

Ismail Kara made the following analysis of Islamism

in his book, *Islamist thought in Turkey*: Islamism can be described as a movement which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries methodically and cleverly rescued the Islamic world from Western colonisation, tyrannical administrators, slavery, mimicry and superstitions by causing Islam as a whole (faith, worship, morality, philosophy, politics, education) to “once again” dominate life. Islamist thought came onto the global agenda as a serious political movement with the Iranian Revolution. Since then, Islamist movements around the world have fought their way into local or central government, some more successfully than others. They have clashed with rival political groups and experienced internal conflicts. On the brink of the twenty-first century, Islamism has become the most effective and popular “current” of the Islamic world.

Islamic activity grew swiftly in Turkey from 1980. Different arms of modern Islamic movements like Nurcuism and Suleymanism, and mystical movements like Nakshbendism and Kadirism are important. Today, hundreds of thousands of children receive a religious education in thousands of Koran classes under the control of these religious sects; thousands of

high school and university students live in their dormitories; thousands more students are able to further their education through scholarships granted by foundations funded by these same sects.

These sects are heavily involved in economic activities. Companies founded by sects are doing well, particularly in the service sector, by building a customer base from sect members. Additionally, entrepreneurs are creating mutual companies, mainly through collecting funds from Turkish guest workers abroad. These companies, active across the industrial sectors, operate on a without-profit principle. Interest-free financial institutions operating on the same principle obtained their capital from among the faithful.

In the political arena, Islamism means the Welfare Party (RP). The RP was the victor in the local elections of 27 March 1994 and the general election of 24 December 1995; party leader Necmettin Erbakan became prime minister for the first time in his 30-year political life in the Refahiyol coalition government.

Cultural dimensions of Islamist activity are also important. It has essentially flourished in the press and publishing fields from the mid-1980s. The independent involvement of young Islamists has transformed the monthly magazine market. Others threw their energies into the newly-privatised field of television and radio. They now control a number of national and local networks.

Most head offices of the publishing houses which became the focal point of Islamist activity from the mid-1980s are located in Istanbul, the cultural, industrial, commercial and financial centre of Turkey.

It is also the religious centre. The former capital city of the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate of the Islamic world, Istanbul has consistently protected its role as the spiritual centre of the faithful in Turkey, and this despite the founders of the Republic of Turkey basing the Directorate of Religious Affairs at Ankara.

In contrast to Ankara, which the faithful call "the city without mosques," Istanbul is a magnet for religious tourism, with its mosques, each of which is a stunning example of Islamic art, madrasas and, even, cemeteries.

The headquarters of all Islamic sects, whether underground

or not, are located in Istanbul. South-east Anatolia is the cradle of mysticism and sufism, but almost all religious leaders saw their stars rise in Istanbul. Throughout the time of the Republic, Istanbul has cultivated its special role as a religious, or Islamic, city.

There is a fundamental difference between being "Islamic" and being "Islamist." Islamic is an adjective derived from and referring to the religion of Islam; Islamist is a political ideological term which has arisen from Islam. In other words, every Islamist is compelled to be Islamic, or Muslim, but all Muslims are not required to be Islamists.

As well as forming the centre of Islamic life in Turkey, Istanbul is also the centre of Islamist thought, and this is not a recent development. Nearly all the Turkish Islamist thought in Ismail Kara's three-volume anthology is based on his experiences in Istanbul; Cemaleddin Afghani, recognised as the founder of Islamist ideology around the world, came to Istanbul to meet Padishah Abdülhamit II and seek his help in realising Afghani's pan-Islamist ideals.

But the transition of Istanbul from an "Islamic" to an increasingly "Islamist" city is very recent. Islamic thought reflects a modern urban ideology, first pioneered by rural students receiving higher education in the cities, and later among social groups who attempted to overcome the shock of migrating from rural areas to the cities by embracing traditional values, Islamist thought began to spread in the 1980s. All eyes were once again on Istanbul.

The nerve centre of this movement, even if it was not apparent at first, was the economy. Turkey, under the administration of Turgut Özal, who was himself attached to the Nakshbendi sect, was quickly attempting to adapt to a free market and, during this transition period, the faithful with capital resources quickly became a new type of entrepreneur.

In Istanbul entrepreneurs established the headquarters of an organisation known as M.Ü.S.I.A.D, now an extremely effective force in the business world, during the late 1980s. Islamists prominent in M.Ü.S.I.A.D managed to enter the independent election lists of one of the key institutions of the Turkish economy, the Istanbul Chambers of Commerce, in the most

recent elections.

Those youths with fantasies of fomenting an Iranian type Islamic revolution also did their organising for the most part in Istanbul. They realised that the best way of ensuring their voices were heard was to organise illegal protests in front of the large mosques in Beyazid, Sultanahmet and Fatih, following Friday prayers.

The surge of Refah Partisi (RP) support in the 1980s can also be attributed to Istanbul. The success of the election strategy of "renewal" pioneered by current Istanbul Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the RP Istanbul Provincial Organisation was implemented by all cadres of the RP, opening new horizons and gaining new grassroots supporters.

This approach, which mobilised legions of female activists to spread propaganda, making face-to-face contact with the masses and adopting a populism reminiscent of the social democrats, bore fruit in a very short space of time.

Istanbul was also the stage for the RP's rehearsal of moving from local to central government. The RP first succeeded in gaining the district councils of the slums of Sultanbeyli and Arnavutköy, both located well outside of the city centre; the withdrawal of the Kağıthane Social Democrat Council Chairman led to another RP victory in 1991. Kağıthane, the first major victory for the RP in Istanbul, signalled the falling one by one of the slum districts which had traditionally been dominated by the left-wing parties. The local by-elections for council chairman held a year later in the impoverished districts of Güngören, Bahçelievler, Bağcılar and Tuzla were all won by the RP.

RP's success in these elections led to a perception that the party, and the Islamist movement, was mainly drawing from the rural poor. Actually, the RP was collecting not only the votes of the poor in those notorious slums, subsequently swallowed by the city, but also the votes of the middle and upper classes.

The results of the 27 March 1994 local elections clearly show this. RP this time gained control of municipalities with lower class suburbs such as Kartal, Pendik, Esenler, Ümraniye and Bayrampaşa, in addition to those it had previously captured, but also emerged victorious in established municipalities such as Beykoz, Beyoğlu, Eyüp, Fatih, Gaziosmanpaşa, Sarıyer and Üsküdar.

The most important achievement of the 27 March 1994 elections, described as RP's "move to the city centre," was of course to capture the mayoralty of Istanbul.

Istanbul's new mayor, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, when still RP Istanbul Provincial Chairman and not even a candidate for the mayoralty, had said, "Capturing Istanbul means capturing Turkey...Capturing Istanbul means capturing the world and the dynamism which gives the world order...; the reason is that Istanbul is a world city. This is also a healthy development for the future."

RP General Chairman Necmettin Erbakan announced the candidacy of Erdoğan for the Istanbul mayoralty at the Eyüp Sultan Mosque one Friday. They then went to the Fatih Mosque. The RP members designated the Istanbul municipal elections as "The Second Conquest of Istanbul." They wished to foil the ambitions of those who had supposedly taken over Istanbul and wished to move it closer to its Byzantine past.

Turkey went into shock when it learnt that Erdoğan had beaten his closest rival, Ülhan Kesici, by 100,000 votes to become the mayor of the Greater Municipality of Istanbul. When Ankara fell into RP hands by a slim 11,000 vote margin, the shock was even greater. Some 28 provincial municipality capitals, six of them greater area metropolises, now had RP administrations; the 19 per cent of the vote captured by the party translated into control of 327 municipalities.

Public opinion pollsters became the first target of non-RP supporters, who claimed that to prevent an RP victory they would have cast their votes for the RP's closest rival party. Next in line for criticism were the centre left and centre right parties, who had "split their constituency bases, ensuring RP victory."

In the midst of this panicked attempt at pinning blame on someone or something, election officials discovered stamped ballot papers at the city dumps and incinerators, as well as at schools which had served as polling stations. Inquiries conducted by security forces and representatives of all parties except the RP, found that thousands of votes for "parties other than the RP" had ended up on the trash heap.

Non-RP grassroot activists also claimed that it was

undemocratic - "unjust for the RP, with 25 per cent of the votes, to govern the other 75 per cent". Meanwhile, some RP supporters, flushed with victory, reportedly assaulted women, especially those not wearing religious garb, in city backstreets. Rumours, quickly spread by the press, made unfounded allegations of dousings with hydrochloric acid, beatings and even murder.

In response to the RP capture of Istanbul and Ankara, "contemporary, secular, Ataturkist" groups organised themselves in opposition. Various "struggle groups" were formed, using office fax machines.

Amid all this frenzied activity, people were on tenterhooks to know what the RP's victory meant for "secularism." Tayyip Erdoğan promised that Istanbul would not be a "city of bars," but vowed to close all of the brothels in Karaköy. Erdoğan stated his intention to build a mosque in Taksim Square and establish foundations to support those of marriageable age. He also said that he would provide women students with separate buses if they wanted them but that he would definitely not change dress rules for council workers. However, he added that alcohol would not be served at municipal cocktail parties.

Today, three and a half years after the elections, the RP sub-provincial municipalities are low key in contrast to the ever-increasing popularity of Tayyip Erdoğan. Public opinion polls conducted by the municipality show Erdoğan's approval rating and vote potential far outstripping that of his party. (Turkey's RP municipal leaders are extremely fond of conducting such surveys, which always show them in a good light).

With Erdoğan cited as the natural successor in the event of the retirement from active politics of the RP's elderly leader, Necmettin Erbakan, the mayor is compelled to engage in such political manoeuvring. Erdoğan takes pains to present himself as an "outspoken, youthful" man of the people; his Black Sea (Rize) roots and childhood in the notoriously tough neighbourhood of Kasımpaşa helps. He also is careful to emphasise his professional, rather than ideological or Islamist, identity.

Erdoğan has developed an effective public relations team to inform voters about projects he has either developed or inherited from his predecessor, social democrat Nurettin Sözen, to tackle the myriad problems of Istanbul.

The RP mayors, who proudly explain that they run their municipalities along the lines of a firm, are also notable for their populist inclinations. Their charitable works, which include distributing food and fuel to the poor, providing disadvantaged students with scholarships, clothing and educational materials, assisting poor couples to get married and organising mass circumcision ceremonies, have been so successful and effective that municipality leaders from other parties have begun adopting similar methods.

Aside from charitable works, the Islamism of RP municipalities shows itself in four ways: first, by taking on new personnel from those who share Islamist beliefs; secondly, by encouraging beards and head scarves among council workers; thirdly, by emphasising Islamic principles in cultural activities; and lastly by giving preferential treatment to individuals or firms claiming to be Islamist when granting contracts.

Even so, the "Islamism" of the RP municipalities is being questioned by Islamists. Many RP mayors, including Erdoğan, have been criticised by their comrades for having too many non-Islamists on their payrolls, being too tolerant of those wearing non-Islamist dress among their personnel, not favouring Islamist cultural activities enough and, most important of all of course, not ensuring that Islamists benefit enough from the distribution and allocation of municipal revenue.

During the local elections, the RP adopted the slogan "Istanbul is and will remain ours." The Islamist movement, which inspired youth with rousing marches containing lines such as "Fatih was your age when he conquered Istanbul," claimed that Istanbul, former capital of the Ottoman Empire and seat of the Caliphate, had been "conquered a second time." However, events since 27 March 1994 suggest that it is not the Islamists who have conquered Istanbul; it is Istanbul which has conquered the Islamists.

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