

# Islamism in Turkey: beyond instrument and meaning

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## Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to show that strictly materialist or culturalist approaches are inadequate for the theorization of religious political movements. Drawing from the insights provided by these approaches, I contend that Islamism is a novel form of counter-hegemonic politics, which I call religio-moral populism. Like every hegemony, it has to be handled as an articulation of conflicting interests and aspirations. By deploying Castoriadis' model of the institution of society in my reading of the Islamist press in Turkey, I argue that the imaginary and imagination have to become part of the vocabulary utilized by the analysis of religion in order to deal with the tensions generated by such an articulation. I demonstrate my cases through an interpretation of discussions among Islamists on poverty, capitalism and justice.

Keywords: Islamism; populism; religion; Turkey; class; imagination.

Scholars and policy makers around the globe recognize that religion might be slowly becoming the main anti-systemic force, replacing socialism as an alternative social movement. However, both the confusion on the Left and the changing logic of worldwide anti-hegemonic struggle suggest that what is at stake is not simply the succession of anti-systemic forces. The way in which opponents define the 'system', and the way they imagine the alternatives, have changed dramatically. This shift leads us to interrogate the source and meaning of new anti-systemic resistance.

In this article, I develop a theory of religious political movements in order to understand this change. Scholars have either analysed religious movements with what we could call cultural paradigms, taking them as expressions of civilizational/cultural 'essences' or reactions of tradition against modernity (Arjomand 1984), or with material paradigms, interpreting them as mediated responses to supposedly more fundamental (political and economic) processes (Smart 1991;

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Henry 1986). Here, I contend that we need to combine both material and cultural understandings of religion in order to reach an adequate interpretation of this phenomenon. I shall focus on Islamist movements in general, and the movement in contemporary Turkey in particular, to illustrate my main points. I argue that Islamism, which is currently interpreted as pre-rational 'petty bourgeois populism' or traditionalism, needs to be understood instead as a multivalent religio-moral populism – a potentially explosive articulation of different class interests and religious cravings. I shall demonstrate my argument through a close reading of prominent Islamist newspapers and journals for a five-month period.

One must remember, however, that the militant and long-standing state policy of secularization and modernism distinguishes Turkey from other Islamic countries. Secularizing techniques have affected almost every community and individual in the country. This condition problematizes approaches that tend to see religious movements as the return to concerns and structures which Third World states have attempted to repress (Haynes 1993). Whereas Islamism is clearly responding to these secularizing policies, Turkey's peculiar condition affirms that religious movements cannot be explained through recourse to a theory of deeply entrenched forms waiting to be 'revived'.<sup>1</sup> Also, the long tradition of (non-Islamic) socialism and Marxism in this country (another differentiating factor from other Islamic countries) makes it unlikely that the population would 'regress' to so-called 'irrational' forms of protest despite the availability of 'rational' ones.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the strong mass appeal of reformist and revolutionary leftist movements in Turkey of the 1970s casts a doubt on certain materialist interpretations, which argue that religious movements are substitutes for mass mobilization when there is a lack of full-blown rational alternatives. These peculiarities of Turkey require a novel typology for Islamism, more developed than models focusing on traditionalism and pre-rational populism.

### **Sociological traditions and contemporary Islam**

Even though there is a wide spectrum of paradigms concerning contemporary religious movements, the theoretical scene tends to be polarized into those reducing the rise of religious politics to material variables ('materialist' approaches) and those emphasizing cultural factors to the detriment of material ones ('ideational' approaches). They may differ on a wide range of topics but Marxist, neo-Marxist and historical-institutional paradigms share a common ground in that they take religious meaning systems as instruments of social actors. Hence the label materialist. Essentialist and meaning-oriented paradigms are irreconcilable on a set of issues, including their respective narratives regarding continuity and change in cultural systems. However, they both take the meaning system to be the sole explanatory factor when analysing religious politics, and hence the label ideational. In the following sections, I shall take up each

of these five paradigms in turn, and discuss their relative strengths and weaknesses.

### *Classical and orthodox Marxism*

Despite the once wide acceptance among Marxists of an orthodoxy emphasizing consolatory/palliative, instrumental (that is, instrumental for the dominant classes) and depoliticizing aspects of religion in social life (Marx 1974; McKown 1975; McLellan 1987) – an orthodoxy that has quite often blinded socialists to the constructive potentials of religion – some Marxist and Marxians have recognized that religion has often functioned as a tool for protest throughout history (Engels 1926; Kautsky 1953; Thompson 1963). Yet, even these theorists have shared with other Enlightenment-inspired thinkers the belief that religion was bound to fade away with the development of capitalism and the scientific rationality it built itself on. The secularization thesis<sup>3</sup> was (and, to a certain extent, is) shared by Marxists, structural functionalists (Toprak 1981) and Weberians alike. One of the more insightful Marxist thinkers has even stated that religion is ‘the image of perfect justice’, and that rational images of justice would eventually replace religion (Horkheimer 1972).<sup>4</sup> Others influenced by Marxism have recognized religion as a form of social protest, though restricting the relevance of this dimension of religion to non-modern societies (Rodinson 1972). In modern societies, some Marxists have subsequently argued, religion cannot but be apolitical, a refuge of ignorance (Portelli 1974). Yet we witness that religious images of justice and religiously inspired social protests are gradually taking over, or at least claiming the territory traditionally occupied by various leftisms.

### *Neo-Marxist revisions*

The recent ‘materialist’ literature on Islamist movements restricts Islamism to a class movement, albeit in a significantly different and more complex way than classical and orthodox Marxist views. Even though the new materialist literature recognizes the potential mobilizing and politicizing force of contemporary religion, the older framework still lurks in the background, assuming that Islamism, due to its ‘irrationality’ and moralizing tendencies, is inherently incapable of solving the issues it addresses (Ayubi 1991: ch. 10). More generally, it sees Islamism as an ideology of a Third Worldist, populist movement, dominated by the petty bourgeoisie (Fischer 1982).<sup>5</sup> The most significant shortcomings of this approach include its designation of Islam as a mere mobilizational ‘tool’ (Keddie 1991: 304) for the excluded, exploited, alienated masses; and its neglect of the role of Islam as a meaning system. Since the oppressive regimes of the Middle East are more or less secular, and since Islam is ‘part and parcel’ of popular culture, Islam, this approach argues, is bound to become the language of this populism (Burke 1998; Abrahamian 1991). In so doing, the approach

reduces Islamism to being a substitute for older, secular Third World nationalisms or populisms (Hegland 1987).

*The historical-institutional approach*

This position, exemplified by Sami Zubaida (1993), focuses on particular historical conjunctures nested in general socio-economic processes (such as urbanization, political centralization, widening of literacy, communication and transport), rather than on class forces. Zubaida states that unemployment, fraud, a boom in the young population, the bankruptcy of education have created a resentment in the masses of the Middle East, which is channelled to Islamic politics for historical reasons. According to Zubaida, these masses could as well support nationalist or socialist movements, if the latter had not failed in opposing imperialism, and if 'their leaderships and ideologies' had not been 'subordinated to and utilized by the ruling cliques and . . . consequently tainted' (1993: xviii). The autonomy of religious institutions, and the Middle Eastern states' inability to repress activities therein, added to the other institutional advantages of the Islamist movements, since all other opposition was repressed ferociously. Zubaida also draws attention to the fact that popular Islam is syncretistic, magical and mystic, as opposed to the ideology of the Islamists which is puritanical and quite modern. Due to this distance between the two interpretations of religion, he argues, Islamism cannot be seen as a continuity with the Islam preserved in the meaning worlds of the folk.

The historical-institutional approach is stronger than other materialist approaches in bringing in history as conjuncture rather than universal development. However, since it rejects taking Islam's popular force in the Middle East into account, it is not as strong in interpreting the legitimacy generated by religious politics. Religious ideology and activists have also been used by Middle Eastern authorities for centuries. Why have they not been 'tainted' to the same degree as their nationalist and socialist counterparts? Why, for instance, has the Turkish state not been able to take the activities in mosques under control, despite the official recognition that places of worship are one of the primary grounds of organization and recruitment for Islamism? Is this all because Islam as a way of life and as a way of imagining the world is a significant dimension of popular tradition? Islamism, rather than being the expression of the self-same continuity of a religious essence, is a critical refashioning of this imaginary for the struggle against a modern capitalist system. Even though it is clearly differentiated from popular versions of Islam, it is in a much better situation to relate dialogically to the popular imagination when compared with other transformative political movements, whose ideologies are even further distanced from popular culture.

I argue in this paper that Islam (or rather, Islam as it is interpreted by Islamists) is not an instrument utilized once a populism emerges, or once the conditions for its emergence are established – as all three materialist paradigms

contend. On the contrary, I suggest that Islam actively *shapes* this populism and imposes a certain form on it. Specifically, it defines the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and determines who should be participating in this politics. I also delineate the problems implicit in the most recent interpretation of the populism of Islamists in Turkey as '*petit bourgeois*' (Gülalp 1999); such a formulation, I contend, misses the processual nature of a much richer and contradictory populism that is always being made and remade. I further locate this richness, both in the plurality of class dynamics within the movement (the coexistence of the urban poor, the petty bourgeoisie and the provincial bourgeoisie), and in the complications entailed in the use of Islam itself as a guide for aspirations (that is, the tensions arising from utilizing a complex meaning system).

### *Essentialist reductions*

In order to explain the rise of religious movements in the Islamic world, cultural and civilizational approaches to religion have emphasized the distinctiveness of Islam as a meaning system, based on the belief in the essential separateness of Islam as a way of life (Weber 1963; Gellner 1981). The more popular and publicly influential versions of these approaches account not only for the rise of Islamism, but also for the explosion of religious movements throughout the world by evoking the essential differences between civilizations (Huntington 1996). This type of explanation singles out certain elements within complex systems of meaning and presents them as the essence of a society or culture. Yet these principles held to be 'essences' (such as conspicuous consumption in Islam)<sup>6</sup> are time and group bound. The essentialist approach neglects the fact that the principles in question are sometimes restricted to certain historical periods and social groups, and also that they sometimes cut across societies and cultures.

### *Meaning-oriented explanations and Islamism as 'traditionalism'*

A more convincing way of bringing in the distinct quality of religious movements – the obvious that instrumentalist approaches neglect – is to underline the search for meaning and moral order (Wuthnow 1987, 1991; Bellah 1970; Berger 1969; Geertz 1973). Religious movements are perceived here as responses to modern systems of thought which do not offer communities and individuals adequate meaning systems. This argument does not, however, explain why in some cases religion becomes an oppositional search for meaning, while in others it either sanctifies the reigning secular institutions or merely seeks to modify them. Some scholars have suggested that religion thus specified (as search for meaning) becomes radical upon the erosion of communal, personal ties, or upon the severe challenge of the meaning system (Riesebrodt 1993; Marty and Appleby 1991). They therefore argue that radical religious movements are

nothing but radical ways of protecting tradition. They agree that these movements adapt some modern ideas, techniques and organizations, but qualify all as defensive measures, as *ad hoc* modifications for preserving tradition in a modernizing world. In Turkey too, scholars have generally conceptualized Islamism as a reaction to rapid change and modernization (Hann 1997; Sakallioğlu 1996), thereby failing to grasp the degree to which most religious movements are also responses to modern problems such as capitalist exploitation and centralized, totalitarian authoritarianism. As such, religious movements do not preserve tradition as much as actively create their own modernities through critically adapting and revising traditions and communities.

### *Synthesis of the approaches*

Certain analysts of religious radicalism in the Third World have recognized that both material and cultural factors have to be introduced in understanding the rise of religious politics. Eric Davis (1987), for example, has introduced both religious movements' critique of secularism and consumerist materialism, and their promise of wealth and independence in his account of the reasons lying behind religious radicalism. These scholars, however, have taken material and cultural factors as additive, and have not analysed how they are intertwined and articulated. Certain analyses of liberation theology (Leonard 1998) have similarly enumerated material (state repression) and ideational factors (changes in the line of Vatican), but have not combined these in a satisfactory theoretical matrix. The intersection of material and ideational concerns within religious movements has yet to be fully explored.

The interactive relation between the imaginary and the real, as portrayed by Cornelius Castoriadis (1987), offers a starting point in understanding how these concerns intersect, and why meaning systems become oppositional at certain junctures. Castoriadis recognizes that human beings are characterized by a search for meaning, which can be thought or imagined. This search is located in 'the imaginary': the human capacity to imagine and represent things and relations. The imaginary creates a gap between the real (institutions, relations of production and domination) and the symbolic (the signification of the real in the realm of language and symbols). That is, the symbolic is always a *representation* of the real, never an exact reflection.

In Castoriadis' model, the symbolic and the imaginary are by no means 'unreal' in the conventional sense. Through the imaginary, human beings answer such questions as 'who are we?', 'what are our relations with each other?', 'what are our relations with the world?'. The imagined qualities attributed to the people constituting a collectivity, and the qualities attributed to the world, are intricately connected to the social structure. For example, it is only when people start to see other human beings and their nature in terms of their functions and utilities (as 'things') that a capitalist society is possible. Therefore, the creative imaginary is constitutive of social practice. In this sense, Castoriadis talks of the

imaginary as being more real than the real. In turn, the signs that constitute the symbolic system – even though the latter has its own logic and history, which are relatively independent from the imaginary and the real – are chosen (but not in a conscious way) by creative human beings. Thanks to the goal-defining nature of the imaginary, symbols, just like the imaginary that is their primary source, can intervene in the working of institutions, can redefine their substantive aims or be indifferent to these aims. Hence, the symbolic system constitutes a reality of its own, not totally subservient to the reproduction of relations of domination ('the real' in Castoriadis' sense).

The differences and frictions between these three registers (the imaginary, the symbolic and the real) create a potential for shifts in the imaginary through radical imagination of individuals.<sup>7</sup> However, not every imagination can produce shifts in the imaginary, thereby attain the status of an 'imaginary *social* signification' and impact on the organization of symbols and social relations. For such impact, *institution* of imagination and its consequent socialization is necessary. Modifying Castoriadis' scheme for the purposes of this paper, I would like to suggest that the radical imagination tends to lead to radical practice in two instances: first, when the gap between the imaginary and the real widens; and, second, when the sharpened contradictions in the real overlap with divisions in the symbolic.

In Turkey, the influence of world capitalism and the modernization projects of the local élites have created institutions and relations (the real) that radically differ from the moral order envisioned by Islam (the imaginary): they have introduced objectifying relations (those of class) among religious populations, which contradicts what is expected from human bonds within a religious framework. The frustration caused by the growing distance between the real and the imaginary affects not only the relation between the religious populations and the regime, but also the internal relations of Islamists. As I shall demonstrate below, the ideal of *ummah* (Islamic community), so much cherished by Islamism, is far from reflecting the relations of Islamist poor and Islamist rich. Religious people, however, insist on imagining their internal relations and their relations with the world in Islamic terms. Yet, the penetration of the new objectified relations sooner or later makes their presence felt, in varying degrees for different groups and individuals. This is when the religious imaginary has to be reinterpreted through radical imagination – lest it recede into defence or be given up. These discrepancies between the imaginary and the real, and the ensuing space for radical imagination, create potentials for counter-hegemonic struggle against the system and intra-hegemonic strife within Islamism.

The second dimension, the coincidence between divisions in the real and divisions in the symbolic, concerns the widening gap between social groups in the modern world.<sup>8</sup> Societies are divided into dominant and exploited classes, and into rulers and the ruled.<sup>9</sup> Various discourses, whether democratic, socialist, Islamist or nationalist, act as bridges between groups that share unequally in power, constructing coherence in a contradictory society, and making it possible for subalterns to negotiate the terms of their domination. When these groups do

not share a symbolic realm, or share one only in a weak manner, there is a greater chance of hostility and less opportunity for negotiation. This is especially pertinent to and visible in contemporary Islamic societies, where the élite and the masses talk of the world and symbolize their relations with it in different (non-religious vs. religious) terms, and through the lenses of different meaning systems: they are divided not only by class, but also by the naturalized use of different symbolic systems.<sup>10</sup>

### The Islamist print

The claims put forth in this paper are based on a reading, from December 1998 to March 1999, of the prominent Islamist newspapers in Turkey, namely *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Şafak* and *Akit*. I also reviewed the weekly newspaper *Selam*, and journals such as *Haksöz* and *Cuma*. The time frame marks the national election campaigns, when these newspapers and journals featured heated debates on the nature of the Islamist movement in general and the Islamist party in particular. In my daily readings of the three main Islamist newspapers during these five months, I paid special attention to the construction of events in news articles, the debates between columnists and letters to the editor and to columnists.

The print media are crucial to Islamist movements in Turkey. Activists and followers participate in collective readings in coffee houses, dormitories and civil organizations. While these readings circulate ideas beyond the printed page, they also create intellectual space for the popular negotiation of the meaning generated in Islamist print.<sup>11</sup> Four institutional matrices figure prominently in this meaning creation: Islamic capital, religious communities, the legal Islamist party and radical Islamist organizations. Islamic capital has become a considerable force in Turkey after the liberalization of the economy in the 1980s. Whereas Turkish capitalism was based on the accumulation of capital through heavy state support and intervention before the 1980s, the global neo-liberal trend made it possible for the provincial élite to transform their savings into investment. An important portion of the provincial élite combined their funds to form joint-stock companies in order to be able to compete with the huge monopolies created by the republican bureaucracy. The aggregation of these dispersed funds was facilitated by a rhetoric emphasizing the need for the unity of believers against the nationalist and secularist bourgeoisie, which was the artefact of the regime. The firms that were thus brought into being were later to be united in an association, MÜSİAD. The increasing strength of this association and the KOBİs (small and medium sized enterprises) within the movement can be traced throughout the discussions in the Islamist press.

The religious communities influence Islamist press either through forming their own newspapers and journals or through supplying newspapers with columnists. The dissolution of traditional religious orders in the 1920s had channelled the mystic inclinations within Islam to organize as underground religious communities, some of which had ties with old orders such as the *Nakshibendi*



order, but some of which were completely new and independent from old orders.<sup>12</sup> Even though the state was hostile to these new communities from the beginning, it developed manipulative relations with them, first against the socialist wave of the 1960s and the 1970s – where religious people joined the fascists in clashes with the revolutionary left – then against the radicalization of religion after the 1980s. Certain communities (e.g. the *İsmailağa* community) defined themselves with the Islamist movement and resisted this latter manipulation. Others, like the *İskenderpaşa* community, accommodated a more flexible approach, and sided with different parties at different moments. More interestingly, others, including the Fethullah Gülen community, acted as a bulwark against the populist and revolutionary interpretations of Islam, but used the cultural-political space opened by the manipulative strategy of the state for non-confrontational Islamicization of society and state.

The Islamist party, initiated as a party of the religiously conservative provinces and villages, went through a metamorphosis at the end of the 1970s, accompanying the radicalization of Islam worldwide. Upon the retreat of the radical left following the 1980 *coup d'état* in Turkey and the collapse of state socialism worldwide, the recently radicalized ideological line of the party (the Welfare Party) became the most attractive choice for subaltern populations, as a result of which the main support base of the party shifted from the conservative provinces to urban poor areas in metropolitan centres and to Kurdish regions.<sup>13</sup> The party adopted an anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian rhetoric in order to appeal to these populations, a rhetoric which was not sufficiently internalized and systematically articulated, as we shall see below. The revolutionary Islamist groups, on the other hand, were more open and resolute in their attacks against capitalism. Even though their anti-capitalism did not become a popular electoral option, their criticisms of the Islamist party and Islamic capital created an anti-capitalist ideological atmosphere that pushed the party to come to terms with capitalism. The Turkish state could not tolerate even this restricted criticism of capitalism and secularist bureaucracy, and the party was closed down in 1998. When it opened again with a different name (the Virtue Party), its political and economic programme was much milder and more conciliatory. Since a nationwide campaign against Islamism was in place after the coup in 1997, the closing down of the Welfare Party, and the ideological wavering of the new party, did not favour the small religious revolutionary groups, themselves under severe scrutiny in this period.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the diversity in the movement, the Islamist press is the home for a wide range of (frequently diverging) opinions. Whereas *Yeni Şafak* is a forum of the more liberal wing within the Islamist movement, *Akit*, *Selam* and *Haksöz* are examples of radical Islamist print. *Yeni Şafak* – linked to the Albayrak group of firms, one of the prominent religious companies – is read more by the educated and middle-class sectors of the Islamic population. Its columnists consist of liberal as well as Islamist intellectuals and journalists, on the one hand, and members of élite religious orders (such as *Erenköy* and *İskenderpaşa* communities of the *Nakshi* order), on the other. The readership of *Akit* differs remarkably,

tending to comprise uneducated and/or working populations together with more conservative sectors within merchants and shopkeepers. *Akit* does not have as much economic and political institutional support as *Milli Gazete*, *Zaman* and *Yeni Şafak*, but the activism of its audience renders it widely influential. Despite its radicalism, it differs from the publications of radical groups (*Haksöz* and *Selam*) in that it carries strong traces from the conservative past of the Islamist movement. *Milli Gazete*, situated midway between these two poles, is the semi-official daily paper of the Islamist party (formerly the Welfare Party, now the Virtue Party), and constitutes the ideological ‘centre’ of the movement. Some of its authors are independent Islamist intellectuals, some independent mystics and some members of religious communities such as the *İsmailağa* community. *Cuma*, on the other hand, is a journal open to different voices within the Islamist movement, but is more sympathetic to the centre and to radicals than to liberals. *Selam* and *Haksöz* have restricted audiences, mainly university youth and radical intelligentsia. They are related to groups with revolutionary ideas. All of these Islamist newspapers and journals differ from *Zaman*, a mainstream newspaper with Islamic references, which I also analysed in the same period. This newspaper is linked with the Fethullah Gülen community, which has many representatives in institutions such as the police, the army and (national and transnational) public education.<sup>15</sup> *Zaman* is an exemplary site of the discourse of those groups that I call ‘Islamic mainstreamers’. Islamic mainstreamers defend the current oligarchic, capitalist structure of the Turkish regime and demand Islamicization of the system without thorough structural transformation on economic and political fronts.

## Two dimensions of Islamist meaning construction

My reading of the Islamist press foregrounds two elements indispensable for a thorough insight into Islamism. The first of these is the religious reconfiguration of populism. As will be seen below, the Islamist transformation of populist politics calls for a more culturally oriented understanding of counter-hegemony, and especially of Islamism as an instance of counter-hegemony. Second, widespread internal conflict within this populist counter-hegemony necessitates a model that can incorporate intra-hegemonic struggle in the conceptualization of Islamism, in particular, and of social movements in general.

### *The novelty and specificity of religio-moral populism*

The popular rhetoric of Islamist symbolic representation in Turkey presents the dominant groups as primarily composed of oligopolistic capital and civil and military bureaucracy (together constituting ‘the oligarchy’), with the dominant media and public intellectuals serving as their props. The same rhetoric characterizes the dominant groups also as ‘the happy minority’. What is not explained

by purely civilizational and cultural explanations of Islamist movements is this insistence on the opposition between the exploited and the exploiters, the dominated and the rulers. If Islamism was solely or primarily a search for identity/meaning, or an attack of tradition against modernity, this opposition would not be so salient in its discourse.

This requires an interpretation of Islamism as a form of populism, though some qualifications are necessary. First of all, Islamist populism has to be distinguished from the populism of rulers and states (Peronist populism, Kemalist populism, etc.), in that it is not populism from above, envisioning undifferentiated masses whose interests are assumed to be the one and the same with state and (national) capital. Second, Islamist populism is not another variant of clientelist 'populism' based on patronage politics. Many political parties in Turkey and in the Third World engage in this kind of 'populism'. What differentiates Islamist populism is its consistent redistribution of resources from dominant groups to subordinate groups. This is exemplified by the obvious deterioration of services in upper-middle-class districts, and the parallel amelioration of services and infra-structure in subaltern districts and neighbourhoods, during the local governments of the Islamist party. Also, during the short period when the Islamist party led a coalition government, certain sectors of the working classes received wage rises unencountered after the liberalization of the Turkish economy following the 1980 coup, while the profit, rent and interest gains of big business were brought under control. This aggressive redistribution, together with the centrality of populist discourse in contemporary Islamism, casts a doubt on approaches that reduce the populism of Islamism in Turkey to simple election-time pragmatism and clientelism (Akıncı 1999; Heper 1997).

Since the attributes of Islamism mentioned above echo the characteristics of socialist populisms, many scholars have argued that Islamism is simply an heir to left-wing populism or nationalism (Burke 1998). While this may be partially correct, it does not acknowledge the radical novelty of Islamism, namely the new emphasis on *faith* and *morals*. This religious dimension of the new populism leads to a radically different construct of 'the people', comprising not only the exploited and excluded, but also the faithful and moral. Islamists often playfully argue that 'the representatives of *Hakk* [God]' and 'the representatives of *Halk* [the people]' have converged. The exploiters and the faithless are likewise deemed to be of the same breed. Consequently, the conflict between labour and capital is made sense of in religious terms, as a re-staging of the eternal conflict between believers and heathens:

I know that you turn the individual, *the family* and society into 'swallowable morsels' through dismantling them. . . . Even if you seem to be *Suret-i Hak* [a person who appears to be religious and just], your *devilry* is gushing out from your *paças* [lower parts of the trouser]. [In you] I recognize the enemy of human, enemy of nature, *enemy of labor*, *enemy of faith* extortioner from [your] *lack of conscience* . . . no matter what [your] dress is. . . . I know the changing meaning of *Hak* [Right] and Justice in your language, and I don't

believe you. . . . In the building site of tomorrow, workers are digging your graves with their blue overalls. . . . Workers *without the trace of idols* on their foreheads. They recognize themselves by refusing to recognize you.<sup>16</sup>

(Mürsel Sönmez, *Selam* 4 February 1999, emphases added)

These imagined equivalences between the oppressors and the faithless, and between the moral and the oppressed, have slowly become common sense during the 1980s and the 1990s, at least for the (Islamic orthodox) Sünni population. For example, shantytown people interviewed during the election period have interpreted the closing down of religious schools as an attack against the education rights of the poor (*Milliyet* 23 January 1999). This imagined equivalence results from discursive play on the divided 'symbolic' of Turkish society, and also reinforces, even naturalizes, the *partial* correspondence between the fault lines in the symbolic (systems of signs dominated by the deployment of religious images, catch-phrases, rituals vs. those marked by the preponderance of non-religious ones) with clefts in the 'real' (the dominant bloc vs. the popular sectors). The above demonstrates both the continuity of Islamism with the Islamic tradition, where the oppressors are frequently imagined as heathens or hypocrite Muslims, and the deployment of aspects of this tradition with the particular aim of responding to capitalist modernity.

In addition, the Turkish phrases employed by the Islamists themselves create ambiguities. *Halk* (the people) is sometimes used as interchangeable with *millet*. Even though *millet* is generally translated as 'nation', in Islamist discourse it implies a community of believers within clearly defined administrative boundaries – a legacy of the Ottoman system based on the division between religious communities within the borders of the Empire. In other instances, the emancipation of labour unites with the emancipation of believers. The leader of the movement (Necmettin Erbakan) becomes an ordinary 'man who has devoted himself to *the liberation of his nation* of which he considers himself to be a part', as against 'those who establish a sultanate over *labor and freedom*' (İsmail Bakırhan, *Milli Gazete*, 25 March 1999, emphases added). The *millet* of Islamist discourse thus becomes an ambiguous, and therefore potentially contentious, term with multiple connotations, including nation, people, class and religious community. This further underlines how the populism of Islamic discourse is embedded in a religious framework.

Even though such a symbolic system imposes some consequential restrictions on the construction of the people (the exclusion of religious and sect<sup>17</sup> minorities from this construct), it is nevertheless not a deficient form of opposition when compared with older populisms (nationalist and socialist). The latter were more open to different sections of the subaltern in theory. But, when it came to the practical formation of counter-hegemony, leftists further excluded the (religious) sectors already excluded by the dominant (Western) interpretation of modernity, labelling them as obscurantists, reactionaries, etc. In an era when rationalism and Eurocentric developmentalism are on the retreat, religious populism clearly demonstrates its advantages over old-style

(secularist) socialism. Therefore, the moralist populism of Islamism has to be seen as a novel articulation, with its specific strengths and weaknesses, rather than as a deficient substitute for nationalism or socialism.

### *Intra-hegemonic struggle*

I noted above that the reduction of Islamist populism to *petit bourgeois* populism is another weakness of the (neo-Marxist) political economy approach. What the latter can predict is at most compassion towards working classes and the poor, and their passive inclusion in the movement, accompanied by resentment of conspicuous consumption and over-exploitation by the rich (Fischer 1982). Whereas the attitudes of one portion of the intelligentsia of the Islamist movement are exactly restricted to these points on matters concerning poverty, there is fierce debate among Islamists about where the poor and the rich stand in the movement and in Muslim life in general.

A frequent intellectual move among Islamists, which would be alien to a *petit bourgeois* movement, is the construction of the poor as the 'real' Muslims, and the opposition of their (instead of the middle classes') Islam to the Islam of the rich:

some [of the rich] are laicist/some Islamist/their worldviews irreconcilable/quite separate/but they are in alliance against the beggar/their attitudes [regarding the beggar] are just the same/some are drunkard f . . . ers [censure in text] some hajji. . . . And in fact, what goes along between them is not a religious fight. Only [a fight over] shares and profits. The commercial fight of this infidelesque materialism is executed through the abuse of the faith and religion of *we the poor*. . . . We the penniless are incorrigible before the end of time: we took religion and faith in earnest: *we are not joking, we really believed*.

(Murat Kapkiner, *Akit* 23 December 1999, emphases added)

Islamic practices and rituals are constructed as essential parts of the culture of the poor, distinguished from, and threatening, dominant culture:

We force life with our shoulders and with minds nourished in Kur'an courses, *teravih* prayers [communal prayers performed in the holy month of Ramadan], soccer games, Müslüm [Müslüm Gürses, a musician popular among the urban poor] concerts, and kung-fu salons. Nothing is able to deceive us. [W]ith our unending intelligence, with our spontaneous and untrained intelligence, we undermine 'the white mansions'. 'Civilization' is squirming on feather pillows. Squirming is the hand that is reaching out for our bread, milk, wheat, and even for our gullet.

(İdris Özyol,<sup>18</sup> *Yeni Şafak* 7 March 1999)

Radical papers contend that, even when the rich engage in Islamic rituals, they mutate religious meaning and form: 'Despite the mutant *iftar* [meal that breaks

one's fast] dinners of some communities and foundations, Ramadan continues with its *true meaning* among the people, among the poor, in iftar tents' (*Selam* January 1999, emphasis added).

Many Islamists, who do not want to see Islam as a poor people's movement, resist this strong resentment and class hatred. Islam, according to them, has to be the culture and civilization of the city centres, but 'today's Muslims are striving to spread religion from shantytowns, ghettos, villages and provinces to big centers' (Mehmet Sevket Eygi, *Milli Gazete* 30 January 1999). These Islamists of the 'big tradition' also believe that the poor are not responsible for their own condition (as opposed to the capitalist belief in individual success), so the non-poor are responsible for solving their problems. Nevertheless, this does not give the poor the right to dominate the Islamic movement, and 'provincialize' and *gecekondulaştırılmak* [transform into a shantytown movement] it. This ideological confrontation has its counterpart in cultural and political practice, as some Islamists organize in urban poor areas, while others construct Islamic residences aimed exclusively at the religious élite.

While the distaste for conspicuous consumption and glorification of the lifestyles of the poor have been noted by the political economy approach and interpreted as the reaction of a tradition-bound *petite bourgeoisie*, my data suggest that much more is at stake. In line with the hermeneutic tradition, we could assert that this critique arises from the meaning system itself. We see the irreducibility of this critique in its frequent attacks against a pure market system that corrupts Muslims' beliefs. The political economy approach is put into question here also following its own 'class' criteria. What we encounter in many Islamist intellectuals is not a glorification of the poor from a distance, but an identification with them. Furthermore, voices and activities of the 'poor' (or representatives of the poor) within the movement enrage the 'non-poor' of the movement. There is a class struggle *within*, not noted by those who reduce Islamism to *petit bourgeois* reaction, or *petit bourgeois* populism.

### From meaning construction to material confrontation

Do their critical takes on the political regime of Turkey lead Islamists to affirm, negotiate or confront capitalism? Various Islamist evaluations of the aspects of Turkish capitalism converge on some points, such as opposing interest and rent, objecting to monopoly capital and supporting KOBİs (small and medium-sized enterprises). Whereas these commonalities have led many scholars to portray a univocal Islamist stance on capitalism, I believe that Islamists' conflicts on several issues demand a typology differentiating between several strands. Risking over-simplification, we can divide the Islamist stance in Turkey into three categories: (1) proponents of a moral capitalism; (2) proponents of an alternative capitalism; (3) and those who morally oppose capitalism (henceforth-designated moral capitalists; alternative capitalists; moral anti-capitalists).<sup>19</sup>

*Moral capitalism*

Currently, this is the dominant economic ideology among the Islamists of Turkey. Proponents of moral capitalism believe in the virtues of the free market, but acknowledge the social problems it causes. Instead of laying the greatest emphasis on regulating or socializing the market, as Western social democrats do, they focus more on lifestyles and consumption patterns (like Islamists elsewhere). If the well-to-do fulfilled their religious duties of paying the *zekat* [alms] and avoiding luxury consumption, and valued communal solidarity above profit, some argue, Turkey's problems of unemployment and poverty would be largely solved (Tahsin Sinav, *Milli Gazete* 9 January 1999). Moral capitalists frequently encourage Islamist capitalists to prioritize religious/political tasks over expansion and profit. They harshly criticize the proponents of 'alternative capitalism', since these latter recommend that Islamic capital engage in relation with anti-Islamic and *zalim* (oppressive) forces (like the US and Israel), if it is so required by economic logic (Ahmet Varol, *Akit* 11 February 1999, criticizing Abdurrahman Dilipak). Alongside these religious/moral measures, moral capitalists also recognize the need for some redistributive mechanisms that will balance the goals of accumulation of capital and social justice.

The most important thing to be noted about advocates of moral capitalism is that they privilege morality, religion, community and *ummah* over economic prosperity and development, which makes them suspicious about the merits of free market economy, despite their allegiance to the latter *in principle*. They do not challenge the market, but are disturbed by the type of society and personality created by the market, which puts them in a state of ambivalence: they praise the market as the best economic option, yet curse it for its consequences.<sup>20</sup>

*Alternative capitalism*

Some Islamists have a vision of an economy which functions better than Turkish capitalism – the latter being an economic/political order based on quite a strong oligarchy of bureaucrats, generals and capitalists, an economy increasingly based more on rent and interest rather than production. This camp of Islamists envisions a more liberal capitalism, where bureaucrats and a few secular businessmen do not control all the economy. Even though their ideal state does not interfere much with the economy, the Muslim bourgeoisie itself is supposed to run the latter in a more solidaristic way. Despite the fact that this would imply caring more for the workers and lower classes, just as in 'moral capitalism', the logic behind this solidarity is expansion, profit and stronger competition with the global bourgeoisie, rather than social justice based on the principles of the Kur'an. Actually, when the issue at hand is economy, these people speak the language of impersonal market forces and cold rationality more than the spiritual language of moral capitalists. Religion and morality are seen under a positive light because it is believed that cadres moulded with Islam will be more efficient

than cadres who lack faith (quite a Protestant approach to religion). Less than surprisingly, most of the proponents of this model are Islamic businessmen and Islamic economists, though some of the prominent intellectuals of Islamism are also in this camp.

Alternative capitalists are very cautious about anti-Westernism. Ali Bayramoğlu, the president of MÜSİAD, warns the Muslim population that this is a 'war of brand names, before a war of civilizations'. In a recent popular programme broadcast on a secularist TV channel (Kanal D, Fatih Altaylı, *One on One 2* April 2001), Ali Bayramoğlu has gone as far as saying 'capital cannot be classified as pious and irreligious. The objective of capital is making profit.' This approach, playing down the symbolic differences between the religious and the irreligious, contradicts with the earlier practice of Islamic capital, which was itself accumulated by means of grand ideological promises. During the period when the presidents and organizers of religious joint-stock companies were demanding that religious people donate their savings, they used to promise them that there would be no exploitation in their firms, that they would not engage in types of business deemed illegal in Islamic law and that the growth of Islamic business associations would finally give birth to an Islamic society. The Islamic firms thus begotten could not live up to these ideals in later practice. First, some of them (such as the firms owned by Enver Ören, leader of the *Işıkçı* community) started making use of the interest banking system – to which they were supposed to provide an alternative via an Islamic banking system – in mediated ways. Then, the names of others got involved in large-scale frauds. What is more, almost all of them gradually gave up supporting the dreams of an Islamic society that would be totally different from capitalist society. When profit becomes the first and foremost aim, it becomes obligatory that one make peace with the system and try to ensure the best conditions for the proliferation of markets. This is the current inclination of religious businessmen and alternative capitalists, who have recently been discussing whether the label 'Islamist', with its connotations of social struggle and revolution, is really appropriate for the religious movement in Turkey.

Although the alternative capitalistic outlook is represented by quite a small number of people when compared to the moral capitalistic outlook, some of the writing on Islamism in Turkey has focused on the former, taking it as the real Islamic line. As a result, Islamism has been interpreted as the ideology of the rising provincial bourgeoisie (Şen 1995). The reason for this misplaced focus is the institutional strength of alternative capitalists: Islamic newspapers, even radical ones, get most of their financial support from Islamic businessmen, sources they cannot abandon given their already shaky position under the rule of a hostile state. In spite of this indirect control, Islamic papers and journals abound with criticisms of the liberalizing Muslim bourgeoisie and intellectuals, their growing disrespect for the rights of labour and the poor, and their increasing conspicuous consumption. However, the advocates of alternative capitalism have gathered enough institutional strength to disregard these criticisms and walk their own way. To the degree that this sub-current within Islamism



crystallizes into an independent line, it will be interesting to observe whether the rationalized religion of alternative capitalists will constitute a separate imaginary – as it might as well simply invigorate the reified capitalist imaginary through spiritual legitimacy.

### *Moral anti-capitalism*

The moral anti-capitalists may not number many, but they are still crucial, at least since they represent a perspective towards which moral capitalists might shift as their disillusionment with capitalism (and with the liberalizing Islamic party) grows. Moral anti-capitalists think that capitalism is a system that is, and definitely will be, incapable of fulfilling the basic (religiously/morally defined) human needs:

Is capitalism really suitable to *human creation* [*fitrat*]? Are the aliments and commodities that are produced now for people's needs, or for the profit of some? Are *equal sharing* and the protection of the oppressed among the goals of capitalism? . . . Capitalism, just like a one-eyed *deccal* [the Islamic equivalent of the Anti-Christ] *who sees only this world*, is successful in dragging people, but does not see that its end has come. . . . Everybody is obliged to see that moral approaches, which put matter in its proper place through seeing it as a means, which state that the aim of human life is the recognition and worship of Allah, will save humans from every kind of destruction and lack of satisfaction.

(Halil İbrahim Tütüncüoğlu, *Milli Gazete* 9 January 1999, emphases added)

In some, this anti-capitalist attitude is channelled by a patrimonial-étatist ideology, which dates from the Ottoman period. *Devlet Baba* [paternal state] has the moral duty to cleanse capital from the 'dirt, rust and theft' it has accumulated. Till the day it does so, capital is the *real* threat in Turkey. In others, we see a new-left, pro-civil society approach, including actions such as forcing capital to behave in moral and non-exploitative ways by organizing consumer associations. Still others list capital under the oppressive forces that are the enemy of Islam for good, and have to be swept away by using revolutionary measures. While it is possible that some of these discomforts with capitalism could be dealt with within the boundaries of an anti-monopolistic capitalism, it is highly likely that the majority of the moral drawbacks will persist as long as individual interest prevails in human relations.

What might be even more telling than the self-professed anti-capitalism of some Islamists is the way certain Islamists seem to articulate a strict anti-capitalism, and then shy away from it. One of the primary reasons for this undecided attitude, as mentioned above, is the financial ties of the Islamist movement with the rising provincial bourgeoisie. The following passage, problematic because of its incoherence, is cited here because it exemplifies this ambiguous anti-capitalist criticism:

I was seeing it in all its openness: Wherever there is money, there is solidarity, service (to religion and belief!), there is ‘*Huzur Islamda*’ [Peace is in Islam, a popular slogan of the 1980s and 1990s]. On the other hand there is, alongside the troubles of life, bread, shelter, wood and coal, the sincere torment of ‘Are we [the poor] considered Muslims? We, a handful of people, cannot come together’. . . . I won’t say that a capitalist has no religion and no belief, but this is certain: the people with money, no matter how oppositional their religion, sect, temperament, are in true alliance. [A complete alliance] against those without money, whatever the latter’s religion and belief. . . . We hope that [in the future] we can talk about sincere men of belief like Hulusi and Kemal, who are true believers and not [oppressive] wealthy men [the columnist has added the last sentence to the text as a footnote].

(Murat Kapkiner, *Akit* 23 December 1998)

The above hesitation and confusion in attacking capital, Muslim and ‘infidel’ alike, the ‘buts’, the cautions and finally, ‘exceptions’ added to the anti-capitalistic argument, are characteristic of more than a handful of Islamists. This structure of feelings against capital and capitalism can turn into a more thorough critique if pertinent political conditions and a fostering ideological climate arise.

The correct, moral stance towards capitalism is not only an issue debated among intellectuals. The commodification of human relations is a central concern for the readership of the Islamist press. Below are selections from a letter from a reader who is disturbed by the bourgeoisification of his father. He introduces the letter with certain *hadiths* (words of the prophet) sanctifying material pursuit, but then goes on to express his doubts about the nature of capitalist everyday life:

But since commercial life rests on competition it causes a boost in the person’s greed to earn. As a result of this [the person’s] observance of the boundaries of *helal* [religiously legitimate] and *haram* [religiously forbidden] decrease. . . . Before engaging in commercial life, my father was a man making efforts to serve Islam. Now he has become a man thinking about where to buy which products, how to pay his checks and bills, following money markets.

(*Akit* 6 May 1999)

The *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) columnist of the newspaper answers this letter by reconfirming the religiously legitimate nature of the pursuit of profit, underlining its proper forms. The anti-capitalist doubts in the letter are negated through the authority of a learned Muslim. In this letter, and in the columnist’s response to it, we see how reactions against commodification common in any setting are repeated and displaced in a particularly Muslim context. What we witness here is the friction between reified-rationalist and religious ways of imagining one’s relation with finance and money.<sup>21</sup>

Economic issues might in the near future become lines of demarcation among the Islamists. There are already some signs of such a development. Islamic holding company owners and managers have started to fight *publicly* for markets

(*Milliyet* 4 February 1999). Conflict between religious capital and religious labour unions is slowly starting to be added to this more publicized fight. Recently (autumn 2000), the religious workers of one of the major Islamic holdings (Yimpaş) went on strike. The administrators responded by bringing workers from another city. The local branch of Hak-İş, the confederation of religious workers, argued that the incoming workers were incited to attack the strikers, wounding several of them. As companies trusted in religious circles treat their workers just like any other capitalist company, over-exploiting them and violently breaking their strikes, there is a likelihood that more and more Islamists will agree with Murat Kapkırner quoted above: 'no matter how oppositional their religion . . . the people with money are in true alliance . . . against those without money'. To the degree that neo-liberal globalization proceeds by undermining local communities and moral codes in Turkey, forcing capitalists to act with strict competitive logic to the detriment of other motives, it is possible that certain borderline moral capitalists might join moral anti-capitalists as they lose hope of preserving any dignity under the sway of capital.

### **The Islamic ideal of justice and the critique of capitalism**

This section of the paper focuses on the ways justice is deployed in Islamic discourse, for justice is the positive content of the moral critique of capitalism. The Islamist alternative to capitalism is imagined on the basis of the ideal of justice. Turkish Islamists very frequently point out the imbalances of wealth (one of the primary indices they use in order to show the degree to which Turkey is an unjust society), and not only in articles or commentaries. 'Injustice' even becomes 'news', even on the front pages of their newspapers. As one might expect, they attribute this injustice to alienation from Islam. They further contend that only the charity of Islam keeps people from starvation in contemporary Turkey. All Islamists see justice not only as a good solution to the extreme inequalities created by the system, but also as the foundation stone of Islam. However, the ways Islamists situate justice in theology, and their specific takes on what justice is, vary considerably. It is through the documentation of these differences that I propose to lay bare the intra-hegemonic struggle within Islamism.

As mentioned above, the symbolic system has a life of its own. Though the suppression of the Islamic imaginary by the republic has radicalized Islam, certain inherited symbols have restricted the potentials for confrontation with the state. The 'circle of justice' and 'the paternal state', frequently deployed by Islamists, are primary examples of these conservative symbols inherited from the pre-republican past. The authors and politicians who emphasize the tradition of the Ottoman Empire in defining their ideal of justice refer to the state more than to religion. For example, some see a fair sharing of all resources as a requirement for a strong army, state and bureaucracy (Nazif Gürdoğan, *Yeni Şafak* 14 March 1999). This reading of justice is based on the notion of 'circle of justice' – central

to the rhetoric of state traditions of Near Eastern empires – which sees balance between social groups as the primary prop of state strength (İnalçık 1989). Alternatively, and more commonly, the idea of *Devlet Baba* ('the paternal state') is invoked, a catch phrase employed by all parties across the political spectrum, and one that is very widely accepted in public and entrenched in tradition. But, whereas conservative parties more generally make use of authoritarian connotations of this phrase (a father both provides and punishes), the Islamic party and its politicians emphasize the 'providing' dimension of being a father (Numan Kurtulmuş, the president of the Istanbul branch of the Virtue Party, *Milli Gazete* 28 January 1999). The people targeted by party leaders seem to recognize this role to some degree. A shantytown dweller interviewed during the election period, for instance, defines the party as 'the Paternal State in the shantytowns' to a journalist conducting research in poor neighbourhoods (*Mil-liyet* 22 January 1999).

However, most discourse on justice comes from Islamic sources rather than state ideologies. Based on theology and history, most Islamists assert that social justice is the dictate of religion. For some, justice is more pragmatic than an end in itself:

*Zekat* [alms] is a worship that removes all animosity toward property, consolidates respect of property and protects wealth. It is for this reason that our Prophet has ordered thus: 'Take your possessions within a fortress by giving *zekat*'. How tersely does this *hadith* point out the truth that class consciousness, likely to emerge in societies where rich and poor are not coalesced, can turn into anarchy and cause plunder.

(A. Rıza Demircan, *Akit* December 1998)

Yet, even when such pragmatism exists, the ultimate goal is creating a society without poor people:

Throughout history, in societies where Islam has been lived, social equilibrium has been obtained by *zekat* and *sadaka*. . . . Thanks to these financial worships, poverty has been abolished in the Islamic society, so much so that there have been times when there were no poor to receive *zekat*.

(Mustafa Keskin, *Cuma* 1–7 January 1999)

Whereas the former pragmatism and legitimation of inequality are intrinsic parts of the Islam propagated by the Turkish state, the latter vision (the will to build a society without poor people) is unique to Islamists. Some conservatives follow the interpretation of state Islam and believe that, since inequalities exist, they are God given (not to be challenged outside the boundaries of *zekat*), but radicals see these as a test which Allah puts Muslims through: a sin and an evil which they have to erase from the face of the earth.

The majority of Islamists foreground the needs of the poor and the needy when discussing social justice, rather than those of 'society' as a totality. In fact, according to a common interpretation, *zekat* is not charity, but a *return* of the things to which the poor have rights, as creatures of Allah: 'In the possessions

that Allah has given us, resides the right of others, the needy, the oppressed and all Muslim poor. Turning into a capitalist by piling wealth like Karun, doesn't become those who believe in Allah' (Ömer Serdaroğlu, *Akit* 5 January 1999). Islamists support their call for social justice also by using certain collectivist *ayets* (couplets of the Kur'an) and *hadiths* (sayings of the prophet) such as 'Muslims hold three things in common: water, herb, fire'. This *hadith* is interpreted to mean that believers should have collective ownership of the basic necessities of life.

When these abstract ideas are translated into social prescriptions, what is demanded is the sharing of property (not through state regulation, but through the consent of believers) until poverty disappears (Hami A. Doğan, *Cuma* 1-7 January 1999). More frequent is a vague portrayal of an Islamic society in contrast to capitalist society, without any elaborate models of an Islamic welfare state: 'The accumulation of wealth in one hand due to the structure of the capitalist system, oppresses the poor. . . . Would these happen if Islam had reigned? Islam regulates the distribution of wealth among people and prevents the formation of *uçurum* [precipice]' (Ömer Serdaroğlu, *Akit*).

### *The Just Order as an arrest of the floating signifier*

The Islamic discourse on justice (and the discourse on equality which is both its corollary and its presupposition), outlined above, can be seen as a relatively open text, the floating meaning of which is fixed in certain ways under certain situations. The *Just Order*, the socio-economic programme of the banned Welfare Party and the cornerstone of its propaganda, is a good model of this fixation. The *Just Order* promised a society free of interest, exploitation, monopolies, unemployment, a society which would be made possible through regulation of the market by the state and by 'communities of morality' formed by contract (a compromise between the ideal Islamic order outlined above and a classical welfare state). The *Just Order* was always encountered with suspicion among Islamists. Liberal, pro-capitalist Islamists opposed it fiercely, because of its utopian socialist character. The majority of Islamists praised it for its emphasis on justice, but raised doubts about its feasibility. Radicals saw it as just one of those examples of centrist party jargon, incorporating elements from the ideal Islamic order, but not expressing it publicly, out of fear of infuriating the state. The Virtue Party replaced the promise of the *Just Order* by the promise of free market economy and more transparent forms of privatization (*Milliyet* 5 March 1999). However, the party retained its moral populist discourse while working in the shantytowns and addressing unions. These tactical swings and uncertainties led many of the party's ideologues themselves to warn the party that the result would be a loss of mass support (A. Haydar Köksal, *Milli Gazete* 29 December 1998; Fahrettin Gün, *Milli Gazete* 12 April 1999). In the following, a columnist sharply critiques the post-28 February party:

When the Virtue Party lays claim to the spirit of Özal [former president, initiator of neo-liberalism in Turkey], it will have channeled *the strength and power it has taken from the ghettos*, to those [liberals] who have made our country into a land of ghettos. . . . The Özalist turn of the Virtue Party is a *treachery* against the tradition of ‘just order’. . . . The Virtue Party should leave the spirit of Ozalism and *return to the spirit of the millet*.

(Atilla Özdür, *Akit* 11 March 1999, emphases added)

While the increasing oppression of the regime and the pragmatism of the party have moved it away from even the restricted utopia of the *Just Order*, justice and equality continue to be points of concern in Islamism. The openness of Islamic discourse (and thus its potential for being fixed by models more egalitarian than that of the *Just Order*) on the issue at hand can be demonstrated by the following passage in which a columnist imagines the flow of consciousness of a worker listening to a sermon in a Friday communal prayer, during which the preacher points to the equality among worshippers in a mosque:

In the mosque they [the imagined worker’s rentier landlord, his boss, a boutique owner from the neighborhood and him, a foundry worker] all stood in the same rows, and ascended the heights of brotherhood through feeling the vanishing differences of *mevki* [post/class] and *makam* [rank]. But what can you do, the short moments found in the mosque passed away. . . . He believed that it was not that important to be equal in the mosque. Wasn’t the crucial thing equality outside the mosque? . . . Oh, one wished this brotherhood would never finish.

(Mehmet E. Kazıcı, *Akit* 30 March 1999)

This imaginary representation of the Islamic community is a lucid demonstration of the *radical imagination*. The justice that reigns in the imagined mosque can be found nowhere in the actual (contemporary or historical) Muslim community.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, this representation is neither a will to preserve existing Muslim communities (traditionalism), nor a desire to resurrect lost ones (essentialism). Indeed, this imagination is a shift in the traditional Islamic imaginary, which emphasizes the reproduction of existing relations among the *ummah* (Mardin 1991). The growing distance between the Islamic ‘imaginary’ (the image of a just and balanced community, in which inequality is restricted) and the Islamic ‘real’ (the intensifying unequal secular relations between believers) is bound to produce such shifts in the imaginary, which may lead to an Islamic meaning system with more emphasis on equality. However, for such imagination to become a social imaginary alternative to the traditional Islamic one, it has to be instituted as such – otherwise it is bound to remain as the whim of certain individuals. Yet, moral anti-capitalists are institutionally disadvantaged when compared with moral capitalists and alternative capitalists, who have, to a certain degree, been successful in instituting their interpretations of Islam.

## Conclusion

Ideational approaches are useful in helping us recognize that new religious movements are an attempt to find meaning and build a world, when the world can no longer be understood in the old (secularist and modernist) terms. In other words, these movements cannot be seen solely as responses to socio-economic dynamics – neither in a Marxist nor in a neo-functional (Robertson 1986) sense. However, they are weak in theorizing fundamental changes in meaning systems, since in the last analysis they take religions as essences ‘that are both exclusive of others and peculiar to themselves’ (Kepel 1994). They leave no space for imaginative shifts in the imaginary. Islamists’ debates over justice and capitalism clearly show that the meaning of Islam is always remaking itself through the conflict of *materially situated actors*. In analysing the role of Islamism in Turkey, ideational approaches are also undermined by the salience of class and political issues in Islamist discourse, while materialist approaches fail to appreciate properly the embeddedness of these issues in a moral and religious framework. The latter also overlook the fact that the religious meaning system itself, together with material divisions, might be a source for political and economic conflicts – as suggested by the above discussions on poverty and justice.

Castoriadis’ dynamic model of the imaginary makes it possible for research on religious movements to integrate meaning systems into a theory of religion without reducing them to social dynamics or making them static, all-explanatory tools. When the imaginative agency intervening in the tensions between (and within) the real and the symbolic registers of a society is neglected, the plurality of class dynamics within social movements, and active meaning creation by actors, risk being reduced to monolithic class forces or oppositions between cultural categories. In order to avoid these pitfalls, I draw attention to intersections of material and ideal frictions in a *radical imagination*. The analysis of the imaginative negotiation of these intersections provides a theoretical space for the portrayal of the novelty and specificity of religio-moral populism. Bringing imagination into the realm of social theorizing about religion allows us to interpret this populism’s peculiar articulation of class and popular discontent with (Islamically informed) moral criticism of modernity at yet another level.

## Postscript

The official pressure on the Islamist movement, culminating in the closing down of the Virtue Party in July 2001, has intensified the intra-hegemonic strife within the movement. The proponents of alternative capitalism have now split from the centre of the movement, and are forming a centre-right religious party that aims to be on good terms with the regime. Religious alternative capitalism is becoming an independent political choice for the first time in the history of Turkey. Moral anti-capitalists, on the other hand, have stuck to the centre party instead of forming a party of their own, because of their institutional impotency, as well

as their wish to enable the movement to survive its ongoing political crisis. The popular sectors that once supported Islamism might now support the new liberal religious party because of the military's and the bureaucracy's obstinacy in fighting against Islamist populism. There is a widespread popular belief that the dominant forces will never allow the Islamists to rule even when they are elected by democratic means (as was the case in the 1990s), but that they might permit liberal, capitalist religious leaders to work within the system. The leaders of the new party likewise believe that the people, bereft of radical transformatory options, will be content with seeing religious folk like themselves in economic and political power. The fulfilment of these popular hopes could bring about the end of an autonomous Islamic imaginary, and the ultimate cultural invasion of Turkey by the capitalist imaginary, now strengthened by the wave of new (individualist) spiritualities in the realm of religion. It remains to be seen whether the new party will be able to operationalize its alternative capitalist outlook as national politics and institute it as a popular imaginary, and whether the dominant bloc will permit such a new religious line to rule the country.

## Notes

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1 This is particularly the problem with the term 'revivalism', offered by scholars who justifiably want to transcend the ethnocentric assumptions of the term 'fundamentalism' (Esposito 1992): it assumes there is something out there to be revived.

2 Coding religious movements as the other of rationality is in itself problematic, since Islamists do not have a single stance on the issue. Some Islamists are staunch advocates of rationality, whereas others emphasize spiritual insight to the detriment of reason. Yet others argue that reason should be coupled with dogma for a religiously sound position. Those who label Islamism as pre-rational fail to notice these nuances since they conflate Western reason with reason in general, attributing irrationality to all that is outside Western reason. For a social analysis of reason in Islam, see Asad (1993).

3 The secularization thesis asserts that reason will eventually replace belief and separate it from the public sphere. For a critique of the thesis, see Stark (1999). More recent versions of the thesis retain the claim about the ultimate desacralization of public life, but admit that reason does not necessarily replace religion in the private realm (Sommerville 1998). The thesis encounters problems especially in the Third World, even in this restricted version.

4 Still, the interpretation of religion as 'the image of perfect justice', to the degree that it introduces religion as a meaning system, surpasses its limited interpretation as a tool of either the dominant or subjugated groups in society. If one drops Horkheimer's modernizationist assumptions, his insights into religion could be utilized in interpreting the case at hand.

5 Among explanations focusing on class, that of Michael Fischer is one of the most open to incorporating culture and symbols, even though he has a tendency to account for their effectiveness by resorting to class again. For a more cultural-oriented account by the same author, see Fischer and Abedi (1990).

6 Even though Weber's (1963) characterization of Islam as the religion of warriors



immersed in conspicuous consumption recognizes variation of Islam by class, it ignores historical variation, and contestation of meaning in given historical periods.

7 Castoriadis notes that individual imagination can have such an impact only in rare instances. Whereas he uses the term 'radical imagination' to refer both to the radical social imaginary and to individual imagination, I use it to refer only to the second, in order to emphasize individual imagination and open up theoretical space for the agency of Islamist actors.

8 I partially owe this use of Castoriadis to Şerif Mardin (1991). I depart from Mardin's depiction of religious politics in that I look not only at the friction between the republican imaginary and the Islamic imaginary, but also at the friction between the Islamist imaginary and Islamist practice.

9 Of course such separation is never clear-cut, and there are no objective criteria to determine the exact lines of demarcation between the dominant bloc and the subordinate sectors. As a matter of fact, the lines are drawn by events and discourses.

10 Religion or culture of the masses is frequently contrasted with those of the élite (Lanternari 1963; Ginzburg 1980). Even though this approach is more prominent in the study of non-modern settings, some scholars have applied this dichotomization to analyse contemporary cases (Echghi 1980). Due to the influence of mass education, mass media and the diffusion of other ideological apparatuses, it is very difficult to maintain the idea that there can be a clear distinction between these two spheres. Some contend, in the case of Turkey, that, even though the republican regime produced a gap between the discourses and ideologies of the élite and those of the masses, cultural and ideological exchange (and even political co-operation) between the two have never really stopped (Sakallıoğlu 1996).

11 Further research is needed to find out how the ambiguities and tensions analysed throughout this paper are handled in the daily collective readings of the Islamist print media.

12 For the religious communities in Turkey, see Çakır (1990).

13 For the party before the 1980s, see Toprak (1981) and Ağaogulları (1982). For the post-1980 party, see Güllap (1999) and Akdoğan (2000).

14 *Selam*, a weekly paper analysed in this article, was one of the publications that suffered from the coup. The paper was banned and some of its contributors were arrested on the basis of suspect accusations.

15 An important portion of Fethullah Gülen cadres in state institutions have been liquidated since the coup in 1997. The dominant sectors' relations with the community have been worsening since then, though recently there are some signs of betterment.

16 This quotation is also telling in terms of the following passages of this paper: the Islam of the subaltern as opposed to the Islam of the élite and the struggle over the meaning of justice within the Islamist movement.

17 In a Turkish population of 75 million, there is a heterodox Muslim population (Alevites) who number between 7 million and 25 million (estimations vary dramatically due to various ideological, political and cultural factors). The Islamist movement is not successful in organizing this population. To the contrary, the Alevite sectors of society fiercely oppose Islamism because they believe that this movement threatens their right to existence.

18 İdris Özyol is a popular essayist with a young audience, who identifies with those he calls 'black kids' – a metaphor he uses for people of different oppressed groups – and writes his pieces from this standpoint.

19 It should be noted that most Islamists perceive themselves as anti-capitalist. Yet this implies only being against monopoly capitalism, a point that brings them all together, as we have noted above.

20 While our characterization of the centre of the Islamist movement in this manner is quite similar to the political economy characterization of Islamism in general as '*petit bourgeois critique*', we want to emphasize that the meaning system plays a crucial role here. Being a 'moral capitalist' is not simply the dictate of one's class position. If this were

so, the moral dimension of this socio-economic critique would never lead one to suspect the market.

21 Unfortunately, due to the nature of the data used in this paper, we cannot know to what degree the reader accepts the conformist solution offered by the columnist.

22 Even during the *Asr-ı Saadet* – the Golden Age of Islam, the times of the Prophet and the four Caliphates – inequalities and oppressive relations (such as slavery) persisted. Islamists believe that these would gradually wither away through the moral work of the believers if it were not for the Umayyad counter-revolution.

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