

THE APPEAL OF ISLAMIC POLITICS: Ritual and Dialogue in a Poor District of Turkey

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The author explores the reasons underlying the growing effectiveness of Islamic movements by studying ethnographically the interaction between the religious movement and the people in a squatter district of Istanbul, Turkey. The empirical analysis examines how the state and the Islamists impact the lives of the residents, and how secularizing and ritualizing interventions are incorporated and resisted. These interventions and the resulting resistance generate hybrid subjects who embody traces of many conflicting discourses and practices. The Islamist party is widely supported, not because it expresses an Islamic essence or enacts strategic framing, but because it is able to reflect and refract the dialogic religious field produced by the interactions between the residents, the state, and Islamism.

Turkey, being the sole Muslim nation at the door of the European Union, is frequently the center of international public attention. It has become the topic of lively debates because of the complex roles it has assumed in the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. Inasmuch as a center-right party with Islamic roots is now in government, it has become all the more urgent to have a deeper understanding of the religious movement in Turkey. In this article, I propose to account for the increasing appeal of Islamic movements in Turkey by studying ethnographically the interaction between Islamism, the secular state, and the people in a specific location—Sultanbeyli (a squatter district in Istanbul).

While some scholars have focused on Islamic movements, organizations, and institutions, and others have studied lived Islam, there is only a meager body of scholars that looks at the *interaction* between religious movements and Islam as lived by the people. This lack of focus on the interaction between religious movements and everyday religion has resulted in the perpetuation of certain stereotypes. Many scholars take what can be called a “culturalist” position and base their claims concerning the popular support of religious movements on assumptions about the persistence of traditional religions and the distinctiveness of religious traditions (Lewis 1993; Huntington 1996). Consequently, some take religious movements as natural derivatives of popular religiosity (Nasr 1998).

Others who have recognized that contemporary Islamic movements incorporate many modern elements have accounted for their popularity by pointing to institutional,

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conjunctural, and socioeconomic factors (Keddie 1991; Zubaida 2000). While this alternative literature has contributed to our understanding of Islamism, it has gone to the other extreme of neglecting the role of belief and ritual in these movements. This article attempts to unpack the complexities of this role by looking at the interaction between religion as lived by the people and religion as formulated by movement and party activists.¹

Scholars have recently applied social movement theories to the study of Islamism to make up for the shortcomings of the established approaches and their lack of focus on the agency of religious activists (Wickham 2002). Even though this paradigmatic shift in Islamic studies has brought to the fore the agency of the movement elite, it has left the agency of the followers² unearthed. I argue that this has to do with social movement theory's reliance on frame analysis in its approach to culture.

The dialogic perspective (Bakhtin 1981; Gardiner 1992; Steinberg 1999) I take here differs from the framing perspective (Snow and Benford 1992), which pays scant attention to the agency of followers in the context of other movements as well. Frame analysts have examined the interaction of official culture with social movement culture (Noakes 2000), as well as the interaction between frames of movements and countermovements (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). Yet, as critiques have pointed out, the general tendency in the literature has been to assume that the relation between activists and ordinary people is top-down rather than fully interactive (Adams 2000). This article, by contrast, will underline the importance of interactions between activists, representatives of the state, followers, and non-Islamists, and emphasize that movement culture is constructed through this interaction.

I argue that the Islamist party³ in Sultanbeyli is widely supported because it is able to "reflect and refract" the dialogic religious field produced by interactions between ordinary believers,⁴ the secular state, and Islamism. These interactions create a political field in which the traditional and the modern, the religious and the secular, mutate in unexpected ways and produce hybrid⁵ positions. By "reflect and refract," I mean that the Islamist party reproduces the hybridity of this religious field in its discourse, practices, and organization while, at the same time, the party transforms this field and intervenes in it. In the end, Islamists are able to both thoroughly transform everyday religious life and hold municipal power.

Turkey's distinctiveness lies in the century-old attempts of its ruling elite to marginalize the Islamic vestiges of an empire (the Ottoman Empire), and to separate politics from religion (Mardin 1971). Even though other Muslim countries such as Algeria, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria have also undergone secularizing projects at some point in their histories, none of these has been as far ranging and persistent as the one in Turkey. Therefore, Western governments, particularly the United States, promote Turkey as a secular model for other Muslim countries and a bulwark against Islamic revivalism (Davison 1998:11; Esposito 2000). Western social scientists and Turkey's rulers also present Turkey as an exemplary case of the passing of "traditional society" (Lerner 1967). The rise of Islamism in Turkey is all the more puzzling in light of these political and scholarly expectations.

ISLAMISM AND POPULAR SUPPORT

Most works on the urban poor's support for Islamism have problematically assumed that this popular sympathy can be traced back to either the traditionalism or the monolithic and antic cosmopolitan modernism prevalent among the poor (Arjomand 1988:91–92, 96; Hefner 2001:503–504). Scholars who take the social movement theory approach to Islamism have gone beyond questions of modernity and tradition to focus on how activists actually deploy culture in mobilizing people (Wiktorowicz 2004). However, following the dominant currents in social movement scholarship, they have focused on the agency of activists and ignored the agency of followers. This has to do with the way social movement theory takes activists as the main producers of meaning in social movements (Benford and Snow 2000; Rohlinger 2002). Even though some frame analysts' theoretical statements emphasize the interaction between activists and “recruits” or “audiences” (Benford and Hunt 1992:48–49; Benford 1993:200), their analyses end up privileging the agency of activists.

My approach to movement culture differs from that of framing theorists in that it focuses on the dialogue between activists, followers, contenders, and authorities, instead of analyzing how activists strategically package their appeal to make it “resonate” with popular expectations. While other scholars have criticized the framing perspective for its instrumentalism and lack of dynamism (Hart 1996; Munson 2001), I emphasize that framing suffers from a lack of focus on the agency of followers and ordinary people, who are generally taken as receptive rather than creative. To shed light on this creative process, I study how “top” and “bottom” interact to constitute a specific movement culture.

To examine Islamists' appeal in a Turkish urban district, I employ a “dialogic analysis” of ritualization. Dialogic analysis is the study of discourse as the interactive product of conflictive communication (“dialogue”), with a focus on the social context of utterances, their use for competing parties, and traces of others' discourses in one's own (Bakhtin 1981; Wertsch 1991; Steinberg 1998; Nielsen 2002). Its emphasis on the unfinished and fragmented nature of discourse (Gardiner and Bell 1998) differentiates the dialogic approach from culturalist and framing approaches to meaning. The dialogic perspective also differs from the framing perspective by focusing on the mutual transformations of contending parties rather than on how one of them succeeds through packaging its demands in the most resonant way.

The dialogic perspective enables us to focus on a multiplicity of voices within the religious field, rather than forcing us to carry out a bipolar analysis that sharply distinguishes the West from the East, tradition from modernity, the Islamists from the secular state, as culturalists do. It reveals how words such as “religion” and “Islam” gain different meanings when used in different contexts and/or by different actors. Studying the variety of voices involved in religious discourse in Turkey allows us to see how ordinary believers, different sorts of Islamists, and Islamist party leaders construct “Islam” differently. It also shows how the interaction between these different constructions produces an unstable, fragmented, and always-unfinished religious field. The Islamist party thrives not because of a coherent sense of religion that is forged against an equally coherent secularism or

Westernism, as culturalist scholars would have it, but instead, because of its moves in this fragmented religious field.

Nevertheless, the dialogic perspective is insufficient for revealing all the dynamic aspects of religion. In my approach to everyday religion, I use Catherine Bell's (1992) conceptualization of "ritualization" to scrutinize the practical dimension of religion, which is as vital to Islamist popularity as the discursive dimension, yet is inaccessible in its entirety through a dialogic approach. Bell defines ritualization as the way in which certain social actions (the "sacred") are strategically distinguished from other actions (the "profane"). Like Bell, I base my discussion of religion on practice theory as developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Practice theory focuses mostly on how power is exercised, and defines this as the core element of religious life. Ritualization, as understood within this practice theory framework, is a set of culturally and temporally specific strategies for privileging some acts over others, and consequently, for empowering certain actors with respect to others.

According to practice theory, ritual behavior is not an essentially separate way of acting, as classical sociologists and anthropologists have assumed (Durkheim 1915). Ritualized activities constitute themselves as different from and in contrast to other activities only because of *strategic interventions*, which are handled as levels of ritualization in the following analyses.⁶ These interventions are inevitably exercises of power through which hierarchies are established and disestablished. Whatever the intention, their primary social effect is the production and reproduction of various forms of inequality.⁷ This conceptualization of ritual is useful when distinctions between ritual and nonritual activities often shift as a result of interventions by Islamists and local representatives of the state. The negotiation of these shifts, in turn, is central to Islamist appeal.

The way Islamism functions in everyday life, through both ritual and ideology, calls for the combination of the frameworks introduced above (dialogism and ritualization). This requires that we revise the dialogic framework, which tends to focus more on discourse than practice, by analyzing ritual with dialogic lenses. The emphasis of discourse analysis is on linguistic/cognitive battles (Steinberg 1993), while practice theory draws our attention to battles over everyday practices. Discourse analysts realize that linguistic battles are a matter of practice (especially in cases of collective action), but they lay emphasis on language and discourse as the vehicles of symbolic domination rather than ritual, the body, and everyday practices (Steinberg 1994). I argue that a full understanding of religious politics is possible only through the integration of all these dimensions—discourse, ritual, and everyday practices—in our analyses.

On the other hand, the conflictive way in which religious interventions are experienced on the ground compels us to look at the different voices that ritualization encounters, rather than focus mostly on ritualizing activities, as Bell does. Ritualization cannot be taken as a monolithic process through which Islamists expand the scope of ritual activity. It is a dynamic process in which interventions are resisted and adopted. I hold that dialogue is the process through which ritualization is restricted and absorbed into the social fabric. Practice theory in general, and Bell's conceptualization of ritual in particular, marginalize the impact of voice, discourse, and resistance to power in social life (Bell

1992:93). The analyses below, however, will show that these are integral to the workings of power and to Islamist popularity in Sultanbeyli. Hence, the study of ritualization can benefit from a dialogic perspective, and dialogic analysis will gain from being extended to the scrutiny of ritual.

SETTING AND METHODS

Sultanbeyli, with its population of 200,000, is the poorest district in Istanbul and is also the district with the highest number of Islamist party votes. Located on the outskirts of the city, Sultanbeyli was a village of 3,700 people before 1985, but had become a district of 80,000 by 1989. This has mostly been an informal development, and most of the buildings are still unregistered (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001). Together with its political affiliation, the district's informal growth has made it a frequent target of secularist policy and criticism.

Tensions between the state and the Islamists have frequently led to spectacular quarrels between the elected municipality of Sultanbeyli, the appointed secularist local government, and the secularist military. After the anti-Islamist military intervention of 1997, however, activists have toned down public criticism. The intervention, which repressed Islamic organizations and parties nationwide, also decreased activities in this particular district and closed down some sites of agitation, such as religious teahouses and youth organizations. These tensions between the Islamists and the state make the district a suitable case for studying the influence of politics at the everyday level.

The material presented here comes mainly from five sources: the local municipality, the local headquarters of the Islamist party, mosques, coffeehouses and religious teahouses, and educational institutions in the district. Through participant observation at these sites from the summer of 2000 to the summer of 2002, I collected material on religious beliefs, rituals, and interactions between Islamic activists, the local representatives of the state, and the people.

I studied the mosques of the district center and peripheral neighborhoods through regularly attending Friday sermons in different mosques and also observing regular community prayer services, which are held five times a day. In addition, I focused on coffeehouses and religious teahouses, where unemployed men spend their days, and the employed come to socialize after they return home from work. In Sultanbeyli, religious men distinguish the places they hang out by establishing teahouses where there is no gambling, unlike regular coffeehouses. At religious teahouses, I analyzed how the men of the district spent their daily lives, followed Islamist publications, and watched television. In the municipality and the local Islamist party headquarters, I studied everyday interactions between Islamist functionaries and the people. I taught at a primary public school within the borders of the district, which enabled me to detect on the ground how the administration and the teachers in this poor neighborhood tried to discipline students and parents into modernized people and how the residents resisted their project. I also analyzed institutions of religious education. In *İmam*-Preacher schools (state-sponsored, theological high schools), Kur'an⁸ schools (a rough equivalent of Sunday schools), and

medreses (traditional equivalents of theology faculties), I studied the strategies used in socializing with religious people.

I supplemented this ethnographic experience with 50 semistructured, in-depth interviews, which mostly lasted one to one-and-a-half hours, where I asked 56 interviewees about life in the district, interpretation of religion, and opinions on local and national politics. Because of the highly segregated life among the religious residents, I could have meaningful access only to the male half of the district as a male researcher. As a result, I was limited to three formal interviews with women. The interviewees were chosen through snowball sampling. Both individual and group interviews were conducted. The individual interviews (a total of 47) consisted of talks with 11 small merchants and shopkeepers, 16 workers, 2 retired workers, 3 housewives, an *imam* (prayer leader), 2 religion teachers, 3 primary school teachers, 3 real estate dealers, 3 politicians, and 3 functionaries from the municipality. Of the three group interviews, two were with construction workers (in groups of two and three) and the other was with four recent graduates of Sultanbeyli's *İmam*-Preacher school.

GROUND SHARED BY THE STATE AND ORDINARY BELIEVERS

In spite of models emphasizing the schism between religious society and the secularist state in Turkey (Yavuz 2003), the state and its ideological apparatuses are crucial in expressing the desires of religious people. Based on an analysis of education, I show here how the presence of the state in the religious field results in a degree of religious legitimacy.

In 1923, the Turkish state began a program of secularist and nationalist indoctrination through education. As democratization started in the mid-1940s, however, various agencies of the state incorporated increasingly religious elements to sustain legitimacy, without dismantling the larger secularist and nationalist framework. The military intervention of 1980 institutionalized religion in a way that expanded the legitimacy of the modern Turkish regime. Standard religion lessons were introduced to the curriculum of public education. Certain religious communities (*Fethullahçıs* and *Süleymançıs*) gained public visibility under the protection of the military. The constitution drafted after the military intervention included, for the first time, religious references in the definition of Turkishness. These moves aimed to unite the rulers and the religious masses against the rising leftist tide. This religious shift bred unintended consequences in educational practice. In 2002, the bulk of public education was still based on secularist and nationalist premises, as intended, but the state had incorporated religious elements in its ongoing attempts to maintain legitimacy.

The combined effect of the Turkish state's overall modernism and its recent religious shift is apparent in Sultanbeyli. Both the expectation of universal public education and the extraordinary value attributed to education among the inhabitants of Sultanbeyli, which I observed during daily conversations in coffeehouses, schools, and teahouses, attested to the partial success of the modernizing project among religious squatters. However, the religious bent given to the expectation and value of education demonstrate

how communal culture at the ground level is a composite of the Islamic and the modern. Most importantly, religious residents of Sultanbeyli think that a standard religious education administered by the state would ensure the unity of the nation. This feeling was succinctly expressed by Rasim,⁹ a retired construction worker and a regular of the central religious teahouse:

I wish [the state] would at least teach religion through the television, telling us what is right and what is wrong. But it doesn't do that. As a result, different religious communities emerge which divide the nation. The state has increased compulsory education to eight years, but it doesn't tell what Islam is. If the state doesn't teach religion, there will be many who will make people stray away from the right path.

What is remarkable about Rasim's position (which was shared by many religious squatters) is the expectation of a singular interpretation of religion at the national level. Before modern influences and nationalism, it was quite natural for there to be competing and coexisting interpretations and communities. Now, various sectors of the religious population (ranging from Islamists to traditionalists) see the plurality of religion as a divisive force that afflicts the nation.

Kur'an schools are one of the best sites to observe the hybridization of the project of modernity. These schools, where children memorize parts of the Kur'an and learn the basic principles of Islam, are the most widespread institutions of education in Sultanbeyli. They reach even the families that shun public education because of its costs and/or its secularism. The residents have mostly funded and established these schools themselves. Although the omnipresence of Kur'an schools could be read as the result of a civil religious action, the popular expectation that the state should support, fund, and ultimately open these schools suggests that even this apparent civil action is hardly evidence of a rift with statist culture. My observation of conversations in coffeehouses and teahouses, as well as the interviews I conducted, revealed that most people still expect religious education from the state, despite what they perceive to be the negative influence of the secularist state on Islam. When it is taken into account that providing religious education was not the duty of the state in the (pre-19th century) Ottoman Empire (Kazamias 1966), it can be concluded that statism in the religious realm, which is popular among the religious population, is not the result of some civilizational (Islamic) essence. It is, rather, the outcome of the modern invasion of cultural and educational areas by the state. This invasion has become "hegemonic," that is, accepted as natural by the people (Gramsci 1971).

Through these mechanisms, the Turkish state incorporates religious elements and thereby establishes its legitimacy in the religious realm. However, this legitimacy is not all consuming: Islamism expands its influence through both producing and incorporating religious elements that the state does not thoroughly engage, except through repression (e.g., the use of Islamic symbols in everyday life, the regular daily prayer, Kur'an reading groups, the Islamic veil, contemporary Islamic thought, and religious orders). The Turkish state has created the conditions for political and literalist interpretations of Islam by educating the people, increasing literacy, politicizing every aspect of life, and emphasizing reason in education. Through its modernization project, it has also created hybrid

citizens who combine elements of traditional Islamic and modern Western cultures. These people aspire to a deeply pious life permeated by Islamic rituals, language, and symbols, and wish to strengthen Islamic culture against what is perceived as Western encroachment. They also, however, value education, reason, freedom, and political involvement. Without these transformations, the specific types of Islamism analyzed below would not be able to find any adherents. Furthermore, by tending to withdraw from the religious realm after the military intervention of 1997, the state left a wider space to maneuver for groups that have the potential to capitalize on these hybrid cultural elements. As the military and the courts have made an antireligious shift, perceiving Islamism as more dangerous than leftist politics, Islamists have made popular inroads by appealing to increased religious expectations and grievances.

ISLAMIST INTERVENTIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Islamists, Traditionalists, and Secularists in Sultanbeyli

In this section, I sketch the boundaries of, and the actors and conflicts in, Sultanbeyli's religious field, as well as connections within Turkey and the broader Muslim world. Islamism—the main oppositional ideology in Sultanbeyli, like most other poor regions of the Muslim world—was born in the late 19th century as a response to secularist westernizing projects and traditionalist religious opposition. From the 19th century on, “secularists” in Turkey sought to restrict Islam to the private sphere, narrowly defined.¹⁰ “Traditionalist” religious opposition was characterized by the attempt to preserve the symbols and practices of Islam against this project. I define “Islamism” as the project which went beyond both secularism and traditionalism by aiming to restructure society *systematically* along Islamic lines. Seeking a systematic alternative to the secularist project in different spheres of life necessitated a rethinking and redefinition of Islamic symbols and practices, rather than their mere “preservation.”

The traditionalist opposition against modernization, spearheaded by the Islamic scholars (*ulema*) and mystic leaders (*şeyhs* or *meşayih*), came to be one of the main targets of Islamism. As a reaction to traditionalism, which was based on the apparent avoidance of every aspect of modern technology, institutions, and culture, Islamists attempted to develop a new understanding of Islam that could counter the West and local westernizers by selectively adopting and adapting Western institutions and technologies.

The resulting Islamist narrative (henceforth called “mainstream Islamism”), which eventually became more influential than other Islam-inspired politics, holds that modernization in the Middle East is forced. This forced modernization has, it is argued, morally corrupted Muslim societies and caused them to remain “backward.” Religion, by contrast, is the only authentic source that has resisted corruption. Mainstream Islamists believe that the only solution against forced modernization is a return to pre-Western religious civilization. The models they aspire to are the Muslim empires of the past.

Mainstream Islamists differ sharply from traditionalists in their openly political stance and their acceptance of such modern ideas as development and progress (as exemplified by frequent allusions to the metaphor of backwardness). Though main-

stream Islamism is under the influence of (scholarly and mystic) traditionalists, one can also discern many modern influences that have shaped it. The most blatant example of modernity is the notion that activists, intellectuals, and politicians can and should unite to change the flow of history and institute a better society. In Turkey, this ideological line was expressed most trenchantly by Sadık Albayrak (1977), a journalist and a longtime ideologue of the Islamist party. Hasan al-Banna's (founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood) writings have also been influential in the development and spread of mainstream Islamism in Turkey and elsewhere.

"Radical Islamism," the ideology of organizations such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood under the leadership of Sayyid Qutb, has emerged as a critic of the civilizational and conservative tendencies of mainstream Islamism. Radical Islamism demands a return, not to Islamic civilization, but instead to the Golden Age of Islam (*Asr-ı Saadet*, the time of the Prophet and the four caliphs), when a revolutionary community (with negligible class differences) is believed to have prevailed (Qutb 1993).¹¹

Since Islamism is generally seen as an undifferentiated whole in the West, we need to mark further the differences between mainstream and radical Islamism. Mainstream Islamism emphasizes the family, morality, and social harmony over wholesale political and economic transformation. Yet, mainstream Islamists do not deny the necessity of such change, and hold that working on morality without disrupting social harmony will eventually bring about the demise of modern regimes. The primary concern of radical Islamists, however, is a total change in the systems of the Middle East, all of which they deem un-Islamic. They openly pronounce that such change might involve sustained conflict and even revolution.¹²

Mainstream Islamists base their legitimacy on sources such as Islamic jurisprudence, while the radicals frequently speak the language of modernity (primarily based on the terminology of the natural and social sciences) intermixed with religious language. Interestingly enough, a highly selective reading of modern leftist discourses has shaped radical Islamism's criticism of other Islamic positions. Mainstream Islamists, including those in Turkey, have also borrowed ideological themes and tactics from leftists. However, this has occurred mostly because of debates about the Left initiated by radical Islamists, rather than through primary contact with the Left. Actually, mainstream Islamists think that all modern values and perspectives have a very strong destructive potential that requires cautious distance—an attitude that differentiates them from radicals.

Even though most mainstream Islamist organizations elsewhere propagate antimystic messages, these are dampened among the mainstream Islamists of Turkey because of the strong tradition of mysticism in the country. Nevertheless, radicals are still fiercely against traditional mysticism (*sufism*) and mystic religious orders. Radicals are also most critical of the *ulema* (religious scholars), whom they blame for the stagnation of Islam, whereas mainstream Islamists only partially criticize them and seek to incorporate them into their movements. Moreover, the mainstream Islamists in Turkey see themselves as the inheritors of the recently demised Ottoman Empire, which leads them to publicly generate a strong nostalgia for this empire. They thereby emphasize the civilization

created by Muslim empires much more than mainstream Islamists elsewhere. Radicals, however, distance themselves from the Ottoman Empire, where religion was subordinated to the state. In Turkey, radical Islamists are concentrated in small political groups, publishing houses, and journals such as *İBDA-C*, *Selam-Tevhid*, *Haksöz*, and *Umran*. Mainstream Islamists have generally organized around the Islamist party, which at one time had several million members.

The position of the Islamist party, though apparently mainstream, is an unstable articulation of these different strands. This party has co-opted many prestigious traditionalist mystics and religious scholars (*şeyhs* and *ulema*). However, the Islamist agenda of the party matured after the death of a *şeyh* (Mehmed Zahid Kotku) who had considerable influence over the top leaders. Especially during its radicalization in the 1980s and early 1990s, the party loosened its ties with the mystic orders, which usually shy away from attacking the establishment, and built more ties with radicals. It also absorbed radical Islamist cadres, discourses, and tactics (e.g., the incorporation of the radical intellectual *Girişim* circle).

Mainstream Islamism is popular among the *imams*, merchants, shopkeepers (groups among which traditionalism also finds adherents), and top-ranking Islamist party officials of Sultanbeyli. It is also the main tendency among the columnists and editors of the newspapers (*Akit*, *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Şafak*¹³) they follow. Radical Islamism is mainly the ideology of young graduates of theology faculties and *İmam*-Preacher schools. Some of these graduates are public school teachers, some work in the local municipality, and some are unemployed. Most of them are either members of fringe groups or had relations with them in their school years. Radical Islamist ideas are also circulated in the district through political magazines and a few exceptional columnists in the popular Islamist newspapers. As distinct from countries like Egypt, radical Islamism does not find many advocates among the urban poor. The urban poor of the district are mostly members of the Islamist party and of mystic orders.

In Sultanbeyli, mainstream and radical Islamists compete with each other and with traditionalists in the quest to shape the religious understanding and practices of ordinary residents. Their attempts at transformation are negotiated by ordinary people who have access to secularist discourse, along with traditionalist discourse. The residents are familiar with secularist discourse not only because of compulsory secularist education: the appointed local government, secularist women's organizations, and the local headquarters of the Republican People's Party (the political party that founded the republic) actively propagate a rigid understanding of secularism in the district. This partially civil and hegemonic existence of secularism, even in quite religious districts like Sultanbeyli, differentiates Turkey from other Muslim countries in which secularism is almost exclusively an official ideology, and pushes Islamists to engage in a more exchanging and dialogic relation with non-Islamic discourses.

We can understand how Islamism works in Sultanbeyli by looking at its tensions with (religious) common sense and common usage, as well as with the religious or non-religious positions summarized above. There are several strategies through which the religious movement attempts to transform everyday life. I name four of these ritualiza-

tion strategies as ritual expansion, ritual transformation, ritual contentism, and ritual purification.

Ritual Expansion

“Ritual expansion” is the process by which religious ritual comes to occupy a greater place in everyday life. A certain degree of seemingly spontaneous ritual expansion coexists with Islamist ritual expansion. Sultanbeyli is a district populated by migrants from different regions of Turkey. The normalized intensity of rituals in one’s hometown is no longer “normal,” since the latter is yet to be defined in this new location. The crucial questions are: Which practices will define a standard (religious) Muslim in this district? Is fasting sufficient to be called a Muslim? Or does one have to pray regularly? Is praying in the privacy of one’s home good enough, or should one definitely go to the mosque (in addition to the Friday prayer, which Sunni Muslims are obligated to pray as a community)? Practices such as fasting during Ramadan are common to almost all Sunnis from the popular classes; however, to cite one salient distinction, praying regularly is restricted to more pious regions of Turkey. As immigrants from more pious regions constitute a majority in Sultanbeyli, praying regularly has tended to become the norm. Community pressure pushes people to go regularly to the mosque. Yielding to such pressure is very common among individuals who had not been regularly praying before coming to Sultanbeyli. Lütfü, a middle-aged petty tradesman, recounts his own transformation as follows:

When I was in Levent [a central district of Istanbul], I used to play cards, smoke, and stay at the coffeehouse till midnight. But I haven’t been playing cards since I moved here because there isn’t that kind of environment. [Here] I look around only to see that two of my friends go to the mosque. I say to myself, “This is also our duty anyhow,” and I take the ablution and go to the mosque.

Distinction (Bourdieu 1984) in everyday life is another dimension of ritual expansion. Religious activists distinguish themselves from the general population through religious knowledge, symbols, and practice, thereby making the latter a center of attraction among the squatters. Many religious people in Sultanbeyli recognize the hierarchy arising from the difference in religious knowledge and practice as the most fundamental hierarchy. However, they generally seem content with their place in the religious hierarchy, making themselves and others believe they are unable, either intellectually or economically, to understand and apply higher religious education. Lütfü (the petty tradesman) resorts to this tactic against his older brother, a devoted Islamist who was getting ready to leave Turkey to start a business in Pakistan while I was in the neighborhood:

If the person wants to educate himself, I mean if he has sufficient capacity and brainpower, he should go and read, and delve into the depths of Islam. But we are content with [what we do]. We know Allah, we know our Prophet, we pray, we fast, and we give our alms. . . . [Doing more] is beyond our brainpower and economic resources.

Through a dialogic move, Lütfü recognizes the legitimacy of Islamist discourse, repeats its words, but shifts their meaning and carves out a space against Islamism by doing so. He thereby redefines religious learning by rejecting its transformation into a religious duty (its ritualization) and by narrowing it down to voluntary specialized knowledge. When

religious education is made a matter of brains and money, only certain members of the community can attain it. However, one of the primary aims of Islamism is holding everybody responsible for knowing and doing more than the five basic pillars of Islam (which most religious Sunni Muslims in Turkey try to learn and do well). This goal is frequently frustrated because of everyday resistance, as by a claim to incapacity in the case of Lütfü.

Ritual Transformation

Ritual expansion is not completely novel, contemporary, or modern: *imams* of mosques and instructors of *medreses* have practiced it throughout the centuries. A more modern form of religious intervention, which I call “ritual transformation,” leads to more problematic relations between ordinary people and the Islamists. This is the urge to reform not only religious behavior, but also every behavior, by asserting that Islam recognizes no distinction between the religious and the secular. Islamists in Sultanbeyli redefine behavior such as dressing, voting, greeting, socializing, entertainment, and family relations as religious issues, and transform these into rituals. They argue that displaying Islamic symbols in public (such as the Islamist veil, which is different from the traditional Turkish headscarf) and voting for the Islamist party are forms of worship just like regular prayer.

Ritual transformation is in friction with common practice and ordinary people for several reasons. First, the politicization of religion, which is so vital for urbanizing believers who want both to practice religion and to participate in all aspects of urban life, disturbs the peace of some pious people who would like to avoid confrontation with the state. This becomes an issue especially in the case of the veil, which is banned in public institutions. Security forces sometimes use violence or the threat of violence in enforcing this ban. The politicization of veiling, therefore, tends to alienate some ordinary people from the Islamists. Feyyaz, a worker in the local Sultanbeyli municipality and an activist of the Islamist party, narrates his interaction with a relative not involved in politics, demonstrating this alienation:

I was at my brother-in-law's house [in my] village, listening to the news about [tensions regarding] the ban on veils at an *İmam*-Preacher school. [T]he students [were] protesting against the ban. . . . [The police] had placed sharp marksmen on the roof that aimed at the protesting veiled girls. . . . Of course, I was saddened to see this happen in a country where 99 percent of the population is Muslim. . . . As I was mourning about the female students [who were] 13 to 15 years of age, this was what my brother-in-law—who prays five times a day and has an [Islamic, rounded] beard—told me: “Let them take off their veils and enter their classrooms like that.” It was as if someone shot me in the head. I said: “The veil is ordered by God. How can you argue that they should abandon it? You are on the verge of being an apostate.” “No,” he said, “this doesn't make me an apostate.” He almost threw a knife at me! . . . I also told him that he has to vote for the best party. When I said, “The party has to represent you, or God will ask you to account for [your vote],” he responded, “He will not.”

The type of reaction that Feyyaz talks about is common not only among pious peasants like his brother-in-law, but also among men of Sultanbeyli who do not aim at finding employment in the formal sector. For religious people who do not wish to participate in

urban life, covering is a sign of honor and belief, and it is crucial for them that nobody interferes with their veiling (or the veiling of their wives or daughters). However, some of these people, and especially those outside the boundaries of Islamist influence, also believe that a female could quit her veil if she wants to receive formal education or work in a public firm. Still, men are not very agreeable to this idea if the female is one's own wife or daughter. This shows that for some people, religion is more of a tool of control over the family, rather than a blueprint for political order.

Second, this account by Feyyaz demonstrates another tension between Islamists and ordinary people. The politicization of ritual and ritualization of political behavior either restrict the electoral choices of the religious person or make him suspect when he goes on to vote for the party "suggested" by the *şeyh* he follows—as the Islamist party always emphasizes that voting is a matter of faith. Hence, both people like Feyyaz's brother-in-law, who shift their votes from one party to another, and traditionalist religious people, who act in accordance with the orders of their *şeyh*, are compromised when voting turns into a religious task.

Third, Islamist interventions of this type disturb accustomed ways of living and force the believer to organize his or her whole life anew. Feyyaz complained about how his family and kin reacted when he transformed his life after becoming tightly associated with the Islamist party:

My wife and I went [back to visit] my village. It felt uncomfortable when she didn't shake the hands of the [male] people or didn't kiss the hands of the [male] elders. But when you tell them, "You don't have [shaking and kissing the hands of the other sex] in Islam. Allah has rendered this behavior *haram* [religiously forbidden]," you are stigmatized. . . . According to Islamic life, men and women have to sit in separate rooms, without seeing each other. But when your wife is not seen, they feel it is not right. . . . When you do an Islamic wedding, [the religiosity of the wedding] is said to be out of place. But when you do a wedding with drums and pipes and folk dances, it is full! I lived through this myself. I did my wedding in accordance with Islamic values. It wasn't attended by many people.

Whereas Islamists want to construct an opposition between religious weddings and weddings with music and dancing, in the countryside most weddings are both musical and religious: in these weddings, *mevlits* (poems that commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad) are read just before or after dancing. These types of wedding ceremonies are still common in Sultanbeyli. Since ordinary people perceive the holiness of the familial order as a natural part of the sanctity of religion, Islamist interventions that disturb this order are not quite welcome.

Even though most problems that ritual transformation faces stem from the sanctified place the family holds in the life of the religious residents, the familial order also helps to institute ritualization in other ways. The positive qualities about religious upbringing and a pious life that Sultanbeyli's residents emphasize the most are family values, restriction of sexuality to the private realm, obedience to and fear of elders, and a "clean" life away from alcohol. Whereas these do not occupy such a central place in activist (especially radical) interpretations of Islam, they are of the utmost importance to ordinary people.

The Sultanbeyli municipality is therefore quite often praised for creating an environment in which the consumption of alcohol is minimized and sexuality is not openly displayed. In fact, many people point to this environment as their reason for persistent support of the Islamists.

Ritual Contentism

Another strategy of intervention is, in contrast with the former, exclusively peculiar to Islamism and to modern times. The emphasis on the need to learn the meaning of the Kur'an, rather than only reading and memorizing its Arabic original, is one of the most pronounced principles of Islamism in Turkey. Islamists do not go as far as arguing that Muslims should read the Kur'an in the vernacular while praying, as some Protestant-influenced secularists in Turkey do, but they vehemently espouse the need to learn the meaning of all the rituals and texts that believers conduct and read in Arabic. Radical Islamists in particular preach that believers should know the meaning of what they are doing and reading when they are praying and reciting the Kur'an in Arabic—practices they still uphold.

Traditionalists and some mainstream Islamists are severely critical of this dimension of Islamism. They hold that it is best for ordinary believers to be steadfast in their beliefs and rituals. The regularity and frequency of religious practice, and its leadership by a sincere and educated Muslim, they insist, is more important than knowing the meaning of the ritual. Imitating the most learned around you is better, according to this criticism, than taking the risk of interpreting the Kur'an incorrectly. While those Islamists who want people to read the translations of the basic sources (as well as the original Kur'an) shift the balance of power in the religious field in favor of the ordinary person, their contenders desire to sustain the authority of the "learned" by seeking to invalidate this practice.

Contentism was very effective from the end of the 1980s until the military intervention in 1997. Both in district centers and in remote neighborhoods, not only very pious people but also youth from all kinds of Sunni families gathered in informal meetings to read translations of the Kur'an and *Hadis* (the deeds and words of the Prophet) alongside their originals, and learn by heart the lives of the Prophet and his companions. These activities were most influential when they were combined with nonreligious ones, such as sports. Many neighborhood clubs gathered teenagers together and carried them through religious and political education after several hours of weekly sports activities.

After the military intervention, the tide slowly abated, though activists still gather in less public ways. Together with the disapproval of traditionalist religious scholars and official pressure, this type of intervention also causes tension with the uneducated and the elders. The distinction put forth by ritual contentism between "Islam learned through hearsay and from the parents" and "Islam learned from the [translated] sources" empowers those who have gone through Islamist education to criticize the religious practices of those who have not, and again disturbs the hierarchy of the sanctified family. Nevertheless, this type of Islamist activity helps the wider community promote a moral order by controlling the lives of young people, thereby arousing some sympathy among ordinary people.

Ritual Purification

The type of Islamist intervention that encounters the greatest difficulties is the appeal to “return to the basic sources.” For mainstream Islamists, this return implies sticking to the interpretations of revered Muslim scholars—interpretations that are based on the Kur’an, the *Sünnet* (model patterns of behavior adopted from the Prophet), and *fıkıh* (Islamic jurisprudence)—and eliminating or reforming the practices that do not fit. Radicals lay less emphasis on historical *fıkıh* and argue that religious, social, and political life has to be based more directly on the Kur’an and the *Sünnet*. This latter version of ritual purification sharply contradicts popular allegiance to some traditional ways (such as visits to prominent mystics’ tombs). It also challenges fatalistic political attitudes, which take the reigning order as a given without questioning if it is in line with the basic sources of Islam.

As exemplified by Orhan—a neighborhood *imam* and a potential religious scholar—quoted below, mainstream Islamists seek conciliation between their principles and popular practices by, for example, attempting to change the meaning of mystic practices, such as the visit of *şeyh* tombs:

There should be authorized and licensed people in charge of religion. Is the visit of tombs going to be evaluated as worship or as visiting an elder? The people see this as worship. This is wrong socialization and knowledge. It will end up in perversion. These tombs will eventually become sacred and our religion a form of superstition. These [tombs] are our cultural heritage. Where should we place them properly? The bearers of knowledge should decide. . . . If you study the [holy] book, then observe other Muslim countries, and then decide that saint tombs represent a form of superstition and close them down, things won’t work out. What we should do is provide information and raise people’s consciousness. When the citizen visits the tombs, it should not be in an atmosphere of worship. They sometimes open their hands [and pray] there, as if they were in the presence of God. Of course these tombs should be visited. There are venerable people lying there; they represent our values. Let’s go there, but not behave as if we were on a pilgrimage.

Orhan’s position epitomizes a crucial distinction between radical and mainstream Islamists. Radicals are fiercely against traditional mysticism and religious orders, while mainstream Islamists follow the footsteps of traditional religious scholars (*ulema*) and tolerate them, though they do not totally approve of them. Mainstream Islamists respect the ways of the people, yet have criticisms of these; radicals attack popular rituals, labeling them “traditional religion,” which they claim they will replace with “real Islam.” Orhan, a recent graduate from a respected theology faculty working toward obtaining a master’s degree, seeks to change the meaning of tomb visits without challenging people’s traditional attitudes. He affirms this practice as long as the visitors take it as the veneration of religious notables, instead of a form of worship. He stops short of arguing that these visits are sinful without exception. By attempting to assign authority to the “bearers of knowledge,” Orhan also aims at reproducing his (and more generally, the class of scholars’) power over religious meaning and practice.

This exercise of power calls us to combine dialogic and practice approaches: Orhan uses the discourse of mysticism (*şeyh* tombs as cultural heritage, *şeyhs* as venerable

people) while at the same time redefining mystic practice as outside the realm of worship. These discursive plays predicted by the dialogic approach are tightly interwoven with the reshuffling of everyday *practices* and uses of the body, as in Orhan's suggestion that the visitor of the *şeyh* tomb should not open his or her hands as if in the presence of God. Moreover, redefining religious practices through drawing the boundaries between the sacred and the profane—that is, ritualization—is Orhan's primary practice as a scholar. This redrawing of boundaries is also one of the main sources of his power.

Radicals' criticism of heterodox practices is more direct and more demanding when compared to mainstream Islamists. Their harsh denigration of mysticism—which they find apolitical, open to personal abuse, and potentially prosystem—is not met with sympathy in Sultanbeyli, where most religious people have had some contact and positive experience with religious orders. Moreover, their messages can hardly compete with those coming from mystics who have gone through traditional religious education and who supposedly have access to divine intuition. Sinan, one of the young functionaries of the municipality, organizes conferences in the district and fights against what he perceives to be ignorance, without much success. The difficulties he faces exemplify the limits of ritualization:

When Cüppeli Ahmet [the second man of the *İsmailağa* community, a sub-branch of the influential *Nakşibendi* religious order] comes here, the Ulu Mosque [the largest mosque of the district] overflows onto the streets. People listen to preachers like him, but when we cite references from the Kur'an they don't listen to us. Our word carries no authority.

Traditional religious education is still revered among the people of Sultanbeyli. People who receive this education (through religious orders or through *medreses*) are trusted more at the popular level than people who have gone through religious education in modern institutions, such as theology faculties or *İmam*-Preacher schools, like Sinan himself. Radical Islamism is not widespread among the residents because of the lack of popular trust in such modern institutions, though its disseminators occupy important positions, such as offices in the municipality of Sultanbeyli. As this case shows, even direct appeals to the Kur'an cannot go very far in challenging the traditionalist credentials of the mystics.

Radicals further confront the common understanding of Islam by calling the believer to read the Kur'an using his or her own *reason*. Reinterpreting the Islamic term *tevhid* (the unity of God), they proclaim that obeying anyone but God (in the light of one's reason) is un-Islamic, since it questions the oneness of God by recognizing other sources of authority. Radicals who espouse this interpretation use it to incite struggle against what they see to be the *tağuti* (unjust, idolatrous) regime.¹⁴ Most of the inhabitants of Sultanbeyli are far from accepting all the implications of this quasirationalist and radical approach to religion. Nevertheless, despite the unpopularity of radicals, their appeal to read the Kur'an in the light of reason, and their challenge to authorities who do not go by the Kur'an, has had an impact at the popular level. The ordinary people in Sultanbeyli, who have had long-lasting contact with Islamists, are now more eager readers of the sources and deem opposition more legitimate than those who have never had significant contact with them.

DIALOGUE AND THE PRODUCTION OF HYBRID ISLAMIC POSITIONS

While frame analysts recognize that interactions lead activists to shift their frames and transform the frames of new recruits, they assume that the core goals of movements remain untransformed after these shifts (Snow et al. 1986). A dialogic perspective, by contrast, leads us to look at how interactions transform even the core goals of a movement. I now turn to documenting the transformation of some values and actions that are the results of the interactions analyzed in the above sections. These transformations imply that adherents and activists of movements might change more thoroughly than frame analysts would admit.

In Sultanbeyli, the results of dialogue are observable in many contexts. For instance, supernatural powers of mystics are rejected by the religiously educated in formal settings. However, their experience and their dialogue with believers of mysticism push them to take a different position in some other settings. Everybody under the influence of Islamism rejected the relevance of unorthodox practices in my formal interviews, but in private, they stated that certain mystic people might indeed possess supernatural powers. Their friends or relatives had put a doubt in them either through discussion or through demonstration.

For example, Fethi (a middle-aged Islamist and a real estate dealer) narrated an instance when one of his friends took him to a *şeyh*. At one point in their conversation, the *şeyh*'s cat jumped on Fethi and scratched him. Fethi now suspected that the *şeyh* must have understood that he did not believe in the *şeyh*'s mystic powers. The angry mystic leader had probably made the cat attack Fethi as a punishment! Maybe the *şeyh* did have some powers after all, Fethi concluded. Other Islamists also doubted the validity of the orthodox rejection of mystic powers. Korhan, a young religion teacher and a self-described radical Islamist, was one of the most fervently antimystic men I encountered. For two years, he tried to persuade me that no good could come out of the mystic orders. He thought that I gave too much credit to mysticism, in a manner that did not become an "educated person." Despite his seemingly uncompromising disbelief, Korhan once mentioned in passing that he had witnessed a relative, allegedly a *şeyh*, use his supernatural powers with dexterity. However, Korhan made this remark in one of our unrecorded conversations, and he did not give any other details about this relative when I probed him further. He was probably worried that his sustained attempts to convince me would be negated by what could appear as counterevidence.

On the other hand, people who lack formal education, including some of those who follow *şeyhs*, have started to read *meal* (the translated meaning of the Kur'an), rather than only memorizing the Kur'an in Arabic. The increasing number of people who read the meaning of the Kur'an also pushes the elites of mystic orders to legitimize their practices through the written sources of Islam.

The Impact of Dialogue on a Mystic Order

Transformations in mystic orders, the castles of traditionalism they are, further reveal how each actor and group are caught up in the dialogue. Mystic orders are the popular

religious groups with the most intense, yet barely observable, internal tensions. They are the most stubborn networks about retaining the nonmodern references and practices of Islam. Even though there are modern elements in the structures, resources, and discourses of some orders, their leaders and intellectuals have difficulty legitimizing them. Frictions that are more serious emerge in the realm of everyday practice. In the mystic tradition, the follower has to obey all the commands of the *şeyh*. However, in Sultanbeyli, many followers of religious orders openly question certain recommendations of their leaders. Since most of the *şeyhs* live in traditional centers of Istanbul that are quite far from the district, there are no mechanisms of tight control on such aberrations. Some followers evade defying the *şeyh* openly, and instead, behave aberrantly by arguing that the *şeyh* has said a certain thing, but he has meant something else. Such mechanisms of resistance, analyzed by many anthropologists in a variety of settings (Scott 1985), are put into practice more easily when the center of authority is distanced because of urbanization.

More devastating for the internal consistency of the orders is when the *şeyh* is in a situation where he has to annul his command himself. This has been the case with Mahmut Efendi, the leader of the *İsmailağa* community, with regard to a ban on watching television. Though, in fact, most members of the community who live in Sultanbeyli avoid television, many turn it on from time to time too. Their excuse is that the *şeyh* himself made an allowance for those close to him to watch television, so that they can report to him on world affairs and actions the Turkish state is undertaking that impact Islam. This religious order has had to transgress its own sanctions in order to cope with its contenders and the flow of modern life. However, a new sect (led by Cüppeli Ahmet) has emerged within the community—a sect more willing to make use of at least the printed media, if not television. As the practice of the main body has failed in living up to its own ideology, ideology itself has started to change, which has caused cracks in the community. Hence, dialogue does not have to be always nourishing; it can also disrupt networks and give birth to competing ones.

Dialogue in Everyday Interactions

Dialogue even becomes conscious in certain interactions, although the actors might not be fully aware of the dialogic implications of these instances. Old friends are especially cognizant of their mutual transformation. Selim is one of the radical Islamist real estate dealers of the district. He does not believe in Islamic mysticism. Having worked in Saudi Arabia—the only Muslim nation, except Turkey, officially against mysticism and religious orders—has also influenced his position on this issue. However, his experience in an urban poor district has pushed him to consider some positive outcomes of mystic activity (such as making people more pious and bringing peace to the district). He openly uttered his emergent thoughts about the positive aspects of mysticism and religious orders in the absence of traditionalist mystics. Nevertheless, he was still unhappy about most orders because they were too traditionalist, closed, and static. When I raised some doubts about his interpretation based on my knowledge of the thorough changes that even relatively closed, yet large and influential, communities

like *İsmailağa* have gone through, he said, “Our friend Kamil is connected to Mahmut Efendi [the *şeyh* of the *İsmailağa* community]. I will call him and let you speak to him.”

After Kamil, a retired construction worker, entered his office, Selim toughened his tone about religious orders and their traditionalism, and started talking passionately about a common experience they had. The previous week they had been to a sermon where one of the disciples of Mahmut Efendi preached that turban, *cüppe* (religious robe), and *takke* (nightcap) were among the necessities of religion. Selim was very angry. Right after the prayer, he told Kamil, in a volume which those around them could hear, that these all depended on weak *Hadis*. He pointed out that everybody in Arabia in the time of the Prophet wore these garments, and that therefore they had no distinct religious significance. Selim’s tough position against traditionalist mysticism in public is rendered more interesting by his sympathetic approach to religious orders in private.

Selim also criticized the order for not watching television: “How are you going to change the world if you are not informed about the world?” He then rounded on Kamil by asking him why Mahmut Efendi did not invite his community to resist the *zalim* (irreligious oppressors). Kamil answered: “No, no, he knows all of this [that there is oppression and oppressors in Turkey]. He only does not mention it. He only prays by saying, ‘My God, make those who rule us come to their senses.’” Kamil added that Mahmut Efendi frequently said that Erbakan (the old leader of the Islamist party, who was banned from politics during the time of this research) is a combative person, and invited people to support Erbakan. When Kamil changed the subject and argued that Erbakan knew jihad very well, Selim commented that Erbakan’s political analyses were very good, but that he was also after political gain. He added that this was not the case with Mahmut Efendi, and that mystics like him were “far from the concerns of this world.” He concluded the conversation by saying, “In fact, you cannot make a mystic say these [implying the Islamist overtones of Kamil’s speech]. We softened each other by talking over and over again.” Kamil confirmed by smiling and nodding his head.

This exchange is significant for a number of reasons. Besides demonstrating that Islamists are more concerned with changing the world, while mystics worry more about living the correct belief, it also shows that followers of definite positions develop thoughts that diverge from their official discourses as a result of conflictive interaction with others. For example, Kamil sees his mystic leader’s praying as a political—“Islamist”—act, rather than as a neutral and spiritual ritual. This is in stark contrast with the way ritual is interpreted in the mystic tradition. Selim, on the other hand, feels more personal respect for the mystic leader of his friend than for the nonmystic leader of the party he votes for. This is particularly significant in the case of Selim, who was raised in an extended family known in Sultanbeyli for its unwavering support of Erbakan, the leader of the Islamist party whose identity has merged with that of the party. Moreover, Selim’s approval of “being far from the concerns of this world” and his distrust of politicians—two central tenets of mysticism which contradict the political and this-worldly characteristics of Islamism—also demonstrate how Selim himself has been transformed through interaction with mystics.

These interactions influence not only particular individuals, but also the totality of the discursive field, and consequently, political action. Because of this influence, Islamists can go (as Selim did) to the funeral of a certain *şeyh* (Mahmud Esad Coşan) who had worked to impede the Islamist movement in the last 10 years of his life. Islamists generally shy away from participating in funerals of *şeyhs*, as they are worried that such public statements might help elevate a deceased *şeyh* to a status reminiscent of Catholic saints. Yet, Selim not only went to the funeral of any *şeyh*, but to that of a *şeyh* who had fought against his own ideology and party, mostly because he now considered mystic orders supportive of as well as harmful to an Islamic lifestyle. The same Selim who was (as he himself reports) deeply certain about the sinfulness of mysticism when he returned from Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, had come to a point where he could participate in such a funeral in 2001. In short, both the central values and actions of people—not just the way they frame these—change because of ongoing interaction.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE ISLAMIST PARTY'S STRENGTH

Different from secularist institutions and other Islamic groups, the Islamist party does not have a rigid doctrine or practice concerning religious issues—it neither upholds a religious law it wants to apply nor imposes a certain reading of Islam on its followers.¹⁵ Indeed, this is one of the primary characteristics that differentiates it from other religious organizations, such as the traditionalist religious orders and the radical fringe groups. The Islamist party does stand for a certain agenda—intensifying the role of Islam in politics, public life and economics—but remains relatively open to attempts at (re)defining what Islam exactly means in these contexts. In 2000 and 2001, the headquarters of the Virtue Party in Sultanbeyli was home to continual debates between mainstream Islamists, traditionalists, and radicals. By contrast, I encountered such debates neither at the headquarters of the other political parties nor at the periodic meetings and dinners of the mystic orders.¹⁶ The Virtue Party's success consisted of being able to reflect and refract the richness of this dialogue in its organization and propaganda. This allowed people of different Islamic strands to support the party.

This dialogical dimension is also reflected at the organizational level. In spite of the party leader's (Erbakan) sometimes sharp attacks on and criticisms of mystic orders, a portion of local party representatives and authorities in Sultanbeyli are recruited through tapping into mystic channels and politicizing ordinary followers of mysticism who otherwise tend to remain politically inactive. Some of these local party representatives are highly critical of radical rejections of mysticism. Their recapitulation of the Islamist party's aims in mystic terms speaks to popular concerns, and therefore is likely to find more popular support than radical critiques of mysticism. Even though local party representatives end up being more concerned with politics than with mysticism, their stance on the issue allows the municipality to nourish relations with certain mystic orders and their followers. This position sustains warm relations between the local headquarters of the party and the orders, even at times when the national leader fiercely attacks mysticism.

The party's everyday mobilizing strategies also attest to a hybridization and interaction of tradition and modernity, of religious and secular modes. Kerem, one of the high functionaries of the local municipality and a middle-aged activist who has served the party for all his mature life, held that the success of the party in the district partially resulted from a particular strategy of mobilization. The representatives of the party organized talks by going from house to house and enriched these informal meetings with communal worship:

The talks started with subjects like belief, worship, creed, Islam, and ended with topics concerning the governing of Turkey. Therefore, the talks were based on the axis of morality. [In the more active days of the party] we used to carry these talks to coffeehouses, thereby reaching the people whom we couldn't reach at their homes. In this way, we made our way into every cell of society. . . . Leftists used to do the same type of thing before the 1980s, but they did it only with certain youth who were severed from their families. We, however, contact every sector of society.

In other words, mobilization strategies of the party are neither completely religious (characterized by worship, belief, and faith) nor exclusively "Islamic" (in the sense of having premises only in Islamic history). They are partially borrowed from the strategies of the revolutionary Left, attesting to the willingness of Islamists to learn from their contenders. Yet, the activists of the party have made this strategy of mass militancy their own by injecting religious and familial patterns into it. Particularly interesting is the combination of door-to-door propaganda with what has been one of the basic practices of Islam for centuries: *sohbets*, or religious talks in informal settings, preceded and followed by communal prayer.

If Islamism was nothing but the updated version of Islamic culture, as culturalist scholars have argued, Islamist politics would be based exclusively or mostly on *sohbets* and other traditional modes of conduct. That it meshes *sohbets* with door-to-door propaganda and political work in coffeehouses shows that Islamism is a hybridization of traditional Islamic culture with aspects of modernity. Kerem's account also demonstrates how dialogism and ritualization are interlocking mechanisms in the exercise of power: political, moral, and leftist discourses are intertwined in the process of ritualizing politics (as by sanctifying propaganda via *sohbets*), and both this discursive plurality and the concomitant ritualization of politics extend the power of the Islamist party. It is neither the hybridization of discourses nor the fusion of religion and politics by itself that grants popularity to Islamist politics, but the interaction between the two.

THE LIMITS OF DIALOGUE

Even though Islamists reflect and refract the dialogic aspects of the religious field in their own way, there are areas where they are sharply intolerant of the hybridities in religious life. Following only printed material and taking the Islamists at their word, one could get the impression that the secularists are harsh elitists, while the Islamists defend popular practices against their elitist interventions. Yet, Turkish secularism and Islamism unwittingly share some common ground in that they both have elitist projects geared toward

“elevating” the people (by Islamicizing or secularizing them) and saving them from their alleged backwardness and primitiveness. Islamists, just like the secularists, have a now-open–now-repressed dislike of popular culture.¹⁷ Osman, the son of one of the Islamist notables of the district, exemplifies this position. He has recently graduated from the *İmam*-Preacher school in Sultanbeyli, and his social circle thus consists of friends from this institution, who are in theory all puritanically against facets of popular culture that seem to contradict religion. He expresses his reaction to some popular practices as follows:

Our people do not know manners. There are manners associated even with sitting at the coffeehouse. Even if you are going to a coffeehouse, behave according to those manners! . . . In this country, everybody is arabesk. They only listen to that kind of music.

In Turkey, “arabesk” is the name for a popular music genre that is a creative mixture of Turkish, Arabic, and Western music. The dominant secularist culture interprets this hybridity as a form of degeneration and a dangerous move away from national culture. Likewise, the (mostly, though not exclusively, poor) sectors that listen to this music are also referred to as “arabesk”—a term that partially signifies their alleged cultural confusion. Even though arabesk music is inspired by Islam (Özbek 1991), it incites Islamist disapproval because it appears to blame God for poverty and misfortune. Islamism ignores how forms of popular culture, such as arabesk, are essential to the reproduction of Islam in Turkey, despite the fact that the credentials of such cultural expressions might be shaky from an orthodox point of view (Stokes 1992). Some religious activists like Osman strongly react to coffeehouses, which they see as another expression of arabesk and of confused culture.¹⁸ Yet, these are among the central loci of Islamist grassroots mobilization in Sultanbeyli, as elsewhere in Turkey. Even though coffeehouses and arabesk are part of Islamic life in the district, and although at least one of them is crucial to Islamism, Islamists attempt to reduce and control their significance. In this sense, Islamism has a “monologic” (Bakhtin 1984; Gardiner 1992; Smith 1998) as well as a dialogic component: it ultimately subordinates the plurality of religious voices to the hegemony of a unified perspective. Islamism thereby brings under control the potentially destabilizing religious field of Sultanbeyli.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Islamist popularity can be partially accounted for by the way Islamic activists intervene in ordinary people’s lives and the dialogue in which their interventions result. Some essentialist scholarship on contemporary religious movements assumes that these are natural springs from the belief systems of nonmodernized populations. I have argued, to the contrary, that the supporters of the Islamist movement are hybrid products of a dialogic religious field, which consists of mutual intervention and resistance between communal concerns, the secularist state, and religious activism. The key to Islamist success lies in this hybridity and in the way activists work with it.

While the state in Turkey has become hegemonic, thanks to its naturalization of the value and necessity of universal public education, popular sectors have tilted this naturalization by demanding religious education for all. The Turkish state gained further legitimacy after its ideological shift in the 1980s by creating the expectation of a unified religious education provided by the state, but has not fulfilled this expectation. Islamism has become popular by exploiting this and other cracks within hegemony.

Islamists intervene in the lives of the ordinary residents of Sultanbeyli by expanding the realm of ritual, transforming religious, and nonreligious practices, inviting people to reflect on the meaning of Islam, and inciting political activity through ritual purification. When carrying out these interventions, they engage traditionalists, secular inhabitants, and ordinary believers in conflictive ways. Their calls for more meticulous observance of established rituals and their introduction of new ones produce a field where inequality is gauged in terms of who possesses ritual knowledge and who is most observant. Another dimension of Islamist ritualization is the process by which behaviors formerly thought of as profane (for example, wedding ceremonies) come into the sphere of the sacred. Since this strategy of ritualization implies a desire to transform all aspects of everyday life, it disturbs not only custom, but also political peace, as the secularist military and courts are vigilant and harsh about any public expression of religion by nonofficial actors. These disturbances bring forth resistance from some ordinary believers who want to retain peace and custom.

The emphasis on the content and meaning of rituals, yet another strategy of Islamist ritualization, disrupts hierarchies based on age and religious license, which in turn causes opposition from traditionalists as well as some mainstream Islamists. However, this opposition does not necessarily result in depriving this type of ritualization of religious legitimacy, and some inhabitants shape their lives under its influence. Finally, the radicals' calls to return to "the basic sources" and their attacks on popular beliefs and practices do not produce immediate results. However, in the end, even ordinary believers start speaking about the need to replace "hearsay Islam" with "real Islam" and to resist authorities who are perceived to be un-Islamic. These engagements of Islamists with traditionalists, secularists, and ordinary religious people transform all the parties involved in this dialogue. The result is a multiplicity of voices, each carrying traces from the discourses of its rivals.

Because of dialogic interaction, some Islamists of Sultanbeyli, who are officially against mysticism, come to accept certain supernatural powers. "Hidden transcripts"¹⁹ start to circulate among mystics that attribute political resistance to their leaders, whereas their official ideology emphasizes quiescence to the exclusion of confrontation. Likewise, hidden transcripts that embrace virtuous mystic leaders gain currency among radical Islamists, going against their puritanical public reaction against mysticism. In short, the core motivations and practices of each party, not just the way these are framed, tend to be transformed.

The Islamist party in Sultanbeyli becomes popular not because it taps into an already existing Islamic culture, but because it casts a wide net that is able to capture the multiplicity of voices in the religious field. The party's recruitment of its leaders through

various channels, including mysticism and official education, as well as its combination of modern forms of propaganda with religious ones (such as *sohbet*), are but a few instances of the party's strategy of reflecting and refracting the dialogic religious field. Nevertheless, the openness of Islamists does have its limits: most are often rigid about defining certain aspects of popular culture as essentially un-Islamic—a practice which tends to alienate significant sectors of the population.

Even though many ideological structures and practices I have documented here can be encountered in other parts of Turkey and the Muslim world, Sultanbeyli is still quite distinct in the persistent support it garners for religious politics. Further research is needed on the relations between religious activists and ordinary people in order to discover if the dialogue addressed here is a general phenomenon that can also be observed in other settings. The analyses in this article otherwise suggest that the rise of Islamic movements is not a sign of historical regression or backward-looking reaction. To the contrary, this rise is an expression of the complexity of our contemporary world, where the secular and the religious, the traditional and the modern, East and West are thoroughly transformed through dialogic processes.

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NOTES

¹This is not to say that “nonspiritual” factors play only a secondary role in the rise of religious movements. I have devoted a single article to the role of religion in these movements because this role is unduly simplified. I will analyze the structural dimensions of Islamism in the same district elsewhere.

²Here, I define a follower as someone who joins protests, provides funds and moral support, or simply votes for an organization or party, but who is not in a leading position within the movement.

³The major Islamic organization in Turkey, named first the Virtue Party and then the Felicity Party at the time of this research, was established more than 30 years ago under the name the National Order Party. Since the party was closed by the authorities four times in the course of these years, I will refer to it in this article generically as “the Islamist party” whenever I talk about its general tendencies, instead of giving the party's name, which changed each time it was banned. For more on the historical development of the Islamist party, see Gülaip (1997). Whether the following analyses apply to the center-rightist party now in power in Turkey (the Justice and Development Party, which was founded toward the end of this research project as a result of a split within the Islamist party), is beyond the scope of the article.

⁴In this article, I use phrases such as “ordinary believers” and “ordinary residents” to refer to people who are not religious activists or experts, or not representatives of the state.

⁵Hybridity refers to the mixture of distinct cultures to result in new and composite formations. As different from the classical formulators of this concept (Bhabha 1994), I do not assume that the components of hybridization are originally distinct. They are rather imagined to be distinct by social actors.

⁶I use “strategy” not in the rational-choice sense of purposive and calculated action, but in the Bourdieusian sense of now-conscious–now-unconscious moves that function mostly through “feel for the game” (rather than through explicit planning) and that seek accumulation of various sorts of capital (Bourdieu 1977). The Bourdieusian understanding of strategy is also different from that of rational choice theory in that it focuses on the interaction of the individual or the group with macrostructure rather than focusing on the individual as the primary unit.

⁷The practice theory approach to ritual is similar to Victor Turner’s (1969) conceptualization of rite as the dramatization and resolution of social conflicts. As the primary concern of ritual studies, the practice theory takes distinctions between social groups—rather than distinctions between nature and culture (Lévi-Strauss 1965), or action and thought (Geertz 1973). Yet, practice theory differs from Turner’s dramaturgy in that it handles ritual as formative of these social distinctions, and not as simply reproductive of them.

⁸I use the Turkish transliteration of Islamic terms, instead of the Arabic ones usually used in Islamic studies, in order to remain loyal to their spoken and written usages in my field site.

⁹I have used pseudonyms for the people involved in research to protect anonymity.

¹⁰The political and intellectual leaders of Turkey have been “secularist” rather than just “secular,” in that they have militantly fought for restricting the influence of religion to individual lives by using official sanctions. While sharing the classical social scientific assumptions about the requirements of secularization—the differentiation of social spheres and the privatization of religion (Berger 1967; Tschannen 1991; Yamane 1997; Gorski 2000)—they have gone beyond them by defining even the living room and the guest room as public spaces and attempting to de-Islamicize every social space but the bedroom. Most secularists in Turkey are still averse to broader definitions of secularism, which negotiate the boundaries between the public and the private, and/or revise the privatization thesis (Casanova 1994). The Turkish version of secularism also involves the official propagation of a secularized and nationalist interpretation of Islam to protect the régime from (Islamic and other) subversion.

¹¹My differentiation between types of religious politics points out certain tendencies rather than impenetrable walls. I have differentiated between traditionalism, mainstream Islamism, and radical Islamism because the typologies in the extant literature (moderate Islam vs. radical Islam, traditionalism vs. fundamentalism, etc.) obscure important differences and do not map onto the differences in my field site. For example, fundamentalism—if defined as a set of strategies that aim to preserve the distinctive identity of a people and that is based on the pragmatic modification of selectively retrieved beliefs and practices (Marty and Appleby 1991)—might cut across the boundaries between traditionalism, mainstream Islamism, and radical Islamism. Likewise, some proponents of these positions may have nonfundamentalist positions. In other words, none of these positions are necessarily fundamentalist, but each can take on fundamentalist characteristics in certain situations.

¹²The so-called “Islamic terrorists,” who have lately attracted much public and academic attention (Juergensmeyer 2000; Esposito 2002), are mostly derivatives of radical Islamism. However, most radical Islamists in Turkey have not engaged in violence, with the notable exceptions being *Hizbullah* (Çakır 2001; Lamchichi 2001:60–62), *İBDA-C* and, most recently, some new groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

- ¹³*Yeni Şafak* has gradually shifted to a center-rightist position after the military intervention of 1997.
- ¹⁴The language paraphrased in this paragraph was cultivated as a result of the circulation of the writings of Sayyid Qutb (1993), Ali Shariati, and Ruhollah Khomeini (1981) in Turkey. However, the thoughts of these figures also had divergent implications, causing splits as well as ideological vitality among radicals.
- ¹⁵The secularist authorities in Turkey have argued that the Islamist party had a covert agenda of imposing Islamic law. The evidence provided in this regard has been based on the conviction that any deprivatization of religion subverts modernity and prepares society for an Islamic government, rather than any direct proof (Koğacıoğlu 2004).
- ¹⁶I carried out participant observation at the headquarters, meetings, and dinners of the Nationalist Action Party, Democratic Left Party, and *Menzil* and *İskenderpaşa* communities, where debate and criticism regarding any political or religious issue were out of question.
- ¹⁷I use popular culture in the sense suggested by Stuart Hall (1981): a cultural field distinguished from and subordinated to elite culture, yet still open to elite influence and manipulation, as well as to popular will and creativity.
- ¹⁸Petty gambling, Islamic symbols, satellite television, heavy smoking, and newspapers of all sorts coexist in most coffeehouses, thwarting the Islamist search for purity.
- ¹⁹James Scott (1990) has distinguished between public transcripts of disadvantaged actors, where they pay respect to the dominant sectors and ideology, and their hidden transcripts, which are characterized by resistance. My analysis implies that the interaction of official/public and hidden transcripts might also transform official ideology itself.

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