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*in Post-Cold War Turkey:*

*Towards a Multicultural Integration ?*

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# **Cultural Diversity and Official Ideology in Post-Cold War Turkey: Towards a Multicultural Integration?**

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## *Abstract*

This paper shows to what extent the political implications of “culture wars” in post-Cold War Turkey have been influential on a full consolidation of Turkish democracy. In particular, I will reconsider the relationship between cultural diversity and official ideology in a Muslim context, by examining the identity claims of Islamic and Kurdish movements to new rights and the resistance of Turkey’s official ideology, Kemalism. The main argument is that the official homogenized and monolithic notion of Turkish culture that expresses the “secular” and “national” way of life surrounding politics has set limits to the process of Turkish democratization. It is also argued that during the last decade the struggle between Kemalist, Islamic and Kurdish groups occurred in a form of political battlefield in which the Kemalist-state elite, Islamic opposition and Kurdish separatism has maintained conflict-ridden discourses for the sake of their own politico-cultural agendas. In fact such an analysis seems necessary to shed some lights on the consistency of ‘Turkish model’ that after the September 11 terrorist attacks Turkey received this title due to its secular, democratic and Muslim characters. Here an examination of the relationship between Turkish modernism and Turkish nationalism on the one hand and Islamic-religious and Kurdish-ethnic movements in terms of politics of culture gains outmost importance.

**Key words :** culture, Kemalism, Islamism, Kurdish nationalism, cultural diversity

## **Introduction**

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between cultural diversity and official ideology in post-Cold War Turkey, by examining the identity claims of Islamic and Kurdish movements to new rights and the resistance of Turkey’s official ideology, Kemalism. What happened in the post-Cold War era was “culture wars” that determined the fate of Turkish democracy. Here, my aim is to document Islamism and Kurdish ethno-nationalism and

counter measures of the state elite who are the legislators and interpreters of Kemalism. The Islamic and Kurdish groups sought to form “alternative” cultural forms and symbols, but the Kemalists sought to revitalize and preserve hegemonic symbols on the basis of monoculturalism. In this study, I will show that the Kemalist-state elite, Islamic opposition and Kurdish separatism have maintained conflict-ridden discourses for the sake of their own politico-cultural agendas. Regarding the symbolic universe of Kemalism, Islamism and Kurdistan, I argue that the concept of official culture, based on the logic of assimilation/inclusion and at the same time exclusion, comes to hinder the representation of cultural differences, or being incompatible with multicultural society.

In fact such an analysis seems necessary to shed some lights on the consistency of “Turkish model” that after the September 11 terrorist attacks Turkey received this title due to its secular, democratic and Muslim characters. In this respect, an examination of the relationship between Turkish secularism and nationalism on the one hand and Islamic-religious and Kurdish-ethnic movements gains utmost importance. Moreover, the clarification of Turkish democratic experiment in a multicultural Muslim context has a great deal for the problem of culturally diverse society that poses several difficulties for establishing a viable democracy in non-Western countries.

### **Culture and French Republican Tradition**

For the last decades the world has been undergoing processes of transformation. It is in fact an era of uncertainties and, at the same time, coupled with the rising tide of globalisation through which transnational forces from above and identity politics from below erode the rule and practicing of the nation-state such as nation, citizenship and sovereignty (see, Bauman, 1997: 3 and 21-25). Thus, there has been more and more emphasis placed on difference rather than sameness, heterogeneity rather than homogeneity, multiculturalism rather than

monoculturalism, and the like. Within this context, culture as an idea and discourse have become a more contested issue and means of the struggle, especially on the basis of determining state-society and state-individual relations.<sup>1</sup> Parallel to assaulting the nation-states' monoculturalism in every respect, the relationship between politics and culture is entering into a new phase.

In the recent literature on culture and nationalism, culture is conceived "constructed" regarding its relation to the nation-state and nationalism and so seems to be always "contested, contingent and historically grounded," and so it is "a constituting element of political action and identity" (Warren, 1993: 17). It is a nationalist ideology of the nation-state, which standardizes and subjugates all perceived qualities of life. Historically, the state during the nineteenth century began to see culture as both its object and instrument in its project of transforming and shaping society.<sup>2</sup> Briefly, by means of its policies and institutions the nation-state formulated its own culture as part of its project for social engineering.

In this regard one might talk about two dominant notions of culture. The first notion of culture developed in France's republican, revolutionary tradition that was intersected with the idea of civilization. The other was the organic, differentialist notion of culture coming into being through German-Romantic tradition. In the former one, both culture and civilization that flourished from the Enlightenment philosophy reflected an ontological and epistemological rupture and the leaning to construct a new symbolic universe based on the new secular "Truth" and new patterns in which the "enlightened" and "civilized" rulers came to be the unique culture-builders. At the heart of this quest there was the idea of the construction of an "ordered" society and "civilized" citizens. It expressed a vision of "human-

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<sup>1</sup> See (Eller, 1997: 251-53). In fact this is the struggle of "which groups and interest will hold power and shape the production and reproduction of society in such domains as education, government, institutions, and art" (p. 251).

<sup>2</sup> This was based on a modernist program of culture constituting "an active politics and policy of culture... to transform ways of life" (Bennett, 1998: 104).

self cultivation” and making of “ordered society”, covering and designating a “new way of life” as a more developed and civilized category. This understanding turned into an extensive political project under the rule of the Jacobins after France Revolution. For the sake of the project, all forms of life became the objects of cultural crusade maintained from above by the “civilizing” rulers. Here, the “new way of life” determining all aspects of the modern public sphere were extended to the private one through assaulting particular attachments, family relations, artistic and musical taste, and so forth (Ranci  re, 1995: 8). The state and its actors with a determined “civilizing” mission played a decisive role in this attack revolved around the Republican quest for equalizing everybody. In short, culture that was produced in a nationalist endeavor as top-down format was disseminated and imposed on the people believed to be backward. It works through setting a strict hierarchy between the traditional and the modern, the civilized.<sup>3</sup> It seems clear that this notion of culture was therefore assimilationist coexisting with both inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies. The imagined community of the Jacobin elite was largely inclusionary in the sense that everyone had a potential to be turned into a civilized, patriotic citizen. This mission of inclusion was irresistible.<sup>4</sup> In the discourse of the Jacobins, membership to the French political community, or the public, was only possible through cultural assimilation. This stemmed from a strong link between citizenship and nationhood set by the Revolution. The outsiders would be accepted as members of the French nation if they gave up their old ways of life and culturally

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<sup>3</sup> This is based on logic of transforming cultural differences into a homogenous whole, through *hierarchicizing* ways of life, favor of a “high” or “developed” form of life (Bennett, 1998: 104). This is closely tied with the efforts of totalizing all forms in the society under the rubric of an imagined cultural community.

<sup>4</sup> On this mission for inclusion, Giesen (1999: 247) writes, “every act of resistance on the part of outsiders not only puts the inclusion of an individual at risk but also challenges the entire mission of inclusion. Outsiders cannot resist inclusion, neither by right nor by reason. Whoever questions the mission has to be overwhelmed and destroyed.”

integrate into the nation. If not, they were excluded. Here the result was that membership to French culture passed through linguistic and cultural assimilation.<sup>5</sup>

At this juncture, during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods and in the second half of the nineteenth century, the French tried to actualize language cultural unification by means of state agents. In such a way the French state had sought to give a common cultural content to the new French identity. In the time of the Third Republic (1871-1940) appearing with the claim that it would complete the Revolution, this act reached its zenith. The French Republicans made efforts to civilize and assimilate the masses, especially the peasants, aimed at building a nation and forging the sense of the homeland.<sup>6</sup> This civilizing mission, or “civilizing conquest”, was also applied to justify the French imperialism outside France. This nationalism of the 1880s largely provided the roots for “an expansive, assimilationist reform of citizenship law whose central provisions have endured to this day” (Brubaker, 1990: 393). Since then, the law has also been applicable for the newly naturalized foreigners (mostly immigrants) and the colonized. The Republican institutions worked for them and turned them into Frenchmen as in rural France.

Nevertheless, this assimilationist understanding of membership includes some inconsistencies in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Inside France the way for full membership to the political community passed through being assimilated into the French culture or similar to those who formed a new life at the centre. If anyone insisted on his particularistic affiliation, he would be deprived of attaining public identity. This is “particularistic exclusion” within a universalistic system (Dubois, 2000: 26). This became very clear in the cases of the position of the colonized and recent immigrants. According to the French colonial regime, they were seen as potentially assimilated as “citizens of the Republic”, but “[T]his assimilation depended on a process of transformation that could only

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<sup>5</sup> For the connection between citizenship and nationhood, and their assimilationist and inclusionary characteristics, see Brubaker (1990).

<sup>6</sup> For the “Third Republic’s civilizing efforts in rural France” see Weber (1991: 31-32).

take place gradually through education and a transformation from tradition to modernity” (Dubois, 2000: 26).<sup>7</sup> The exclusion here came to the fore only when considering them as immature to act as free citizens and to have “full citizenship” rights. To be a full citizen means to be free from “savagery” and traditional forms of life.

### **Official Notion of Culture and Construction of Kemalism as the Turkish State Ideology**

The above-mentioned model of culture formation seems to be necessary to interpret and grasp the revolutionary ambitions of Turkey’s state elite to construct “secular” and “national” culture. As happened in all over the world, post-Cold War Turkey witnessed an intense war of cultures, which questioned the official notion of culture and so overwhelmed Turkish politics. What was the most contested issue were the political implications of the definition of Turkish culture in determining the scope of the public sphere. Many of the themes running through politics of culture in 1990s Turkey involved references, reassessments and re-appropriations of the early phases of Kemalist modernization. In other words, like their counterparts in anywhere else, revival identities in Turkey have inevitably taken shape within the frame of the nationalist project and discursively produced their own “alternative” imagined communities by reconstructing the past and present around new symbols and rituals. Here the rise of identity assertions may be considered in terms of the perspective of “multiple modernities” that accentuates the emergence of alternative cultural programs.<sup>8</sup> In this process, the definition of culture that is the outcome of the modernizing and homogenizing attempts of the early Kemalist regime (especially the 1930s) has become more

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<sup>7</sup> As Dubois argues, it is “this complex of inclusion and exclusion, and of the deferral of the application of universal ideas, is the very ‘Republican racism’ which continues to haunt the contemporary discussions around immigration in France.”

<sup>8</sup> Based on the separation of modernity from Westernization, the idea of “multiple modernities” acknowledges “a multiplicity of cultural programs” (Eisenstadt, 2000: 1-29).

and more a contested issue between the custodians of the official ideology and Islamic and Kurdish groups.

The Republican rulers, during its formative decades, initiated a modernist project to civilize the society, on the basis of a sort of state-led, or top-down, nationalism, akin to the French type.<sup>9</sup> On the basis of that project, they promoted a secular state in place of Ottoman-Islamic one by making a strong-minded effort to Westernize the country. In the process Western secular law, the idea of the nation, Western alphabet, Western social intercourse and Western clothing replaced the Ottoman traditions and cultural norms. The state was the main active agent in institutionalizing a new culture through which the boundaries of Turkishness and Turkish citizenship were clearly defined. Here the ruling elite constituted in the first instance a revolution aimed at breaking with the past and constructing a new culture, with “new men”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Turkish state discursively produced, advanced and diffused a form of culture by means of the school system, quasi-professional cultural institutions, the military and the media (Çolak, 2003a). This formulation from above was to a greater extent the cause of belief in the Jacobean and positivist ideals of nineteenth century Europe. Kemalism that was formulated as the ideology of the Turkish state in the 1930s took nourishment from scientism, particularly Comtean positivism, together with laicism and nationalism. Secularism (*laiklik*, laicism) and nationalism constituted the basis of Kemalism. Here Kemalism as a state ideology provided a legitimate ethos for new cultural institutions of the Republic (the People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*), the Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*) and the Turkish Language Society (*Türk Dil Kurumu*)), which symbolized and manifested the monopolization of the legitimate use of culture. These institutions were planned as the basic agents for promoting and imposing “the modern way of life” to cultivate and order the

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<sup>9</sup> For “top-down” and “bottom-up” nationalisms see Charles Tilly (1996: 303-304).

<sup>10</sup> It was in a first instance a “Cultural Revolution” that was the most emphasized theme in the writings of the Kemalists during the 1930s and 1940s. For two popular examples, see Saffet (Engin) (1993: 352-54) and Ömer (Irdelep) (1934: 257-58).



society, to create future-generations and tame the masses. The rationale for culture production was the will of the Kemalists to find out their ideal image in the future, but not mainly the past and the present, as with Jacobin revolutionary utopianism.

The ruling group of the Kemalist regime attempted to attribute civilized and laic life forms and a “cultivated” state of mind to the concept of culture.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, culture, claiming universal validity for itself, became their self-image, or a way of their identification. The civilizing elite detached themselves from the rest of the people with particularistic and traditional affiliations, with their distinct language, historicity, dress-style, taste of art and music, education, way of thinking, notion of honor, and so on. In this way, their “elitist categorization of culture” (Eller, 1997: 249) denoted at the first glance a social and cultural status, based on various qualities and patterns, ranging from artistic taste to training, from dress to manner of eating. This culture was the entire source of all-good values, truth, and identity. This was also true for the Romantic notion of culture, but the difference was that, unlike the Romantic-German definition, the Kemalists did not regard “living culture” as a spiritual, organic entity giving true essence to human beings. Also, as in the French conception, setting up a strict *hierarchy* between life forms, it anticipated *revolutionizing* every sphere of life considered to belong to the “old”, that is, primitive, archaic. In the Kemalist formulation, the standards of the “civilized” world, by which the knowing elite judged all existing aspects of life, were set for the society.<sup>12</sup> These included prescriptions on how to dress, how to eat, how to look at others, how to dispose of spittle, how to walk, how to speak, and so forth. All these standards gradually became the means of public representation; that is, all were necessary for being publicly visible. The process of forming a citizen was imbued with producing a new man through a process of acculturation, which carries out such

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<sup>11</sup> For the Kemalist notion of culture see Çolak (2003a).

<sup>12</sup> As the exterior appearances of modernity, the new standards that established mainly the base line of the new Turks’ identification, were, as Kadioglu argues, especially symbolized through “modern images” rather than philosophic-historical and ethical underpinnings (see, Kadioglu, 1999: 22, 31, 129).

aim through symbolic violence over *ancien régime*'s symbols whether through the seemingly most insignificant details of dress, bearing, or physical and verbal manners to which a positive value attached.

They became obviously uncontested subject matters of the Kemalist political project of cultural, political and social transformation. In the process, then, instead of the "old", a new system of politics and education were instituted, new forms of public and private life were set in motion, and new family types and gender roles were introduced. As Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, one of the leading theoreticians of Kemalism, claimed, "from the aesthetic point of view, newness, in comparison with oldness, always demonstrated beauty, kindness and goodness. Only a revolution brought about newness by cutting of all ties with the past" (Bozkurt, 1940: 72-73). For him, on the basis of Kemalism's six principles, the Turkish revolution erased the past completely. And instead it created economically, socially, and politically the most radical newness.

Kemalist secularism here had a determining implication for the formation of "new" culture. Kemalist secularism was unique in the sense that it signified the official effort to control and domesticate Islam by institutionalizing it under state control. All autonomous associations on a religious basis outside the state control were banned. Nevertheless, in the early decades of the Republic, there was an attempt to find out "true", "enlightened" Islamic content for Turkish culture (Mert, 2001: 206). In this sense Kemalist secularism separated from French concept of laicism that anticipated lay control over religion through which the state and religion separated from each other.

As in the French conception of culture, the Kemalist mission of inclusion attributed to transform all values, customs and habits that belonged to the private realm, a realm of particularities and tradition. It seemed to be a cultural crusade. Here it was aimed to expand the boundaries of the public sphere toward the private one. In this regard those who reject

internalizing new manners and behavioural norms were excluded. Exclusion here means to be deprived of gaining a new public identity, that is, of benefiting from the advantages of the state and participating in the public sphere. This position has defined who belongs and who does not to culture. Membership to the Turkish culture meant the internalization of a set of manners manufactured by the official cultural institutions. For example, the People's Houses (founded in 1930) came to the fore being places where the practices of patterns of new style and taste were introduced to the ordinary people; the Houses were therefore the agents for taming them through creating a proper network of practicing new modes of behaviour. In such a way, in general, the institutions provided the technologies of the formation of citizenry; that is, the modern Turkish citizen signifies the status of a subject matured in the discourse formation during the early Republican period.

As argued above, Kemalism's "society-making" notion of culture based on the logic of assimilation is inclusionary and exclusionary at the same time. All these mean to establish the rigid boundaries between insiders and outsiders. In the official discourse those who were not able to assimilate into the culture were deemed as "internal" outsiders (Ottomans, Islamic groups, dervish orders, Kurds, *asirets*, etc.). The result was the process of internal exclusion. In fact, this was a *homogenizing* account of how the new Turkish culture de-legitimized and marginalized those outsiders and assigned their values to the past as "past" or made them "prehistoric" as only "folkloric" and "mythic" objects of museums. The denial of the "internal" outsiders came with a concrete act to transform all forms of difference into sameness. This was based on a model reflecting a set of relations between the civilized and the savage, the modern and the traditional, the West and the East.

Herein lies the Kemalist perception of authenticity. Contrary to the Romantic formulation, it did not include the patterned aspects of life evolved especially around Islam and tradition over the centuries. In the official discourse, those aspects were regarded

“artificial”, “imitated”, “archaic”, which had overwhelmed the true essence of the Turkish nation, while newly constructed culture was presented as “true” and “authentic”. Her true essence could only be discovered in the endless-progressive march of modern civilization. It was for this reason that traditional dress forms and music, the Arabic alphabet, “old” words, rituals in gender relations and family, traditional public rites, ceremonies and festivities, were not seen as aspects of Kemalism’s “authenticity”. Regarding their artificial, imitated and archaic nature, the civilizing rulers excluded these aspects from the new past of the Republic.

Turkishness of new culture expressed such a view of authenticity. The Turkish reformers’ main intention here was to end the Ottoman multicultural and multinational legacy by melting all differences under the name of Turk. The way they used the term "national" (*milli*) entailed that Muslims living within new Turkey’s borders were belonging to a national group. The reformist rulers strove to transmute the Ottoman Muslims (including Turks, Kurds, Caucasians, Bosnians, Albanians, Lazs) into a “civilized”, homogenous Turkish nation (Karpat, 1988: 51-52). The Muslim migrants from the Balkans (Bosnians, Albanians) and the Caucasus were easily naturalized and even accepted as part of Turkish nation, although non-Muslims namely Greeks, Armenians and Jews living in Turkey which were only groups accepted as minorities were called Turk only in respect of citizenship.

Like all Muslims with different ethnic and cultural affiliation, the Kurds, major linguistic and cultural group, were considered as part of Turkish nation. Parallel to eliminating the religious remnants of the *ancien regime* condemned as uncivilized and archaic, following the abolishment of the Caliphate (1924), Kurdish schools, associations, foundations, publications and religious organizations were all banned. This was followed by a series of Kurdish revolts in the eastern Turkey with ethno-religious and traditionalist inclinations. The Turkish state launched a widespread program to provide integration of Turkish citizens with Kurdish origin into a new Turkish culture. If the Kurdish origin people were willingly accepting

to be part of the Turkish nation, they would be included into national public sphere; if not, they were excluded. Here lies the definition of the perception of who are Turks, who are not. Therefore, Turkey's civilizing and nationalist rulers strove to achieve their assimilation and in some sense Turkification through the way in which a process of expulsion of some of rebellious Kurdish tribes and a widespread education campaign were applied. This was obvious in the Law of Settlement (1934) which was issued to provide for their linguistic and cultural integration into "Turkish culture".<sup>13</sup> This was the quest to make "similar", which, much more than simply making all people speak the same language. It meant sharing and internalizing a "civilized", "Turkified" way of life, manufactured at the centre. By rejecting all particularistic belonging, all citizens were going to be "cultured" equals appropriating "Turkish culture".

This effort to create new symbolic universe needed a historical justification that found its true expression in the Turkish History Thesis formed in the early 1930s. Here new Turkish history was invented in a political process and fundamentally based on a secular imagination for the past as well as the future (Çolak, 2003b). The politician historians of the new regime tried to invent and edit a new myth of Central Asia and Anatolia in order to create continuity in history with an act of "forgetting" of the Ottoman/Islamic past and tribal and ethnic bases. Kemalist positivistic historicism implied the will of articulating into the genealogy of "civilization" and "culture". According to it, the Turks had a right to belong to Western civilization because they were its first initiators and carriers to the rest of the world. In the Early Republican period, the state elite launched a widespread historical crusade through the school system and adult education centers (the People's Houses and Rooms) to arouse consciousness of being firmly established in a secular genealogy or time-period in the hearts of the new Turks. This campaign tried to "remind" them that they had been the carriers of all "civilized" and "national" qualities throughout the centuries.

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<sup>13</sup> See *Resmi Gazete* (Official Gazette), "Iskan Kanunu" [Law of Settlement], n. 2733, (Ankara: Prime Ministry, June 21, 1934).

In short, the life woven around new Turkish culture also demonstrated political life, that is, expressed political convictions as well as social and cultural ones. In this discourse, politics and all forms of life could not be separated; here, culture emerged as a battleground on which symbols were produced; they clashed and dominated each other, a battleground surrounding politics. The result was the politicization of all aspects of life: language, education, art, literature, history, and so on. Consequently, culture came to be the basic criteria for determining who would participate in the politics.

### **Multi-Party Era and Public Presence of Islamic and Kurdish Groups**

By the transition to a multi-party system in 1946 Turkey's cultural diversity gradually became politically significant and began to find suitable and legitimate spaces even in the political parties' manifesto, particularly, the Democrat Party (the DP, 1946-1960) in the 1950s. That is to say, Kemalist secularism and nationalism began to be questioned to a certain extent, especially by the forces of the periphery. Kemalist culture failed to completely replace the wider Islamic and various ethnic allegiances of the people and this new cultural identity was unable to find popular adherence. By Turkish democratization and structural changes in the 1950s, Islamic customs and ethnic sensitivities found a political voice with multi-party politics under DP rule in the 1950s. The DP carried the official definition of culture as a chief objective of political debate by stressing the significance of local-Islamic traditions and regional-ethnic affiliations for Turkish national culture. In terms of its policy on religion, it allowed the call to prayer to be in Arabic, and also it made religious instruction in the primary schools obligatory and religious radio broadcasts (Rustow, 1957: 97). Consequently, the most important development in this period was the official acceptance of Islam, and even some traditional forms, by both the state elite and the politicians as part of Turkish identity.

But the role of Islam in the society and politics was not settled. DP ruling cadre came to power by utilizing the existing grievances to the single-party's radical secularizing reforms. They did this by adopting a new, "conservative", interpretation of Kemalist secularism that aimed to reconcile as far as possible the principles of the laic state and the people's conservative inclinations (Mert, 201: 207). For this conservative critique, secularism is not a problem itself. The Turkish state's notion and implementations seems to be more akin to the French Jacobin laicism. Here the conservative imagination intended to harmonize state and religion once again, which was chiefly necessary to hinder the "communist threat". The "conservative interpretation" that has put its stamp on the Turkish politics until today would make Turkish citizens both "national" and "religious".

Turkish democratization and structural changes (urbanization) in the 1950s led to the emergence of a milieu where peripheral forces including traditionalist, Islamic and ethno-regional groups began to express themselves at least as being voters. The result was a small Islamic revival, while constituting a very small section of the Muslim population. That revival gave the rise to the first signs of Islamic intellectuals and of alternative social and communitarian networks in the cities that were accelerated by the mass migrations.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in response to the laic state and its policies, newly formed Islamic groups develop an Islamic critique of Kemalist secularism. In the discourse of 1950s Islamism there was a strong emphasis on "democracy" and "religious freedom". Like the Islamic groups, Kurds became more and more publicly visible and part of Turkish politics. The Democrat Party played a fundamental role in their integration through a democratic mechanism. Due to transformation in agricultural production and urbanization, there emerged new educated Kurdish intellectuals who began to re-evaluate the position of Kurds in a sophisticated way and to question the

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<sup>14</sup> For the role of democratization in the emergence of new localized networks of communities see Aktay (1999).

official perspectives. In general the DP rulers and the state officials sought to marginalize the alternative, or counter-hegemonic, Islamic and Kurdish movements.

The Turkish military in 1960 intervened into politics accusing the politicians, namely the Democrats, violating the country's national interests. The main reasons behind the breakdown of democratic regime were the nature of the DP as a coalition of anti-bureaucratic forces and the decrease of social status and political influence of civil and military bureaucracy under its DP rule and leaving little room for the opposition (Özbudun, 2000: 31-32). It was charged as being center of anti-Kemalist activities rejecting Kemalist version of secularism and Turkish nationalism. Parallel to the early Republican regime's official policy toward the religion, the leaders of the coup aimed to prevent the use of the religion for "political" purposes. At the same time, they again used what they might call "true Islam" to legitimize their military-political regime and also to prevent the spread of communism and religious reactionism (Cizre-Sakallioglu, 1996: 239). The act of representing (official) Islam, an end product of Kemalist secularism, was indeed the will to shape the soul of the citizens, most of whom lived within the framework of traditional, Islamic networks. Such an understanding of secularism expressing the representation of only "civilized" social groups in a democratic system as being made legitimate the centralist bureaucratic elite interventions into democratic processes (Çolak and Aydın, 2004). Moreover, the 1960 military coup launched a program of Turkification as in the early decades of the Republic. That for example included the act of Turkifying names of some of Kurdish villages and towns and the attempt to prove Turkishness of Kurds. These attitudes for re-secularization and re-Turkification were also obvious to some extent in the reconstruction attempts of the 1971, 1980 and 1997 military interventions.

Nevertheless, such an age-old cleavage between the state elite and the value system of the provincial and peripheral forces made those attempts fail. Democratic practices that



continued to make the peripheral forces electorally significant and the liberal context provided by the 1961 constitution resulted in the rise of Islamic and Kurdish groups as public actors. Thus, for the first time in the history of the republic, one faction of the Islamic groups formed a serious political movement, namely Erbakan's National Salvation Party (the NSP). This party became a coalition partner in the governments of the 1970s. These Islamic groups, like the leftist and nationalist ones, benefited more and more from the 1961 constitution's clear recognition of the right of association. Unlike the conservative, right groups, its proponents rejected the basic tenets of Kemalist modernization and proposed an "alternative" identity based on Islam, not a secular world-view. In fact, it was the first serious political struggle over the identity of the Turkish citizens. The other one became one of the hottest issues when associations based on ethnicity emerged. Parallel to the rise of "ethnic consciousness", in politics the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (the KDPT) was founded in 1965. But the Kurdish intellectuals became integrated into the Turkish leftist movement. They found a suitable place in the Turkish Workers Party (The TWP, founded in 1960). The TWP in 1970 announced its recognition of a Kurdish identity that had been erased by the Turkish state and upon that it was closed by the 1971 coup. Through the 1970s there was an escalation of Kurdish-leftist movement in Turkey's eastern region. Such a movement and rise of ethnic consciousness among Kurds living in cities and the Islamic organizations were among the main reasons behind the 1980 coup together with threat of communism.

The 1980 coup and the 1982 constitution launched a cultural program for the sake of "national unity and integrity" challenged by leftist, Kurdish and Islamic movements. The post-1980 policy toward Islam concentrated on more and more integration of its "enlightened", official notion into national culture by rejecting its reactionary and archaic forms and symbols (Cizre-Sakallioglu, 1996). Related to the Kurdish issue the constitution brought about the ban over public use of any ethnic language and manifestation of any cultural symbol of ethnic

(Kurdish) nationalism, which would cause the formation of minorities in Turkey (Günter, 1988: 403).

The 1980 military intervention signified a new stage in the processes of secularization. It was in such a manner that the generals of the coup tended to extend the scope of the previous state elite's efforts to spread official Islam. The 1982 constitution brought about compulsory religious courses in the primary and secondary schools and also taught the significance of the Turks' historical, secular and moral values. Thus, in their views, it would be possible to avoid a "moral void" that would be filled by Marxism and Islamic fanaticism. These efforts attempted to propagate a depoliticized, Turkish, Islamic culture (Hale, 1994: 298-99). So, the state control over religious education and indoctrination in a new doctrine of co-optation sought to eliminate the effects and importance of the "reactionary" religious currents in education and socio-political life. Indeed, it is not contrary to the general trend of Kemalist secularism; it used "enlightened" or "modern" Turkish Islam to make strong the ties among the citizens. The state elite therefore maintained the well-known struggle against religio-social movements and their "alternative" symbolic world in the name of war with *irtica* (reactionism). It was evident in president Evren's (head of the 1980 coup) insistence on the ban on women wearing headscarves because that was seen as a significant sign of the public reality and visibility of Islamic groups.

The official attitude that any kind of affiliations and organizations defined on the basis of ethnic, regional and cultural belonging were rejected became confirmed in the post-1980 period by the efforts of the military and bureaucratic mechanism. So it still meant that membership to Turkish culture that should be secular, civilized and national expressed the rejection of possible belonging to both Islamic and Kurdish identities. Turgut Özal who served as the prime minister from 1983 to 1989 and the president from 1989 to 1993 made some opening the above-firm outlook. Özal, the initiator of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, embarked on a new plan to integrate some of religious and nationalist extremists into the

centre and to moderate them on the centre-right politics (Dagi, 2001). Özal's policies evolving to some extent around democratic freedoms and human rights targeted to expand the scope of official notions of both secularism and nationalism through the search for ways to integrate the religiously conservative masses and Kurdish ethnic groups into the mainstream politics.

The economic and political liberalization during the Özal era gave way to the rise of Islamic and Kurdish groups that was apparent in the grand gesture of new urban social, political and economic networks and institutions. It is actually synchronic with processes of globalisation in which transnational forces from above and identity politics from below brought about an erosion of the ideas of the nation and citizenship based on a unique identity rooted in national sovereignty. It has given rise wars between cultures dominating political and social life all over the world. For Turkey the result was an extensive crisis of the state's official ideology, Kemalism that intended to form a homogenous and secular nation (see, Yavuz, 2000). Thus the group identity-based social and political movements, namely Islamic, Kurdish and Alevi, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s began to question the basic assertions of Kemalism. Identity politics had dominated Turkish political scene in the 1990s. This is much more obvious in the 1995 and 1999 general elections: the total votes of the three parties representing three different identities –“the Welfare Party, representing the Islamic identity; the Nationalist Action Party, representing the ultranationalist Turkish identity; and the People's Democracy Party, representing the Kurdish identity”- was almost one-third of the votes (Özbudun, 2000: 142).

### **The Rise of Islamism in post-Cold War Turkey and Kemalism's Reactions**

The structural changes by political and economical liberalization and the dissolution of center politics in a globalizing context led to the emergence of a void that began to be filled by political Islam developing around the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, the WP – 1983-1998),

the successor of the pro-Islamist NSP of the 1970s, under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. In fact, the rise of Turkey's Islamism as a political critique of modern universal principles and a search for authentic religious identity came to be the outcome of the "global crisis of modernism" (Gülalp, 2001). In these processes, not only the legitimacy crisis of Kemalist secularism, but, perhaps most importantly, that of its "conservative" versions, accelerated on the part of the Islamists the questioning of the official notion of culture that excludes those who deviate from the secular "mainstream".

Islamism rose as a movement that represents new provincial businessmen, intellectuals and poor segments of the society who are excluded from socio-economic, cultural and political power (see, Önis, 2001). What was happening at this point in the context of the weakening of the welfare state and the state's official ideology in Turkey was the rejection of membership to official culture by socially and economically marginalized groups who were also not allowed to exercise full social and political rights. Under such circumstances, it appeared very easy for the Islamically-oriented groups, by using the emerging social base, to turn various traditional religious positions (largely represented previously by the centre-right parties) into a more effective political action in the 1990s. There emerged a set of social networks of Islamic groups in which religious traditions are reinterpreted and disseminated and young people learn "real Islam". They accomplish the role of social insurance institutions and these are coupled with the growth of business and "counter" elite organizations that can use the mass communication effectively. The major end product of this trend is the emergence of "alternative" public spaces in which many of the conservative masses began to socialize within a very different set of values and forms. In these spaces, new body politics, new kinds of eating, new fashions and artistic styles were displayed and disseminated (Göle, 2000: 30). It is indeed a real challenge to the modernist ideology and policy of the state that just only the "Westernized" way of life woven around "legitimate" (i.e. modern) cultural codes is a

necessary precondition for public visibility. To the extent that the Islamic sectors maintain their autonomous communal life, they sought ways to push the state to recognize and institutionalize their view of “Islam”, even to “conquer” the state as a counter-hegemonic movement.

The Welfare Party during the mid-1990s became the political voice of the excluded, especially the traditionalist religious segments of the society. It successfully mobilized these segments for the sake of its political and cultural program. Using much more populist rhetoric with cross-class demands, the WP tried to unite the peripheral businessmen and urban poor and workers around a “common Islamic identity” (Gülalp, 2001: 439). It promoted a form, as Tugal argues, of “religio-moral populism” articulating different social interests and religious enthusiasms, with a “moral criticism of modernity” (Tugal, 2002). Beside its emphasis on a just order and equality for the excluded, it promised to make legitimate their “religious” symbols and rituals (such as cloths including “headscarf”) and to arrange official working days in accordance with Islamic worship. In other words, the promise was mainly to re-store the Turks’ real, Islamic, identity. This message was effectively launched with the help of the party’s nation-wide grassroots organization. Their goal in the long run was to transform people’s way of life and to pave the way for a new “Islamic” society (Gülalp, 2001: 434).

WP leaders therefore represented themselves as the true representatives of the “values”, not simply the “interests”, of “the society” currently dominated by the “authoritarian”, secular state. They saw themselves the carriers as faith and morals against the faithless state’s oppressive rule.<sup>15</sup> The WP’s re-traditionalizing vision included the re-definition of the people’s identity through a new moral base inferred from Islamic principles and heritage of the near past, Ottoman. This new moral base was regarded necessary to project a holistic vision of community, a “secure shelter” for all, as an antidote to the evils of

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<sup>15</sup> For an evaluation of the equation of the exploiters and the faithless and of the dominated and the faithful see Tugal (2002: 95).

modern individualism and alienation. In this sense, actually, in the election campaigns, the discourse of the WP had a populist tone embracing all segments and ethnic and religious differences of the country. WP Islamism worked to divide the society as ‘infidels’ and ‘Muslims’, or enemies of Islam and supporters of Islam. This was a polarizing and antagonizing discourse for the functioning of democracy. In some way, the WP in general publicized the restrictive categories of Kemalism. In other words, ironically, the WP has internalized Kemalism’s authoritarian conceptions of society and state as well as its symbolic use of politics. It might be argued that Kemalist ideology, by influencing its rivals, rendered possible affinity in the content of politics between itself and its adversaries. A holistic view of identity and community, which we see in Kemalism, would be observed in the WP’s program too. WP’s program was aimed to determine the boundaries of a new community by offering a prescription to define the symbols of socio-political and socio-economic life. Like the Kemalists, its leaders made an attempt to establish “hegemony over the symbolic structure of Turkish society” (Yavuz, 1997: 77). In its program “authenticated” symbols were presented as inviolable in constituting identity for the people and the public.

The WP’ leaders in its municipalities and partner of the coalition government in adopting the politics of symbols, made an attempt to acculturate, in its true sense Islamicize, the Turkish society. Moreover, negating official ones, alternative commemorations were launched to construct the present and past; here the commemoration of the “Conquest of Istanbul” as “alternative national day” in an unofficial way has an important place. Here it is obvious that the goal is to “construct an alternative national identity, evoked as an Ottoman-Islamic civilization as opposed to the secular, modern Turkish Republic” (Çinar, 2001). In fact it was the rejuvenation of myth of “the Conqueror” whose Istanbul was a place of Islam. In this regard, especially in dealing with cultural diversity, WP ruling cadre adopted some Islamic intellectuals’ formula of multiculturalism based on classical Islamic treading with

different groups by means of a mechanism of legal pluralities according to which each group is acted toward its own law (read as “religious”) like Islamic, Christian, Jewish, atheist. It was a political project called “multi-judiciary order” that was first developed on the basis of the Prophet Mohammad’s “Medina Document” by a group of Islamic intellectuals, especially Ali Bulac. In fact that model was designed as an alternative model of citizenship, to both Kemalist monism and liberal democracy. It is mainly about the Islamic communitarian view of multiculturalism in the age of identity politics, which envisions the emergence and survival of autonomous, legal communities (Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and atheist) with their own peculiar laws. In fact a hierarchical ordering among different communal bodies constitutes the basis of “Islamic formula” in the sense that some communities are emphasized as more virtuous, faithful than others –“laic” or non-Muslim ones. Here lies to a greater extent the Ottoman practice of such Islamic pluralism, called the Ottoman millet system (Navarro-Yashin, 1998: 22). That view of pluralism found indeed a wider support among the WP circles.

WP pluralism based on the re-articulation of the Ottoman millet system is hardly welcomed by Turkey’s official ideology, Kemalism/Atatürkism, the ideology that addresses national unity on the basis of monoculturalism. After the Kemalist officials removed the WP from power in 1997 by a form of intervention into politics called February 28 process, the case that was filled against the WP to close down mentioned its view of religious pluralism as one of the reason. Likewise, Turkey’s Supreme Court, as it closed the WP in 1998, pointed out it as one of the reasons.<sup>16</sup> The struggle between Kemalist secularist uniformity and Islamic quest based on “rediscovery” of historical memories put its stamp on Turkish social and political life.

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<sup>16</sup> On the issue, Aslan writes, “to justify its judgment on, the Court cited Erbakan’s public statement, such as ‘you shall have the right to opt for whatever law you want’ (legal pluralism)” (Aslan, 2002: 17).

When the WP won the 1995 elections and became the leading party in the WP-TPP (the True Path Party) coalition government in 1996, one of the serious political crises of the Republic occurred. It was a crisis between the elected regime on the one hand and the state elite and secular social groups on the other. Welfare's leaders pragmatically promised to obey the rules of the game, even before the 1995 elections. However, their different view of secularism insisted on some symbols that the Kemalists see as harmful to "civilized" and laic culture. In fact, what is significant for the Kemalist establishment is that for the first time in the Republic's history, a political leader with Islamic inclinations became the prime minister and put into practice some practices not desired by the Kemalists. When the WP was in governmental power, a Kemalist bloc - including the military, the judiciary, a large group of intellectuals, the mainstream secular media and some civil societal elements who are more sensitive on the issue of "Islamic reactionism" - began to work together to resist the threat seen by them to be posed by the WP's policies, e.g. emphasis on removing the ban over headscarf, the attendance of religious leaders with religious dresses to Ramadan dinner at the residence of the prime minister, prohibiting alcoholic beverages in the municipalities controlled by the WP.

Indeed, it seems a chance for the secularist groups to revitalize their Kemalist spirit that had faced a serious legitimacy crisis in the post-Cold War era. Unlike the previous period, in the post-Cold War era, the Kemalists decided to organize vertically (being deep-rooted in the society), as well as horizontally, on the basis of a political program aimed to "save modern, secular and national Turkey". This was indeed a turning point for Kemalism. Once again, Kemalism that the secular establishment prefers to call it as Atatürkism became more visible around a simple symbolism that turned into an attempt of re-identification for the Kemalists not only among the ruling secular circles, but also among secular social groups outside the state's structure (Yegen, 2001: 70-71). In the context of processes of globalisation



necessitating democracy, human rights and freedoms, as a reaction to the claims and demands of various social and communal identities, in the 1990s the Kemalist elite put into use a large-scale social engineering program on the bases of the early Kemalist reforms to transmute Kemalism into a social identity.

Once again the military by launching a nation-wide campaign of the Kemalist bloc and effectively using the National Security Council (NSC) intervened into the democratic processes in 1997 publicly known as the February 28 process. This process again militarised Turkish politics and resulted in the “indirect” intervention against the Islamic groups, called as “postmodern intervention” by its initiators.<sup>17</sup> The NSC’s decisions released on February 28, 1997, returned secularisation to every aspect of public and social life. The decisions included legislation and other measures to reduce the political and social visibility of the Islamicly-oriented groups. They re-instituted state control over especially religion and education, which would protect the citizens of the Republic from “anti-secular” forms of life. In the eyes of the civil and military bureaucrats, the WP with its emphasis on ‘archaic’ interpretation of Islam and its traditional symbols was the source of all reactionary movements.

The measures of the February 28 process under the guidance of the civil and military bureaucracy brought about a series of the political bans lasting until today. First the WP-TPP coalition government was ended with the military-led coalition’s pressures in June 1997 and then accused of being the centre of the all anti-secular activities. The Constitutional Court closed down the Welfare Party in January 1998 and its leader cadre including Erbakan was banned from politics for five years. The Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, the VP), the successor of the WP, became the third party in the 1999 elections. It was closed in January 2001 mainly because it defended the wearing headscarf at the public realm. The reason behind the closure

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<sup>17</sup> *Milliyet* (Istanbul daily), 15 January 2001.

of the two parties becomes more meaningful in relation to the general tendency of the Turkish Constitutional Court's decisions in political party cases. As Aslan aptly argues, the dominant approach is "ideology-based" in all decisions that express a "positivist, one-dimensional, monolithic, and authoritarian outlook" and ignores individual rights. In the decision regarding the WP it was seen as the centre of reactionary activities (Aslan, 2002: 11). In that decision the Court defines secularism as the guarantor of contemporary political, social and cultural life and so cannot be sacrificed for "the sake of liberties". This legal framework restricts the possibility of people with different religious understanding and practices being represented in the state. The current state elite in the name of speaking for the people maintain a very narrow policy of representation.

The re-secularisation process launched on February 28<sup>th</sup> aimed to regulate public and social life. It enforces some restrictions on 'non-authorized' religious appearances and expressions in state offices and state-run institutions, including the universities. In 1998 Turkey's Higher Educational Board expanded the ban on Islamic dress and symbols in educational institutions by new regulations.<sup>18</sup> For the Kemalist rulers from the beginning there is no place for every kind of religious and traditional garbs in a "modern" way of life. Since the early 1980s, the debate on the headscarf has plagued Turkish politics. For the state elite and some secular intellectual circles, the headscarf is a symbol of "challenge" to the principles of the Republic and a rejection of "civilized" forms (e.g. women's emancipation, secularised public, freedom); that's why it is divisive. This attitude seems to have shaped in the Constitutional Court's judgement on the closure of the VP. It pointed out the party's emphasis on the freedom to wear headscarves. It saw women with headscarf in the public realm as contrary to the Kemalist principle of secularism, and also the party that defends the freedom to wear headscarves is also seen as acting against secularism. In addition, the NSC and the

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<sup>18</sup> These regulations vested university administrators with authority to "fire those who 'acted against the republic and its values'. Violators also could 'lose their pensions and face a life-long ban in state sector employment'" (Yavuz, 2000: 35).

military sought to revive the ban on participation in dervish orders and religious communities and other quasi religio-social orders that had been banned officially since the 1920s, but which had become largely tolerated. To this end the activities of many of religious foundations have been inspected and controlled periodically. The elimination of such types of “alternative”, “illegitimate” religious practices (banned dervish orders) and symbols (religious garbs and headscarf) is part of the official quest to form a “modernized” Islam.

### **Kurdism as a Challenge to Kemalist Nationalism**

As all endeavours to exclude to open up public spaces for Islamic groups with different religious interpretation, the possibility of building up Kurdish identity has been rejected.<sup>19</sup> It was this legacy of the constant construction that has made Kurdish ethnicity more and more politicized (Entessar, 1992: 1-2). One of the main results of the 1980 coup’s policy to exclude the previous implicit recognition of Kurdish reality on behalf of the re-articulation of homogenous national culture was the rise of Kurdish nationalism in the 1980s that simultaneously hastened Kurdish identity formation (Barkey and Fuller, 1998: 15). It also contributed the escalation of the armed struggle of the PKK (founded in 1979 with a goal to keep an armed struggle against the Turkish state and feudal Kurdish elements).<sup>20</sup> Kurdish identity formation in the late 1980s and 1990s that mainly turned around ethnic identification accompanied with a set of developments such as urbanization, spread of education and dissolution of traditional ties.<sup>21</sup>

Özal, by the early 1990s, made an opening in the official attitude towards Kurdish entity when he emphasized Turkey’s ethnically and culturally heterogeneous composition. This was the denial of the 1980 coup’s effort to make re-homogenizing nation as well as the imagining of

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<sup>19</sup> For this denial of Kurdish ethno-political identity see Yegen (1999).

<sup>20</sup> For an evaluation of the PKK on the formation of Kurdish ethno-nationalism see Yavuz (2001: 1-24).

<sup>21</sup> For the effect of modernization on the spread of Kurdish ethnic identity see Cizre-Sakallioglu (1996).

official nationalism. Even Özal began expressing broadcasting in Kurdish. Parallel to that, the ban on speaking Kurdish was lifted except the prohibition of using Kurdish in political speeches. It was the time of the emergence of new Kurdish social and political associations. At that time the People's Labor Party (the HEP, the PLP) was founded as a representative of Kurdish rights. In the 1991 elections, it entered the parliament by making the cooperation with the Social Democratic Populist Party (SDPP) (Marcus, 1993: 17). The SDPP made a coalition government with Süleyman Demirel's Truth Path Party. PM Demirel declared the recognition of "Kurdish reality". Then many Kurdish newspapers began to appear.

The Constitutional Court banned the HEP in July 1993 by due to its provocations about Kurd uprising against the Republic of Turkey and its relation with the terrorist organization PKK. Instead, the HADEP (the People's Democracy Party) was founded, and won the majority of votes in many cities of eastern regions in the 1995 and 1999 elections but not passed over the national threshold. The Constitutional Court in March 2003 closed down the HADEP for same reasons.

In the Turkish state's discourse, Kurdish question was deemed as "reactionary movement", "tribal resistance", "regional backwardness", but not as "an ethnic issue" (Yegen, 1999). This is in accordance with the official concept of culture that defines all particular, regional and ethnic diversities as belonging to "pre-modern" times. Therefore these diversities have to be civilized. Thus, throughout the Republican era, the state maintained a strict cultural control over them and launched widespread restrictions. Indeed, in terms of Kurdish question, restrictions over the expression and representation of Kurdish cultural and linguistic identity "increase the visibility of Kurdish nationalists with little interest in integration, and seemingly corroborate the pessimists' claim that Kurds asserting their ethnicity are all potential separatists" (Somer, 2002: 76). This is the end product of a zero-sum game of two compatible nationalisms. "Rigid versions of Turkish nationalism, and their counterpart, rigid versions of

Kurdish nationalism”, Somer (2002: 81) writes, “compete for the undivided loyalty of the same people and for the ownership of the same territory”. A cultural war between two competing nationalisms evolved around politicization of history and some popular festivals (e.g. *Newroz*), and even debate on “ethnic” origins of *Kangal* dogs.

Toward the mid-1990s, for drawing the boundaries of Kurdishness, a group of Kurdish intellectuals strove to form “Kurdish national history” (Hirschler, 2001). They started to find out the ties between modern Kurds and an ancient people of the Kurdish region to prove that there is an ethnic continuity in history. Here Kurdish ethnicity is portrayed as belonging to an Aryan race. That was developed as a counter argument to the Turkish History Thesis (THT) according to which the Turks belong to “civilized” Aryan races. The Kurds resided for centuries in today’s region where they live. It was a geographical area where ancient civilizations of which the Kurds were real heirs came to the fore. The “barbaric others” have always invaded to control the “civilized insiders” or the Kurds’ homeland (Hirschler, 2001: 155). This formulation of civilization versus barbarism is another inverted notion of the THT. This attempt to render a homeland for “Kurdish nation” accompanied with the effort to describe national peculiarities that had been preserved through endless cultural resistance (Hirschler, 2001: 152-54).

In this respect *Newroz* has a very symbolic meaning for the making of Kurdish ethno-nationalism mainly as a symbol of Kurds’ resistance to foreign, barbaric invasion, although it is a popular festive celebrated in the south-east and eastern region of Turkey, Iran and some Turkic societies as the first day of spring. As a myth of “independence and resistance of the Kurdish nation”<sup>22</sup> it was used to make free today’s Kurdish homeland from Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Thus, it signified both the remembrance of a heroic past and the resistance to the

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<sup>22</sup> In the common usage of Kurdish popular discourse, it expresses the myth of Kawa the Blacksmith who on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 612 B.C., killed the Assyrian tyrant Dehak and liberated the Kurds and other peoples of the region from his oppressive and cruel rule. So *Newroz* holiday belongs to the Kurds, because it symbolizes their independence. See *Özgür Gündem* (pro-Kurdish daily), 21 March 1997; *Özgür Gündem*, 21 March 1999.

“oppression the Kurds continue to suffer from”.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the early 1990s the Kurdish groups began to effectively use the *Newroz* celebrations as popular uprisings to the Turkish state.

But, by 1995, *Newroz* became a “highly contested field since the Turkish state tries to introduce its own interpretation of the symbolic content, similar to the Iranian state” (Hirschler, 2001: 154). When during the early 1990s it gradually came to be the symbol of revolting against the Turkish state, the official authorities tried to tame it and the new official attitude to this holiday was that it was a real Turkish holiday commemorated by the Turks through centuries.<sup>24</sup> It was also renamed as *Nevruz*.<sup>25</sup> In this way they tried to turn it into part of official cultural ideology, written as *Nevruz* as opposed to local usage, *Newroz*. During *Nevruz* celebrations in 2000, as a symbolic resistance to the official one, some local newspapers in Turkey’s south-east region wrote it as *Newroz*, upon which the official authorities brought suit against those newspapers that spelled the term *Nevruz* as *Newroz* (Baslangiç, 2000: 19). This case seems to be very illustrative to show the importance of the issue of language as a political and cultural dilemma in Turkish politics and society, and to what extent language has become politicized. In this way Turkish with its “civilized” letters and words has had a central place in determining the boundaries of Turkish culture.

### **Concluding Remarks: Transformation in Islamic and Kurdish Perspectives**

Unlike the Welfare Party, its heir, the Virtue Party adopted more moderate rhetoric. It emphasized on democratisation, individual rights and liberties, and the necessity of EU membership. The WP program emphasizes mainly social rights and freedom to practice

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<sup>23</sup> *Özgür Gündem*, 21 March 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Can Dündar, [milliyet.com.tr/arsiv](http://milliyet.com.tr/arsiv).

<sup>25</sup> For a typical example to Turkify Newroz see Tural Sadik (1996).

religion. It sought a collective identity for all citizens, but not individual civil rights. Islamic sensibilities and practices took an important place in its program by defining Turkey as primarily a Muslim country. Though rejecting the Kemalist secular formulation of Islam, the WP with counter hegemonic premises seemed to adopt its notion of the collective as a whole, but in much more religious terms. Nevertheless, in the Virtue Party program, a major emphasis was placed on individual and human rights. The primary motive for extending democratic rights was to defend religious freedoms. The VP began to work according to a new strategy to co-exist with the secular state (Önis, 2001: 288). Nevertheless, in February of 2001 it was closed by the Constitutional Court relying on the charge that it was only a continuation of the Welfare Party, given its support for the right to wear the headscarves. Its two successors -*Saadet Partisi* (the Felicity Party) founded by Erbakan's close friends in 2001 and the AKP founded under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the former mayor of Istanbul- also adopted this strategy of co-existence. Although especially the AKP seems to be undistinguishable from other centre-right parties, both new parties see secularism as necessary to guarantee religious freedoms and individual rights.<sup>26</sup> In general sense "co-existence" envisions the emergence of multiple and alternative social forms including different styles of life, different patterns of consumption and diverse modes of behaviour based on different moral principles. In general, the Islamic movement is moving from a conflict-centred view of communal identity to more privatised life politics of integration. This is very evident in the case of the AKP. At this point one might argue that this movement is linked to the "neo-Islamic" claim that there is a right to a separate identity considered within the framework of human rights and global values. Relying on that claim, Islamic circles are voicing more loudly a right to active political participation and more toleration of their symbols and rituals.

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<sup>26</sup> *Hürriyet* (Istanbul daily), 9 August 2001.

After its establishment, the AKP became gradually the voice of ‘neo-Islamic’ demands, placing a strong emphasis on the synthesis between democratic values and traditional-Islamic ones. In the 2002 elections it received 34 percent of the votes and gained an overwhelming majority with 363 seats in the 550-member parliament. It seems clear that AKP’s victory is partly the result of past failures of all centre-right and centre-left political parties to cope with Turkey’s major economic and political problems. While its pragmatic leaders seem to adopt a discourse of being loyal to the limits set by the secular establishment for the hegemony of the Kemalist regime, they are dealing with the headscarf issue and the state’s control over religion instead on the basis of tolerance and individual rights. Rejecting an exclusive “Islamic” identity, they see the AKP as a “conservative democratic” party. In this respect, they claim to have the mission of combining Islam and both with democracy and modernity, a “Turkish model” for the rest of the Islamic world after September 11. In AKP’s program, all issues relating the state to religion should be settled by a public consensus that is only possible through democratic practices. Thus, Turkey’s proposed EU membership is of great importance for the AKP’s leadership. It is seen both to be “emancipating mechanism” to establish a consolidated democratic regime and to help to expand the democratic rights to be enjoyed by Turks. That is why the AKP government immediately initiated a state-wide and international campaign to receive a clear date for membership negotiation with the EU.

Such a transformation in Islamic discourse might be also observed in the Kurdish movement especially after Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, was arrested and jailed in 1999. It was the move from the formation of the closed Kurdish “national culture” to the recognition of Kurds’ different linguistic and cultural peculiarities under a democratic pluralist system. There was a sign in the early 1990s that the Kurdish reality was recognized and then achieved more and more public visibility. But following years showed that it was collapsed with identification of Kurdish issue with the PKK’s claims of separatism. Even all-



moderate Kurdish groups seeking for justification under democratic rules were silenced and marginalized. The post-1999 developments and Turkey's accession to the EU made the Kurdish issue debated in terms of expanding cultural rights on the basis of the right-based, constitutional citizenship. Kurdish groups now more want to exercise their language and practices as part of their individual rights. To adopt the Copenhagen political criteria of the EU, Turkish governments made a legal rearrangement to allow broadcasting and education (just only in private institutions) in Kurdish. Now the Kurdish problem is gradually tuning into a question of "decentralization" and "recognition of cultural rights".<sup>27</sup> Although in Turkey there has been a respect for cultural diversity (especially in terms of Turk-Kurd relations) at the private level (Somer, 2002), this has not yet fully come to the fore in the official public discourse.

In conclusion, Turkish politics has been under siege by the cleavages in post-Cold War Turkish society, between Islamists and secularists, between Turks and Kurds. This culture wars turned primarily around problematizing those who are included in and who are excluded from the public sphere. Here the most contested issue was the political implications of the definition of Turkish culture in determining the scope of the public sphere. The Kemalist establishment deemed Islamist and Kurdish movements with "alternative" identity claims as divisive and reactionary and so throughout the 1990s excluded and marginalized them. It might be argued that like the Kemalist elite, both Islamic and Kurdish groups promoted a cultural program that preaches only one way to understand and live that was their own world. In that sense, Turkey gives a good example of a political society, which became more and more polarized due to politicisation of cultural symbols. This process resulted in narrowing the boundaries of the politics.

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<sup>27</sup> For the importance of the EU and new faces of Turkey's Kurdish question see Yavuz (2001: 14-21).

The identity claims of both Islamist and Kurdish groups and their politicization in the recent years gradually became a matter of recognition of cultural rights and provided negative implications for Turkey's EU candidacy. Nowadays, Turkish governments are making changes in legal and administrative mechanism to adopt the EU's form of multiculturalism. Kurds and Islamists, together with other groups seeking for "cultural recognition", see these criteria as a chance for their representation at the public sphere and, accordingly, are making changes in their discourses. Although making some openings, still the questions of ethnic groups and religion seem to remain to some extent unsettled in Turkey's public political discourse.

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