry in the cabinet. This was a key part of the overall policy of the founding political decision-making elite of Turkey who wanted to establish a strictly secular state and to transform society into a modern one.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{30} Tas, \textit{Ataturk Ilkeleri ve Inkilaplar\i Tarihi II}, 160.

\textsuperscript{31} Lewis, \textit{Emergence of Modern Turkey}, 404.

\textsuperscript{32} Roger Owen, “Modernization Projects in Middle Eastern Perspective,” 249.

\textsuperscript{33} Lewis, \textit{Emergence of Modern Turkey}, 279.

The first article of Act no. 429 reflects on *Kemalist* secularism:

In the Republic of Turkey, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and the Cabinet, which is formed by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, are responsible for the legislation and execution of provisions concerning the affairs of people; and the Presidency of Religious Affairs will be formed as a part of the Republic for the implementation of all provisions concerning faith and prayer of the religion of Islam, and the administration of religious organizations.\(^{35}\)

With this regulation, religious affairs concerning faith and prayer were made the concern of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, and all other areas of interest were considered to be under the legislative power of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, thus *sharia* as a legal system was abolished:

*Diyanet* is responsible for regulating the operation of the country’s registered mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants and also covers the cost of utilities at registered mosques. Some groups, particularly some *Alevi*, claim that *Diyanet* policies reflect mainstream *Sunni* Islamic beliefs and accuse the *Diyanet* of bias since it does not allocate specific funds for *Alevi* activities or religious leadership and does not cover the cost of utilities at ‘*Alevi* cem houses’ because they are not formally recognized as places of worship.\(^{36}\)

### Marginalization (Elimination) of Ulema (Islamic Scholars)

As the Ottoman establishment was coming to an end, the *Ulema* were being marginalized by the proponents of secularism. Devout and conservative critics of the religious establishment took to berating the *Ulema* with unflattering comparisons to Christian clergy. The negative branding of the *Ulema* became very prevalent in public discourse during the closing years of the empire among westernists, nationalists, and some conservatives alike. On this backdrop, Mustafa Kemal declared in 1923, “We should remember that there is no special class of people in our religion. This religion

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Nielsen, Akgonul and Alibasic, *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, 355.
rejects priesthood and its claims of monopoly. Take the *Ulema* for example: the duty of enlightenment is restricted to them, and our religion specifically forbids it.”\(^{37}\) Ataturk, here, was assuming the position of a religious leader by referring to the Islamic tradition.

Furthermore, he was using religious knowledge to buttress his take on the clergy. The analogy which Ataturk drew from at this particular statement is also very interesting and a strong argument for openly rising against religious leaders. At various local levels, the early Republic that positioned itself against the *Ulema*, had faced backlash. People took castigation of the *Ulema* largely as an assault against religion. They rose up against the authorities. Nonetheless, the state wielded this to its advantage as well:

> [A] significant Muslim (and Kurdish) backlash, especially in the 1925 Seyh Said rebellion, gave Ataturk and his supporters the opportunity to rid themselves not just of religious leaders, but of a large number of unionist (Ottoman) sympathizers. It also gave the new republicans a moment to consolidate “Turkish” as a modern, secular, national identity, and it is this legacy, and the suppression of the Muslim parallel path to modern, which remains so contested in present-day Turkey.\(^{38}\)

### Tevhid-i Tedrisat and Implementation Followed through Reforms

In the “*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*” section of *Religion, Society and Modernity in Turkey*, academic Serif Mardin discusses the unification of Teaching under the Republic. The provision passed on March 3\(^{rd}\) attached all public instruction in the Turkish Republic to the Ministry of Public Instruction, which, is the foundation of modern Turkish educational policy. This law has, however, sparked a controversy that has lasted until the present. The statute of 1924 brought an end to all teaching of religious seminaries known as *medrese*. It unified education under a secular setting. In the meantime religious

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education that was until then provided by medreses, was to be taught by the state. Therefore, for this particular purpose “in 1924, in order to provide an educational service to a large number of school-age children, the decision was made to establish Imam-Hatip schools.”

This also ensured that all the Diyanet employees were to be trained in the national schools. The fourth article of the Tevhid-i Tedrisat law proposed the establishment of a Faculty of Divinity in Istanbul University in order to train experts in religion to be hired by the Diyanet. It also stipulated that new schools (mekteps) to train imams and preachers be established. These mekteps, in other words, schools, survived until 1933, and the Diyanet opened Qur’an Study Schools in 1934 in order to replace these mekteps.

As the state attempted to marginalize religion by controlling it, it was also trying to implement certain reforms. It is noteworthy that in the “reform of religion” project, that the state undertook, the Diyanet was not a policy maker. This reform proposal included performing the rituals of worship in Turkish, redesigning the interior of mosques, and introducing musical instruments into worship. However, the vast majority of people strongly opposed these reforms, preventing their success, causing the commission to be dissolved, and the measures to be abandoned.

Despite popular opposition against absurd elitist invention of religious practices we find an overall control of religion by state power through the establishment of Diyanet. According to Article 136 of the Constitution of Turkey: “The Department of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties

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39 Mardin, Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey, 276.

prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity.” It is empowered to regulate issues concerning Islamic belief, rituals and morality and providing society with religious guidance.\(^{41}\)

**Majority Rules and/or Minority Rights?**

In the reforms the Turkish state undertook concerning the “containment” of religion in public and private space, various approaches were taken from the alphabet reform to establishment of *Diyanet*. Indeed, it is clear from these reforms that both majority and minority rights have been restricted and abridged by state control of all religions. Despite the fact that majority of the populations was comprised of Muslims they did not enjoy religious freedom due to the restrictions on mosques, religious education and dissemination of religious knowledge. The non-Muslim minority was treated no differently. With the closure of *tekke* and *zaviyes*, their monasteries, temples, shrines were closed down as well. They were discouraged to openly announce their religious identities. In short, in this particular take on secularism, namely illiberal secularism, neither majority’s views were respected nor minority rights taken into consideration.

The formal changes were brought alongside the introduction of secular i.e. *laik* values. The unraveling crisis, disruption and discontent that were brought to the Turkish society with respect to religion’s place in public life were major indicators of a deeply engrained identity crisis. This created a snowball-effect over the years turning different groups within the society against one another. Discussions around *laiklik* became the

\(^{41}\) Nielsen and Akgonul, *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, 353.
most divisive and controversial topic of contention particularly in 1990s and 2000s.
During the last decade, the rule of Justice and Development Party (AKP) has brought
economic and political reforms in large part that overturned many of the previous
restrictions under the illiberal secular era of the nation-building project of the 20th
century. The following discussion in Chapter 3 will introduce the transition from illiberal
secular era into an illiberal democratic era, beginning with Islamist roots dating back to
1960s when religion was reappearing in the public sphere.
The uncompromising application of the westernization project in a top-down manner by the early Republican People’s Party (CHP) government caused people to develop a sense of opposition and distance to the state. This opposition was most prevalent among the religiously conscious groups. They, however, did not have a political venue to pursue their opposition within the political system. CHP was the only party during this one-party system and party members were appointed as the governors and mayors of cities, provinces, etc. to ensure implementation of this top-down westernization project. The resentment against CHP’s anti-Islamic laws built up within the society as a result of the identity changing reforms that continuously distanced a religiously based Muslim society from its Islamic-Ottoman roots. With the onset of multi-party politics beginning in 1940, the religiously conscious opposition found its niche right across the aisle within Democratic Party under the leadership of Adnan Menderes.

In today’s terms, Menderes was not an Islamist nor was he a religiously identified politician. His popularity among the majority was due to his stance against the methods used by the CHP government. So people supported him not necessarily because they agreed with him on all his policies but because he was the only political figure who was an alternative to CHP ideology:

By establishing new linkages between the center and the periphery and bringing the views and aspirations of the periphery closer to the center, the Democratic Party presented politics for the first time as having deliberative
aspects rather than being simply an administrative means to implement an elite-defined civilization project.¹

Between 1946 and 1950 when the Democratic Party came to power for the first time after a one futile attempt in the ballot box, Menderes used the frustration in people against CHP as a leverage to promote democratic values. “This was the first government that was fully based on the will of the people.”² Under his reign within the next decade, he literally worked on undoing the damage brought on Turkish people by CHP reforms. His first order in office as the Prime Minister had a “symbolic” value that won the hearts and the minds of masses that would later become the basis of the Islamist movement.³ This order was the reversal of the call to prayer from Turkish language back to its original Arabic language. Between the years 1938 and 1950 as part of westernizing reforms, Ataturk had ordered ezan to be Turkish. Sela, a call to funeral ceremony was also in Turkish.

As a personal anecdote, I wanted to include my grandmother’s experience as a youth in the Istanbul streets when she first heard the ezan called in Arabic for the first time after eighteen years. “It was emotional indeed for the people of the older generation who literally began to cry,” she said. “For those of us who were young kids and were hearing the ezan in its original language the first time was also emotional because we had heard our parents speak of it. It was as if life came back to the city, and we felt alive again. Elhamdulillah (Thanks be to God).” Also, my grandfather was a young man in high school employed to call Turkish ezan at the time.

¹ Hakan Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity in Turkey, 61.


³ Ibid., 77.
Adnan Menderes believed in political and economic liberalization, namely the two prongs of the democratic process. He was never against the West. He believed that majority rule was essential to a democratic multi-party system. In his party program this translated to the necessity of meeting the needs of religious people. “The salient feature of this program was a transition from etatism to economic liberalism and from a stricter to a more relaxed or perhaps concessionist secularism. Also, the foreign policy slanted even more to the West.” He perceived CHP’s approach to westernization authoritative. Furthermore, there was a patent urgency to address the day-to-day needs of almost all Muslim population such as religiously conducted ceremonies, rituals such as birth and burial. Without any religious knowledge, people would not know where to turn except the state that assumed authority on religious affairs. Therefore, Adnan Menderes utilized basic rights discourse by introducing to the nation that religious freedom was essential in the progression of a society and if the people demanded religious education similar to that of the Catholic schools in the West then it was required by the government to open up Islamic schools. This approach was manifested in the opening of Imam Hatip schools under the National Education Ministry where basic Qur’anic and Arabic instruction was given alongside secular curriculum of positive sciences.

In brief, National Education Ministry is the state institution responsible for education. Since in Turkey, religion and religious education are controlled by the state, it comes only natural to the state to provide its citizens with religious education through the work of National Education Ministry. Religious education was first introduced as optional. Later it was rendered mandatory. That is to say, all children had to learn about

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4 Ibid., 75.

5 Ibid., 77.
religion, independent of their religious affiliation. The religious education provided by the state focuses on Sunni tradition with an approach of Hanefi sect. In other words, the Turkish state recognizes only Islam to be a viable religion and furthermore within the Islamic credo, it recognizes the Sunni reading of Islam, failing to take into account non-Sunni traditions such as Alevi tradition. The fact that the state merely focused on a particular interpretation of a particular religion enabled the state to create homogeneity amongst its subjects. Under this perspective, people who were not affiliated with a particular reading of Islam, namely Christians, Jews and people of other faiths and Muslim people who were not Sunni Muslims, failed recognition by the state. Moreover, their children were forced to learn about Sunni Islam despite their affiliations to other religions or other readings of Islam.

Menderes did not see religious education to be violating secularism principle. He looked up to the western democracies in general. His foreign affairs policies also involved tightened relations with Western Europe and United States where in both, secularism would accommodate people’s right to religious expression and education. Under his leadership, the Imam Hatip schools were opened where future practicing Muslim leaders such as Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, Bulent Arinc and many Islamist were raised. The Institute of Islamic Studies was opened on his watch that later became the higher education institutes, namely Ilahiyat School, as part of universities.

Menderes not only addressed the issues of the masses in need of religious education, he also appealed to the common men of the periphery:

…DP government directly or indirectly encouraged private initiatives favoring religion such as the building of mosques and the setting up of the centers of religious instruction by private funds and communal donations, the increase in the number of pilgrims going to Mecca and that of people who visited the tombs
and shrines of holy men and a more widespread observance of the fasting during Ramadhan.⁶

Despite the fact that Menderes government made strides in developing the country’s industries from health to transportation, from energy to commerce, changes in the realm of religion disturbed the elites only to prod military intervention.⁷ Menderes was forced out of office in 1960 and the Committee of National Unity, a military establishment assumed office. By then, the creation of the democratic machinery was already on its way accompanied by the very foundation of the Islamist movement, which only needed time to burgeon. Nonetheless, democratization did not take place as anticipated partly due to the entrenchment of illiberal secularism that pried into every fundamental value of the republican life. The attempt to mend the illiberal nature of secularism during Menderes’s time resulted in his execution. Hanging of a dually elected prime minister by the military establishment was sufficient to put a halt to the democratic process.

From 1960s to 1990s

Islamist movement of Turkey was started off by Necmeddin Erbakan, who established MNP (National Order Party), MSP (National Salvation Party) and RP (Welfare Party) in tandem during a period of thirty years between 1970s and the end of 1990s. In his approach to religious affairs, he was not much different than Menderes. He also was against an “interpretation of secularism which might be hostile to religion.”⁸ Erbakan was an adroit politician. He utilized the democratic foundation put forth before

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⁶ Ibid., 78.
⁷ Ibid., 75.
⁸ Jacob Landau, Radical Politics in Modern Turkey (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1997), 191.
him wisely. He also employed rights discourse in his rhetoric by suggesting that the “democratic regime was a whole. It was not possible to have a democratic regime without rights and freedoms of thought and belief.”⁹ Similar to Menderes, Erbakan was a nemesis for the elitists in the country. Unlike Menderes though, Erbakan was against integration of Turkey to Europe. He had both social and economic reasons to support his stance. He argued that there was a religiously based cultural chasm that could not be bridged between Europe and Turkey. It was Muslim Turkey on one side and the Christian West on the other. Erbakan believed that integration into Europe would only serve the latter rather than the people of the former. Western hegemony that came in both social and economic forms was what he was up against. He believed that Muslims and only Muslims could help one another, and therefore it was indispensable for Muslims to join hands together economically and politically. This view of Erbakan would later give way to the birth of what he would call an “alternative” to the union of original G7 established among Western democracies, namely D8. Moreover Erbakan believed that integration to Europe would only further serve the aspirations of the elitists in Turkey. According to him, the elite had the economic and political upper hand over the nation’s religious masses. He argued that “big businesses would become even more predominant in the Turkish economy because of its stronger links with European countries” consolidating their power to exercise more restrictive policies over people.¹⁰

Erbakan also wanted to open up more space for the religious people in public life. He wanted religion to be more visible and religious people to have the right to practice their faith in comfort and security. Nonetheless all of his parties, one after another, faced

⁹ Geyikdagi, Political Parties in Turkey: The Role of Islam, 122.

¹⁰ Ibid., 123.
the same destiny of closure sometimes accompanied by military interventions. In a coalition with the DSP, another version of CHP, in 1974 Erbakan succeeded in turning optional religious education to compulsory.11

Erbakan played a critical role as the galvanizer of apolitical masses of the periphery. In the rural areas people were comparably more religious than the people of the urban cities. There was a cultural superiority assumed by the latter over the former. The latter was more educated and more secular while the former perceived the secularizing policies to be a fundamental stumbling block particularly in areas such as education. Many wanted to stay away from official educational institutions that invariably preached secular values. Particularly, in the realm of female population, the dichotomy between the rural and the urban would be more salient. In general, we can argue that there was almost a bi-polar dichotomy between the educated, secular, elite or elite-follower, urbanized city dwellers who were privileged economically, socially and politically (since they aligned their lives with the aspirations of the official state, which is the ideology of the CHP) and the less educated, politically and socially conservative, and economically lower classes of the society. He albeit indirectly wielded religion as the main component of his rhetoric. He had to conceal it within the nationalist discourse to ensure that it stay within the secular political realm. This also allowed him to align with the Turkish-Islam synthesis promoted by the official state ideology.

**Ozal Years**

The political turmoil of the 1970s was represented by the leftist-rightist divide goaded by the military powers.12 Unbridled clashes between the youth of the two

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11 Ibid., 106.
political classes led to social and economic unrest. At the end the Military, quasi-rightly so, found the grounds to intervene. One of the reasons used to justify the coup was the fact that Erbakan’s political movement was perceived as a “threat” to Turkey’s commitment to secularism. A program organized by his followers and the speech he made in Konya in support of the Palestinian cause was among the pretenses that the military fell back on to explain the exigencies that led to the military’s action.\(^\text{13}\)

All party leaders of the time were taken into custody leaving the political vacuum to be filled with a new face in politics, namely Turgut Ozal. The military government established by General Kenan Evren held an election that brought Ozal to the prime ministry in 1983. During his time in office, he strived to introduce a transition into a full-fledged democracy by focusing on economic liberalization. Ozal was a technocrat who spent sometime working at the World Bank in the United States. His admiration for the American political system shaped his program in Turkey. He developed an appreciation for Americans’ striving to keep the government small. He believed in government’s efficiency to serve its people and argued that the government need not be large to be efficacious. He believed in “Turkey’s integration into global capitalist economy.”\(^\text{14}\) He prioritized privatization policies as part of the economic package. This would allow, he conjectured, a shift from state power that was consolidated in the hands of the elitists to people’s power. In other words, “…the focus increasingly shifted from the state to


\(^\text{13}\) Murat Aksoy, Basortusu-Turban: Batılılaşma-Modernleşme, Laiklik ve Ortunme (Istanbul: Kitap Yayinevi, 2005), 158.

society; consequently the modernizing elites began to lose their power to transform the society from above and were increasingly replaced by more representative elites.”  

This was the beginning of the emergence of long awaited civil society. His liberalization policies also “created a new Islamic capitalist class in Anatolian cities” which would later become the fulcrum of an alternative middle class, in other words a new religious bourgeoisie that will vie for power and representation in public space under the leadership of Erbakan in 1990s. This new class would, in time, create a new Muslim elite class during Tayyip Erdogan’s reign in early 2000s.

Ozal also admired Americans’ approach to secularism. He believed in the creation of a religious space where people could freely exercise their faith. He also employed his own faith based initiative programs, if you will. Since Turkish secularism rendered the state control over religious affairs, Ozal wielded state’s power in his discretion to expand the space for religious people. He, for instance, encouraged religious indoctrination of the youth through state subsidies to religious schools, pious societies and mosques. Among the achievements of his epoch one can cite the building of 15,000 mosques and allowing the building of mosques on university campuses, and encouraging the opening of more than 2,000 religious courses, and increasing the share of public money to Diyanet. The military establishment that carried out the coup and brought Ozal to power did not take an issue of his policies concerning religion. There was a practical reason for that. They countenanced National Education Ministry taking


16 Kardam, Turkey’s Engagement with Global Women’s Human Rights, 49.

17 Huri Tursan, Democratization in Turkey: The Role of Political Parties (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2004), 228.
the initiative in the religious text teaching of the Qur’an. The country had been eroding into political strife from the different ethnic/political background of citizens who comprised a majority of university level students as well as high school level. Such political-religious/ethnic identities ranged from the Religious Nationalists to Marxists and Alevi Kurds to Islamists. In order to establish credibility and control over differing views emerging from the young generation, the Republic deemed it necessary to give teachings on religion. Such teaching, of course, is modified according to the “Secular Turkish Republic’s” definition. Hence religion was a unifier for the nation. There was, though, no room to expand on the content of the “religious” teaching, or teaching of other traditions such as Judaism and Christianity.

President General Kenan Evren, served toward further entrenchment of illiberal secularism which, needless to say, was counterproductive to the process of democratization. He would incessantly opine on religious matters to shape people’s perception of religious duties not leaving religious matters to personal preferences but rather using it to shape state policies. During his presidency, he introduced the official ban on wearing of the Muslim headscarf in 1982. He argued that there is no such thing as covering for women in Islam. This was the doctrine of “Evren’s Islam.” The Holy Book of Qur’an stated otherwise:

And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests

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18 Caparoglu, Meclis’te Basortusu Mucadelesi, 47.


20 Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity in Turkey, 70.
and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.  

Furthermore, the Holy Book commends:

O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.

Despite the above reading of the scripture that is widely accepted by Muslims all around the world, Evren did not budge in striving to persuade women to take their headscarves off. The headscarf ban prevailed decade after decade becoming one of the means of assurance for preserving the illiberal nature of Turkish secularism. Ozal also attempted to revoke the headscarf ban several times during his time in office, however he failed due to the opposition from CHP and the President, General Evren. He continued to challenge people’s belief system not from outside, but from inside of the religious creed. During one visit of his to one of the cities in the Eastern part of Turkey on a Ramadhan day (when Muslims fast for a period of one month and do not drink or eat anything between the sun rise and the sun set), he drank a glass of water right before he started his public address on stage. He then turned to the audience and said: “I know that it is Ramadhan, but I am not fasting because I am a traveller,” referring to the very part of

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21 *Holy Book of Qur’an*, Chapter 24 (Surah Noor), Verse 31.  


23 *Yeni Akit gazetesi*, 7/19/2013.
the knowledge within Islamic tradition that a traveller could be exempt from fasting until his trip ends:

[Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew.\(^{24}\)

\(\textit{Erbakan Years}\)

Late 1980s and early 1990s attested to Islamists’ saliency in the public realm. Erbakan’s Refah Party (the successor of MNP and MSP) first became the major opposition. The national municipality elections of 1994 marked the beginning of Islamist politics in office. RP became the highest ranking party with 22.4% of the votes. Islamist won 400 cities and towns in total, including the major six metropolitan cities namely Istanbul, Ankara, Konya, Kayseri, Diyarbakir and Erzurum.\(^{25}\) Tayyip Erdogan, who is a mere epitome of what the Turkish Islamist movement “produced,” became the mayor of Istanbul. RP only lost the city of Izmir in the Western border, which symbolizes the elitist approach and the westernized lifestyle of the republican ideology. Across the board, from Istanbul in the North East to Diyarbakir in the South East which is a highly Kurdish populated region, Islamist came out as the victors. They espoused the cliché of “all politics is local” as their rule of thumb and immediately acted on it. They worked “religiously.” The word is used intentionally to point to the fact that Islamists saw political action as an integral part of their religious duties. Turgut Ozal worked toward shifting the power from state to the people in 1980s. Now Erbakan was taking on the

\(^{24}\textit{Holy Book of Qur’an}, \text{ Chapter 2 (Surah Baqarah), Verse 184.}\)

\(^{25}\textit{Ergun Ozbudun, Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation} \text{(CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 89.}\)
challenge of bridging the gap between the state and the people. He believed in a government of service below the people, so to speak, rather than a repressive machinery that looks down upon its people. Erbakan was open in his critique of the state’s priorities. He believed that the state was in existence only to serve its people, therefore it should not be concerned with protecting itself from its people. Rather than the state being in the hands of a few privileged elitists who are only concerned about their own well being, it must be in the hands of the people that make up the Turkish tapestry.

The second victory of Islamists came three years later. Erbakan came to power in a coalition with Tansu Ciller’s centralist DYP (True Path Party) in 1997. Erbakan’s prime ministry lasted only eleven months. His government was overthrown by a military coup, namely the post-modern coup of February 28. Erbakan cashed in on the political space opened up for marginalized groups within the society as a result of the liberalizing policies of Ozal period. The people of the periphery and the petite bourgeoisie of the small cities of the country became strengthened, starting to create an alternative bourgeoisie class that was culturally conservative. They posed an alternative life style of Islamic traditions mixed with Turkish culture as opposed to the elitist city dwellers who presented a secular and westernized life style. Islamists “played a key role in the political socialization of Islamic groups by mobilizing them to take part in the political process and thus facilitating political participation.”

A pluralist civil society that the Republic lacked until then was now in emergence. This would give way to the rise of an entrepreneurial class dubbed the Anatolian Lions made up of the newly established religious bourgeoisie who was “economically liberal.”

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27 Ibid., 215.
Erbakan also had an economic program. He was determined to take the state funds that were largely allocated to serve the benefit of a small elite and create programs that will benefit the larger society. He created the “pool system” to collect all revenues before distributed to the society.28 This infuriated the elitist class who were in close connection with the military. He also had a foreign affairs agenda to unite the Ummah, the global Muslim community. He believed in the economic and political cooperation of the Muslim people throughout the world. Economic cooperation, he hoped, could one day lead to political unity as in the past of the Caliphate period. He would call this an Islamic Union. It was conjectured to be similar to European Union. Erbakan also shared with public the symbolic currency that he hoped to introduce if the union was created. As a step geared toward this goal he initiated the establishment of the Developing 8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, in short, D8 comprised of eight developing Muslim countries, namely Turkey, Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nigeria as an alternative to then the G7 of the developed countries.29

Erbakan’s government also attempted to amend laws that would open up space for religious expression. Despite the fact that Erbakan publicly enunciated that he would revoke the headscarf ban he did not find majority support in the parliament. On the contrary, this attempt would be considered against the secularism of Turkey and therefore would become one of the reasons used by the Constitutional Court to close down RP.30 The military and the elitists joined hands to prepare the environment for the


30 A set of directives from the 1997 post-modern coup listed in The Dallas Morning News,
coup. The elitists were never content with the election of RP to start with. Now they had the opportunity to get rid of the Islamists. They took to the streets and protested. The president of the country, Demirel, also took active part in by his incendiary remarks. Post-modern Coup of 1997 came with a set of directives from the military at the end of the convening of the National Security Council that rearranged the place of religion in public life, marginalized schools that provided religious education and ostracized religious Muslim who were public servants and military members:

1- There must be no compromise against actions that target the republican, laik, social democratic regime of Turkish Republic. The revolutionary reforms must be implemented.

2- Prosecutors must be mobilized to take action against behavior that violates the revolution laws.

3- Promotion of sarik [a hat worn by religious authorities in the Ottoman time worn] and cuppe [a gown that was worn by religious authority in the Ottoman time] is seen.

4- Legal vacuum emerged from the repeal of Article 163 of the Constitution led to the strengthening of reactionary and anti-laik activities. Regulations that will fill that vacuum must be made.

5- In the educational policies a return to the spirit of Tevhid-i Tedrisat [Atatürk’s reform to secularize the educational system] must be elicited.

6- Compulsory education must be increased to 8 years.

7- Imam Hatip schools were originally established to meet a need. The excessive Imam Hatip schools must be transformed into professional schools. The Qur’anic courses under the control of fundamentalists must be closed down and courses must be given at classes of Ministry of National Education.

8- There is an entrenchment of fundamentalists employment at the federal offices, and municipalities. The government must prevent this.

9- All behavior to exploit religion for political gain, such as building a mosque must cease and desist.

10- Semi-automatic weapons must be taken under control.

11- Iran’s attempt to push the regime into instability must be kept under scrutiny.

12- The regulations that will enable the independent work of the judiciary system and will secure the independence of it must be made.

13- Recently there is an enormous increase in provocations that target the members of TSK Turkish Armed Forces. These attacks are causing discomfort in TSK.

14- The hiring of the military officers, who are discharged from TSK due to involvement of reactionarism, by the local municipalities must be thwarted.

15- The speeches of the mayors, the party officials at cities and towns must be regulated under the Law of Political Parties.

16- The religious sects’ becoming economic power with the support of endowments and financial institutions must be watched closely.

17- The messages aired by the television and radio outlets that are known to espouse an anti-laik path must be watched carefully.

18- The illegal monetary transfer from National View Endowment to some of the municipalities must be stopped.\(^{31}\)

Turkey, at this point, was experiencing both the applications of illiberal secularism that resulted in lack of democratization. A government that was dually elected was thrown out of office for prioritizing people’s demands rather than that of the elitists who were determined to preserve the status quo. Erbakan’s destiny was not as harsh as that of Menderes. Banned from politics, he was put in house arrest. Mayor of Istanbul, Tayyip Erdogan was also imprisoned for publicly reading a religious poem. It is noteworthy to mention that Islamist movement in Turkey “has never resorted to violence in its challenge of the secular state ideology that has governed Turkey for 74

\(^{31}\) Akel, *Erbakan ve Generaller*, 337.
years. It opted for remaining within the current political system to pursue its religiously aspired goals.

**Erdogan Years**

Political realm, bereft of Islamist leaders, their party closed down, a new government of a centralist ANAP (Motherland Party), a **Kemalist DSP** (Democratic Leftist Party) and a ultra nationalist MHP (National Movement Party) establish a coalition government to undertake the duty of implementing the secularizing decree of the National Security Council. Islamists established the ephemeral FP (Virtue Party). FP also was closed down due to a female parliamentarian’s headscarf, who demanded that she take her oath of office. This was perceived as an attempt to violate secularism principle of Turkey. The incident, also known as the **Kavakci Ordeal**, led to the closure of the party soon after. The coalition government implemented the coup directives rigorously. Many of the **Imam Hatip** schools were closed down, women with headscarves were fired, public servants whose female family members wore the Islamic headgear were either demoted, relegated or fired. About a hundred thousand military men on active duty were kicked out of the military. **Imam Hatip** schools were particularly a focal point for the groups behind the coup. They argued that in order to ensure thwarting the growth of Islamist movement, these schools had to be closed down since **Imam Hatip** schools were the education institutions where most of the religious political figures were raised:

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Imam Hatip schools were named Imam Hatip High Schools in 1973 and authorized to provide education for both vocational and undergraduate study under Article 32 of the Basic Law of the National Education of 1973. During the process of military intervention, the so-called “28 February 1997 post-modern coup,” the secondary schools of Imam-Hatip Lycees were closed down and the high school part was made four-year lycées providing vocational education. As a result of this change, graduates of these schools were effectively barred from entrance to universities, apart from faculties of theology and the number of students attending them fell from 500,000 to 60,000 in the space of five years…Since February 28, 1997 coup d’état, new Imam Hatip schools were not established.35

The government in office also introduced a ban on the teaching of the Holy Book of Qur’an to children under the age of 12 at home. It required that children be taught during the summer session by state employed teachers at official settings. This was an example of the expansive and meddlesome nature of illiberal secularism that shaped life within the private realm as well. In the public space the situation was no different. Illiberal secularism was fervently introduced to every facet of public life as well in the ensuing years after the coup. People’s lives were scrutinized by the security forces, part of bureaucracy that was under the influence of the coup-supporter elites. Members of the judiciary who were also proponents of staunch secularism decreed against the religious defendants, brought before justice for mundane and personal reasons such as not consuming alcohol despite insistences at social gatherings or avoiding to bring their wives to these functions to mingle with others. According to the illiberal nature of Turkish secularism, to be an observant Muslim who fasts at the month of Ramadhan was a valid reason to be expelled from active duty for reactionary anti-secular behavior. The post coup government was committed to employ illiberal secularism at the expense of losing democratic principles along the way. The cost, for a country like Turkey who wanted to be a member of the “European club” sooner or later, was very high. Following

the nationwide economic crisis of 2001 early elections brought Tayyip Erdogan’s AKP (Justice and Development Party) to power with 34.28% of the votes. Erdogan was still barred from politics for threatening the secular state ideology. Abdullah Gul assumed leadership and became the prime minister only to, later leave his post to Erdogan.

In order to ward off the castigations from the anti-Islamist elites the first thing Erdogan did was to announce that he was no longer an Islamist. Not many found him convincing. As prevalent in other parts of the world, Islamists of Turkey were not to be trusted with their word. On the contrary, they were assumed to always have a hidden agenda to be divulged when the right time came. Erdogan had no hidden agenda. He was transparent as to what the party program included. He enunciated that economic development was the top priority on his to-do-list. In response to the disenfranchised masses from religious groups waiting to be awarded in return of their support to Erdogan, he stated that their priorities were no longer his, for the time being. Mainly the demands from the practicing Muslims included the reversal of the coup directives. Nonetheless Erdogan did not have the political power to attend their cries. He, rather espoused Ozal style leadership in many ways and focused on consolidating power through economic development. That is to say, he embraced neo-liberal policies. For the purpose of development overall, he pursued European Union accession road map. To be promoting EU membership helped him gain some credit in the eyes of the elitist seculars, but more so among liberals who have been victimized by the illiberal secularist system as well. In other words, people who were committed to the liberal thought became Erdogan’s main supporters in addition to the religious masses.

His neo-liberal outlook with respect to economy caught the attention of the Western democracies as well. He shaped his foreign policy based on maximizing foreign
investment to tackle the long awaiting problems of Turkish economy. In the meantime, he took the necessary measures through enactments to fight corruption, unemployment and inflation as required by the accession process. During this particular time, Erdogan never mentioned the fact that he was a victim of secular illiberalism as a person who was jailed for reading a religiously inspired poem. Furthermore, he sent his two daughters who wore headscarves to the United States to pursue their higher education. He, along with his family, was still a victim of the staunch secular state ideology. Abdullah Gul or Bulent Arinc and others were no different. Gul’s daughter opted to wear a wig on her headscarf until she finished the university. That is to say, AKP as a party did not challenge the illiberal nature of secularism during the first five years. On the contrary, they, consciously, turned attention to economic issues and ignored the social religious matters all together.

During this time, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, as a “soldier of Kemalism,” put stumbling blocks to slow down Erdogan’s government. He never accepted women with headscarves to his presidential residence. Therefore Erdogan, Gul, Arinc and others whose wives wore headscarves could only enter the premise alone without the company of their wives. President Sezer vetoed almost all of AKP government’s parliamentary proposals. Despite the fact that the parliament passed, for instance, welfare laws to increase state subsidies to help the needy students, Sezer would immediately veto the law. He did not have to think twice if the law actually was to the benefit of the larger society or not, he just used his veto power to thwart AKP’s agenda. Nonetheless, Sezer’s actions were counterproductive. A patient Erdogan garnered more deference from the public than before as he assumed the position of the wise leader who was acting out of altruism. In the consecutive two elections AKP continued to increase its votes. In the
2007 presidential elections, the fact that his wife wears a headscarf became the major opposition reason against Erdogan. CHP started a nation wide opposition campaign based on character assassination. The theme in this campaign was presented mainly by the argument that neither Erdogan nor his wife were qualified to lead the nation and represent Turkey in the international realm. Close to the election time, to the surprise of many, Erdogan offered the position to Abdullah Gul. CHP carried out its opposition against Gul as well. His wife was also wearing a headscarf. CHP, after such a focused character assassination against Erdogan and his family, could not find the kind of support it was hoping for during Gul’s candidacy.

In the meantime, the military establishment introduced a novel version of another coup, namely an electronic coup in 2007. The Kemalist military, replete with consternation and disgruntlement due to the rising religiosity amongst people, expressed its concern through its official website. The major subject that led to military’s perturbed state was the celebration of commemorating the Prophet’s birth. These celebrations were long part and parcel of the Turkish Islam’s folkloric culture. The fact that the military establishment was disturbed with these cultural activities was a blatant proof of the kind of chasm secular elitists and the religious people had in between. The former was so foreign to the latter’s cultural norms and rituals to the extent that it perceived them as a threat.

Despite the efforts of the proponents of illiberal secularism, namely the Kemalist elitists, Abdullah Gul became the new president. With the new president from his own party, Erdogan for the first time included the illiberal nature of Turkish secularism in his agenda. He believed that secularism had to be redefined. After a meeting in New York City held by SETA Foundation in 2011, Prime Minister Erdogan in a conversation
directed me to look at the party program online and emphasized how the party had re-defined secularism.\textsuperscript{36}

Under Gul’s presidency, Erdogan was now ready to push for some internal reforms. He would not attack secularism directly per se, but he would make references to the implications of illiberal secularism of Turkey that is violating basic rights such as education and economic freedom and the right to choose in day-to-day life. In a visit to the Middle East after the Arab Spring, he advised the Egyptians to espouse a secular system. That is to say that Erdogan’s AKP did not have an issue with secularism as a concept but were against the ways in which secularism was understood among Turkish elitists.

He reversed the provision that permitted discrimination against \textit{Imam Hatip} students and graduates. He also attempted to lift the headscarf ban in higher education. CHP immediately filed a complaint against the government. The Constitutional Court came very close to shutting down AKP for anti secular activism. This was construed as a major warning to the government about secularism. Erdogan had to withdraw the proposal.

Constitutional changes, Erdogan hoped, would be the panacea for many of the social and political challenges of the country including the misconstrue of secularism and would be part of his legacy before he moved on to his new post, namely presidency. He opened up a discussion about transforming the parliamentary system to a presidential system similar to that of the United States. He believed that the major stumbling block in the path of democratization of Turkey was the obsoleteness and outdated-ness of the

\textsuperscript{36} Personal conversation with PM Erdogan at a meeting organized by SETA Foundation on September 24, 2011 in New York City.
constitution. The current constitution that the country is governed by is a product of the military establishment. After each military intervention, namely in 1961 and 1982, the military authorities who assumed power amended the constitution in a way to preserve the system as authoritative, rendering the military controller of the political machinery. Hence the constitution in and of itself, as it was, was posing a threat to the democratization processes. Since the 2010 general elections, AKP government has been pushing hard on establishing a parliamentary consensus for constitutional reform. It is still at work.

One important relatively recent development that affected the democratization process is the fact that AKP government divulged an illegal organization called Ergenekon that carried out mass killings, bombings, assassination attempts and coup attempts in the far and recent past. Some of the high-ranking, active duty military members, bureaucrats, technocrats, journalists and civilians were implicated. One common value shared by all the members of Ergenekon is their commitment to illiberal secularism. That is the reason why one has to mention this organization at this point in discussion. Currently some are imprisoned and there is an ongoing investigation and trial process that is taking place. According to the information unveiled within the trials today the public knows that there were several coup attempts, namely Sarikiz, Ayisigi, Yakamoz and Eldiven coups by the military against Erdogan’s government. Ergenekon members are also alleged to be behind unidentified murders that occurred over the years.

Reforms Implemented by Justice and Development Party

As we have seen rigorous reforms followed through during Ataturk’s period in the early Republic, we can attest to a reversal of such reforms from an Islamist ideological purview under Prime Minister Erdogan’s leadership. Among a few bullet
points, the following sections reflect on how Erdogan attacked social ills that were brought on by an illiberal secular era. Except for attempting to eradicate adultery from society, most of his reforms were successful due to mass support by the general public and politicians.

**An Attempt About Criminalizing Adultery:**

Relatively early on during its reign, AKP attempted to include adultery in criminal activities to be punished. Nonetheless due to the opposition, particularly raised by women, the party had to withdraw the amendment.

**Attacking the Headscarf Ban:**

In an effort to end the thirty years old ban on wearing of the religious head cover, a court revoked the decree of the Constitutional Court that stated that precluding someone from education due to her Islamic headscarf is not in violation of the constitutional rights. Setting precedence, the court decree is used by AKP government as a leverage to end the ban for university students. A similar court case that involved lawyers who wear headscarves was concluded with the defendant, namely the lawyer with the headscarf being the victor. This also set precedence. Both examples insinuate the very fact that during the past ten years, AKP worked to replace the judiciary members who were committed to illiberal secularism with those who were not against it.

Furthermore Erdogan recently introduced a new legislation under National Education Ministry, which regulates students’ dress. According to this, in elementary education students will not wear a specific uniform. This means that they will be able to wear whatever is found fit by themselves. This opens space for a possible solution to the ongoing ban on the headscarves.
Regulating Elementary Education by 4+4+4:

One of the major implications of the 1997 coup was the 8-year block mandatory education system that was introduced to thwart religious education, which according to the culture of Islam was supposed to be received early on in life. AKP finally took this matter into its agenda to replace it with a new system. According to this new system of education, mandatory education was raised to 12 years, with two intervals in between. This meant that after four years of education, parents could take children to private religious education for a certain period of time, after which the student could come back and resume. This created uproar among the Kemalist illiberal secularists to suggest that Erdogan was attempting to take the country to the “dark ages.”

Introduction of Islamic Courses as Electives:

Erdogan also introduced a new curriculum, which included courses such as Arabic, Qur’anic reading, interpretation of Qur’an, the tradition of the prophet of Islam etc. as electives. Courses that will teach Alevi tradition (outside of the Sunni tradition) were also introduced.

Regulating Abortion:

One legislation that also created uproar was the one about abortion. Abortion is legal in Turkey. However Erdogan stated, “abortion is murder!” In an attempt to fight the soaring rates of c-section births and abortion of unwanted fetus, AKP wanted to decrease the number of weeks of pregnancy that would allow the mother to have an abortion. They attempted to change it from 10 weeks to 4 weeks. One major impetus behind this legislation was to deter youth from extra marital activities and preserve Islamic morality. Due to the widespread opposition from women, they withdrew the legislation.
Creation of a “Religious” Society:

Unlike the past, during the last two years, Erdogan states his critique of the illiberal secular system more overtly and almost without trepidation. Erdogan drew attention to raising a youth conscious of “values.” He challenged his critics by arguing, “What is it that you want? A youth that is hooked on drugs? Indeed we want to see a religious youth!”

Regulating Alcohol Sales and Consumption:

Sales and consumption of alcohol is permitted in Turkey. AKP recently amended the provision concerning sales in a way that sales will not be permitted between 10pm-6am. Furthermore they introduced a ban on advertising alcohol. Lastly, the youth under the age of 18 will not be allowed to purchase alcoholic beverages.

Alternative to Co-ed:

Recently 26 Imam Hatip schools for girls are opened throughout the country that will start to education next year. In addition to Imam Hatip schools for boys and girls, these schools will only accept female students.

Amending the Law on Military:

Most recently an amendment was introduced to the military’s internal service law, which allowed the military to intervene via coups. No longer will the military have the legal right to overthrow a dually elected government based on the concept of internal enemy.

Assuming International Leadership:

The aforementioned Davos incident, where Erdogan took issue with the human rights violations that occurred in Gaza Strip and West Bank, became a marker in Erdogan’s leadership. The people of Muslim countries immediately responded with full
support entailing Erdogan to become a “super star” per se in the eyes of millions in the Muslim world. Unlike their own leaders, the leader of Turkey was raising the issue and standing by the Palestinian people. That, for many of the leaders, was a risk to take in the increasingly interdependent world. Many in the Muslim world named their newborns “Rajab Tayyip Erdogan.” In the post-Arab spring era, Erdogan also utilized the role model-ness of Turkey, a project that the Turkish state assumed since the outset of the Republic. On this note, Erdogan and the Kemalist elitists did see eye to eye arguing that Turkey very well must be emulated as an example by the rest of the Muslim countries in the region. Now that in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa change was inevitable, all of these countries could follow in the footsteps of the “model” Turkey. In this spirit, Erdogan, in his trip to Egypt, advised to his counterparts, namely the Ikhwan, to embrace secularism.

Erdogan is not the only actor who shapes AKP’s foreign policy. Ahmet Davutoglu, the Foreign Minister has a great impact on it as well. His academic project called “Zero Problems with Neighbors” came to be reified during his apprentice per se, as the secretary. The level of his success could be contested. Nonetheless, it is a fact that AKP government achieved putting Turkey on the map as a mediator, deal breaker, strong actor and the “bridge between the East and the West.”

In the international realm, Erdogan aims at maximizing Turkey’s power by increasing economic and social cooperation with Muslim countries and other developing countries. Africa, as an exploited continent by the Western powers, is an area where AKP government turned to for further cooperation. Turkic states that Turkey shares a common ancient history with, comprises another region of interest for AKP. Countries of D8 and others such as South Korea, India and Russia are some others. At the social and
cultural realm, Turkey cashes in on Turkey’s reputation in the Arab world through Turkish soap operas, movies, music and goods.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

A Nexus of Illiberal Secular Era and Illiberal Democratic Era

The new era of Islamist politics in Turkey illustrates a profound effect in the changing perception of modernization process. The preservation of religion is gradually becoming the principle moderator of the “new modern trend” we are seeing in Turkey. Importantly, this demonstrates a total shift away from top-down secularization (as it was the case in 20th century) toward an organic development of bottom-up secularization. This new relationship is challenged with the task of defining the relation between religion and the secular realm. My investigation shows that current Turkey presents a case where Dressler and Mandair’s approach of a post-secular society overlaps with Asef Bayat’s theory of a post-Islamist society.

The challenge, however, is to what degree, if any at all, will Muslim politicians be able to break from their past tradition of an illiberal secular era? Since, that particular era gave birth to an illiberal democratic era, how different will the rights discourse be within a post-Islamist society like Turkey? The critical underlying issue is that secular has always been shaped under an illiberal tradition, and although the AKP may have reconfigured the meaning of secularism from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, rights discourse continues to suffer in a longstanding illiberal tradition that extends into a post-Islamist democratic society. Due to illiberal nature of secularism, we have a system where institutional discrimination has been countenanced. Looking at this from a rights discourse perspective it is problematic because laws have not been enforced to eliminate discrimination under this illiberal democratic era.
The conclusion being drawn here is that illiberal secularism gave way to illiberal democracy. How so? This particular take on secularism led to accommodations of coup d’états, military interventions in a so-called justified manner which in the long run affected the processes that would lead to establishing liberal democracy. The headscarf ban is a perfect example of how majority rule and minority rights are abridged within the illiberal secular era that led to the illiberal democratic era. The headscarf ban that predates back to the 1950s and 1960s to my grandmother’s youth followed by my mother’s generation and ensued by my generation as well is substantiated by an anecdotal evidence. During my grandmother’s youth as a student in 1950s at St. George Catholic School, the head covered nuns were resorted to return to Austria due to a ban on majority Muslim headscarves. This same ban continued until the early 1980s when my grandmother had to resign from her university position as a professor of German literature due to the coup d’état that re-enforced the headscarf ban on university students and faculty. Then followed my mother’s generation. She had to quit medical school in the late 1980s because she chose to wear her headscarf over removing it on the university campus was for the same reason. Her democratic electoral process in the late 1990s was also abridged due to her preclusion from taking oath of office as a result of illiberal secularism. The Kavakci vs. Turkey case at the European Court of Human Rights resolved in the conviction of the latter for failing to elicit one of the major components of democratic process namely free and fair elections. The same ban that has been ushered into the illiberal democratic era of 2000s is reified with the example of Prime Minister Erdogan’s daughters who also had to receive their higher education in Indiana University due to the aforementioned restrictions on women’s attire.
From the beginning of this thesis, I have attempted to look at Turkey’s case under the lens of several scholarly disciplines. Charles Taylor’s timely book, *A Secular Age*, provides an underlying message throughout several of the arguments that denote a European-Christian dimension to the liberal culture of positivism in the early formation of the Turkish Republic. In today’s reality, the backlash in a post-Islamist society like Turkey disapproves a large portion of the classical understanding of Christian Enlightenment and instead vies for an Islamic Enlightenment. The important question one can pursue here is, “to what degree Muslim politicians can detach themselves from an illiberal secular past to confront the challenges of a post-Islamist society in which all individuals can share freedom of expression without fear or danger?” How will the parameters of limitations be drawn when free expression is discussed? As it may be seen in other post-authoritarian cases, Turkey’s Muslim politicians carry the baggage of an illiberal secular era and detaching oneself from an illiberal tradition is a complicated endeavor as case in point.

However, one of the key concepts of political democracy in a post-Islamist society is the shift from Christian to Muslim understanding of individualism. From a Marxist interpretation of Christian political democracy “…every man is considered a sovereign being, a supreme being. (Tucker 39)”¹ In today’s reality of Turkey, Justice and Development Party under the leadership of Prime Minister Erdogan unfolds a historical Caliphate type of rulership in which people give popular allegiance to a single leader who is charismatic and fervently meets the demands of the larger population. Some

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examples include hospital reform, student stipends, zakat system under government, free public transportation for the elderly and for all during holidays, etc.

Such reforms brought forward by the AKP in the last 12 years have undoubtedly increased the level of participation in elections and referendums. However, this positive change has also ushered in a new dilemma that Charles Taylor discusses as “Hegel’s dilemma for modern democracy.”\(^2\) Although I believe this dilemma to be somewhat more modified than Taylor’s explanation of a homogenized society, there is much room for debating the dynamic role of identity in majoritarian party politics displayed by the AKP. Unlike Taylor’s observation who states that men “loosen from their traditional communities”\(^3\) due to total participation; in Turkey’s case, we find the traditional Islamic-Ottoman culture being carried into mainstream modern democracy as seen in the reforms undertaken by the AKP government. Therefore, individualism has become something that is part of popular political culture and instead of leaving behind a traditional identity to participate in modern democracy, individuals like Erdogan and his contemporaries have carried traditional Islamic-Ottoman identity to the fore of a new pop-cultural political movement.

In conclusion, we see that political transformations in the 20\(^{th}\) century illiberal secular era created an opportunity space toward an Islamist mobilization that fostered the beginning of an illiberal democratic era in the 21\(^{st}\) century. The theorists I discuss in the introduction support the narrative of a re-configuration of secularism in Muslim Politics toward the making of an Islam-based society in Turkey. The fear that comes out of such


\(^3\) Ibid.
a transition is that while constitutional liberalism might be expanding to provide greater freedom for the society, at the same time a fervently pious majority would be shaping the public discourse. From the Western scholarly perspective, this could possibly lead to the marginalization or oppression of minority voices in the larger society. So, the next challenge will be based on how to shape a system in which all camps are content where equal rights and opportunities are catered to all.
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