Leading a 'torn country': Turkey's ideological and civilized divide

Joshua Walker
University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses

Part of the Leadership Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Walker, Joshua, "Leading a 'torn country': Turkey's ideological and civilized divide" (2003). Honors Theses. 1165.
https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1165

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.
Leading a ‘Torn Country:’
Turkey’s Ideological and Civilizational Divide

Joshua Walker

Senior Thesis:
Jepson School of Leadership Studies
University of Richmond, VA

April 25, 2003

Advisor: Dr. Douglas A. Hicks
Watch out, among you every person is a leader and every person is responsible for their own people, and the greatest leader of the Muslims, who governs all, is also answerable to the people.

- The Prophet Muhammad
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents ......................................................... 1

Acknowledgments ......................................................... 2

I. Introduction ................................................................... 3
   a. Theoretical Model ................................................. 6
   b. Turkish Identity as a Case Study ......................... 9
      i. Ottoman Empire ........................................... 9
      ii. Replacing an Islamic Identity ......................... 12
      iii. Kemalist Revolution .................................. 15
      iv. Kemalism .................................................. 20

II. The Challenge ......................................................... 23
   a. Islamic Politics .................................................. 23
      i. Latent Islamism .......................................... 26
      ii. Orientation of Intensity ............................... 29
      iii. Islamic Modernization ............................... 30
   b. Secularization .................................................. 32
      i. Historical Implications ................................. 37
      ii. The State ................................................... 39
      iii. Turkey’s Struggle .................................... 40
   c. Military and Islam .......................................... 43
      i. Turkish Options .......................................... 47

III. Liberal Islam as an Option ....................................... 49

IV. A New Pluralism .................................................... 59
   a. Turkish Civilization ........................................ 60
   b. Conclusion ..................................................... 64

Appendix ................................................................. 67

Bibliography ............................................................ 68
Acknowledgments

This paper has been a yearlong project that had its genesis in a Fulbright proposal for Turkey. I am particularly appreciative of the advice and counsel provided by Dr. Douglas A. Hicks, assistant professor of Leadership Studies and Religion, who served as my Senior Thesis advisor and mentor throughout the duration of this project. In addition, without the reviews and comments provided by Dr. Anna Wuerth, Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, and Mr. Jonathan Zur this paper would not have been possible. Many friends and faculty members provided moral support throughout the writing of this paper and for this I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Chauntee’ Schuler, Dr. Kenneth Ruscio, Ms. Carmen Foster, Dr. Teresa Williams, Dr. Joanne Ciulla, and Dr. Jonathan Wight.
I. Introduction

Fault lines have always characterized the Anatolian Peninsula. The 1999 earthquake that rocked Western Turkey reminded the world of the shifting tectonic plates that cover this geographic area. Perhaps more important are the human fault lines that exist within the Turkish Republic. These human-determined fault lines or borders between the Western and the Eastern parts of the ancient Roman Empire also became the dividing line between Latin and Orthodox Christendoms and, for over 500 years, between Christian Europe and the Muslim Ottoman Empire. These borders and fault lines among the many ethnicities, religions, cultures, and civilizations serve as a constant reminder of the divisions and differences that continue to define this region of the world. These divisions are deep and increasing in importance, as any scan of events following September 11, 2001 indicates. From the Balkan conflicts to the civil unrest in the Middle East to the war in Iraq, the fault lines of civilizations today are increasingly becoming the battle lines of war and conflict in the future. In this emerging era of cultural conflict, the Turkish Republic is a unique case study.

Turkey's geographic location as a fault line between East versus West and North versus South positions the nation at the crossroads of the world. In addition to its location, Turkey finds itself on a unique civilizational fault line of the Islamic Middle East and the Christian West. Naturally, these civilizational distinctions are problematic in their classifications because no country or region is monolithic in culture or religion. Therefore, while the generality of equating the West to Christianity and the Middle East to Islam is helpful at points for an analysis, these equations are certainly too simple and deserve greater scrutiny. As a result of these classifications, however, Turkey's geographical and cultural characteristics have led to an
identity crisis whose influence has been felt in Turkish political life since the nation’s inception in 1923.

This research paper addresses two fundamental questions: “What civilizational and ideological divisions exist in Turkey?” and “How can Turkey’s leadership help bring these differences into a peaceful co-existence?” By looking at these questions from historical and social perspectives, this paper demonstrates the particular difficulties that the 80-year-old Turkish Republic must face in an increasingly polarized context. Beginning with the Ottoman Empire and the legacy of its unmistakable religious heritage on modern-day Turkey, we see the uniqueness of Turkey, not only in terms of where it is geographically situated, but also in terms of its ideological constituencies. Through examining the most dominant ideologies in Turkey, Kemalism and Islamism, one can see two varying approaches to Turkey’s civilizational divide. While these ideologies have created great polarization within Turkey, the identity crisis that confronts this country goes beyond superficial political reforms. The question of to which civilization Turkey belongs—perhaps this question is itself too simplistic—lingers even as Turkey’s recent history of military intervention and secular governments cast an ominous shadow over the political landscape.

This paper examines the theoretical framework advocated by Samuel Huntington for civilizations as it looks at the many distinctive identities of Turkey from its Islamic, Western, and uniquely Turkish perspectives. Within each of these identities, the views and beliefs that have resulted in the formation of ideological factions are also scrutinized. Using Turkey as a case study demonstrates that Huntington’s model, while thought provoking, fails to account for the diversity of Turkish perspectives and is an oversimplification of this country.
Turkey currently has a predominantly Muslim population existing within a secular state. The reforms that have led to this situation have helped produce a westernized elite, a largely traditional Muslim population, the emergence of an Islamist political movement, and the repression of democratic freedoms for religiously minded parties and minorities. This essay will attempt to suggest how Turkey can negotiate its westernized path, traditional population, the Islamist movement, and issues and questions of democracy. Looking at these areas complicates current civilizational frameworks, providing a modification of Huntington's thesis and allowing a new Turkish civilization to emerge. Founding this new civilization upon pluralism, and not singular civilizational inclusion, is the solution to Turkey's identity crisis.

In this paper, the various challenges of establishing a functional political structure in which secularists and Islamists can peacefully co-exist are examined at length. Many scholarly discourses are brought together throughout this research. A principal difficulty facing research of this sort involves the multidisciplinary scope that is necessary to understand the complexity of Turkey and its leadership challenges. The challenges that face Turkey stem from its history and geographic location. However, the resulting civilizational and ideological divide is a challenge not only for Turkey's political leaders, but also for its religious, military, and academic leaders. Unfortunately, there is no easy solution or answer for Turkey's leadership challenge; rather, as this paper demonstrates, major questions and challenges must be addressed in a multitude of ways. Within this context, the discipline of leadership studies must borrow from a variety of academic fields, including political science, theology, economics, anthropology, and sociology, in order to engage in the complexities of contemporary Turkish identities.

Turkey's history can help us understand the future and what lies ahead for the Anatolian Peninsula. As the Western model of secularization, which includes neo-liberal economic
reforms, modernization, and development, permeates much of the Kemalist elite, a more subtle, latent Islamic movement has begun to move among the Turkish population. This Kemalist-Islamist bipolar tension continues to dominate all political agendas and debates, as Turkey simultaneously looks East and West. Extremists within both groups call for mutually exclusive policy measures, but a more open, pluralistic approach is necessary to reconcile these differences. Especially in a country as vibrant and unique as Turkey, such a compromise must be possible. Public discourse among various viewpoints and peaceful co-existence offer Turkey the most successful formula to embrace its unique identity. Certainly, if any country in the world is going to prove that Islam can coexist with modernity and democracy in a global context, it is Turkey. By laying the framework of the ideological debate underway in Turkey while concurrently examining the many historical, cultural, and religious ramifications for these discussions, this paper offers various middle-ground alternatives to the current entrenched positions.

a. Theoretical Model

Samuel Huntington’s essay “The Clash of Civilizations?” is an appropriate point from which to enter the debate over Turkey’s torn identity and precarious civilizational claims. Within his now-classic essay Huntington argues that the modern international system governing nation-states, established with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, has undergone a series of changes in the post-World War II era. He argues that the previous bipolar model of the Cold War, which made the territorial interests of nation-states paramount to determining which superpower’s side to join, no longer applies. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nation-states are no longer as territorially significant and have begun to characterize themselves through affiliation with
civilizations. The eight major civilizations that Huntington identifies are these: "Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African."\(^1\)

Huntington defines civilization as, "...the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species."\(^2\) Therefore, rather than nation-state conflicts, which could be traditionally solved in a neo-realist model through diplomatic means, Huntington sees future conflicts occurring between civilizations.

Huntington offers an interesting and compelling case for a new international system in which the greatest divisions among humankind and the dominating source of international conflict will be cultural, driven by civilizational wars. One of the most interesting implications of this frame is the grouping of multiple nation-states into civilizations. The lone exception is Japan, which encompasses its own civilizational category. Therefore this debate is central to the Turkish question of national identity because if the greatest conflict is to occur among civilizations, Turkey must determine under which civilization it fits. While analysts like Huntington decide Turkey’s civilizational affiliation on an academic level, the question of where Turkey and its leaders will turn for their civilizational identity.

Turkey has a fair degree of cultural homogeneity (though we will be discussing this point at much greater detail later), but its leaders and citizens are divided over its civilizational alignment. Huntington recognizes this divide when he uses Turkey to illustrate a country in the state of civilizational flux. He writes that, "The most obvious and prototypical torn country is Turkey."\(^3\) Within this classification, Huntington asserts that a torn country’s leaders typically

\(^2\) Huntington, p. 3.
\(^3\) Huntington, p. 19.
wish to make their country a member of the West, but the history, culture and traditions of their countries are non-Western.

Through his label of "torn," Huntington specifically references the ongoing identity crisis that is being experienced in Turkey between an Islamic or Western civilization. Turkey becomes further complicated because of the many ethnic minorities that make up the citizenship. One very general and simplistic example of this challenge is the 20% Kurdish minority in Turkey that sees itself as part of the Islamic civilization, while the ethnically 78% Turks tend to see themselves as part of the Western civilization. This tension between the two ethnicities is a reflection of characterizes the "torn country" status that Huntington assigns to Turkey.

Huntington suggests a false-dichotomy that, in order to solve Turkey's identity crisis, its leaders must definitively associate the nation as either part of the Western or Islamic civilization. He suggests that a definition of Turkey's civilization in favor of the West, which the secular Kemalist government has traditionally advocated, must meet three criteria. First, Turkey's political and economic elites have to be generally supportive and enthusiastic about becoming a part the Western civilization. Second, Turkey's public, both ethnic Turks and Kurds, must be willing to acquiesce in the redefinition. Third, the current Western world must be willing to accept Turkey into their civilization. According to Huntington Turkey has met the first two criteria, but the third has not yet occurred. Turkey therefore continues to be the prime example of a torn country.  

While Huntington establishes a cohesive argument for Turkey's continued identity crisis and perpetual political polarization, his assertion that Turkey lacks only one more category to satisfy its membership within the Western civilization seems rather optimistic. Turkey sits on the borders of a number of civilizations, so instead of attempting to superficially align itself with one

---

4 Huntington, p. 21.
civilization or another by adopting a strictly Western or Islamist view, an alternative solution must be introduced. Huntington's framework is far too simplistic and does not take into account the various complexities of a country such as Turkey.

An examination of Turkish history validates Huntington's assertion of Turkey's torn identity. However, his torn country model of civilizational redefinition seems to be biased towards the West - that is, he sees Western integration as superior to remaining or becoming part of Islamic civilization which he portrays as violent. Along with his unidirectional path of Western redefinition of civilization, Huntington references the Islamic civilization as having the bloodiest borders. By suggesting a solution of Turkey's identity crisis through a redefinition, Huntington seems to be implying a deeper underlying principle. Through his creation of mutually exclusive civilizational affiliations, he implies that Turkey cannot comfortably incorporate multiple civilizations into a uniquely Turkish identity. However, Turkey houses various ethnic and social groups with different religious and ethnic identities, and it defies such a naïve redefinition. Given both its geographic and cultural positions in the international system, notable international relations scholars such as Ziya Onis have suggested that Turkey should optimize its uniqueness and look simultaneously to the East and West as opposed to identifying itself solely with any particular group. By examining these particular blocs, a deeper understanding and discussion of Turkey's place within Huntington's model becomes possible.
b. Turkey as a Case Study

i. Ottoman Empire

The Turkish Republic in its current state has been in existence since 1923. For the purposes of this paper, the most pertinent Turkish historical perspective to explore deals with the descent of the Turks and their deeply intertwined history within the Imperial Ottoman Empire. In Bernard Lewis’ book *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* the opening line states, “The Turks are a people who speak Turkish and live in Turkey.” While this simple statement may seem like common sense to some, Lewis demonstrates how this idea and subsequent propagation by Turkey’s leaders caused one of the major revolutions of the modern era that continues through the present. Europeans have referred to Turkish-speaking Anatolia as Turkey since the eleventh century; however, it has only been in recent memory that “Turkey” as an entity with a national identity has been created and fostered within the people of this area. An exploration into Turkish history, therefore, does not begin with the officially recognized year of independence when the Turkish Republic was founded, but with the Ottoman legacy that has left its mark on Turkey and its civilization. It was upon the rubble of the Ottoman Empire that Turkey was founded; one must first understand the origins of this empire and its decline before any discourse on Turkey is possible.

Early in the 14th century the Turkish tribal chieftain Othman, or Osman, founded an empire in western Anatolia (Asia Minor) that was to endure for almost six centuries. As the Ottoman Empire, named after its founding chieftain, grew by conquering lands of the rapidly declining Byzantine Empire and beyond, it came to include at the height of its power all of Asia Minor; the countries of the Balkan Peninsula; the islands of the eastern Mediterranean; parts of

---

Hungary and Russia; Iraq, Syria, the Caucasus, Palestine, and Egypt; part of Arabia; and all of North Africa through Algeria. Created by ethnically Turkish tribes in Anatolia, the Ottoman Empire lasted from the decline of the Byzantine Empire in the 14th century until the establishment of Turkey as a republic in 1923. A map of the Ottoman Empire is included as an appendix.

The landmass that now defines Turkey once lay at the heart of the Ottoman Empire, with its Imperial Palace located in Istanbul. Lewis notes that while it was primarily as an ethnic reservoir that the Turkish nomadic tribes were important to the Ottoman Empire, they were the primary reserve from which the ruling class drew. The prevalence of the Turks and their influence on the Ottoman Empire that incorporated a multicultural dominion played a significant part in the international role that the empire began to play. As a European power, situated in the Balkans, Hungary, and Russia, and with a religiously Islamic dynasty, the Ottoman Empire experienced a unique tension between the Western and Islamic civilizations. This legacy of tension and conflict between these groups has continued through modern times.

The Turks’ progression of founding the Ottoman Empire and then rebuilding the Turkish Republic over the previous framework with the ethnic nationalism instigated by the Young Turks and Ataturk continues to this day. However, perhaps more significant than the ethnic triumph of the Turks was the emergence of a powerful Islamic identity that transcended all ethnic differences within the Ottoman Empire. The Turks first encountered Islam on the frontiers, but they were never forced into Islam - as many Central Asian peoples were during the eleventh century. The faith brought by the Turks to the founding of the Ottoman Empire, as described by

---

8 Lewis, p. 59.
9 Lewis, p. 71.
Bernard Lewis, "...was the uncomplicated and militant religion of the frontiersman."\(^{10}\) It was in the name of this religion that the Ottoman Empire moved westwards, and in time these territories became incorporated into a new Islamic Empire. The traditions and institutions established by the Ottomans were intended to reinforce the Islamic life and culture, while being tolerant of all religions in accordance with Islamic law. Despite this tolerance, Islam continued to define the Ottoman and Turkish civilization to the point that, as Lewis notes, "...a Christian Turk is an absurdity and a contradiction in terms."\(^{11}\) Therefore, despite a legacy of tolerance, a non-Muslim in Turkey may be called a Turkish citizen, but never a Turk. This classification makes the term Turk an ethno-religious category, thereby solidifying an Islamic identity within the citizens of the empire.

The unifying force of Islam upon the citizens of the Ottoman Empire, and by extension Turkey, served to align Turkey within the Islamic Middle Eastern civilization. It was through cutting its ties with Turkey's Islamic past in 1923 that an identity crisis emerged in the newly formed Republic of Turkey. Historically and religiously, Turkey and its people have long been a part of the Islamic civilization. In the Imperial Ottoman Empire, Islam was the basis of state legitimacy and the source of individual identification. It was as part of this Islamic civilization that the Ottoman Empire left its legacy with the Turkish Republic.

ii. Replacing an Islamic Identity

Turkey's highly stratified social groupings created a division between the ruling elite and the rural peasants. For the common Turk in 1923, his or her identity was grounded in religion. However, unlike in the West where religion and the state were eventually separated in political
thought, Islam\textsuperscript{12} is believed by many Muslims to be an all-encompassing and all-pervasive way of life.\textsuperscript{13} It is because of this fact that Kemal Ataturk's revolution, starting in 1920 and culminating in the Turkish Republic's birth in 1923, alienated so many devoted traditionalist Muslims within Turkey. Ataturk's vision of a "secular" state was "...therefore considered by many to be a concept not only alien to, but also incompatible with Islam."\textsuperscript{14}

While it would be easy to simply classify pre-1923 Turkey as part of the Islamic civilization, it is important to note that even during this time period there was also an identity crisis. The Turkish rulers of the Ottoman and its Arab citizens shared a common religion, but differences still remained. Historically, the inhabitants of the Middle East saw the Turks as invaders from Central Asia who were descendants of the Mongols. After the eleventh century when the Turks converted to Islam, Turks and Arabs lived together for over a millennium, four hundred years of which was under the Ottoman Empire. This time period, described by many scholars as the centuries of "coexistence in the Middle East," did not mean that cultural and idiosyncratic differences did not persist between the Turks and their neighbors. Rather, they learned how to live with each other under Islam. Oya Mughisuddin, a noted Islamic scholar, has commented that, "The religion of Islam was the greatest unifying force."\textsuperscript{15} However, this coexistence did not mean assimilation or Turkish civilizational redefinition.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century of the declining Ottoman Empire, nationalism among the Turks and Arabs began to rise. As Mughisuddin notes, "the Arabs and the Turks started to think and behave differently about each

\textsuperscript{12} It is important to note that many Christian and Jews also hold similar views on their religions.
\textsuperscript{14} Ayubi, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{15} Mughisuddin, Oya Akgonenc. "Perceptions and Misconceptions in the Making of Foreign Diplomacy: A Study of Turkish-Arab Attitudes until the End of the 1970s." Turkish Review of Middle East Studies 7 (1993), 151.
other" and started to measure their achievements not in religious but in nationalist terms. When both the Arabs and the Turks attempted to evaluate their common past from this nationalist perspective the differences between the two became clearer. Historic distrust and stereotypes that had been suppressed by Muslim solidarity began to culminate in open revolts by Arabs. This translated into a noticeable split between the Turks and the Arabs, a fact that negates Huntington’s simple model of one representative Islamic civilization for all Muslims. While Turkey historically labeled itself as part of the Islamic Middle Eastern civilization during the Ottoman Empire, it has never truly been a part of only a singular Islamic civilization. Rather, it has been precariously governed through moral Islamic principles, while being divided within.

From its powerful beginnings in the fourteenth century to its peak in the seventeenth century, the Ottomans challenged Western civilization on its borders as a worthy adversary. At its peak, the Ottomans viewed their own Islamic civilization as superior to that of the West. As a result the West was seen as a rival empire, civilization, and religion to the Ottomans. In the words of the noted historian Bernard Lewis, the West was the “other” in Ottoman self-definition and, “...was the sacred duty of the Islamic Empire to subjugate and convert.” However, as its power began to wane, this Islamic Empire began to look towards the West for guidance. As the new leaders of the Empire, the “Young Turks,” took power, they began deliberately and forcefully to implement Westernizing policies in the late nineteenth century. They began to argue that they were indeed part of the Western civilization and created the eventual impetus for a cultural revolution in Turkey.

Interestingly, many Ottoman elites had always considered themselves as part of the Western civilization because of their stake in Eastern Europe. As the Ottoman Empire dwindled...
and the European nations modernized their armies, it became embroiled in a series of wars that led to disaster and defeat. Finally, "the sick man of Europe," as the Ottoman Empire had been labeled at the close of the nineteenth century by the Russian tsar, developed strong ties with Germany, and it fought on Germany’s side in World War I. Russia, the Ottoman’s long-time adversary and arch-rival for Central Asian dominance, hoped to use the war as an excuse to gain access to the Mediterranean and perhaps capture Constantinople from the Turks. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and withdrawal from the war frustrated this aim. However, defeats of the Ottomans in war inspired an already fervent Turkish nationalism against the Ottoman Empire. In 1920 the sultan's representatives signed the Treaty of Sèvres, which would have confined Turkey to the Anatolian Plateau. The Aegean and Mediterranean coasts were assigned to Greece and Italy; Armenia was to be independent. This postwar settlement, regarded by many historians to be far more punitive than the infamous Treaty of Versailles, outraged the nationalists in Turkey. It was from the rubble of the Ottoman Empire that the Turkish Republic was founded; therefore, the underlying tensions between the Western and Islamic civilization were inherited into the newly established country’s foundation.

iii. The Kemalist Revolution

On the heels of a defeated and desolate people in 1920, a revolutionary Turkish leader, Mustafa Kemal, emerged. General Kemal earned his prestige through his part in the sole victorious campaign conducted during the First World War on the peninsula of Gallipoli. As the commanding general of the under-matched and debilitated ninetieth division, Kemal was able to deliver an important Turkish victory that helped prevent Allied control of Istanbul and the Black Sea.
As the one shining exception to the disastrous war for the Turks, Mustafa Kemal was determined to work for a new Turkey and start a new populist movement against the Sultan and the remaining framework of the Ottoman Empire. General Mustafa Kemal as a military leader became the logical figure around whom a defeated nation could rally. He quickly embraced this role and denounced the cowardliness of the Ottoman government. He followed this by establishing a National Assembly as a shadow government and built an army of eager volunteers. With his newly formed army Mustafa Kemal, renamed Ataturk (Father of Turks), declared war on the Western occupiers of the Turkish fatherland and began to drive them out of Turkey. Turkish troops, led by Ataturk, stormed from their Anatolian heartland toward the West, reclaiming its lost territory and pushing a frantic Greek force back to the sea. As noted by Stephen Kinzer in his book *Crescent and Star*, “In one of the most astonishing military reversals of modern history, Kemal had turned utter defeat into brilliant triumph, ripping to shreds the Sèvres treaty under which modern Turkey was to have been aborted before it could be born.”

A new government under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk emerged at Ankara, to which he moved the capital from Istanbul, the traditional Ottoman Empire capital. The last sultan, Mohammed VI, fled in 1922 after the sultanate had been abolished. All members of the Ottoman Dynasty were expelled from the country two years later. Turkey was proclaimed a republic, with Ataturk as its first president. The revolution led by Kemal Ataturk had succeeded and was subsequently named the Kemalist Revolution.

The Kemalist Revolution, however, had only begun with the military expulsion of foreign troops and the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk contemplated continuing his military success into an expansive campaign to reclaim all of the territories once held by the Ottoman

---

Empire. However, he focused his attention internally on Turkey rather than externally. Kemal Ataturk's legacy would have been secured with his military victories, but the "father of the Turks" dreamed of something more for his people. At the darkest moment in Turkish history, the Kemalist Revolution brought new life and hope to the "sick man of Europe," restored a people's energy and self-respect, and set Turkey firmly on a path to independence.

The modernization project that Ataturk undertook with his revolution was far-reaching and radical not only for its time, but even for today. The establishment of a modern, secular, and constitutionally based nation-state, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, created a fundamental shift in the bases of political legitimation and a redefinition for Turkey. Both internally and externally, many saw this Turkish transformation as a transition of a traditional society into a modern one.

In the midst of Western attempts to divide Turkish territory among the European powers, Ataturk had rescued and founded the Turkish Republic. With his revolutionary zeal, Ataturk transformed a shattered and confused state into a nation bent on progress and modernity. The Kemalist model, named after Ataturk's revolutionary attempts to emulate western development, ambitiously sought to accomplish progression from feudal times to modern capitalist parliamentary democracies, in order to accomplish for Turkey, in three years, what had taken five centuries in the West. The wide sweeping reforms that the Young Turks had hoped for now were being implemented with the revolutionist Kemal Ataturk centering his belief on the ideal of a Western-style, secular society.

The most interesting characteristic of the Turkish revolution, as noted by Sibel Bozdogan, lies in the totality of its modernization project. For Ataturk, modernization meant

---

westernization, secularization, and autonomy for the individual from religion. According to Lewis, "...two dominant beliefs of Atatürk’s life were in the Turkish nation and in progress; the future of both lay in civilization, which for him meant the modern civilization of the West, and no other." Atatürk’s vision of a westernized Turkey was not a mere façade. He was well aware that superficial modernization was worthless and that, if Turkey was to hold her own in the modern world, fundamental changes were necessary in the structure of society and culture. As a result, Atatürk’s legacy of the Kemalist Revolution transformed itself into a type of nationalist ideology that has guided Turkey for the past eighty years of existence.

Atatürk’s framing of modernization in this way required the negation of the binding universal force of Islam that had provided the state with political legitimacy and individuals with an identity during the Ottoman Empire. As Bozdogan points out:

The society withdrew from the Islamic framework into that of the newly defined Turkish nation...The Turkish revolution reflected completely the religious basis of legitimation and attempted instead to develop a secular national one as the major ideological parameter of the new collectivity. It was launched in order to achieve the qualities of nationalism and a modern state in a fundamentally medieval, theocratic empire, and to throw off the pre-existing institutions and concepts.  

This statement itself is a nationalist account, espousing Atatürk’s premises and the respective view of history.

With no executive power when he came to office, Kemal guided the nation by using only the moral authority he had won on the battlefield. In 1922, he ordered his rubber-stamp National Assembly to abolish the Ottoman monarchy and to begin his process of modernizing a "backward" nation of twelve million people. In his explanation for the radical changes he was about to make, Atatürk said, “The civilized world is far ahead of us. We have no choice but to

---

20 Lewis, p. 292.
21 Bozdogan, p. 135.
catch up." By catch-up, Kemal interpreted development and modernization in a strictly Western light, thereby creating a dichotomy between the traditionally Islamic Ottoman heritage and the newly emerging Kemalist Turkey.

Having abolished the Ottoman Empire with the stroke of a pen and approval of the National Assembly, Atatürk set his sights on eliminating the sacred Islamic institutions left in the country. With his top advisors and the support of the military establishment Atatürk sought to change the predominantly Islamic institutions around him, starting with the caliphate. Kinzer describes the Islamic Caliphate as having been revered by Muslims everywhere as “God’s shadow on earth” and using his power for political as well as religious ends. Prior to the Kemalist Revolution, Turkey was considered to be the leader of the Muslim world because of the presence of the Caliphate, who not only held great esteem over Turkish Muslims but over the entire Islamic civilization.

Atatürk’s assault on this religious/political institution dealt a crushing blow to religious power in Turkey, but also to its neighbors, thereby causing alienated diplomatic relations with its Islamic neighbors. The Caliphate’s disposal was quickly followed by the dissolution of Islamic courts and a ban on religious brotherhoods in Turkey. Atatürk followed these revolutionary acts by moving the Turkish capital from Islamic Istanbul, where the Ottoman Empire had been based, to the traditional heart of Anatolia, Ankara. In addition to these institutional changes that Kemal initiated, he attacked the Islamic symbols worn by Turkish Muslims. The traditional fez and veil of the Turkish citizen became a symbol of backwardness and subsequently came under attack. The changes that Atatürk initiated stemmed from his desire to help Turkey progress and develop into a “modern” nation-state fashioned after the Western European model.²³

²² Kinzer, p. 41.
²³ Kinzer, p. 78.
With the same reckless daring he had shown on the battlefield, Kemal tore down the central pillars of the Ottoman political and religious tradition. However, he did not object to Islamic doctrine as a guiding private religious force; rather, he resisted its political, social, and cultural implications for the nation of Turkey. The distinct separation that Ataturk created between government and religion remains and has been adopted by his Kemalist followers.

iv. Kemalism

The Turkish Republic that Ataturk founded was in name a parliamentary democracy; however, in functionality it was an autocratic government. Ataturk experimented with puppet opposition parties, but eventually opted for the rubber-stamp of a single party called the Nationalist Party in 1923. Many scholars such as Stephen Kinzer have described Ataturk's leadership and political style as that of a dictator; however, it was not a dictatorship in the typical model of Middle-Eastern tyrants, but in a unique way. One of Ataturk's earliest biographers, H.C. Armstrong, describes it in this way: "His dictatorship – a benevolent, educating, guiding dictatorship – was the only form of government possible at the moment."\(^{24}\) Ataturk believed that implementing radical changes was the only way for Turkey to shape a new destiny for itself, but he also knew that Turks were not ready to break violently with their past, embrace modernity and turn decisively toward the West. Therefore, he forced the revolutionary change from Ottoman "backwardness" towards Western modernity. "The new nation that Ataturk built on the rubble of the Ottoman Empire never could have been built democratically."\(^{25}\) Turkey's history continues to drive its ambitions for Western acceptance 80 years later.

\(^{24}\) Kinzer, p. 47.
\(^{25}\) Kinzer, p. 47.
While Kemalism has continued to shape Turkey’s progress, a series of inconsistencies in this ideology have become increasingly apparent in Turkey. According to its constitution, Turkey is a secular state with no official religion, but one could argue that Turkey adheres to one strict functional equivalent to religion: Kemalism. Therefore as we examine the role of Islam as a religion in Turkey, it is important to note the extent to which Kemalism could be classified as the official state religion of Turkey. After Kemal’s death a type of cult formed around him, whereby his ideas of a Western, modern, secular state became the creed of the Turkish government. Speaking against the principles to which Ataturk dedicated his life meant instant punishment, and religious political parties were strictly banned.

Kemalist Turkey began to embrace the creed of the Western world to which Ataturk so passionately wanted Turkey to belong. Turkey, according to this vision, should be embracing the pillars of the Western world, human rights, tolerance, free speech and unity. But Turkey isn’t doing so. The irony of the current Kemalist usage of Ataturk’s name to make taboo the very progress that he stood for has not gone unnoticed. Kemalist elites have argued that a full democracy would lead to increases in ethnic tension, religious devotion, and every form of social conflict. With the stakes so high, they prefer to limit democracy, to introduce it in what they consider digestible doses. Thereby they seek to preserve Ataturk’s legacy by stifling progress and keeping things the same in the name of tradition. Ataturk eagerly grasped the opportunities presented by a rapidly changing world. He fought against tradition, while implementing his form of progress. The discrepancies between the current Kemalist point of view and Ataturk’s highlight the differences that have emerged. As a result the tension continues to grow between the Kemalist, on the one hand, and Islamism, on the other.
Regardless of this tension, Kemalism has emerged as the dominant political ideology throughout Turkey's modern history. Like the outside influence of Islam that swept through the Turks in the eleventh century, westernization has impacted all areas of Turkey's development. By aligning and establishing close ties with the West, Turkey has alienated its Islamic neighbors. The mutually exclusive nature of the opposing frameworks of Islam and Kemalism that Ataturk practiced and Huntington theorizes has come to represent the principal ideological struggle within Turkey.
II. The Challenge

Turkey’s leadership challenge to find a more pluralistic system in which both secularists and Islamists can peacefully co-exist requires a further examination into a variety of issues. First, an exploration into how some scholars view Islam fitting into a political structure, or “political Islam,” must be launched in order to answer the challenge of some secularists who question Islam’s viability as a modern political system. Second, the roots of secularization and secularism must be examined with a particular focus on how this discourse now affects these ideologies within an Islamic context. Finally, we will highlight the emergence of a variety of Islamic interpretations in order to dispel any misconceptions about Islam being a monolithic religion. Within this section we will focus on the liberal interpretation of Islam and examine its compatibility within Turkey’s existing political framework.

a. Islamic Politics

The question of whether or not Islam is a viable “modern” political system has been at the heart of much of the debate recently in Turkey, particularly given Islam’s historic roots and recent emergence at the polls. Though the Republic of Turkey since its inception has been a “secular” nation as a result of Ataturk’s legacy, its largely Muslim population has continually been a key political factor to reckon with. In recent days, Turkey’s hard secular stance appears to be weakening, particularly after the elections of November 3, 2002. The landslide victory of the Justice and Development party, an Islamic-leaning party, marks only the fourth time since 1923 that such a party has won a majority in parliament. However, these election results do not necessarily signal the victory of Islamic parties in a general sense. While Turkey seems to be on the path of greater democratic inclusion of Islamic-minded parties, the long history of Kemalism must be accounted for and students of history remember that each of the previous three Islamic
governments in Turkey were overthrown by a military coup or left office due to extreme military pressure.

Turkey’s principal tension in ideologies and political philosophies, as demonstrated by the most recent elections, has always taken the form of the dominant secularist, Kemalist perspective versus traditional Islamism. Though the term Islamism has been the subject of scholarly debate over its definition, it is generally understood to be the group of ideologies in Islam that want to use the *sharia*, or Islamic law, to its full extent, meaning that secular forms of governments and institutions are considered foreign to a true Muslim society. Though Islamism has taken a backseat to Kemalism in the last 80 years, this religious, political, and economic way of life is a well-established alternative to Ataturk’s dream. In contrast to Ataturk’s process of modernizing Turkey on a Western model and eliminating most Islamic institutions, Islamism has oftentimes been seen as the antithesis of modernization. This false dichotomy established by the Kemalists has been used by Turkey’s westernized elite to promote secularism as synonymous with modernization, whereby Islamism became associated with regression and antiquity.

Understanding Islam as both a religious institution and moral edifice helps one understand what its political implications are for a predominately Muslim population. Given the general Kemalist bias in Turkey, Islamism has not been able to promote itself fully in a political light, but rather only in a religious one. The relegation of Islam to individual religious practices has precluded institutional dialogues between Kemalists and Islamists. Topics such as veiling, Islamic education, and the implementation of Islamic jurisprudence continue to polarize the Turkish population, even as the secularist voice is the only on being politically heard. It has been this institutional bias that has skewed the political continuum so that Turkey’s political system has been off-limits for openly Islamic groups.

Despite the repressive measures of Kemalism, Islamism remains a viable alternative to Kemalism and challenges the Turkish political leadership with its increasing popularity. However, for analysts coming from a Western perspective, the Islamic faith can at times be baffling and its conceptualizations of political life even more confusing. It is important to understand what Nazih Ayubi has termed “political Islam.” With his book titled *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, Ayubi introduces the reader to many of the unfamiliar aspects of political Islam, and he makes a clear distinction between Islam and its interpretation.

Ayubi’s discussion of political Islam begins with a historical perspective that compares and contrasts it with his simplistic categorization of “Western” experience with religion. The first point that Ayubi makes is that “...political Islam is a new invention.” In the past, he claims that Islam did not need to be political - either a ruler was a believer or he was not. Whatever the Sultan, Caliphate, or King believed in was the belief structure and became the political structure of the land. The purpose of current political Islamism is what he sees as a reversal of the traditional relationship between the spheres of politics and religion. Islamists hope that political institutions become subservient to religious ones, and not the other way round, as was the case historically. In the past rulers used religion and manipulated it, not the other way around. Therefore it is important to study the context in which religion and politics were brought into the Islamic world and as a comparison, in the West.

Religion and politics were brought together in the historical Islamic state by way of the state appropriating religion. This is the reverse of the predominant European experience in which, historically, it was the Church that appropriated politics. As we will discuss at greater length later on, in the West secularization has involved a gradual exclusion of the Church from the domain of politics. It was a relatively straightforward process because religion was

27 Ayubi, p. 3.
institutionalized; once the Church and its clergy were removed, religion was also removed from politics. In the modern Arab State, secularism was introduced not as a natural progression but through a desire to imitate the West. But in Turkey's case religion could not be simply excluded by separating the Church from state, because there is no Church (i.e. a separable religious community) as such in Islam. "Islam is believed to be all encompassing and all pervasive; 'secularism' is therefore considered by many to be a concept not only alien to, but also incompatible with Islam."^28

i. Latent Islamism

Jacob Landau, in his article "Turkey Between Secularism and Islamism," analyzes how Islamism has persisted in Turkey among its majority Muslim population. Although active opposition to the Kemalist secularization drive was rare, a latent one persisted, chiefly in the rural areas. The successes of the Kemalist reforms mentioned earlier were principally effective in the cities and towns. Turkey's population during these times was heavily rural, including around three-quarters of the people according to Landau. The smaller a village and the more remote it was from an urban center, the less it was affected by the new reforms. It rarely had a school of the new type, nor a court, which could judge by Western codes of law or sanction civil marriage and divorce. Consequently, the local hadja, or religious dignitary, continued to teach the local children and officiate at weddings and divorces - all along the previous, Islamic lines.29

The Islamists invested most of their efforts in three domains: education, publishing, and organization. In addition to pressuring the authorities for increasing allocations to religious

^28 Ayubi, p. 51.
instruction at public school, Islamists promoted an ever-growing number of Qur'an courses for adults in the villages. A great effort was invested in the publication and sale of low-cost Islamic literature: works on Islam, the life of its Prophet and other leaders, Islamic history and mysticism, commentaries on the Qur'an, works explaining the dogmas and rites of Islam, collections of Friday sermons, as well as school textbooks and translation of Islamic classics into Turkish. These were supplemented by many Islamic-minded dailies, weeklies and monthlies, whose circulation rose parallel to the increase in literacy. Organizational activities were carried out on two levels: via Islamic philanthropic associations, whose number grew annually, and via underground activities of various Islamic groups, which were not officially allowed to associate.

The history of Islamic-sympathetic political parties and the cycle of military intervention to keep Turkey a "progressive Western-seeking" country has continued to be a sore spot for the proponents of full democracy in Turkey. The Turkish military continues to represent and see itself as the guardians of Ataturk's legacy and refuses to allow a Turkish Islamic state, even through democratic means.\(^\text{30}\) Turkey's interesting case of an 80-year-old parliamentary system that is protected by the military parallels many Latin American country's experiences. However Turkey becomes particularly complicated because of the lack of violence on the part of extremist Islamic parties.

While scholars have noted that the advances of Islamism in Turkey fit the general Middle Eastern patterns by which Libya, Sudan, Iran, and Pakistan turned into Islamic theocracies in recent years, the Turkish case is different. Unlike the Kurdish groups, located mostly in Eastern Anatolia, the Islamic movements have mostly resorted to achieving power via participation in the Turkish political system, despite successive military coups that have served to curb and weaken Islamism within the country. This affects but little, however, the feelings of frustration of the

\(^{30}\) Compare to the Algerian Islamic Revolution that resulted in a violent uprising in 1991-1992.
secularist majority, who fear the Islamists could succeed in turning Turkey into an Islamic theocracy, distanced from the West and its civilization. Many feel that the military, which has already intervened to seize power three times in the last generation and with their innate interest in Western technology and hardware, form the last line of defense against Islamism. However, the armed forces present a difficult dilemma. A new military coup would undoubtedly damage Turkey's prospects of joining the European Union, by tarnishing its democratic image. So the future seems open at a time that is crucial for Turkey's fate.\(^{31}\)

Ayubi asserts that to group all Muslims as the same monolithic group is problematic. Not only do persons' or adherents' varying interpretations of Islam and its practices differ but how they perceive each other differs, too. The first point that he makes is that being Muslim simply means being a person born to Muslim parents. A *mutadāyyin* is an observant Muslim who upholds the Islamic *shahada*, or faith,\(^ {32}\) and fulfills the duties of praying, fasting, pilgrimage, and tithes. In addition the idea of being Islamic, in nature and content, is designated in this way simply because the believers are dealing with Islamic subjects, and it has nothing to do with a one's personal religiosity or societal orientation. Therefore the "Islamic reformers," or moderates, in Turkey can be broadly defined under this category. They hold that Islam as a belief system is broad and flexible enough to be able to accommodate itself effectively to the changing requirements of modernization in both time and place.\(^ {33}\) We will examine this liberal interpretation of Islam towards the end of this section.

---

\(^{31}\) Landau, p. 5.

\(^{32}\) "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." Esposito, John L. *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press. 1984). 78.

\(^{33}\) Ayubi, p. 66.
ii. Orientation of Intensity

Within the diversity of Islamic thought, there is a variety of ways in which Muslims can orient themselves, whereby Ayubi introduces the "orientation of intensity." Here he describes a salafi, one who believes, often to the exclusion of other sources, in the literal example of the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore these salafis are generally more inclined to be scripturalist and traditionalist. One exception that Ayubi notes within the salafis' doctrinal dogmatism is their ability to combine with political flexibility. To take this intensity one step further, we have the fundamentalist. While this term is derived from the West, it is often used incorrectly to denote all devout Muslims. In practice, the fundamentalist, like the salafi, likes to go to early sources and literal interpretations of Muhammad's writings. The principle difference between fundamentalists and salafis is the lack of a sympathetic attitude towards jurisprudence on the part of the fundamentalists. They adhere strongly to a holistic, comprehensive notion of Islam, which means that Islam needs to literally be a religion, way of life, and a State. "This holistic perspective seems also to imply the necessity of collective action, to bring the totality of Islam into play."

Finally there are the neo-fundamentalists who are defined by their splintering from a main fundamentalist group. Generally they tend to be more eclectic in their selection and interpretation of their authoritative sources. They also tend to favor immediate action.

Ayubi draws these various distinctions to make two points. First, the term Islamist should only be applied to the salafis, fundamentalists, and neo-fundamentalists because it implies conscious, determined choice of an Islamic doctrine. Being Muslim does not necessarily imply any of these things. Secondly, "political Islam" should only be used in reference to fundamentalists and neo-fundamentalists because they are the ones who emphasize the political

34 Ayubi, p. 68
nature of Islam, and often, as is the case in Turkey, engage themselves in direct anti-State activities.\textsuperscript{35}

iii. Islamic Modernization

Both the Kemalists and proponents of Islamism have perpetuated the dichotomy that continues to exist in Turkey between the “modern” state and the “Islamic” state. However, this mutual exclusion need not hold. Haldun Gulap attempts to show that, “Islamism is a product of the frustration of the promises of Western modernization and represents a critique of modernism.”\textsuperscript{36} By taking us through a historical perspective of Turkey’s evolution as a state, he demonstrates the various phases of the Turkish republic. While most scholars seem to have adopted a fundamentally opposing view of Islamism and Modernism, Gulap argues that although the extremes of both are opposed, in moderation both can co-exist.

The various ideologies proposed by Gulap as alternatives to the modernization model offered by the West involve the renouncing of nationalism and materialism. As a normative alternative, Islamism offers a cultural and religious basis from which to build a nation state, as opposed to the “new idol” of capitalism and the resulting obliteration of “...the mind, the intellect, culture, and creativity... Thus Islamism stems from the failure of the nationalist promises of Western modernization.”\textsuperscript{37} As Turkey continues to struggle between the various ideologies of Kemalism and Islamism, it begs to question, why are there not more moderate positions from which to choose?

\textsuperscript{35} Ayubi, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{37} Gulap, p. 7.
While the November 3rd, 2002, victory of the Justice and Development party is a telling sign of the sentiments in Turkey, it has also aroused a great deal of suspicion. Even though this Islamic-leaning party was able to talk about Islam, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the party’s leader, was not initially allowed to become Turkey’s Prime Minister because he had been arrested in 1999 by a ban on inciting religious agendas and fervors within the general population. Therefore Erdogan’s rise to the top slot was a great personal victory for the head of the Islamic-rooted governing party, who just three years ago had spent four months in jail for anti-secular activity. While the ban was overturned less than two months ago, the polarization between Turkey’s secular constitutional system established by Ataturk and the majority Muslim population continues to exist.

Within this framework of polarized ideologies, new Turkish political leaders could emerge as the stabilizing factor for the country. The tension present between the Kemalist and Islamist positions has resulted in a restrictive democratic system within Turkey. The repression of the Islamic political voice has been well documented in Bernard Lewis’ book entitled *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. Within this historical account of the modern Turkish Republic’s emergence, Lewis argues that the restrictive measures instituted by Ataturk and carried out currently by the Turkish military have been implemented to keep Turkey a secular nation. Stephen Kinzer addresses the paradox that emerges from Turkey being a nation that is both bent on secularism and democracy, as it embraces the Western precepts of civilization, and scared of allowing full democracy. To lift the autocratic rule exhibited by the military in Turkey would be to lift restrictions on society, something the Turkish elites continue to fear deeply. “They doubt that their society can withstand the clash of ideas that is the essence of democratic life.”

---

38 Kinzer, p. 18
Turkey’s ideological tension between a Kemalist secular nation-state and an Islamist religious theocracy, therefore, has become institutionalized. With the strong Kemalist bias of the military, three successive coups in 1950, 1960, and 1980, respectively, the institutional framework for a secular government has continued to create greater tension within Turkey. Dietrich Jung attributes the secular - specifically, western - modernization efforts of Turkey, to Atatürk’s legacy in opposition to the Ottoman tradition. While in the West, top-down revolutions are rare and military force is frowned upon, in Turkey both of these are historic norms. The resulting security-focused, top-down modernization within Turkey and the formation of government is clearly a legacy from years past. Turkey sees itself surrounded by a ring of “evil;” therefore, it is not surprising to note that Turkey has the second largest army in NATO\textsuperscript{39} or that it has formed strategic alliances with Israel and the US to ensure its security. According to the Kemalist proponents in the government, Turkey represents a stable country in a volatile region that must be kept as a modern state, and not a fundamentally Islamist nation. In addition, these scholars argue that this stability is the direct result of the military and the restrictive rights paid for by the Islamic parties that have been deemed illegal.

b. Secularization

Western scholars have traditionally attributed the process of secularization to the period of European history defined by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. During this era in which many of the European empires would gain their geographic boundaries, secularization was used to describe the transfer of territories previously under ecclesiastical control to the dominion of lay

political authorities. Since this time the Western perspective on secularization has been further refined by events such as the French Revolution, in which the religious institution of the church was permanently divorced from the political sphere of influence. Similarly, America's constitutional experience with the separation of church and state creates an outwardly secularist framework in which token references to God continue to pervade the political order.

Many in the West, following the works of Max Weber, have come to equate their own history of secularization as being synonymous to that of modernization. As a result, many Western scholars have attempted to advocate a Judeo-Christian model of secularism as being synonymous with the modern nation-state, even in non-Western environments. In fact, modernization theory and development theory have largely maintained unequivocally that the development of modern nation-states and societies requires secularization and by extension Westernization. Generally these scholars sympathetically maintain this view because they believe that the Western experience with secularization has led to the most pluralistic and democratic form of nation building and seek to replicate this experience throughout the world.

Bryan R. Wilson makes a clear distinction between the terms secularism and secularization. He refers to the former as an ideology that denounces all forms of the supernatural and that advocates non-religious or even anti-religious principles as the basis for personal morality and social organization. Secularization, on the other hand, refers to the "...process of decline in religious activities, beliefs, ways of thinking, and institutions that occurs primarily in association with, or as an unconscious or unintended consequence of, other

---

42 Wilson, p.159.
processes of social structural change." This differentiation between an ideology of secularism and the process of secularization is important to remember when discussing Islam and its respective relationship with these ideas. The difference between a historical decline in religious activity and a forceful split between religious and political institutions leads to a new view of Islamic history.

Since its first usage as a concept, secularization has described the European - or more accurately, Western European - experience with religion. Applying this definition to a context divorced from the historical roots of Western Europe produces the portrayal of all non-Western developments as "deficient," as Wilson's framework does. Wilson describes the process of secularization as the extension of rational principles to all areas of social life, giving a new perspective to this discussion. Wilson follows the above description of secularization by saying that the process of rational principles has been less intense in the Middle East and Central Asia, predominately Muslim societies. He attributes this situation to the lack of effective central organization to regulate local magical dispositions by Islam.

Secularism has often been described as a concept foreign to the Islamic world, as demonstrated by the lack of a suitable Arabic translation. The words that have come to be used 'ilmaniyah (from 'ilm - science) or 'alamaniyah (from 'alam - world) do not connote the same things in Arabic as their European counterparts do. In Azzam Tamimi's essay "Origins of Arab Secularism," he suggests that the Arabic term duniawiyah, or "that which is worldly, mundane, or temporal," would best replace the word secularism in an Islamic context. Tamimi argues that secularism is not only foreign verbiage, but it is also a foreign experience contradictory to the all-inclusive nature of Islamic teachings. While English-language discourse on secularism and

43 Wilson, p. 159.
44 Tamimi, p. 13.
secularization tends to agree that “secularism” is a product of Western society, Muslims tend to view this concept in the context of other related terms such as modernity, westernization, and modernization, which were inherited through their history of colonialism. Tamimi further argues that, “Although secularism is usually taken to imply the liberation of the political from the authority of the religious, it has, together with its related terms, been used in different contexts to describe a process aimed at the marginalization of Islam, or its exclusion from the process of restructuring society during both the colonial and post-independence periods.” Thus secularization has come to mean the severing of society’s cultural roots within the Middle East, and also because it was experienced in a context of colonialism and defeat. Turkey’s experience with secularization vividly illustrates Ataturk’s break with pre-revolution Islamic societies and the radical departure from the past.

Secularization described by George Jacob Holyoake, intended to provide a theory of life and conduct without reference to any particular deity or future life. In the Western tradition this came to represent the independence of secular truth, which was founded upon the experience of scientific methodology and that which is believed to be true through common experiences. The attempt to establish a secular theory of conduct and meaning of life to dictate a country’s political ambitions was made by moderate secularists throughout the nineteenth century. As described by Bryan Wilson, secularism in its mildest form deals with the known world interpreted by experience, and neither offers nor forbids any opinion regarding another life. While it would follow that secularists would be content to ignore religion, this has rarely been the case.

---

45 Tamimi, p. 13.
46 Tamimi, p. 13.
47 Wilson, p. 162.
Typically the secularist argument has involved the splitting of sacred and secular aspects of a society or country. Under this logic religious institutions can guide the spiritual well being of individual believers, but the secular realm of politics is explicitly divorced from the belief structure of religion. Unfortunately this separation is not as clean or simple as secularist advocates often claim. In many cases secularism turns into antipathy of religion as a means to eradicate it from the political sphere. Rather than using neutral-based language to describe believers of religion, secularists often classify them as superstitious, backward, underdeveloped, and rationally incapable because of their religious affiliation. This has led to atheism among secularists and the antipathy towards religion as an irrational worldview.

Secularism strictly defined only entails the separation of the political and religious authority in the public sphere; however, generally secularist arguments have been intermingled with atheism. Arguments often advocated by secularists entail the incompatibility or impossibility of material progress so long as irrational superstitions and “unfounded” beliefs so powerfully manifested themselves. The underlying assumptions to this argument are that ignoring religion is not on option because of the irrationality with which religions refuse to divorce God from material existence. Therefore, in order to refute the religious arguments an atheistic approach must be utilized to bolster the secularist arguments. When secularism becomes an ideological pattern actively advocating the departure of God from one’s life and the confinement of religious belief to the private sphere, it no longer represents a pluralistic and democratic framework as often advocated by secularists. Rather than advocating an open framework where no particular religious creed is given priority, secularists privilege their own anti-religious beliefs above those of religious beliefs. John Keane states, in his essay “The Limits of Secularism,”
Secularists further suppose that the void left by God's departure from the world can be filled by the conviction that the separation of church and state and the confinement of religious belief to the private sphere are substitutes for God. The modern quest for personal meaning and salvation can be transformed into 'invisible religion' or 'self-expression' and 'self-realization.'

Keane's strong accusation that some secularists are not merely seeking the separation of religion and politics, but are indeed anti-religious and anticlerical in their beliefs, seems to be validated by Turkey's experience with secularism.

i. Historical Implications

Mehdi Bazargan, an Iranian lay Islamic scholar and long-time pro-democracy activist, has spent many years researching the origins of modern secularism and its implications for the Islamic world. Bazargan describes secularism as an active process to break religious ties with political structures, which he attributes to 17th century feudal governments of Europe who struggled to free themselves from the dominion of the pope and the Catholic Church. At the same time that Western Europe sought to break free, scientific thought sought to liberate itself from the terrible hegemony of the Inquisition. Then there was the European Renaissance, which manifested itself through religious reformation, and Protestantism ushered in by the leadership of Martin Luther. The purpose of this movement was to return Christianity to its pristine simplicity, spirituality, and liberty.

Many religious scholars have devoted their entire careers searching for answers concerning why religious institutions were in opposition to political freedom. However, the real question that needs to be analyzed carefully is whether this antagonism between religious and

---

secularist political views was due to particular doctrinal and historical circumstances or a result of universal properties of all religions at all times. The answer seems simple enough. In his analysis, Bazargan sets aside the question of truth and authenticity of religion, and follows the reasonable assumption that God who, by definition, is omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign, and aware of the good and evil, is better qualified to judge what is proper for human beings than human beings themselves. Does this belief leave any other options for believers than unconditional surrender to God's will? Furthermore, the priests and church, considering themselves successors of the Prophets and representatives of God - and any religious scholars who consider themselves custodians and guardians of the people of God - would necessarily expect the people to follow and revere them, and to subordinate reason and science to the revealed commandments. Therefore, one realizes that this dogmatic doctrine leaves no room for the freedom and will of the people to administer their own affairs and to question - much less reject - the representatives of God who claim immunity from error as successors to the Prophet.

Consequently, democracy, science, investigation, expertise, and erudition seem to be the necessary results of denouncing religion and the religious scholars, while the acceptance of the sovereignty of God and the stewardship on earth of the church or religious scholars would lead to tyranny, enslavement, inquisition, and violence. That is why, according to such scholars as Kurzman and Bazargan - throughout Western civilization, whether under democracy, fascism, or socialism - the idea of the separation of religion and state and the notion of the secular (that is, non-religious, and in a sense anti-religious) form of government prevails. The more progressive the ideology, the more anti-religious the government. In Turkey's case this has led to the

---

50 Bazargan, p. 74.
51 Bazargan, p. 74.
52 Bazargan, p. 75.
acceptance of a secular framework as the only rational belief structure and to the suppression of Islam as an inferior political alternative

ii. The State

Since the ‘nation-state’ is a Western concept, representing a European phenomenon that developed between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries in relation to such phenomena as the Renaissance and the growth of capitalism and individualism, it is natural not to find such a concept in Islamic thought prior to the modern era. However, Islamic political thought did have much to say about a country’s administration and, of course, about rulers and governments; this, when examined and reconstructed, can give us an understanding of what is the closest thing to the concept of the State in traditional Islamic thinking. If it can be argued that the concept of the State in Europe cannot be understood in isolation from the concepts of individualism, liberty, and law, then Ayubi believes that the Islamic concept of societal structure cannot be understood in isolation from the concepts of the group, justice, and leadership.53 As a result, Ayubi defines the State in these terms:

The main function of the State in juridic Islamic writings is really ideological: the State is an expression of a militant ‘cultural mission’ that is religious in character and universalist in orientation. The State has no cultural autonomy from the society where it has an emphasized moral content, which does not recognize and separation between private and public ethics, and which accepts no physical or ethnic boundaries – its civilizational target is the entire universe.54

In the West, most notably in France and the United States, the separation of Church from State was considered desirable because of the clergy’s interference in scientific and socio-economic matters and this separation turned out to be possible because the Church was embodied in a hierarchy that could be neatly separated and isolated from politics.

53 Ayubi, p. 7.
54 Ayubi, p. 23
In Islam the separation of religion from politics was extremely difficult; furthermore, there is a large question mark in many Muslim circles as to whether it would be either desirable or appropriate. Ayubi offers the Islamic perspective that the Golden Age – whether viewed in terms of moral purity, of military conquest or of technological and cultural advancement – was living according to a formula that made no effort to separate belief from life. On the other hand, in the Islamic memory the concept of secularism can be related only to periods of colonial hegemony, or, alternatively, to national attempts at experimenting with various Western developmental formulas (such as capitalism, socialism, etc.) that appear not to have worked.55

“Therefore, traditional Islamic politics was shaped less by Islam as a belief system, since the Quran and Hadith contain very little on politics, and more by the nature of the modes of production and the economic requirements and cultural traditions of the territories that eventually formed the Islamic dominion.”56

iii. Turkey’s Struggle

Under the model advocated by modernization and development theorists we examined earlier, religion becomes subordinate to rational secular paradigms. This model argues that religion should be restricted to one’s private life, and it should have no place as a guiding ideology for any modern nation. Following this logic leads one to the view that placing greater emphasis on religious beliefs over “rational” beliefs leads to backwardness. For a thirty-year period after World War Two, this model of economic and political development was advocated

55 Ayubi, p. 51.
56 Ayubi, p. 30.
in many parts of the Islamic world. In other words, Islam was often seen in opposition to modernization.\textsuperscript{57}

While many prophesized the demise of religion worldwide based on the models of secular modernity, the global resurgence of religion in recent history, and in particular the "Islamic reawakening," have challenged the prevailing views of modernization and development theory. John Esposito's essay "Islam and Secularism in the Twenty First Century" outlines the variety of ways in which Islam has been used to reinforce national identities, to legitimate governments, and to mobilize popular support within the nations of the Middle East. Esposito particularly focuses on the discrediting of secular paradigms within the Islamic world through the Iranian revolution, the emergence of new Islamic republics in Afghanistan and Sudan, and the use of Islam by "Islamic" governments and opposition movements alike to reaffirm the presence and power of Islam in Muslim societies.\textsuperscript{58} Esposito characterizes these Islamic revivals as being in direct conflict with secularists throughout the Middle East who had predicted the decline of Islam's influence on politics and public life.

As one particular context of this struggle between Islam and secularism, the Turkish Republic figures prominently as the home of the Islamic world’s first Muslim-majority, secular nation. Despite Kemal Ataturk's attempts to radically eliminate Islam's influence on Turkey's political structure, the struggle between Islamism and Kemalism continues to this day. From the perspective of many Western modernists the struggle in Turkey seems to be the logical next step in the process of development for the country, but from many Islamic perspectives the secularism imposed by Ataturk was as foreign as the rule of colonial European powers prior to

\textsuperscript{57} For an in-depth discussion of development and modernization in Islam please see Rachid Gannouchi’s essay, "Islam and the West: Realities and Potentialities."

the Ottoman Empire. The secularization trend observed during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the hand of the ideologically distinct Young Turks has now come full circle. Even in discussions of Ataturk’s secularizing policies Western writers often fall prey to compartmentalizing Islam into the private sphere of a Muslim’s life. However, the idea of suppressing Islam into only one segment of a believer’s life is an unacceptable and narrow approach to Islam. Muslims throughout the world look towards Islam as not only their personal moral foundation, but as their life-guiding path. To tell a Muslim that he or she can only tiptoe along this straight path of truth defeats the notion of a pluralistic model in which all beliefs can be freely expressed.

Turkey’s experience after the demise of the Ottoman Empire in which Ataturk sought to clearly define a sense of Turkish national identity has spawned one ideological group within Turkey, the Kemalists, while an Islamic national identity continues to battle against this narrow interpretation of what being Turkish involves. Ironically in Turkey, where the social elites and military subscribe religiously to a secularist perspective of religion as a private matter, the calls for free and open democratic elections have come from the Islamists and not from the secularists. Esposito notes this irony in which secularists deny pluralistic and open elections on the basis of ideological differences with the religious parties wishing to compete. He labels such secularists, who are willing to impose military action to restrict religious parties from running in a “democratic” process, as militant secular fundamentalist. Under this mindset the mixing of religion and politics is regarded as necessarily abnormal, irrational, dangerous, and extremist. Therefore when people do talk about religion being a comprehensive way of life, they are immediately labeled fundamentalist and extremist by militant secular fundamentalists.  

---

double standard, in which religious ways of life are immediately labeled abnormal and called into question, does not apply to the varying secular views. Secularism has somehow become an unwritten assumption of all modern, progressive, and pluralistic societies, when in fact it should be held to the same standards imposed upon religion.

Having privileged secularism in our own Western worldview, and indeed by many Muslim scholars operating under the same conditions, has hurt our understanding and analysis of Islamic politics in Turkey and has led to a tendency to reduce Islam to fundamentalism and fundamentalism to religious extremism. The Westernization started by Ataturk is one possible path for Turkey, but just as viable are paths that grant more space for religious expressions. Even within an Islamic concept some could argue that Kemalism can be a true path, or at least consistent, to Islam if more liberal interpretations were incorporated. The dichotomies posited between modernization or Mecca, Islam or rational choice only serve to hurt Turkey in the long run. By not holding secularism to the same standards as religion, secularists have relegated religion, in the best case, to one’s private life. For many believers this relegation is not a viable option, nor is it a pluralistic option.

c. Military And Islam

Sam Kaplan’s article begins with a new perspective on secularism than what we have seen until this point. “Secularism is neither atheism nor animosity for religion. On the contrary it is respectful of religious feelings. But no pressure must be made in the name of any religion over someone’s individual conscience. The structure of Islam is secular.” With such a controversial introduction Kaplan begins his discussion of the political rhetoric present in Turkey. He

---

categorizes this rhetoric as framing the political debates between secularism and Islam. However, rather than exploring the struggles between the military and various Islamic parties that have competed in the Turkish elections, Kaplan seeks to show how militarism in Turkey has fused these two ideologies into one nationalist cry. Rather than approaching religious or military ideals as being centuries-old traditions, Kaplan sees them as subject to social, political, and cultural constructions of the Turkish government. In addition, scholars have credited Turkey’s Kemalist Revolution for changing many contextual circumstances that have led to the reformation of both the military and its relationship with Islam.

Turkey’s sudden transition from the champion of the Islamic world personified by the Ottoman Empire, to a secularist bastion of Turkish nationalism represented by Ataturk’s Republic of Turkey, certainly challenged many of the underlying assumptions of a revolution. Serif A. Mardin’s article, “Ideology and Religion In The Turkish Revolution” exposes the implicit Western assumptions about “revolutions” inherited from the French Revolution. The Western image of a revolution as a violent social transformation of the political system does not necessarily apply to the Turkish revolution. In addition, the French Revolution’s relegation of the French Catholic religious establishment to the periphery of politics does not find a necessary parallel in the Turkish example. During the Turkish revolution the exchange of power was militarily negotiated between intellectuals, whereby a new bureaucratic structure led by the charismatic leader Kemal Ataturk replaced the Sultanate of the Ottoman Empire. Both Mardin and Kaplan argue that while the Islamic Caliphate was abolished and Ataturk set out on a path of secularism, secularization was not a characteristic of the Turkish revolution; rather, the influence of Islam grew stronger.
Within Turkey’s history there have been three military coups referenced earlier that were
instigated by the military against Islamist governments that allegedly crossed the line of
implementing policies that would tilt the delicate balance between Islamic rule and secular rule.
It has been the military’s unwillingness to describe exactly what constitutes Islamic rule that has
confused many within the Turkish establishment. In fact, many Muslim scholars have argued
that a moderate Islamic agenda is what is popularly supported by the Turkish population, but
given the restraints placed upon political parties by the military establishment, a polarization
takes place in which the more radical Islamist views overshadow the other Islamic voices in
Turkish politics. Sam Kaplan claims that during the period immediately preceding the last
military coup in Turkey of 1980, the government and military began to reinstitutionalize the
syncretism of state and faith.61

Kaplan explores the subtle ways in which Turkey has begun to merge its nationalist and
Islamic views through the educational curriculum in elementary schools. He shows the
importance that is placed on instilling Turkish children with a sense of pride for their country
through showing how Islam fits into the duty of every citizen-soldier. From the various heroic
stories of Turkey’s past to the modern military maneuvers in which the name of Allah is invoked
before every infantry charge, Islam is certainly not on the fringe of Turkish society. The image of
a lone Muslim Turk warrior fighting for the valor of his country and defending the ideals of
Islam is still very prevalent in Turkey and is instilled in young men to encourage military
service. Kaplan describes this Turkish view when he writes, “Military service is a holy duty to
the country, ensuring protection of fatherland and nation.”62 It is through this conditioning that
the Turkish military have, in Kaplan’s explanation, succeeded in creating a union of state and

61 Kaplan, p. 114.
faith. Ironically, at least from the traditional antagonistic view of Secularism vs. Islam, the greatest advocates of this new arrangement in Turkey are the religious intellectuals. Ranging from cleric members to the government employed Department of Religion scholars, these religious intellectuals have helped to advocate the greater integration of Islamic values into Turkey’s political culture.63

The seemingly contradictory nature of Turkey’s union of the outspokenly secular military with the Islamic nationalists has helped to create a new political force. While embracing the economic policies of the West through free-trade and striving for an ever closer union with the European Union, these Turkish nationalists leading the syncretism have dissociated themselves from the Western secular humanism and individualism that they claim lacks moral values – values that Islam provides. Interestingly, even the military has supported this approach by revisiting some of Kemal Ataturk’s ideas through a new prism of enlightened self-interest. Ataturk’s vision of a secular Turkey included many “attacks” on the Islamic institutions of the old Ottoman Empire; however, these were interpreted as necessary preconditions for the collaboration of the military and religion. In other ways, the founding statesman’s words have been used to sanction the military leadership’s novel syncretism of religion and nationalism.64

Ataturk, speaking in 1930 on Islam, said that religion is a necessary institution. A nation without religion has no chance to survive. Only that religion [Islam] is a personal relation between Allah and the believer. The Turkish nation must be with all simplicity a religious nation. However much we place faith in the truth, so must we believe in our religion.65

---

63 Kaplan, p. 119.  
64 ibid  
65 Kaplan, p. 119.
Thus Ataturk, the father of a secular Turkey, has come to sanctify the political and religious militarism of his modern nation-state.  

The ideas presented in Kaplan’s article are thought provoking because of their seemingly contradictory nature. However, issues such as these must be raised before a deeper understanding of Islam and its interaction with secularism can take place in Turkey. This nation’s Islamic heritage continues to be used as a unifying force, despite Turkey’s constitutional constraints on parties claiming to represent the Islamic voice. Throughout their reign the Ottomans relied on the legitimization and strength provided by Islam and its institutions through the dyad of din-u devlet with the idea of state and religion being that by which each Turkish citizen learns to identify himself or herself. The Republic of Turkey, as a fledgling eighty-year old nation, has begun to come to terms with this reality and accept the union of these two powerful forces. While much remains to be seen in Turkey, this new alliance appears to be a political force to be reckoned with both from the extreme Islamist left and the hard-line Kemalist on the right.

i. Turkish Options

The three military coups in Turkey are directly attributable to the growing influence of Islamic-leaning governments, however much more damaging has been the resulting ban on religiously based political groups which has severely undermined Turkey’s democracy. The battle being waged between Kemalists and Islamists should not be decided by military generals, but by electoral ballots. This battle does not represent tradition versus modernity, as militant secular fundamentalists would have observers believe. Rather, it occurs between two competing alternative sectors of society and their visions for development. Islamists claim to have the right

– However, questions should be raised dealing with the genuineness of Islam if it is being used instrumentally to support uncritically the agenda of the military.
Thus Ataturk, the father of a secular Turkey, has come to sanctify the political and religious militarism of his modern nation-state.66

The ideas presented in Kaplan’s article are thought provoking because of their seemingly contradictory nature. However, issues such as these must be raised before a deeper understanding of Islam and its interaction with secularism can take place in Turkey. This nation’s Islamic heritage continues to be used as a unifying force, despite Turkey’s constitutional constraints on parties claiming to represent the Islamic voice. Throughout their reign the Ottomans relied on the legitimization and strength provided by Islam and its institutions through the dyad of din-u devlet with the idea of state and religion being that by which each Turkish citizen learns to identify himself or herself. The Republic of Turkey, as a fledgling eighty-year old nation, has begun to come to terms with this reality and accept the union of these two powerful forces. While much remains to be seen in Turkey, this new alliance appears to be a political force to be reckoned with both from the extreme Islamist left and the hard-line Kemalist on the right.

i. Turkish Options

The three military coups in Turkey are directly attributable to the growing influence of Islamic-leaning governments, however much more damaging has been the resulting ban on religiously based political groups which has severely undermined Turkey’s democracy. The battle being waged between Kemalists and Islamists should not be decided by military generals, but by electoral ballots. This battle does not represent tradition versus modernity, as militant secular fundamentalists would have observers believe. Rather, it occurs between two competing alternative sectors of society and their visions for development. Islamists claim to have the right

---

66 However, questions should be raised dealing with the genuineness of Islam if it is being used – instrumentally – to support uncritically the agenda of the military.
path, while Kemalists claim to have the same. No side is fully wrong or right. Both sides must find common ground on which they can agree and work towards a common solution, even if their comprehensive visions may differ. All Turks do not need to hold the same beliefs; rather, they merely need to live peacefully with one another.

Turkey will continue to struggle with issues of identity, authority, and legitimacy defined differently dependent upon the beliefs of the government; however, these issues can never be resolved if Islam continues to be excluded from the political sphere. While Islamists and Kemalists may privilege their own beliefs, a pluralistic conversation must begin to occur before a truly Turkish path can emerge. Regardless of what path a Turkish government takes it must be sensitive to its citizens and ultimately let them make decisions for themselves through an inclusive democratic system that does not exclude parties because of their ideological beliefs. They must both offer and develop a true and open pluralism within Turkey that can respond to the diversity inherent within the country, and a system in which believers and unbelievers' rights alike are protected and voices are heard.
III. Liberal Islam as an Option

One of the most troubling aspects to the questions of development and subsequent modernization within Turkey's recent history as a nation-state has been the tendency of many Western observers to portray Islam as one monolithic civilizational bloc. Huntington’s grouping of an Islamic civilization certainly accounts for some shared common beliefs and history, but ultimately it leads to oversimplifications that can produce serious misunderstanding and misperceptions. As a result of classifying all Islamic believers into one narrow “Islamic perspective,” many holding Western perspectives identify Islam with threatening images of theocracy and terrorism. This oversimplification has not only led to many misconceptions about Islam as a religion, but also about its functionality in predominately Muslim states. As witnessed by the Turkish example of Kemalists attempting to group all Islamically minded people as “fundamentalists” or “extremists,” a pluralistic dialogue has been difficult as a result of the extreme polarization between secularism and Islam. It has already been argued that a pluralistic and open political system must address the concerns of Turkey’s citizens without imposing restrictions solely upon religiously minded political parties. In this section we will be exploring the role of Islam in relation to a would-be parliamentary democracy such as Turkey.

The starting point for any discussion about Islam and its compatibility with a parliamentary democracy must first begin by understanding that Islam, like any world religion, exists in many forms and interpretations. As Charles Kurzman’s seminal work entitled Liberal Islam states, “Islam heralds an increasing recognition of ideological diversity within Islam.” Islam has consisted of countless varied interpretations, and in historical terms this has meant a wide-variety of political structures all claiming to be true manifestations of Islamic doctrine. Oftentimes, however, the liberal voices of Islam are lost in the militant cries of Islamic extremist.

---

As Charles Kurzman points out through his compilation of essays from a variety of Muslim scholars and intellectuals, there is a tradition in Islamic thought that voices concerns parallel to those of Western liberalism. By paralleling Liberal Islam to that of Western liberalism or even by pointing out the similarities between the two Kurzman is not implying that liberal Muslims are stale and reassuring imitators of Western philosophy. Rather it implies that a greater discussion of Islam’s ideological diversity must ensue before a pluralistic model can be adopted within Turkey. 68

Kurzman breaks Islam, as it has been practiced in the Islamic world for the last fourteen centuries, into three main categories. First he describes what he calls “Customary Islam.” By this term he identifies the Islamic justification in local terms, not global ones. He sees an Islamic identity based upon the way things have always been done, prudence, and linkages to the past helping to define customary Islam. Second, Kurzman labels what we have discussed as Islamism or fundamentalism as “Revivalist Islam.” “This tradition attacks the customary interpretation as being insufficiently attentive to the letter of Islamic doctrine.” 69 Finally, Kurzman outlines “Liberal Islam” which encompasses a variety of Muslim scholars and interpretations of Islam grounded in the Qur’an but not in dogmatic rhetoric. Naturally, while these three generalizations go well beyond Huntington’s monolithic approach to Islam, no classification can ever account for all the understandings and complexities Islam.

Liberal Islam can be contrasted with the other two categorizations according to Kurzman because its calls upon the past in the name of modernity, while revivalist and customary Islam might be said to call upon modernity in the name of the past. As Kurzman says, “…one common element is the critique of both the customary and revivalist traditions for what liberals sometimes

68 Kurzman, p. 4-5.
69 Kurzman, p. 5.
term backwardness, which in their view has prevented the Islamic world from enjoying the fruits of modernity; economic progress, democracy, legal rights, and so on. Instead, the liberal tradition argues that Islam, properly understood, is compatible with - or even a precursor - to Western liberalism."

This disdain for customary and revivalist interpretations of Islam by liberals resulted in various calls for individual believers to practice *ijtihad*. Noted liberal Muslim scholar Fazul Rahman describes this practice as the, "...exercise of independent judgment as opposed to the imitative following of medieval authorities." By urging Muslims to directly study Islam for oneself and, in effect, to be one's own authority, these calls for *ijtihad* by liberals have been seen as threatening to the authority of both revivalist and customary Islamic leaders. The institutional practices and customs of Islam predicated upon the authority of religious scholars would, through this practice, become advocated by each individual Muslim's beliefs and opinions grounded in their own interpretations of Islam. Thus, as many Muslims begin to debate who should ultimately dictate public affairs, liberal Muslims claim new authority to replace the religious scholars' authority that has governed their religious institutions for so long.

The backlash from this modernization movement aimed at reforming institutionalized Islam quickly brought greater scrutiny upon the Muslims calling for such reforms. Rahman, along with many other liberal Muslim scholars, aroused suspicion even about his loyalty to Islam. Rahman was accused of being a pale reflection of the West and of sacrificing Islam at its altar. In fact, in many places Liberal Islam was accused of secularism. Kurzman points out the irony in this accusation, since secularism was largely responsible for undermining popular support for Liberal Islam. Secularism does not take into account Islamic principles and does not

---

70 Kurzman, p. 6.
72 Rahman, p. 45.
privilege any particular religious belief over another, and in some cases it can lead towards an anti-religious bias, as mentioned earlier. Liberal Islam, in contrast, clearly advocates Islamic principles. Beginning in the 1920s, educated Muslims who might otherwise have subscribed to Liberal Islam now turned in large numbers to secular ideologies such as nationalism and socialism. Kurzman outlines how widespread secularization undermined liberalism in a second way by creating a sense of crisis within Islam that favored revivalists. In this polarized environment, particularly apparent in Turkey’s political life, citizens were asked to choose between militant secularism and Islamic fundamentalism with few alternatives in between. The irony of Liberal Islam’s rejection has been the increased number of people that have been pushed to fundamentalism because there is no other viable Islamic choice. As a result, Liberal Islam has suffered from the secularist administration of the Turkish Republic since its inception and subsequent bans on Islamist parties.

Another common misperception about Islam and its relationship to Turkey has been the structuring of the state. This structural debate arising from the issue of a Muslim state being mandated in the Qur’an has commonly been mistaken in the Western media to entail a mutually exclusive secular or Muslim state, rather than a third alternative of a pluralistic Muslim state. Stated at the founding meeting of the Ibn Khaldun Society, a civil society group that transcends national boundaries, “Since the Qur’an emphasizes a just society rather than ideological state, the form that the state takes is not mandated… Muslims should regard the Qur’an as a moral edifice rather than a code of laws. Thus, the new Muslim state will, in effect, be a secular state, with the proviso that the term secular state should not be understood in a negative sense. Such a state can protect religion against political manipulation by state authorities…”73

---

implementation of an “Islamic” theocracy. The clear distinction made between a “moral edifice” and “code of laws” is in itself a very liberal and controversial interpretation of Islam.

The issue of law mandated by the Qur’an commonly referred to, as *shari’a* becomes another particularly interesting area of discussion. While various Islamist parties in Turkey have made calls for *shari’a* law, the republic has been operating under secular-European law since its inception. An objection that liberals often raise to those who call for the implementation of *shari’a* law involves the misunderstanding of the status of *shari’a*. Kurzman outlines these objections in-depth with a selection of essays, where he notes various Islamic scholars’ interpretations that the Qur’an refers to *shari’a* as a path, not as a ready made system of law, waiting to be put into practice. Based upon this interpretation Aziz Al-Azmeh, a Syrian born Muslim scholar, argues that revivalists reduce Islamic law to a handful of symbolic elements, such as bans on alcohol and usury, that are taken to represent the rule of Islam. Yet recasting these elements of faith as law transforms them into modern ideology, a shift that removes the context that provided their original justifications.\(^{74}\)

Within Turkey the issues of modernity and change continue to be raised by both Kemalist and Islamist alike as potentially positive developments. For Islamists this attitude reflects a significant departure from traditional views in Islam, who view contemporary history as decline and continuous departure from the revered early days of revelation. Progress in this view can mean only a recovery of past practices, and, indeed, much revivalist activism has come to be linked with renewal, renaissance, and return to first principles.\(^{75}\) According to many liberal Muslim scholars, they, like the revivalists, seek to ground their interpretation of Islam in a return

\(^{74}\) Kurzman, p. 19.

\(^{75}\) Kurzman, p. 25.
to original sources. "What distinguishes Liberal Islam from revivalist Islam, in terms of progress, is the willingness to see change as a good thing in itself."\textsuperscript{76}

As a part of this new change being sought by liberal Muslims there has been the emergence of a new debate about the legitimizing power of Islam over a democratic political structure. While in Turkey the parliamentary democracy is legitimized by an explicitly secular constitution, many liberal Muslims argue that Islam is inherently democratic in nature and can therefore also be utilized to legitimize Turkey's system if bans on Islamic parties were lifted. Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, an Egyptian shari'a judge and scholar, argues that Islam does not specify any particular form of government, thus allowing Muslims to create democratic regimes.\textsuperscript{77} Taking this viewpoint one step further, Muhammad Khalaf-Allah, another Egyptian modern academic scholar, goes beyond Abd al-Raziq's argument that Islam is compatible with democracy; instead, he argues that the Qur'an lays out the basic tenets of democracy and requires Muslims to work out the implementation. As Kurzman summarizes, "In short, divine revelation does not simply allow democracy, it requires democracy."\textsuperscript{78}

The central issue surrounding the question of Islam's compatibility with democracy has been the Arabic term \textit{shura}, or consultation. While not explicitly institutionalized in the Qur'an, the idea of \textit{shura} is to continually hold Islamic leaders accountable to their followers by having them consult some type of representative body. Khalaf-Allah argues that the establishment of such a system (of \textit{shura}) was one of those matters that God had delegated to Muslims to establish. God did so purposely, not out of forgetfulness or inattention, for God does not err or forget. Therefore Muslims should take a keen interest in establishing such a system. It is up to

\textsuperscript{76} Kurzman, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{77} Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's full essay entitled "Message Not Government Religion Not State" deals specifically with his reasons for supporting such a view.
\textsuperscript{78} Kurzman, p. 37.
them to establish it on a basis that is good for the time period in which they live and for the
nation to which they belong because God has left the shura up to them. While Custom and
Revivalist Islam claim religious authority over the implementation of the shura, Liberal Islam
calls for ijtihad, which would ultimately place authority in the hands of the people to decide.

S. M. Zafar, a Muslim lawyer and head of the Pakistan Human Rights Organization,
quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying, “Watch out, among you every person is a leader and
every person is responsible for their own people, and the greatest leader of the Muslims, who
governs all, is also answerable to the people.” Thus Muhammad calls for accountability only
possible through some sort of democracy, as opposed to a theocracy based upon religious
authorities that do not answer to the people. Zafar uses these arguments to promote his belief that
Muslims should question the government and that, “…parliament is the best means for this, and
the thorough interrogation of the government can only be done by a representative assembly.”
Therefore, in summary, to call un-Islamic the institution that provides means of accountability
and a means of collective ijtihad and which can stand in the way of dictatorship is unjust to Islam
and presents Islam incorrectly. The parallels drawn between questioning political regimes with
that of questioning Islam by revivalists has further led to the misunderstanding of Liberal Islam
as being secularist in nature. The result in practice of this line of reasoning is that Muslims are
frightened of accountability and avoid ijtihad, and Muslims think that a kingdom, monarchy, and
even dictatorship are valid styles of Islamic government, even though they are not. On the
contrary, as Zafar and many other Islamic scholars agree, accountability, ijtihad, and democracy

---

81 Zafar, p. 70.
are Islam’s true foundation, by means of which Islam establishes a just and equitable society. Therefore, Islam is particularly well suited to function within a democratic political structure.

Turkey, as we have discussed, continues to exemplify nearly complete polarization along two main lines of thought represented by the Nationalist Party and the Party of religious reform, which do not take into account the Liberal Islamic perspective and often call for a Turkish return to an Islamic state. The point of supreme interest with the Nationalist Party is above all else the state and not religion. With these secularist thinkers religion, as such, has no dependent function. The state is the essential factor in national life, which determines the character and function of all other factors. The truth is that the Turkish nationalists assimilated the idea of the separation of Church and State from the history of European political ideas, which has no contextual experience within the Islamic world. “Primitive Christianity was founded, not as a political or civil unit, but as a monastic order in a profane world, having nothing to do with civil affairs, and obeying the Roman authority practically in all matters.” Kurzman argues that the result of this was that when the State became Christian, State and Church confronted each other as distinct powers with interminable boundary disputes between them. Such a thing could never happen in Islam, argues poet, philosopher, and lawyer Muhammad Iqbal; for Islam was from the very beginning a civil society, having received from the Qur’an a set of simple legal principles, which like the 12 tables of the Romans, carried, as experience subsequently proved, great potentialities of expansion and development by interpretation. The Nationalist theory of state therefore is misleading inasmuch as it suggests a dualism that does not exist in Islam. Ideals of nationalism today are more Turkish than Islamic.

---

82 Zafar, p. 71.
83 Kurzman, p. 259.
84 A more in-depth discussion of these points can be found in Muhammad Iqbal’s essay, “The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam.”
One particularly important point of distinction that Zafar makes in Islamic teachings is that commonly made between matters of religion (ibadat) and worldly matters (mu'amalat).

Therefore, while Islam incorporates all aspects of a believer's life, it does not necessarily dictate or set forth laws for the mu'amalat. This distinction allows for a political structure respectful towards Islam, but not explicitly Islamic as argued for by the revivalists. Within Turkey this distinction has begun to be articulated through the more moderate and Liberal Islamic groups that are beginning to emerge. Iqbal states in his essay that, "We heartily welcome the liberal movement in modern Islam; but it must also be admitted that the appearance of liberal ideas in Islam constitutes also the most critical moment in the history of Islam." 85

As the "liberalization process", labeled by Indonesian Islamic Leader Nurcholish Madjid, continues to occur in Turkey, an important by-product has been the new voices of Islam that have begun to assert themselves.

The new voices of Liberal Islam must be treated as a separate ideology from revivalist or customary Islamists if a pluralistic system is to emerge within Turkey. The secularist establishment protected by the military must come to terms with the reality that Islam cannot be labeled or compartmentalized into one party, but rather it needs to be expressed through a diversity of ideological differences root within one's interpretations of practices and beliefs in Islam. Grouping all Muslims who express an interest in basing their political views on Islam into a category of extremist or fundamentalist only serves to further polarize the system and stifle the voices of progress. As Turkey struggles to find a guiding ideology, Liberal Islam offers a perspective between the Islamists and Kemalists. Their calls for a reopening of ijtihad, and thereby shifting the religious authority away from the institutionalized elites, allows for a more

---

open and inclusive system for Muslims within Turkey. As we have seen, various liberal Muslim scholars argue that the Prophet Muhammad did not want state-building; therefore, in this view, let the moral edifices of Islam always guide a true believer and never let a government contradict anything in the Qur'an. However, beyond this point, change should be inspired by Muslims and their particular contexts, and not by a dogmatic belief structure that is no longer fluid as intended from the inception of Islam. In the case of Turkey with its parliamentary democracy, Muslims should work within the system and seek change that is closer to Islamic principle, but open and true to the spirit of Islam.
IV. A New Pluralism

The middle ground for Turkey seems to lie somewhere between moderate non-militant secularism and Liberal Islam. While adherents of each perspective retain their fundamental ideals, both seem capable of agreeing on practical policy issues. For example, fundamentalist Islamists within the Truth Party have been advocating rural development programs to help the impoverished countryside of Anatolia. Their message of economic development and greater autonomy for the local governances is a practical message; however their calls for an Islamic state have undermined their ability to work in collaboration with moderate Kemalists. Similarly, the recently elected Justice and Development party has continued on a path of collaboration with the West and has, at least up until this date, not made any radical shifts in its foreign policy. North Atlantic Treaty Organization membership and Turkey’s European Union aspirations will not allow Islamist politicians to radically change foreign policy. While extremes in both groups force a mutually exclusive, dichotomized relationship, the moderate tails of each party allow for a separation between public and private life. While Kemalists and Islamists will always differ over their private views on life, an acceptable political structure that permits peaceful co­habitation can be negotiated between the two.

The simplicity of advocating a middle path between the extremes of Turkish ideology, perhaps, is a luxury only reserved for outsiders. From Turkish perspectives, the key concern focuses on its historical distrust of the “ring of evil” that constitutes its neighbors. The global context in which Turkey exists seems to desire a definitive victory of one ideology over the other. While the Kemalist Revolution and the subsequent secular governments may claim to have delivered this victory, strong Islamic sentiment continues to permeate throughout this history-filled land. Turkey’s continued struggle with ideological tensions suggests the greater issue of
Turkey’s civilizational identity. Ataturk’s vision of a united Turkey has been achieved through military might and suppression; however, Turkey’s identity crisis continues to define its bipolar ideological formation.

Huntington’s conceptualization of Turkey as a “torn nation” perpetuates this thinking and encourages the final redefinition of Turkey as part of the West. However, classifying Turkey as either a Western or Islamic member-state establishes a false dichotomy. Turkey has never been exclusively a part of either of these two civilizations, nor has it been solely Kemalist or Islamist. Rather, the nation has continually existed between these civilizations as a perpetual fault line. Turkey is both Western and Islamic at the same time, and to deny either of these aspects of Turkey’s unique heritage is problematic and dangerous.

In the case of Turkey, Huntington’s model of the Western and Islamic civilizations that border each other with volatile border regions must be revised. Pluralism, and not singular civilizational inclusion, is the answer for Turkey. There is no black and white in a country that is so ethnically, culturally, and historically complex. Huntington’s false dichotomy for Turkey negates the possibility of a third alternative, that of a Turkish civilization marked by pluralism and fitting in between Western and Islamic civilizations.

a. Turkish Civilization

The Turkish Republic, as has been explored throughout this paper, has never neatly fit into any civilization. However, the clear split between the Kemalists and the Islamists seems to indicate that Turkey will never fit into the existing civilizational framework that Huntington proposes. Therefore, rather than discounting Turkey as a prototypical “torn country” that will

86 This is not intended to denote an ethnic Turkic civilization, but rather a Turkish civilization that is marked by pluralism for all of Turkey’s ethnic groups that fits between Huntington’s categorizations of the Western and Islamic civilizations.
never resolve its ideological and civilizational differences, it is important to search for another alternative; perhaps that of a uniquely Turkish civilization that incorporates both the Western and Islamic civilizational influences.

The late twentieth-century leaders of Turkey have followed in the Ataturk tradition and defined Turkey as a modern, secular, Western nation-state. They allied Turkey with the West in 1952 with NATO and in the Gulf War; they applied for membership in the European Community and became associate members with the establishment of the Accord of Ankara in 1963, with full membership within the EU as its ultimate aim. At the same time, however, elements in Turkish society have supported an Islamic revival and have argued that Turkey is basically a Middle Eastern Muslim society. In addition, while the elite members of Turkey have defined Turkey as a Western society, the elite of the West refuse to accept Turkey as such. Turkey appears to be lacking the support necessary to become a member of the European Community, and the real reason, as President Ozal said, “is that we are Muslim and they are Christian and they don’t say that.” Having rejected Mecca, and then having been rejected by Brussels, to where does Turkey look? Tashkent may be the answer. The fall of the Soviet Union gives Turkey the opportunity to become the leader of a revived Turkish civilization involving seven countries from borders of Greece to those of China. Encouraged by the West, Turkey is making strenuous efforts to carve out this new identity for itself. This identity, which has captivated both the Kemalists and Islamists, certainly would be an amalgamation of many different aspects of Turkey.

Reflecting back on Turkey’s history, political scientists have argued that the country’s self-interest has always guided its civilizational identity. Neo-realists point to Turkey’s inclusion in the Western alliance after World War Two as the rational move for a country feeling threatened by Soviet ambitions on Central Asia and a hostile ring of Arab states. International
Relations specialists like Soli Ozel have argued that Turkey’s domestic and foreign policies all point towards this rationalist model of civilizational identity. Turkey’s inclusion in NATO as the only Muslim nation, representing a new type of Middle-Eastern nation-state with whom the West must deal, seems to fit this mold as well.

Kemalist Turkey represents an alternative type of Middle-East regional power, based on a modern, secular, and market-oriented state that the West can comprehend and support, unlike the Iranian Islamist model. Because of this contrast in style and unique geo-political situation, Turkey has begun to assert its regional power by introducing the “Turkish model.” This idea is based upon the country’s “…reasonably successful experience of mixed economy, parliamentary democracy and early exposure to market-oriented reforms.” It is through this Turkish model, orientated towards the West, and Europe in particular, that makes Turkey’s strategic value to the West of great importance.

Ziya Onis’s investigation into the potential and limits of Turkey as a regional power in the post-Soviet Caucasus and Central Asian areas draws upon a new civilizational paradigm, one in which a newly emerging Turkish civilization supercedes both the Western and Islamic elements of this “torn country.” Starting with the history of the Turkish Republic that formed in 1923 after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey’s ethnic and linguistic ties with six other Central Asian states seems to constitute a uniquely Turkish civilization both along the ideals of shared culture and history. By describing the six states of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan as Turkey’s primary sphere of interest, Onis shows the recent attempts of Turkey to assume common economic, religious, and cultural ties between these states is one way in which to increase regional influence.

87 Onis, p. 66.
With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the formation of these six independent Central Asian republics, these states have begun to look towards their successful Turkish neighbor. As an economic and military regional power, Turkey has begun to play an “...influential part in shaping their (neighbors) economic development, political direction, and external relations.”\textsuperscript{88} Thus, Turkey’s role in the post-Soviet era has taken on a new dimension of leadership.

As Turkey’s strategic importance for the West as a military ally against Russia post-Cold War diminishes, neo-realists would argue that Turkey must look towards its Islamic neighbors or inwardly for its identity resolution. Recent events in Turkey, principally the landslide election of the Justice and Development Party, have brought into clear focus the problems with a bipolar Kemalist versus Islamist framework. As this new government simultaneously reaches out to the West through diplomatic missions and political rhetoric, it has also engaged in a series of conciliatory gestures to its Arabian neighbors. This approach of looking East and West appears to be the foreshadowing of things to come for Turkey.

One bottom line for Turkey is this: the nation will never be able to fully become part of the West or the East. The Ottoman Empire was certainly an Islamic Empire that would align itself nicely within the Arab states that surround modern-day Turkey, despite historical misgivings on both sides. Istanbul and its large population of European-descendents belonged to the West during the days of the Byzantine Empire; however neither of these two empires exists anymore. Today the Turkish Republic must come to terms with its civilization and not that of its predecessors. It is for this reason that Turkey must find the middle ground between the Kemalist and the Islamist positions so that a Turkish civilization can emerge. This civilization is one that is rich with history, culture, and heritage, while unique in its multiplicity and diversity.

\textsuperscript{88} Onis, p. 66
Discussion about this multiethnic, multilingual, and fully democratic ideal has not been able to surface because of the polarized ideological landscape of the country. Rather than embracing strictly Western or Islamic civilization, why can’t Turkey redefine itself as part of a unique Turkish civilization that incorporates both of these civilizations?

The potential for Turkey to establish its own unique civilizational grouping brings together the various aspects of Turkish identity that have been examined throughout this paper. These identities include, but are not limited to, the individual religious/cultural identity, as well as national identity of Turkey in a cultural/political international arena. With the various identities within Turkey, it makes sense that Turkey should constitute its own civilization without being fully aligned either with the West or the East. This paper has attempted to address these identities while demonstrating the different levels of civilizational and ideological alignment. The negotiation between these levels represents an important leadership challenge for Turkey. Ultimately finding sustainable, pluralistic alternatives for peaceful co-existence in Turkey between its divided population is a matter of what leaders and processes can achieve.

b. Conclusion

Turkey, since 1923, has proven to be a valuable case study in ideological and religious tensions and national identity crisis; however, with a newly elected government, Turkey appears ready to write a new chapter in its history. The complexity of the issues that exist within a modern state along with the diversity of traditional cultures and rich history of Turkey do not allow for a singular civilizational inclusion as Huntington advocates, nor a single ideological path to follow. The Kemalist heritage of this young country has presupposed the necessity for
adopting modernity as defined by the West, but the tension that grips the country forces us to re-examine Turkey and its underlying principles.

This discussion of Turkey’s polarized political environment demonstrates the operative of dichotomies between Kemalism and Islamism. However, the outwardly visible barriers between the two sides are surmountable, especially as Turkey seeks to find its own path, as opposed to blindly following the example of the West in the name of modernity. No political system is perfect, and as has been demonstrated, it is inadequate and an oversimplification to advocate a “Western” approach when dealing with a country as complex as Turkey. Turkey must find its own political system that suits its national needs best and that accounts for the protection and voicing of all citizens. Therefore, rather than being threatened by the existence of other potential alternatives to modernity, leaders, citizens, and scholars in the West should welcome this variety and learn from these other models to improve their own systems.

The paradox that emerges from this study is that Turkey is a nation bent on being accepted into Western civilization but afraid of allowing full democracy. To lift the restrictive rules enforced by the military in Turkey continues to be a heated topic, something the Turkish elites fear deeply. Western nations, and members of the European Union in particular, have been quick to criticize restrictions within Turkey; popular opinion in the nation, however, shows a justifiable basis for its insecurity. Within Turkey’s sphere of influence, Yugoslavia, Syria, Armenia, Turkmenistan, and other nations have been torn apart by civil war that Turkey sees as an inevitable part of allowing a fully pluralistic and democratic political system to emerge. As the world becomes more global, it is ironic to think that it is only through the differences of tradition, locality, and authenticity that Turkey can market itself more effectively and compete on a worldwide scale. Ultimately, it is through listening to the people of Turkey that a more
pluralistic and multi-cultural life can come into existence. The ultimate challenge for Turkey's political leaders is to find a way for peaceful coexistence, rather than clashes, to determine the interactions between secularist and Islamically minded citizens in Turkey. It is only through embracing, rather than denying, its ethnic and ideological diversity that Turkey's leaders can demonstrate what benefits can be garnered from such a richly diverse population. The clashing ideas and civilizations that Samuel Huntington alludes to in his essay must be offered a meeting point so that they do not come into bloody conflict. Turkey, as the crossroads of the world, must become a pluralistic example of civilizational interaction, or else risk a calamitous confrontation between the Kemalists and Islamists.

Turkey does not need to become fully part of either the West or Islamic civilization; rather, it needs to embrace both while not surrendering its unique identity. Though Turkey has changed in many ways since Ataturk, the restrictive orders of secularization and Kemalism continue to limit the potential progress of this nation. Co-existence and public discourse among many viewpoints offer Turkey the most successful formula to embracing pluralism and a unifying national identity. If Turkey and its leaders can find this right formula, it will undoubtedly astonish the world. With thoughtful and sustained leadership, Turkey could become one of the world's most successful nations at embracing its differences in the twenty-first century.
Appendix

Map of the Ottoman Empire

Bibliography


