

# Introduction: State and Society: Neither Lovers nor Haters

Berna Turam and Monica M. Ringer

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In both media accounts and scholarship, contemporary Turkey draws much attention as a hotbed of contestation between Islamists and secularists.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the ban of the popularly elected Islamist Welfare Party and of the headscarf in universities in 1998 reinforced an already predominant dichotomy between the repressively secular state and the Muslim actors. What deserves more attention, however, is the transformation in state-society relations since the late 1990s. Although Islamist political parties initially remained weakly marginal after the 1998 semimilitary intervention, the Islamically oriented Justice and Development Party (JDP) came to power as a single-party government by free and fair elections in 2002. Unlike previous Islamic parties, it was not forcibly shut down by the secular state. The JDP maintained good relations, especially in its earlier years of rule, with other sectors of the state, even including the military, as well as the European Union.<sup>2</sup>

Nonconfrontational politics between the JDP government and other branches of the state continued up until April 2007, when the JDP nominated Abdullah Gül to become the first Islamically oriented president of the Turkish Republic. The military gave a warning immediately after Gül's nomination, which was followed by street protests in principal cities in Turkey. The controversy over the presidency was just the beginning of a series of secularist backlashes against the JDP and Islamist actors, primarily in urban centers of the country.<sup>3</sup> The secularists vocally expressed their discontent of Islamic politics and public demonstrations of piety. Not surprisingly, the headscarf ban has been at the center of these clashes.

## State-Society: Breaking the Dichotomies while Recognizing the Boundaries

The recent secularist backlash remains understudied despite the temptation of the puzzle it creates.<sup>4</sup> Why does secularist discontent peak at a time when Muslim actors in Turkey seem to have secularized and integrated into the secular polity and capitalist market? The answer lies in the shifting patterns of interaction between the secular state and Muslim actors. While

1. Zeyno Baran, "Turkey Divided," *Journal of Democracy* 19 (2008): 55–69; Ali Çarkoğlu and Barry Rubin, *Religion and Politics in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2006).

2. Metin Heper, "Justice and Development and the Military in Turkey," in Çarkoğlu and Barry, *Religion and Politics*; Ali Resul Usul, "The Justice and Development Party from Euro-skepticism to Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-fatigue," in *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, ed. Umit Cizre (London: Routledge, 2008), 175–99.

3. For other forms of secularist discontent outside the major urban centers, see Binnaz Toprak, *Türkiye'de farklı olmak: Din ve muhafazakarlık ekseninde otekileştirilenler (Being Different in Turkey: The Otherization of the Secular by Religion and Conservatism)* (Istanbul: Bogazici Üniversitesi, Bilimsel Araştırmalar Projesi, 2009).

4. For an exception, see Cizre, *Secular and Islamic Politics*; and Berna Turam, "Turkish Women Divided by Politics: Secular Activism versus Islamic Nondefiance," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10 (2008): 475–94.

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Islamists abandoned their radical edge and integrated into the secular system and free market,<sup>5</sup> the ability of the Turkish state to accommodate religion has likewise expanded. Put differently, through its nonconfrontational interactions with Islamists, the Turkish state has experimented with greater capacities for accommodating religious piety and politics. While admittedly this increased tolerance has not always been smooth or unilinear, the long-term trend has been toward what Berna Turam refers to as “the politics of engagement.”<sup>6</sup> Engagement refers to a wide variety of nonconfrontational state-Islam interactions ranging from contestation and negotiation to cooperation and alliance. Typically, while incidents of contestation between secularists and Islamists attract enormous public and scholarly attention, engagement between Islam and the state has been a largely neglected and disliked subject. The significant role of such engagement was evident in the 2007 elections, where despite strong secularist backlash the JDP won the national elections, increasing its vote from 33 percent in 2002 to 47 percent. The so-called secularist establishment, including particularly the military, abided by the results of these fair and free elections. The JDP has been in power since 2002 and appointed Gül as the new president in 2008.

These recent political trends toward more constructive state-Islam interaction have been unsettling for Turkish secularists and have led to sporadic outbursts. Ironically, the headscarf of President Gül’s wife and the couple’s pious lifestyle, more than his career in Islamist politics, seem to threaten the Turkish secularists, particularly the secularist feminists.<sup>7</sup> The historically symbiotic association of the secularist elite with the republic has precluded a secularist movement that was independent from the republic.<sup>8</sup> However, the recent integration of the Muslim actors into the republic informs a differentiation, or even a different standpoint, between

secularist actors and the state. This, certainly, does not mean that the secularist elite has lost all of its power. Rather, it suggests that the secularists are becoming one among many social actors in Turkey. Usually, relative independence between the state and social forces is considered a positive feature of democracies, in which both sides acquire the space to develop their autonomous power.<sup>9</sup> However, unlike the new generation of Islamist actors, the secularists lack the high skills and long-term experience of negotiating their own terms with the state. There are two good reasons for this failure. First, as the secularist followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had assumed an organic ownership of the republic, they saw no reason to negotiate with and convince the state. Second, the secularist left has had a long tradition of confronting the state, a state that has repressed and eventually undermined the Left in Turkey. Not surprisingly, the post-2007 secularist backlash in Turkey is expressed in sporadic street protests and short-lived emotional outbursts. The absence of a durable consistent and well-organized secularist collective action stands in sharp contrast to the highly skilled networking and organizational capacities of Islamists in and outside of national boundaries.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their weaker collective-action skills, hardcore secularists continue playing key roles in decision making in certain branches of the state, particularly the Constitutional Court. However, the potentials and limits of their power must be rethought separately from their historically “almighty” image and be reevaluated in light of new power dynamics and new forms of power sharing within the state.

Different departments of the state have fallen into more overt conflict since Gül assumed the presidency in July 2008. Soon after, the JDP felt powerful enough to lift the headscarf ban, which had been enforced officially since 1998. The Constitutional Court, an institution in the

5. See especially Cihan Tugal’s remarkable work, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

6. Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

7. Turam, “Turkish Women.”

8. See particularly Esra Özyürek’s original analysis, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

9. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

10. Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Ayşe Saktanber, *Living Islam: Women, Religion, and the Politicization of Culture in Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002); Turam, *Between Islam and the State*; Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

secularist camp, responded immediately by overriding the government's decision and by reinstating the ban on 5 June 2008. The polarization is provoked both by the JDP, which has increasingly failed in its commitments to democratic reform since 2007, and by the weak opposition of the Republican People's Party (RPP), which uses antidemocratic means to undermine the government. Although neither group is to disappear in the near future, both largely fail in accepting the importance of democracy and cooperation in advancing a democratic political culture, democratic institutions, and reforming legal structures. Rather than focus on whether women should be allowed to wear a headscarf to university campuses, the debate should center on the need for a consensus concerning individual freedoms. The debate concerning the conflicting choices of clothing has too long seesawed between one group's political ability to enforce its views against another's, rather than compromise and consensus on more core issues that are imperative for real democratization.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, the split between the branches of the state—the military and the Constitutional Court versus the JDP and the presidency—is directly reflected in divides in daily life in urban space.

These new divides between different branches of the state and social groups are indicative of a much larger transformation. When the Constitutional Court boldly initiated a lawsuit that would outlaw the JDP from government, this time its action was viewed in the context of the wider debate concerning democracy and civil rights in Turkey—a debate that was closely monitored by the European Union (EU) and democrats in Turkey. Since 2007 tensions between secularists and Islamists acquired a new intensity and scale and drew much of the public into a widening debate. Ordinary people from all walks of life disagree, while remaining only marginally committed to either the Islamist JDP or its secularist opposition, the RPP. Put differently, the public debate increasingly involves more than simple contests between Islam and secularism, not only because of international interest in the affair, but also because it is a means

whereby Turkish society is negotiating the terms of its democracy.

In this broader context of democratization, the staunchly secular Constitutional Court backed down and ruled against banning the JDP, although it did charge the party with violation of the secular tradition. Despite its persistent reservations, recent state behavior toward the Islamic government suggests that we are witnessing a gradual state transformation from the enforcement of rigid forms of state control of religion into different, and still contested, shades of secularism. The recent contestations between the JDP and other branches of the state are ultimately productive, although not painless, negotiations over the boundaries of religion and politics.

Despite the obvious centrality of these contestations, an exclusive emphasis on the Islamist-secularist split draws attention away from the shifting dynamics of negotiation and compromise. Disguised by the Islamism-secularism controversy, Turkey's main challenge remains democratization. The problem of democracy is evident in the attitudes and politics of both secularists and Islamists, whether they are nonstate or state actors. In this sense, the support from hardcore secularists for military domination and intervention is no bigger a challenge to democracy than is the Islamist political leaders' adoption of similar antidemocratic means to fight the secularist opposition, such as a series of recent "curious" arrests of the leading secularist public figures.

Yet there have been exceptions to this rapidly growing polarization. Some people and groups have managed to stand above the clash between the JDP and the RPP, as well as the tensions over the headscarf issue. The religious Gülen movement, for example, superseded even the headscarf controversy, while diluting and avoiding conflict at different levels. The leader Fethullah Gülen announced that the headscarf was "a detail" in the larger context of religious faith and practice and encouraged young female students to take off their headscarves for the sake of secular education.<sup>12</sup>

11. Turam, "Turkish Women"; Jenny B. White, "Coup .com: Turkey Conquers the Politics of Fear," *ISIM Review* 20 (2007): 38–39.

12. Turam argues elsewhere that the cost of constructive state-Islam interaction has been the compromise of women's choices of headscarf and their agency. Turam, *Between Islam and the State*, chap. 5;

see also Alev Çinar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

However, although the Gülen movement's primary commitment is to avoid confrontation, it often ends up becoming the most contested issue that divides the society. While the movement is arbitrarily associated with the JDP government in public opinion, it remains separate from the JDP and often rather critical of its late rule. In May 2008, the JDP canceled Gülen's annual Abant conference, which was to be held in Diyarbakir, a city with a large Kurdish population.<sup>13</sup> In an interview with Turam, the conference organizers and the spokespeople of the Gülen movement explained in detail about their recent efforts, activities, and schools in the predominantly Kurdish eastern provinces. They also complained that the JDP has undermined this effort by canceling their conference, which succeeded in bringing Kurdish and Turkish intellectuals and academics together. Gülen's followers were most upset about the JDP government's excuse for canceling the conference. They were told that the conference overlapped with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speech in Diyarbakir on his "reform package" in the region. It is ironic that the pro-Islamic government puts itself in a position of competition with a religious nongovernmental initiative. The JDP was threatened by the popularity and success of the Gülen movement's organizations and conferences, which would easily have overshadowed Erdoğan's speech. This incident is telling. The stereotypical juxtaposition of the secularist establishment against the "Islamist camp" is not a valid binary anymore. Moreover, the largest Islamic movement in Turkey, Gülen, occasionally expresses discontent with the JDP government and its failure to cooperate with ordinary Muslim actors and religious social forces. The JDP's recent failure in engaging with Muslim nonstate actors was reflected in the recent local elections in April 2009, in which the JDP shared equal votes with other major parties.

Another social group that avoids polarization is the secular economic elite—represented by the Turkish Industrialists' and Business-

men's Association (TÜSIAD). Although exceptions apply, the members of TÜSIAD have been largely able to maintain a moderate position despite ongoing conflict between the religious JDP government and the secularist opposition.<sup>14</sup> TÜSIAD was particularly content with the early period of JDP's rule, when the government undertook a series of democratic reforms, both economic and political. Albeit in quite different ways, nonreligious liberal democrats, represented by the newspaper *Taraf*, have also avoided the deep divide and refused advocacy of one camp over the other by carrying the debate to the level of individual choice, freedom, and liberal democracy. Interestingly, these attitudes that privilege nonconfrontation and compromise over blind advocacy of one camp have been regarded either as naive or as "pretend" forms of American liberalism, or a dissimulation that hides these groups' "real" intentions. Murat Belge's insights on this issue deserve highlight:

The conditions that one side authoritatively imposes may disappear when the opposition becomes more powerful and defiant in time. [To the contrary,] through long-term discussions [of negotiation and compromise] the opponents may get to know each other better and even understand and agree with and warm up to each other. . . . Unfortunately, these attitudes have not been fully developed in our part of the world. By this, I refer to a larger set of countries and peoples and not just Turkey—the Middle East, the Balkans, a large part of Asia, Russia, and so on. Here, mentalities of a zero-sum game play a major role. In the Turkish language, the verb *compromise* [*uzlaşmak*] stands for an undignified act, and the term *compromiser* is loaded with insulting connotations.<sup>15</sup>

In this vein, Belge also highlights elsewhere that the term *engagement* does not properly translate into Turkish. This is partly reflected in the public and academic interest in opposition and confrontation, while failing to take different forms of negotiation and cooperation seriously.

13. Berna Turam, interview with a group of spokespeople of the Gülen movement, Istanbul, May 2008.

14. Yavuz's research reveals that TÜSIAD has maintained its liberal democratic position and continued to actively push for democratization partly because

of the organizational factors, which guaranteed some consistency in the association's larger goals. Devrim Yavuz, "The Secularist-Muslim Conflict and Large Business: Testing Turkish Entrepreneurs' Commitment to Democracy," in *Government and Opposition* 45 (2010).

15. Murat Belge, "Uzlaşma üstüne" ("On Compromise"), *Taraf*, 8 February 2008 (translated by Turam).



Furthermore, an exclusive focus on the Islamist-secularist split overshadows the more crucial issue of continuities and affinities between state and society.<sup>16</sup> Despite strong trends of globalization, the state remains the main organizer and manager of religion and religious affairs. In this respect, the so-called laicist states of Turkey and France have been singled out for their diligent efforts at restricting public religion and relegating it to the private realm. The Turkish state's control of Islam has been overemphasized to highlight state repression of Muslim actors and restrictions on freedom of religious expression. Yet contrary to the stereotypical juxtaposition of the secular state against Muslim actors, they share certain affinities, which have developed from long-term interaction and familiarity.<sup>17</sup> These affinities are often manifested not only in the shared sense of belonging and in different forms of nationalisms but also in the collaboration of state actors and Islamist actors in international agendas. Accordingly, it is important to note the efforts that the JDP made early in its rule (2002–4) to promote Turkey's membership in the EU and also the ongoing cooperation between the Turkish Republic and the Gülen movement in Central Asia and the United States.<sup>18</sup> It should not be surprising then to see that Muslim actors display certain secular ways of life, similarly, the state and the secularists socialize into conservative politics and worldviews, which have been embraced by the pious. Accordingly, an exclusive focus on the state and its authoritarianism ignores the importance of ordinary citizens and their political views, culture, and leverage. How states manage or fail to manage religion democratically is substantively shaped by the manner of state-society interaction in everyday life.<sup>19</sup>

How do pious Turks negotiate and contest state regulations, challenge its laicist image and/or practices, and find ways to convince the

state to listen, respond, and even to cooperate? Unfortunately, the predominance of Foucauldian analysis on technologies of power and the tacticality of the state has not helped social science push these questions further to explore the unintentional, unplanned, and even affective forms of mundane interactions between the secular states and citizens. Not every material act or discourse of the state is a reflection of technologies of power. Many strategies and tacticalities of state control have failed in the context of growing powers of domestic and international Islamist actors and their movements and networks. Authoritative states, like Egypt, have been convinced, molded, and socialized into more conservative ways of life by pious actors.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, each and every Muslim actor does not necessarily confront the secular state with a yearning for it to be replaced by an Islamic state. To the contrary, most Muslims in Turkey have been clear in their allegiance to the republic. New generations of politically engaged Muslims have in many ways succeeded in negotiating with the state for larger space and freedom for their own pious ways of life. Democracy requires that instead of undermining and being threatened by these gains of the pious, other social groups, including the secularists, the leftists, and secular feminists, engage in negotiations for their own freedoms and interests. Thus through these constructive patterns of state-society interaction many of the pathways to democracy are being forged. In contrast to the fight for short-term victories between the late JDP government and the secularist RPP opposition, societal compromise entails a calm, long-term process. As Belge reminds us: "Engagement and victory are not the same thing. In the former, you can impose your request and demands. In the latter, the debate and discussion may continue for a long time."<sup>21</sup>

16. For state-society theories, see especially John A. Hall, *Civil Society: Theory, History, Comparison* (London: Polity, 1995); Hall, ed., *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue, eds., *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

2000); Michael Mann, *The Social Sources of Power*, vol. 2, *The Rise of Social Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

17. Turam, *Between Islam and the State*; Sami Zubaida, "Trajectories of Political Islam: Egypt, Iran, and Turkey," *Political Quarterly* 71 (2000): 60–78.

18. Ziya Önis, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists: Political Parties and Paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey," *Journal of Southern*

*Europe and the Balkans* 9 (2007); Berna Turam, "A Bargain between the Secular State and Turkish Islam: Politics of Ethnicity in Kazakhstan," *Nations and Nationalism* 10 (2004): 353–74.

19. Migdal, *State in Society*; Salwa Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

20. See especially Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*.

21. Belge, "Uzlasma üstüne."

### Outline of “Secular Muslims”

The articles in this collection go beyond the binary cliché of the repressive secular state versus victimized Muslim actors. The authors reveal counterintuitive accounts of secular Muslims and conservative secularists, as well as understudied linkages and continuities between secular politics and religion. The empirical and theoretical depth of the articles provides a fresh look at highly contested issues that extend beyond the borders of the Turkish Republic. Our aim in this collection is to complicate the debate rather than provide easy solutions or simplistic models.

Yeşim Bayar’s empirically rich study challenges the idea that the educational policies of the early Turkish Republic were shaped exclusively by a Western secularist commitment. To the contrary, her archival research on parliamentary records shows that religion was a central part of the early republican elite’s discussions on education. Moreover, the study reveals and analyzes educational policy shifts (1923–38), which were indicative of a dynamic debate and controversy (as opposed to certainty, consistency, and commitment to one idea) about the role of religion in education.

Sinem Gürbey’s theoretically provocative article takes issue with the representations of the Turkish Republic as a state that simply denies the role of religion or removes Islam from the public sphere. To the contrary, she argues that the state produces a certain kind of religion that is central to the making of good citizens. Gürbey argues that different branches of the state work toward essentializing the connection between military service, Islam, and the Turkish nation—a connection that was exclusionary toward non-Muslim citizens. Furthermore, the article goes beyond the dissemination of religion merely by the Directorate of Religious Affairs in proving Gürbey’s point. Based on her analysis of *Askere din kitabı* (*The Book on Religion for the Soldier*), written in 1922 by the directorate’s president, she argues that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s vision of the military as an educational institution represented military service as a religious duty and a form of worship.

In a similar vein, Buket Türkmen’s article focuses on the relationship between religion, ed-

ucation, and nationalism through an analysis of the religious education textbooks that were part of the Turkish high school curricula from 1995 to 2007. More specifically, Türkmen emphasizes that while exhibiting certain continuities with the earlier understanding of religion and its role in society under the Kemalist regime, the content of religious education has recently been undergoing a significant transformation. This transformation, parallel to the re-Islamization of the public sphere, has entailed a reinterpretation of Islam that is becoming increasingly more Sunni-centric. Türkmen’s findings also underline that a redefinition of civic morality, manifested in the content of these textbooks, has become closely linked to an intensification of what she calls the “holistic spirit” of Turkish nationalism.

In the context of an intensification of Turkish nationalism, Esra Özyürek’s article considers the debate from another angle. Özyürek focuses on the small community of Turkish-speaking Christians converted from Islam and the difficulties they face in being accepted as Turkish Christians. She argues that the underlying element of the campaign against Turkish Christians is not religion but nationalism and etatism. Opponents of Turkish Christians promote the idea that by converting to Christianity these people are being treacherous to their nation and their state.

“Muslim community,” whether it is manifested in the context of an urban neighborhood or a market-oriented Islamist project, appears as a predominant theme in several of this issue’s contributions. Metin Heper uses several sets of survey data to question and challenge the argument that “pious community” poses a threat to the secular republic in Turkey. By highlighting the loyalties of both pious and nonpious Turkish people to the state, he argues that these loyalties do not contradict religious faith. He analyzes quantitative data that show that the pious in Turkey have secularized by agreeing to separate religion from politics. Heper sees this process as part of a “cognitive revolution” that has transformed how Turkish Muslims think about religious faith.

An alternative study to Heper’s view of cognitively secularized Muslims is Cihan Tugal’s

work on the transformations of the Islamist project. Based on a two-year-long ethnography and fifty interviews in a squatter district of Istanbul, Tugal posits that political interaction is pivotal to the Islamic transformation of the city's squatter areas. Arguing against civil society- and subjectivity-centered analyses, he demonstrates that while the agency of the poor is crucial to this interaction, squatter agency is ultimately shaped and absorbed by the Islamist project.

Following up on Tugal's argument on the incorporation of the Islamists into the capitalist system, Marcie J. Patton analyzes the match between neoliberal economic policies and the conservative communitarian ideas that the JDP developed and capitalized. Patton's work explores this accord between communitarianism and neoliberalism by examining how a certain articulation of Muslim community leads to a deepening neoliberalism.

Finally, Ali Çarkoğlu tackles the controversial issue of women's head covering by an empirical analysis using his survey data collected in 1999 and 2006 with a nationwide representative sample of voting-age respondents in Turkey. Unlike previous work that focused on political, cultural, and identitarian aspects of veiling, Çarkoğlu's article focuses on behavioral aspects of women's head cover choices. His data complicate the debate on the headscarf by showing that among three identified types of head covers the more "traditional" headscarf is the dominant choice over the more "politicized" style of veiling, the turban. The article also illustrates that the third type, a full-body veil referred to as the *çarşaf* in Turkey (the chador in Iran), seems to be declining consistently and disappearing from the daily practices of Turkish women.

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