Islamizing the city: Religious politics in Istanbul

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One of the puzzles of the new age is no doubt the vibrant presence of religion in the spheres it was least expected to survive and flourish: politics, cities, female activism and public places. Most surprising for observers is the expanding influence of religion not only in societies which were already perceived as pious and traditional, but in thoroughly Westernized and modernized countries such as Turkey. Especially the Islamization of Istanbul, one of the bastions of cosmopolitanism in the Middle East, has attracted much public attention.

I look at the interaction between Islamist political activism and city dwellers in Sultanbeyli, the first district in Istanbul to have an elected Islamist municipality, to shed light on the dynamics of Islamization. Before the mid-1980s, Sultanbeyli (which was only a village) had no dominant political or religious colour. The decisive politicization started after the mid-1980s, when religious people in provincial towns and villages heard about the Islamic educational activities in the district and immigrated to Sultanbeyli in networks of family, kin and religious community. Islamist activists spread the word as far as Erzurum (a provincial city of Eastern Turkey) in the East and Germany in the West, and many families bought land in the district without ever having seen it. Immigrant women were also active in attracting relatives to the district, by telling them that this was the primary site of religious awakening in Turkey. Many other former peasants came to the district with the hope of finding cheap land and housing, rather than an Islamic haven.

However, due to their interactions with the other, religiously dedicated immigrants and the control of the Islamists in the making of the district, many of these immigrants also became voters of the Islamist party in the process.

A peripheral village of Istanbul thus gradually turned into a large urban district with a distinctly Islamic colour as a result of interactions between the Islamists and the rural immigrants. One of the high officials in the municipality of Sultanbeyli, who has been quite influential in the establishment of the district and the victory of the Islamist party, lucidly expressed the resulting urban Islamic identity:

> Sultanbeyli is an outcry [*çığlık*]. Not everything is perfect, but we have been successful. Fifteen years is not a short period of time. If prostitution, adultery, and alcohol have not entered the district for so many years, that means there is something [Islamic] here. Our [Quran] schools have raised students who ranked second and third in worldwide competitions. Sultanbeyli was a seed. It has been crushed and thrown into the soil. Its fruits are now all over the world.

The establishment of such an Islamic urban identity in Istanbul through political work as well as active immigrant participation (implied here by the ambiguous 'we', which might be referring both to the Islamist leaders and the rural-to-urban immigrant followers) requires us to look closely at both Islamism and the immigrants, rather than assuming that immigrants adhere to Islam mindlessly or that they build their own worlds autonomously. It is only through such a double focus that the seemingly opaque protest voiced by this municipal official (why would building an Islamic urban district be an 'outcry', and against whom?) can be properly understood.

Islamism emerged as a viable political option in the 1970s with the establishment of the Islamist party (named the Virtue Party during the time of my research).[1] Islamists differentiated themselves from the anti-religious 'centre-left' (especially the Republican People's Party) – which is the political line of secularist bureaucrats, intellectuals and professionals in Turkey, rather than the organized working classes – by emphasizing Islam and local culture. Its main difference from the centre-right, on the other hand, was calling for an Islamic state and economy that would allegedly serve the interests of the majority, whereas the centre-right only used Islam to legitimize the modern state and its control by big business. After the 1980s, urban politics was mostly dominated by the struggle between the centre-left and Islamism. Islamists held most key urban municipalities by the end of the 1990s.

Islamism and the city

Modernization theorists have interpreted Islamism as a fundamentalist response to the anomie fostered by urbanization. Civil society theorists, by contrast, have seen the Islamist movement as a creative bottom-up response to modernity's ills. As an alternative, I propose a Gramscian analysis, which handles civic activity on the ground as

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[1] Since this party was closed by the authorities four times in the course of three decades, 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, its internal tensions, and its differences from other Islamic groups in Turkey, see Arat (2005), Saribay (1985), Yavuz (2003), and Zubaida (2000).

a central dimension of a hegemonic project.

Modernization theory

Modernization theory long ago posited that immigrants to cities lose their identities and latch onto essentialist identities such as Islam to cope with the strain introduced by urban life. Their engagement in politics does not follow a rational and formal pattern; rather, the anomie they experience pushes them to informal, traditional and irrational types of politics.[2] Contemporary scholars ranging from Arjomand to Hefner have recognized that the engagement of the middle classes is much more complex than being a response to strain, but this social psychological model is still applied to the poor immigrants. For example, Piscatori argues that migrants to cities, faced by the 'strain' of city life, 'orient and comfort' themselves by having recourse to 'traditional symbols and rites'. This purportedly helps 'spread *rural* attitudes in the cities'. In conjunction with this depiction, Piscatori speaks of 'the *static plight* of the sub-proletariat' (Piscatori, 1986, pp. 28-30, emphases added). In his work on the Iranian revolution of 1979, Arjomand (1988, pp. 91-92, 96) holds that the support of the urban poor for the Islamist movement was a result of rapid urbanization, which brought with it the intensification of religious orthodoxy, as it always has in the Islamic tradition. The spread of religious activity and ideas among the poor, he contends, was along totally traditional lines, as evinced by the

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[2] While there are more strict heirs of modernization theory who hold that any version of Islam is incompatible with modernity or civility (Gellner, 1981, 1991; Huntington, 1996; Lewis, 1993), the scholars cited below tend to attribute this incompatibility only to poor people's interpretations and practice of Islam.

popularity of age-old books and rites.

Some other scholars argue to the contrary that the urban poor support a monolithic modernist interpretation of religion, which these scholars differentiate from a pluralist modernist interpretation adopted by the middle classes. Hefner (2001, pp. 503-504), for one, attributes the authoritarianism of a certain brand of Islamism to the poor population of Indonesia and other Muslim countries. My research, however, indicates that the urban poor do not suffer from either anomie or an authoritarian and monolithic interpretation of Islam. Rather, they come to the cities with diverse identities, and Islamism finds a way of speaking to these identities.

Civil society

The recent blooming literature on civil society in the Muslim world draws our attention to the creativity of the actors on the ground (Norton, 1995-1996; Ozdalga and Persson, 1998; Ruffin and Waugh, 1999; Singerman, 1995). As distinct from some like Hefner who argue that such civic creativity is restricted to the middle classes, scholars such as White (2002) emphasize that urban poor sectors build their own identities and networks, which might even have an impact on formal institutions. In their accounts, Islam or Islamism enters after the fact of civic creativity, as a political or religious channel that gives a voice to the already formed urban poor communities and identities.

In the broader context of the Middle East, civil society scholars have argued that Islam has been a countervailing force against the state for centuries. Then, starting with the 19th century, authoritarian modernization has sought to destroy the autonomy of the religious sphere (Kamali, 2001). This account of the Middle East blurs some realities

both about its history and its current condition. First, it ignores the historical power balances between the religious sphere and the state, and that the former was in a majority of the cases under the control of the latter. Second, it plays down the fact that even some changes within civil society which are perceived as positive within this paradigm (e.g. gender egalitarian moves, see Kelsay, 2002) has come about after pressure from the state (especially see Arat, 2005 regarding this argument). When these factors are taken into account, civil society appears to be a terrain of struggle between different forces (whether liberating, subordinating, or something in-between), rather than a one-way street toward freedom.

These problems with the civil society approach in the study of Islamism can be related back to the problematic nature of the broader civil society literature itself. This literature tends to ignore the mutual constitution of civil society, the state, and politics. It takes society as the source of all solidarity, commonality, and trust, which it opposes to the dominating state (Tocqueville, 2000 [1835/1840]; Putnam, 1995).[3] Even White, who has revised and developed the civil society paradigm by recognizing the intersections between politics and civil society, holds that networks exist before politics and that 'institutions are products of the underlying society' (White, 2002, pp. 21, 26). By contrast, I take civil society as an effect of hegemonic projects.

Islamism as hegemony

My findings indicate that the poor are not autonomous, self-organizing actors.

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[3] For a more elaborate critique of the civil society paradigm along these lines, see Riley (2005).

The poor are creative, they do start to establish new identities, but their agency has an impact on the urban scene only when Islamism gives a direction to it. Islamist activists guide identity-formation among the poor and in this process they transform the poor's identities remarkably.[4] While networks, communities and society *precede* politics and ideology in the civil society literature, my account shows that politics is *formative* of society and communities.[5] Islamist politics and urban poor identity are mutually constitutive. My perspective regarding religion and civil society is mostly inspired by Gramsci (1971), who has argued that 'free' associational life in modern democracies is tightly related to the leadership of powerful groups in society. Through civil society, these groups go beyond only dominating the disadvantaged sectors: they build consent for their rule.

In this account, civil society is not so much a countervailing force against the

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[4] While some scholars have assumed that the poor in Turkey are authentic and Islamic (Aksoy and Robins, 1994), others have criticized this attribution of authenticity and emphasized the state's role in forging Islamic identities (Navaro-Yashin, 2002). This article, while rejecting the notion of authenticity, draws attention rather to the interaction between political parties, movements, and actors on the ground in the making of religiosity.

[5] Turam (2004) has developed a similar perspective on civil society in the Muslim world. She has emphasized the formative role of the state rather than of Islamist politics. Her focus on a religious community which works with the state rather than confronting it (that is, the difference in our empirical foci) partially accounts for the differences in our analyses.

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state, but both civil society and the state are battlegrounds for competing hegemonic projects. Since civil society, as the realm of civic activity and network building, is by definition more intertwined with the creativity of actors on the ground, hegemonic projects need to be open to this bottom-up creativity in order to secure a foot in civil society. I will argue that Islamism's novelty and difference from other hegemonic projects in Turkey comes from being more open to this creativity when establishing its hegemony. In other words, Islamism appeals to the poor not because it simply liberates them as against an oppressive state, but because it absorbs their creativity when implementing its own project.

Politics and immigration in the making of a district

Below, I describe the setting and methods of the study. Sultanbeyli, located on the outskirts of the city (near Izmit, which is to the east of Istanbul), is marked by the preponderance of its urban poor population, the unparalleled strength of the Islamist party, and the widely publicized struggle between the secularists[6] and the Islamists. The

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[6] I use 'secularism' to denote an ideology that restricts the influence of religion to individual lives by using official sanctions. In this sense, Turkish secularism (*laiklik*) is closer to French laïcité (which has directly inspired it) than to Anglo-Saxon secularism. Yet, the Turkish version of secularism also involves the official propagation of a secularized and nationalist interpretation of Islam in order to protect the regime from (Islamic, ethnic and leftist) subversion (Bromley, 1994; Davison, 1998; Heper, 1985; Mardin, 1983). Because of these local peculiarities, Turkish secularism should be differentiated from the mainstream social scientific understanding of the 'secular' as

district, with its population of 175,000 (in 2001), is the poorest district of Istanbul, and also the locality with the highest Islamist party votes.[7] A village of 3,700 people before 1985, it had become an urban region of 80,000 in 1989. This has mostly been an informal development, and most of the buildings are still unregistered.[8]

From 1989 onward, the Islamist party has been the dominant popular political force in Sultanbeyli – a political situation till then unseen in metropolitan Turkey, where elections have been held since 1946. Together with its political affiliation, its informal growth has earned a bad reputation for the district among agencies of the secularist state (such as the local government, the secular courts, and the military). Successive governments avoided making Sultanbeyli, a large district within the boundaries of Istanbul, a part of the metropolitan municipality until late 2004.[9] Therefore, the district

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simply the differentiation of social spheres and the privatization of religion (Berger, 1967; Gorski, 2000; Tschannen, 1991; Yamane, 1997).

[7] As I have analyzed the religious and political dynamics of the support for Islamism in Sultanbeyli and Turkey in the context of the party's relations with the state (which has intervened especially after 1980 in favor of Turkish-Islamic identity formation), international networks and influences, American foreign policy, sufi orders (*tarikat*s), the media, education, and radical Islamic groups elsewhere (Tuğal, 2006a, 2007), here I focus mostly on urban-spatial dynamics.

[8] For information on the population dynamics in and ethnic make up of the district, see Isik and Pinarcioglu (2001).

[9] Governments and municipalities have had complex and sometimes tension-ridden relations with squatter settlements throughout Istanbul and Turkey (Keyder, 1999).

could not make use of the metropolis' funds for a long time, and depended on its own resources.

Since the financial strength of the district's municipality was not sufficient for solving infrastructural problems, the inhabitants suffered from the lack of basic urban amenities such as running water, a functioning sewage system, and well-paved roads. What is more, Sultanbeyli's lack of connection with the highway, which passes right through the middle of the district, restricts labour mobility and discourages incoming business. Partially as a result of these peculiarities, local enterprises are far less in number than in other squatter districts of Istanbul and most of the adult men work in construction sites outside the district.

Some of its inhabitants have come to Sultanbeyli because of its distinctly Islamic cultural and political colour. The Islamist party returned this interest in kind by making it easy for people to purchase land in informal ways. Analysts of politics in squatter or shantytown settlements have interpreted such exchanges of political support for material support ('clientelism') as purely rationalistic and unprincipled. However, careful ethnographic analysis demonstrates that these exchanges involve the affirmation and establishment of networks and identities (Auyero, 2000). Seen in this light, clientelism is no longer a solely economic process devoid of ideological commitments and political dedication. Likewise, the poor's overall support for the Islamists in Sultanbeyli cannot be reduced to the exchange of favours as some scholars have suggested (Isik and Pinarcioglu, 2001), but has to be interpreted as the result of the poor's and the Islamists'

However, Sultanbeyli has been exceptional in its exclusion from the administrative boundaries of the city for a long time.

joint constitution of networks and identities. As a result of this joint constitution, the municipality of Sultanbeyli has been the most lenient local power in Istanbul concerning squatter issues despite mainstream pressure.

Nevertheless, Islamizing activities in the district abated after the secularist military intervention of 1997, which restricted Islamic schools and religious orders throughout Turkey, in addition to closing down the (Islamist) Welfare Party, youth organizations, and some religious teahouses. After the intervention, Islamists organized in the Virtue Party, which had toned down its criticism of the establishment. Despite this moderation, the regime ratcheted up its pressure on the Islamists, and the Virtue Party was going through a split during the final stages of this study.

This nationally unfavourable climate was coupled with increasing local pressure in 2001, when several decisions taken by Ankara put a nearly complete end to constructions in Sultanbeyli, which slowed down the immigration. The ethnographic analysis below was conducted around this time when Islamists were still the most popular party in the district, but were loosing some ground due to these official pressures.[10]

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[10] A couple of years after the completion of my ethnography, a new, conservative political party (the Justice and Development Party, the JDP) took control of metropolitan municipalities, including Sultanbeyli. This was possible, one could argue, because the key activists of the Islamist party have split from the Islamist mainstream and established the JDP, carrying over their urban-spatial strategies to the new party. The existing literature on the JDP (Atacan, 2005; Cavdar, 2006; Mecham, 2005; Patton, 2006), admittedly a young party, has not yet explored the urban-spatial strategies of the party. This can be a fruitful venue for future research.

I sustained an ongoing relationship with Sultanbeyli for twenty-seven months (Summer 2000-Summer 2002), during which I engaged in ethnographic fieldwork and carried out fifty in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These mostly lasted one to one and a half hours. I asked fifty-six interviewees about their life in the district, their interpretation of religion, and their opinions on local and national politics. Due to the segregated life among the religious residents, I could have meaningful access only to the male half of the district because of my position as a male researcher, even though three females were interviewed formally. The interviewees were chosen through snowball sampling. Both individual and group interviews were conducted. The individual interviews (a total of forty-seven) comprised talks with eleven small merchants and shopkeepers, sixteen workers, two retired workers, three housewives, an imam (prayer leader), two religion teachers, three primary school teachers, three real estate dealers, three politicians and three 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 theological high school.

I also taught at a primary school within the borders of the district. After a year of teaching (2000-2001), I rented an apartment located close to my previous school so that I could retain the networks I established while teaching, and develop new ones. Having built trust thanks to these networks, I was able to access many party activists and municipal officials. The school also allowed me to bypass gender segregation partially, interact informally with female residents of the district (mostly the parents of my students) and observe the gendered dimension of Islamism. The ethnographic material presented below come from my systematic participation in and observation of

coffeehouses frequented by construction workers, the public education system of the district, the activities of the Islamist party and the municipality, and neighbourhood life around the apartment where I resided.

The terrain of urban politics

In this section, I will look at how the position of the Islamist party is differentiated from its alternatives, especially in its approach to immigrant agency. While establishment parties of the centre-left and centre-right use conventional venues for propaganda (newspapers, rallies, fliers, etc.), Islamists spread their messages also through door-to-door propaganda, informal talks in mosque yards, and occasional meetings in religious teahouses and coffeehouses. This allows them to politicize every public and even private site. The relatively restricted political space of establishment parties – which is partially related to their dismissive stance with respect to coffeehouses, mosques and immigrants' domestic practices – has been one cause of their lack of appeal in the district. As Kamrava (1998) has argued, mainstream parties in Turkey are controlled by elites, with little roots in the people. In such contexts, populist movements can appeal to the people based on anti-elite platforms.

Along these lines, an additional reason of the centre-left's failure in the district, as reported by its former activists, has been its publicly aggressive stance with respect to religion. This has cost it many votes especially in the 1989 elections, the first and only elections in the history of the district when the centre-left was a viable contender. Another difference between the Islamists and establishment parties, which I will expand on below, is the way they interact with urban identity. Since the centre-left has

historically been the main rival of the Islamist party in squatter areas, I will focus on the difference between these two main adversaries.

The secular left and the Islamist party

 Hemşehri (co-local) identity, which is based on people's places of origin, is frequently the axis around which political struggles are shaped in squatter districts of Turkey. Distribution of resources, political power, and recognition is often influenced by *hemşehri* communities. In Sultanbeyli, *hemşehri* identity is publicly illegitimate among centre-leftist squatters. Like other parties in Turkey, centre-left parties also draw on communities of origin as a resource, but condemn them publicly. For example, the Republican People's Party is based on Alevi (heterodox Muslim) networks as well as *hemşehri* networks (Schüler 1999), but does not acknowledge the symbiosis between these networks and the party. The party's ruling elite is not recruited from these networks and is rather detached from them.

 Kadir, a construction worker active in one of the centre-left parties (DSP, the Democratic Left Party), expressed the centre-leftist attitude against the rampancy of *hemşehri* identity:

> [Among squatters] there is a mentality like 'my relative is from Sivas, my
> relative is from Kars. I can take refuge in them'. But instead, people
> should think 'no, here there are neighbours [rather than *hemşehri*s]'. We
> have to know that we are all from Turkey. The municipality has to say:
> 'friends, we have left our cities and villages and we have come to Istanbul.
> In Istanbul we have formed a lifestyle, but this lifestyle is definitely not

from Kars, or from any other city. We have to live here as residents of

Sultanbeyli and we have to forget our hometowns'.

Centre-leftists criticized the municipality for failing to fulfil its 'civic duty' of making people put their national identity before their place of origin. Hence, they saw Islamism not only as a retreat from secularism, but also from the formation of the nation. The centre-left thus sees itself as a part of the nationalist state, which appeals to some squatters but leaves others out.

The Islamist party's difference from other political parties becomes clear especially in its definition of the immigrant as a religious subject with a definite place of origin.[11] Whereas the centre-leftist parties saw relations of kinship and *hemşehri* identity as backward and rural, the Islamist party recognized the immigrant subject as the subject wants to see him or herself, but emphasized the role of religion in bridging the differences between kin and co-local communities. Party activists recognized place-based differentiations among squatters, but brought people of different origins together in *sohbet*s (religious talks in informal settings), and cultural and political activities. Whereas other parties publicly bracketed the imagined primary belongings of their members and audiences, the Islamist party went as far as organizing its committees on the basis of *hemşehri* identity. It did this, for example, by taking one person from each place of origin when constituting a neighbourhood committee. In sum, what differentiated the Islamist party was not its use of co-local communities. As noted above, many parties in Turkey use these communities to an extent. What was specific to the Islamists was their ability to

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[11] The Islamists' definition of religiosity excludes not only non-Muslims, but also heterodox Muslim Alevis, as it takes Sunni Islam for granted (Author, 2006b).

infuse these communities with ideological meaning and connect them to the party's organizational structure.[12]

The party also carried out mass agitation based on the recognition of this subjectivity. Recai Kutan's (the national leader of the party) appeal to the mostly immigrant and poor crowd in a mass meeting held in Sisli (a central district of Istanbul) exemplifies such agitation:

> Istanbul is the mirror of Turkey. Istanbul is also Rize, Gumushane, Artvin and Kars [some provincial Anatolian cities]. This magnificent crowd is the voice of the sacred *millet*.

In three sentences, Recai Kutan combined three salient elements of immigrant subjectivity: coming from a certain provincial place, living in a big city, and being religious. Kutan played here on the ambiguity of *millet* – a word with multiple connotations, especially in the way it is used in Islamist discourse. In the Ottoman Empire, *millet* referred to separate religious communities with different legal systems and

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[12] The only other major party which articulated co-local networks to an ideological organizational structure was the Kurdish nationalist party, named the DEHAP at the time of this research. However, the Kurdish nationalist party is disadvantaged with respect to the Islamist party by being openly a minority party and by institutional barriers which diminish its influence, such as the ten percent threshold for gaining representation in the Grand National Assembly. For about 15 years, the Kurdish vote has been split between the Kurdish nationalist party and the Islamist party. For the complex relations between the Kurdish minority in Turkey and Islamic politics, see Calmuk (2001) and Houston (2001).

administrative structures. In modern Turkey, it is used as a translation of 'nation' (Lewis, 1988). Islamists make use of the ambivalence involved in this historical transformation, and imply a religio-national unit when they are ostensibly talking of an exclusively national one. Kutan's combination of religion, national identity and provincial belonging also redefines what the city is, partially in line with immigrant desires: the city is not 'itself', but the mirror of regions from where it has attracted immigrants. As a result of blurring the distinction between belonging to Istanbul and belonging to provincial towns, the Islamist party was able to win the hearts of the immigrants. Islamists thus constructed a solid relationship with the urban poor not only by protecting pre-existing immigrant communities, but by expanding and transforming these communities. The next section will elaborate on how Islamism reshapes the city based on its own interpretation of immigrant agency; and the section after that will demonstrate how immigrants develop their own agencies under Islamist leadership.

Islamism's redefinition of the city and the immigrants

In this section, I am going to show how Islamism shapes the city and its new residents through supplying guidance to former peasants and organizing dissent against central and prosperous districts.

The metaphor of 'conquest': the Islamist takeover of urban space

The Islamist movement in Turkey has always had an ambivalent position regarding the city. For example, Istanbul has been embraced as the symbol of Muslim glory, yet also condemned as the place where Westernization was initiated. However, two

shifts in the class base of the Islamist party (which used to get its votes mostly from peasants, provincial businessmen and the traditional petty bourgeoisie in the 1970s) changed this attitude.

First, the Islamist party started to appeal to a rural-to-urban immigrant population after the 1980s – due in part to its social justice agenda, as well as to the repression of the Left, the previous carrier of that agenda. The centre-left's increasing emphasis on secularism at the expanse of social justice after 1980 also facilitated this transformation. In the 1980s and 1990s, failure of rural development and the war in eastern Turkey fuelled a partially involuntary immigration, while urban settings were losing their power to incorporate the incoming peasants, due to the neo-liberalization of the economy. The repression and disorganization of the Left[13] and the centre-left in such a context opened the political field up to unconventional forces.

Second, the provincial bourgeoisie, which has constituted the leading sector in the movement ever since the 1970s, became powerful enough to compete with the established (urban and secular) bourgeoisie and embarked on doing more business in big cities (Bugra, 2002).[14] Whereas the voting base of the party was restricted to the provinces in the 1970s, in the 1990s the party also got votes from metropolitan centres. As a result, the connotations of 'the urban' began to be more positive. Islamist

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[13] Socialists and communists have had some appeal to working classes only during the 1960s and 1970s. For the extent and restrictions of that appeal, as well as the social justice orientation of the centre-left in the 1970s, see Erdogan (1998) and Samim (1981).

[14] For the political positions of the business sectors which support Islamic politics in Turkey, see Kamrava (2004) and Onis (2006).

intellectuals and ideologues now put more emphasis on the great tradition of Ottoman and Islamic cities, as can be seen in the writings of Mustafa Armagan (1997) and Rasim Ozdenoren (1998).

Nevertheless, the Islamist movement of the 1980s and the 1990s could not accept the city as it was. The metropolitan centres had become symbols of Westernization and of the removal of religion from public life. Islamists thought that the authoritarian secularists had taken the cities by force and divested them of their religious character. Therefore, they now talked about a 're-conquest,' especially of Istanbul, referring to the Ottoman seizure of the city in 1453 as the first conquest. The secularist inhabitants of the city centre were thus implicitly compared to the Christians residing in Istanbul in Byzantine times. Conquest celebrations on the anniversaries of the 1453 seizure, which had always been a mobilizing ground for the Right in republican times, began to attract more and more people and became a symbol of growing Islamist strength (Bora, 1999).

As the Islamist party triumphed in many municipal elections in urban centres starting with the victories in Sultanbeyli and Arnavutkoy (1989), large metropolitan centres gradually became more pious. The Islamist party came out of the 1994 municipal elections as the leading party and assumed offices in key localities throughout Turkey. Islamist municipalities carried out a thorough redistribution of urban resources, as they channelled more services to urban poor regions, and distributed free coal, food, and clothes to the poor. Moreover, as the Islamists had largely curtailed municipal corruption, the quality of urban services increased perceptibly. At the same time, the Islamist party set about redefining urban public culture, with tighter control on bars and the consumption of alcohol, and the re-centring of Islamic and traditional symbols in public

places (Cinar, 1997).

However, the content of this 're-conquest' was defined differently by different actors. The neo-liberalization of the Turkish economy after 1980 had created both impoverishment for working populations and new opportunities for small and medium-sized businessmen. People from these two classes, now frustrated with the establishment parties, looked to religious politics for the expression of their hopes and grievances. Different Islamists, in turn, appealed to these two different populations. Islamist voices with more neo-liberal tendencies, as exemplified by Mustafa Kutlu (1995), argued that after its 'conquest' Istanbul would be more integrated with the world. They pointed out that a rich Ottoman history could be used to attract more tourists. They also contended that inclusion of Muslim energies in the redevelopment of the city would make it compete better in world capitalism. Others such as Idris Ozyol (1999), however, were less concerned with market efficiency. They wanted to see the termination of the elitist exclusion which had kept the masses on the borders of cities. They were more interested in retribution against the urban elite and redistribution.

These differences in opinion regarding the use of space echoed other class tensions in the composition of the movement as well. On the one hand, Islamist strength in cities clearly became a function of squatter votes. Islamists were successful in mobilizing various kinds of squatter networks for political purposes. On the other hand, though not as numerous as squatters, a new religious middle-class was also emerging (Gole, 1997; Saktanber, 2002), and some within its ranks had started to voice dissatisfaction with the movement's identification with subordinate classes. Some of these professionals and intellectuals wanted the movement to develop along more

bourgeois lines, and therefore were more sympathetic to the leadership of ex-provincial businessmen. At least until 2001, the party was able to contain these explosive differences. The combination of all these sectors' political energies engendered a gradual Islamization of cities.

The party's interpellation of the immigrant subject

Although class differences would be resolved to the disadvantage of the subordinate sectors toward the end of the 1990s, the Islamist call comprised elements that cut across classes within rural-to-urban immigrants and ensured the continuing support of the poor. The most prominent crosscutting elements were providing an answer to the desire to find one's place in the city and articulating the shared populist reaction against the urban centre and the urban elite. During an event organized by the semi-official newspaper of the Islamist party (*Milli Gazete*) in Sultanbeyli, the host told a capturing story about an immigrant woman before inviting the editor of the newspaper to the stage. This incident demonstrates the former dimension of the Islamist call, its claim to constitute an answer to the desire to find one's place in the city:

> An old woman who came to Istanbul from Anatolia at a very early time in
> the morning looked around to see that all the stores were closed. She
> found a *Milli Gazete* stand and stood by it, saying to herself: 'the one who
> sells this newspaper would have fear of God anyway. He would think that
> service to a human being is service to God. I am sure that he will show me
> the way and find me a place'.

In turn, the editor of the newspaper took the microphone and responded to this narrative:

I had also heard this story. Our brother did not tell us how it ends, and nor

do I know it. But I am sure that a sincere servant of God has helped her. I

have also helped a lot of people who have mounted down from buses

coming from Anatolia to Istanbul.

The way religious activists imagine the situation of immigrants in the city bears a

structural analogy to the way religious people in general imagine their positions in the

universe.[15] The traditional Islamic construction of the person is based on the sense of

being potential prey to certain weak characteristics always present in human beings

(generally summed up by the term *nefis*, which is usually translated as 'self' or 'the

flesh'), such as greed, pride and thrift. If it were not for the message of God, people

would be driven by these evil qualities. They would consequently be unable to find the

proper way, and they would suffer in the other world. When activists in Sultanbeyli make

reference to the life experiences of its inhabitants, these references establish equivalence

between the role of religion in personal life and the role of religious activism in the life of

the immigrants. Just as it is religion that is going to save souls from being lost in the

universe, it is religious actors who are going to show the correct path in the urban jungle.

Through striking this resemblance with immigrants' religious beliefs, Islamists

counterpose their urban activities to the allegedly corrupting and disorienting urban life.

This dimension of the Islamist call resonates with modernization theory's emphasis on

Islam's capacity to offer a direction to disoriented immigrants (even though the

immigrants are not as 'lost' as the quotations above suggest, as we will see in the sections

below).

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[15] Here, I am mostly drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) idea of 'homology'.

If this is how religious activists perceive their own leadership, how do the residents of the district interpret their interventions and self-ascribed guidance? The religious stance on alcohol can be used as an example to demonstrate the residents' understanding. Most inhabitants of the district talk about the former ban on the sales of alcohol in Sultanbeyli in an approbatory tone. Remzi, a temporary cleaning worker in the local municipality, has come to Istanbul for better education and job opportunities. He first moved to one of the central districts, as his brother used to run a teahouse there, and he could work with him while going to a primary school in the district. He eventually moved to Sultanbeyli because it was cheaper. While an infrequent consumer of alcohol before moving to the district, he quit drinking after his interactions with Islamist party members. Remzi now shared the positive sentiment about the former alcohol ban with other conservative inhabitants:

> I gave a birthday party six months after I settled in this district. One of my friends, who had come from outside the district, asked if we could buy alcohol. I said of course, and we collected money. Someone at the party said that alcohol is not sold in Sultanbeyli. We would have to go to another district to buy it. That would take too long and we gave up. If we had bought alcohol, if we had drunk, bad things could have happened. But thank God, the ban on alcohol prevented us.

Remzi pictures himself and his friends as naturally open to alcohol. In accordance with the traditional Islamic outlook on human nature or 'creation' (*fıtrat*) and society, Remzi assumes that naturally self-destructive impulses must be controlled by authorities, as well as by the person himself and his close relations. This understanding of human nature can

be seen as one of the reasons why Ali Nabi Kocak, the former Islamist mayor who banned alcohol sales during his time in office, was so much revered in the district. The power of the Islamist party, therefore, came from the sense of control it conferred on immigrants. In a district dominated by the Islamists, the immigrants felt that they could live in a city without suffering the unwanted consequences of urban life. In the case of converts like Remzi, this perception of the Islamist leadership was projected to the respondent's past and provided to the researcher as a reason for ongoing support for the Islamist party.

The second dimension of the Islamist call mentioned above (the populist reaction against the urban centre and the urban elite) can be observed in the party's recognition of the immigrant subject. Ahmet, a high functionary of the Islamist local municipality, distinguishes the practice of the (elected) municipal leaders from that of the (appointed) local governor by referring to this recognition:

> The local governor should descend to the level of the people. If you treat
> them the same way you treat retired women from Beyoglu [a central
> district of Istanbul], you will not succeed. …The administrator should
> himself get involved with the people. If they go to the coffeehouse, he
> should go to the coffeehouse. If they go to the mosque, he should go to the
> mosque. If he has to visit their houses, and if they eat their meals on the
> floor, he should sit down and eat with them. There is no other way you can
> learn their lifestyle and social structure. You can call the people to your
> presence by using the gendarmerie, you can scare them, but you cannot
> discover their brain and lifestyle.

Ahmet is drawing on popular resentment against the local government's coalition with a secularist organization that comes to the district and tries to mobilize, unsuccessfully, against religious activism.[16] According to the Islamists, the activists of these organizations share nothing with the people. Islamist legitimacy, in contrast, is closely related to shared everyday practices between top Islamist administrators and the poorest of immigrants (even as Islamists keep a distance and feel superior to the poor, as suggested by the word Ahmet uses, at least when speaking to the researcher, to depict the ideal relation between the politicians and the people – 'descend'). Secularist functionaries and activists (e.g. the local governor, secularist teachers, activists of secularist organizations, etc.) not only avoid these practices they associate with poor and/or newly urbanizing people (eating on the floor, going to the mosque, going to the coffeehouse, etc.), but they publicly attack them. Ahmet's approach to the relations between administrators and the people demonstrates how Islamists aim at entering the capillaries of society in the way theorists of hegemony describe. In sum, the Islamist party appeals to the people by being a guide in a complicated labyrinth and voicing their reaction to the urban elite.

Immigrant Subjectivities

This section will discuss certain dimensions of squatter agency which cannot be adequately theorized by remaining within the 'strain' framework provided by

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[16] This organization was Cagdas Yasami Destekleme Dernegi (The Association for the Support of Modern Life), the activists of which are predominantly upper middle-class women.

modernization theory. Although Islamism is far from being just a channel for the expression of civil society, its strength does not lie in simply seducing isolated, passive and disoriented immigrants either. Its immigrant supporters are active in the making of the city. Below, I discuss how the urban poor construct space through imagined distinctions between the urban and the rural, as well as through the negotiation of gender segregation, both under the leadership of the Islamist party.

The urban/rural distinction as an everyday strategy

In urban sociology and anthropology, the discussion about whether immigrants are rural or urban or a mixture of the two has a long history (Gans, 1962; Gutkind, 1974; Lloyd, 1979; Mangin, 1970). In what follows, I take the urban/rural distinction as an 'effect of discourse', rather than the expression of an innate reality. I use the phrase effect of discourse in the Foucaultian sense (Foucault, 1977; Mitchell, 1991): distinctions that have no empirical validity prior to their deployment in discourse systematically shape reality afterwards, though not necessarily in the way predicted in and desired by discourse. I argue that, not what the urban and the rural really are, but how they are used in everyday practice can help us understand immigrant experience.

Even though the academy is now moving away from the established outlook that takes rural-to-urban immigrants as essentially peasants (but see Erdentug and Burcak, 1998), for elite and subordinate city dwellers, as well as for the media, the informal city is still 'rural'. How can we account for the persistence of these categories in everyday practice? Why do squatters themselves fall back on the very category that is used for excluding them from the city? The answer, I argue, lies in how the categories 'urban' and

'rural' are configured in the practice of squatters, and how this differs from their configuration in dominant discourse.

Both the media and the squatters themselves say that immigrants have brought to the city their 'mores' and 'peasant mentalities'. However, some of the behaviours that are perceived as rural are in fact manoeuvres which can be frequently observed in urban settings in a variety of contexts. For example, living in tight and closed communities and religious mobilization – to which both the Turkish media *and* the squatters refer to as 'rural' – are urban as much as rural strategies. Scholars of Latin American urbanization and religion have demonstrated that these strategies can be quite conducive to neighbourhood improvement (Burdick, 1993; Roberts, 1995).

The rural/urban distinction is still frequently resorted to, not necessarily because it is based on empirical reality, but because it lends itself to strategic use. The dominant sectors of Turkey take the city as a haven for freedom, individualism and civility. The (alleged) communalism, traditionalism and uncivil manners of immigrants, they hold, threaten the city. This dominant discourse invites the squatter to participate in urban life, but it expects him/her to leave behind 'rural' traits in order to mingle. The squatter answers by claiming his rural identity and participating in public life through his communal ties (e.g. going to political meetings with extended family). Being 'rural' is also a precept for not understanding the ways of the city and practicing one's own laws. Azim, a middle-aged Islamist construction worker, argues that their use of public land as private lodging (squatting), which as I have mentioned was encouraged by the Islamist party, is justified by their lack of knowledge concerning urban planning terms:

The people of this district do not know parcels and green areas. In our

village we call pasture [*mera*] what they call green areas. And what they

call parcels is just arable fields for us.

Open vs. closed: the reproduction and transformation of gender segregation

According to Gole (1996), the distinctiveness of Islamic culture lies in its

emphasis on closed spaces that make women less visible and contactable, thereby

preserving communal morality. Its inhabitants built Sultanbeyli by keeping this precept in

mind. Those who could afford it built gardens surrounded by high walls which provided

space for the socialization of women in a manner that would not be observable from the

outside. A lot of poor immigrants, however, did not have the resources to finance such an

architectural structure. The most conservative among them compensated for this

disadvantage by building houses with windows that did not permit the visibility of the

interior. Another architectural feature in some of these houses is the layout of the rooms,

the doors of which are not immediately visible to each other. As a result of this layout,

males who are not the members of its kin network can still visit a conservative family

without necessarily encountering the female members of the household.

Various layers of female practice reproduce, negotiate, and challenge this spatial

configuration. The women of families which have settled without their *hemşehri*

networks, or a wide network of relatives, generally do not leave their streets. Their house

visits are restricted, the neighbours see them as outsiders, and they have nobody to walk

the streets of the district with. This leaves them without much to do, since the city is seen

as unpredictable and dangerous, which keeps them from going out by themselves.

Women with wide networks of relatives, on the other hand, frequently go on

house visits. They know by heart the streets of the neighbourhood thanks to their relatives and *hemşehri*s who are spread across the district. They go in packs of neighbours to the bazaars of their own neighbourhood and other neighbourhoods, not only for buying food, but also for seeing relatives and *hemşehri*s in other neighbourhoods. Short house visits of relatives and *hemşehri*s follow bazaar incursions in other neighbourhoods.

These networks have their own drawbacks, however, since mechanisms of control over women might also get more intense to the degree that the community itself is wide. Women with wide networks always have to take into account the opinions of their neighbours; they have to keep their houses tidy and clean, since they are always in interaction with others: anyone can visit them at any moment of the day. There is very little of what might be called personal space in their homes, since most of the space there is in community use.

Women living in small community networks, such as an apartment building of three stories of agnates as in Halime's case, feel the pressures of networks, without enjoying the benefits of community life: they are imprisoned in their buildings or streets, and are also under tight control. Halime's husband, who owns a small workshop, has married a young woman without divorcing Halime[17] and settled in another district, leaving her with his brothers and their families in two adjacent apartment buildings. Her female as well as male kin who live on her street restrict Halime's contacts with outsiders. Halime expressed her restrictions poignantly as she told me the reason why she encourages her son (then in eighth grade) to pursue his studies:

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[17] Polygamy, though prohibited by secular law, is still practiced in both urban and rural areas of Turkey (Yilmaz 2003).

> In the village I wandered around more. Since I came here, I haven't done
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> that. As I haven't gone to school I can't wander around in the city. I only
>
> know two streets beyond this one. I want him to be educated so that he can
>
> wander around.

As there is consistent emphasis in Turkish public discourse on the civilizing and liberating influence of education, immigrants sometimes blame themselves and their ignorance for their lack of freedom. Patriarchy, however, is not a legitimate target in conservative neighbourhoods, which prevents Halime from criticizing the restrictions imposed by her kin network.

For women from conservative families, one strategy of expanding one's space within these restrictions is pushing religious reasoning to its logical conclusions and arguing that everybody, irrespective of gender, should work for God's glory.[18] When this strategy is used, the political participation of women is specifically enabled through the architectural arrangement of the district. Under the current regime of segregation, their participation in political and public life is not perceived as a threat to morality or as an invitation to sexual permissiveness. Fatma, a young activist of the Islamist party, told me that she enjoyed the district very much because she could go everywhere without being noticed too much by men.[19] She added:

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[18] For the mixed blessings of this strategy, see Arat (2005) and Mahmood (2005).

[19] As studies on the gendered dimension of Islamism have mostly focused on the issue of women's dress and conduct (Etoz, 2003; Gocek, 1999; Ozdalga, 1997; Taraki, 1995) this architectural and urban dimension of Islamization has been only rarely noticed (Saktanber, 2002; Secor, 2002).

We would be suffocated in districts like Kadıköy [a central district of

Istanbul]. We would be imprisoned within four walls. Here we can

breathe. Thanks to *sohbet*s and [Islamist] party activities, we can always

go out. I have visited so many homes because of these activities.

Fatma also said that she started going out more after she became politically involved.

Religious activism confers on women the right to get out, associate with others (even

with those outside family and *hemşehri* networks) and organize. Hence, it was not simply

the bottom-up agency of poor actors that expanded the boundaries of conservative life,

but their thorough politicization and their engagement in party politics.

As leftist and secularist options were either disorganized or appeared elitist, the

most feasible option out of restrictive local communities for many women was Islamic

mobilization. However, the Islamist party did not have an agenda of abolishing all

barriers to the participation of women. Moreover, the female activists I spoke to did not

have any demands about increasing the role of women in the administration of the

Islamist party or the local municipality. Gramscian analysis emphasizes that such active

consent of subordinate sectors for hegemonic institutions, and mobilization built around

this consent, both perpetuate inegalitarian structures *and* secure concessions for the

disadvantaged within the boundaries of those structures.

Conclusion

Modernization theory claims that Islam has a special appeal to new immigrants to

the city. These immigrants are confused and disoriented, and therefore grab on to the

identity offered by Islamists to give meaning to their lives. New theories of civil society,

on the other hand, see Islamism as a symbolic vehicle that carries urban communities'
opposition to the authoritarian state. In this perspective, Islamism has no shaping power;
it only lets civil society express its dissatisfaction with the state and acts as an idiom of
self-organization. I have argued that there are active and creative urban communities (as
in civil society accounts) but that Islamism also gives marginal settlements and rural-to-
urban immigrants a new sense of identity (as in modernization theory). The analysis of
Islamism as a hegemonic project can theorize these two dimensions of urban politics
conjointly. According to the perspective developed in this article, the function of the
Islamist Party is to cultivate, explore and shape the new popular imagination, but it does
not work with nothing: it builds itself on the identities and self-organizing capacity of the
immigrants, as much as it shapes these.

Immigrant poor subjectivities are mainly built on developing creative responses to
the urban-rural distinction, as well as on reconfigurations of gender segregation.
Communal belonging (as defined through place of origin) also constitutes a vital node in
the production and reproduction of immigrant subjectivities. Yet, poor communities do
not operate in a vacuum, but work in conjunction with a political movement that guides
them in the new urban spatial structure. Islamism develops and transforms the ways in
which poor immigrants interpret, gain control over, and find their place in urban space.
Also, some outcomes of urban poor spatial practices – such as the transmutation of the
meaning of belonging to certain provincial towns and the meaning of Istanbul itself – do
not come about spontaneously but are facilitated by religious politics.

Through articulation to Islamist politics, the subjectivity and communities which
rural-to-urban immigrants develop gain meanings well beyond self-organization. Islamist

politics actually comes in when existing immigrant identities and communities risk remaining parochial and weak. More, belying its portrayal by modernization theory, Islamist politics exhibits a multilayered approach to the urban behind a thin veneer of essentialism. Islamism, rather than being the authentication of some traditional origin and the maintenance of pre-modern identities, is the negotiation of the city through a re-casting of allegedly authentic (but, in fact, to some extent constructed) identities. It is partially this elasticity that gives Islamism its power.