

## VIII. Tarikat and Cemaat in Modern Day Turkey

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What is a *Tarikat*? What is their role in Turkey? To answer these questions the terms “*Tarikat*” (Islamic order) and “*Cemaat*” (Islamic community or group) and the differences between them will have to be clarified. Then their political and social functions will be illustrated.

*Tarikat* are traditional Islamic organizations that fill a variety of cultural, social and political needs. Having been founded as far back as the 10th century, the *Tarikat* (small groups of brotherhoods made up of mystics who lived in communities) protected Islam from being transformed into a cold, formal doctrine by keeping it alive in the form of a profound and compassionate faith. They managed to restrain Islam because the *Tarikat* supporters were rarely the orthodox ulema but rather the “flexible” faithful who perceived faith not in institutional terms, but on a personal, esoteric basis and through their personal suffering and accomplishments.

The Islam of the *Tarikat* could also be described as heterodox, deviating from Sunni orthodoxy as a result of its Sufi tradition and mysticism. In the past, the *Tarikat* played a major political and social role. After the founding of the Turkish Republic, the networks of mystic brotherhoods were propelled into surreptitious activity when the *Tarikat* were banned in 1925 by a law forbidding *tekkes* (dervish monasteries) and *zawiyas* (Sufi mosques) during the era of one-party rule (1923-1946). During this period, the *Tarikat* provided a virtually secret base for carrying out Islamic activities. Their clandestine, semi-mystic followers supported popular Islam and aided its entry into the 20th century with exuberance and vitality.

The harsh secular measures were moderated during the period of Democratic Party rule (1950-1960) and in the 1961 constitution provi-

sions were made regarding civil liberties (including freedom of speech and association). The *Tarikat* were thus able to begin operating on a semi-lawful basis (despite the fact that from a legal point of view they were outlawed, since the ban on their activities had not yet been lifted) and also to build ties with political parties.

Their social role was widened as a result of urbanization and industrialization, which uprooted many Turks from their traditional communities and created fresh social needs. The *Tarikat* perform a function in contemporary Turkey, providing people with a sense of belonging to a community, human companionship, a set of guidelines, an identity and a form of organization.

In addition, they respond to people's essential needs by offering them financial support, shelter and a network of social contacts. They function as social welfare organizations, given that, in Turkey, approximately 30% of the population has no social protection.

Despite their semi-official status, the *Tarikat* are among the most active voluntary organizations and interest groups in a country where collective rights have been stripped down, hindering the growth of autonomous groups which would otherwise represent a variety of socio-economic and political interests. The principles and workings comprising the basis of the *Tarikat* and *Cemaat* may be better grasped within this framework.

Among the best-known *Tarikat* is the İskenderpaşa Monastery. It is powerful and well-established, and was founded by an important *Nakşibendi* Sheikh, Mehmet Zah Kotku (1897-1980), who was succeeded as Sheikh on his death by his son-in-law, Professor Mehmet Esat Cosan (b. 1938).

### *The Cemaat*

Whereas the *Tarikat* are historical entities with an Islamic tradition dating back centuries, the *Cemaat* are relatively new, having emerged after the establishment of the Republic. Nevertheless, the *Cemaat* do have organic ties with the *Tarikat* and derive their basic features from the *Tarikat* with which they are linked. The *Süleymanci* for instance, have embraced all the teachings of the *Nakşibendi Tarikat*.

The *Süleymanci Cemaat* represents the product of a partial relaxation of secular measures at the beginning of the 1950s, which allowed two new brotherhoods, the *Kantiri* and the *Mevlevi*, to emerge alongside the *Nakşibendi*. The former were the *Risala-i Nur* of Said Nursî, who

had supported the idea of the *Sharia* becoming the regime since the beginning of the 1920s, and the latter was *Süleymanci*, named after their founder, Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan.

### ***The Nakşîbendi order***<sup>1</sup>

The *Nakşîbendi* was the most widespread monastic order in the Ottoman Empire. Even today it can boast many offshoots scattered throughout a region extending from Turkey, Iraq and Syria as far as the Caucasus and the Turk republics of Central Asia.

According to historical accounts, at the order's peak there were more than 32 *tekkes* belonging to the *Nakşîbendi* in Constantinople, while more than 12,000 *murid* (supporters) in the Turkish and Arabian world followed Sheikh Baghdadi.

From the 15th century onwards, the evolution of the monastic order followed two directions, which must be examined in tandem to comprehend the influence of the *Nakşîbendi* in modern day Turkey. One of them was the path paved by the order in Ottoman religious history at the time of the founding of the Ottoman Empire. The second was the movement of spiritual rebirth formed during the era of the Great Mongol dynasty's consolidation of rule in the Indian subcontinent. This movement gained influence in Anatolia in the 19th century.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, and later in the 15th century, Anatolia became the central stage for successive waves of disruptive social changes. The invasions by the Mongols of Genghis Khan that put an end to the rule of the Seljuq Turks at the beginning of the 13th century, large-scale migration towards the west by several Turkmen tribes, the subsequent breakdown of Mongol rule and the messianic riots for millenarian rule led by charismatic Turkmen leaders, all formed part of a turbulent picture.

In the 14th century, a period in which the Ottoman principalities began to adopt the form of sultanates, the first sultans had no option but to support the so-called "dervish colonizers" who accompanied the Turkmen tribes and guided their settlement in Anatolia. The charm that the powerful leaders exerted over their staunch followers was principally due

1. See Mardin, Şerif, «The Naksibendi Order in Turkish History» in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, Edited by R. Tapper, I. B. Tauris, London and New York 1991, 1994<sup>2</sup>.

to their charismatic personalities, plus the popular conviction that they could communicate with the spiritual world and that they possessed the sacred art of magic, which only shaman priests had a command of.

This should not surprise us, as Sufism, which was the ideological platform for such religious orders, “carried out Neo-Platonic teachings by means of a practice which represented the context of eastern society. In other words we have a return to the final moments of Greek philosophy when it had degenerated into religion and, what is more, a pagan one. The pagan element then, so vivid in shamanism, the religion of the Turks, was what made their attachment to Sufism all the stronger”.

### ***Leading Nakşîbendi figures in the 20th century: Said-i Nursî and Kotku***

The 1890s, during which an ever-increasing invasion of Western models of everyday behavior could be observed among the upper class of bureaucrats in Constantinople, was an era of further reductions in the already slight chances of the Islamic past being restored, and was publicly voiced as such. The last serious attempt at this was made by Ahmet Cevdet Pasha as a reaction to a plan by the cabinet of ministers which provided for adoption of the Napoleonic Civil Code (1868). Perhaps the pan-Islamic attempts by Sultan Abdulhamid II in the 1880s and 1890s also repelled the actions of Muslim zealots. Thus, there was no worthy successor to Gümüşhanevi at the helm of Constantinople for at least 40 years, though there is some evidence that a *Khalidi* sheikh setting out for Turkestan in the 1920s went only on the approval of Kemal Atatürk himself<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, if this happened, it signified that the sheikh was performing a “service of national duty” and had no primary interest in saving Muslim souls in Central Asia. Rather, the creation of conditions for annexation of their regions to the fledgling state of Turkey was what he coveted, and to this end he would work by turning his order’s religious influences in the region to his advantage.

It was not until the 1930s that Sheikh Abdulhakim Arvasi emerged as a wise influence, assumed the spiritual guidance of the Turkish poet, Nesip Fazil Kisakurek. According to Mardin, this influence is due to the publication by Kisakurek in 1943 of the magazine *Buyuk Dogu*,

2. Smith, Grace Martin, «The Uzbek Tekkes of Istanbul», *Der Islam* 57 (1), 1980, 137.

which supported Islamic values at a time when such an action was fraught with danger for the editor.

The break between the 1920s and 1930s can also be characterized by a remarkable phenomenon which emerged outside the capital, again with roots in the *Nakşîbendi*: Bediuzzaman Said-i Nursî (1876-1960),<sup>3</sup> who had been trained at the seminars of the *Khalidi Nakşîbendi*, organized in eastern Turkey, and was handed control of the region of Bitlis-Hizan, Anatolia. The origin of the movement in an outlying region is interesting in that it replicates similar developments which were taking place at the frontier of the Islamic world at that time. What we have is clearly “a mobilization of the regions”<sup>4</sup> which is an important dimension in the revival of Islam during the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Said-i Nursî had contacts with the Young Turks in a way that provides evidence that he held a fascination for politics. It was not until the 1920s that he changed his stance and began rallying in favor of the rejection of the option of a purely political path of action. Now he relied upon religious rallying, from which he naturally expected political results to arise. This influence spread via the distribution of a series of pamphlets intended to enlighten middle-class Muslims about Islam.

### ***Mehmed Zahid Kotku and the Nakşîbendi Khalidi cemaat***

At the same time there was also the influence of the activity and personality of the Sheikh of the *Khalidi Nakşîbendi*, Mehmed Zahid Kotku. He had experienced the ban on religious orders in 1925 when he was a young man, and is regarded as the founder of political Islam in Turkey. The first Islamic political party, the “Party of National Salvation”, was founded by a group at the place of worship where he taught, the İskenderpaşa, from which it became known as “the order of the Tekkesi İskenderpaşa”.

3. Subsequent founder of the politically powerful Nurdju order in modern-day Turkey (see 5 below and on). Also: Voll, John, «The Sudanese Mahdi: frontier fundamentalist», *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, 1979, 145-166.

4. For this dimension see William J. Foltz, «Modernisation and Nation-building», in Richard L. Meritt and Bruce Russett, Eds, *From National Development to Global Community: Essays in Honor of Karl W. Deutsch*, Allen and Unwin, London 1981, 22-45.

5. Voll, John, «The Sudanese Mahdi: frontier fundamentalist», *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, 1979, 145-66.

After studying in Constantinople, the young Kotku returned to his home town, Bursa, where he was to serve as imam for fifteen years. Subsequently he was appointed imam at the Uftade mosque in Bursa by the Republican Directorate of Religious Affairs. In 1952 he was invited to succeed Abdulaziz Bekkine who, in complete secrecy, had assumed the leadership of the *Nakşîbendi* in Constantinople.

Kotku's new official position (probably with the assent of the Directorate of Religious Affairs) was now that of imam of the Ümmü Gül-sûm mosque. In 1958 he was transferred to the İskenderpaşa mosque, where he remained until his death in 1980.

A number of features of Kotku's strategy are clearly a continuation of the *Khalidi Nakşîbendi* social stance. He gathered people around him who later, in the 1970s and 1980s, would take an active part in the political life of the country. Among them was Dr. Netsbedin Erbakan, founder of the first Turkish Islamic party, Korkut Ozal, the brother of the former prime minister of Turkey, Mehmet Sevket Eygi, and the editor of the daily Islamic newspaper *Zaman*, a newspaper of great appeal among the Turkish religious masses.

Kotku encouraged and financed two important moves. First, he persuaded his trusted student, Erbakan, to found an exemplary Islamic industrial company, which led to the setting up of an irrigation pump manufacturing industry. Second, he exerted his influence in the founding in 1968 of the *Sabah* newspaper, which would undertake the Islamic struggle. His influence must be given serious examination. His great awareness as regards modernization is noticeable through the choice of his son-in-law, Esat Cosan, professor at the Ankara School of Theology, as his successor in the order. Professor Cosan heads an organization which publishes three magazines in connection with Islamic ideology, one of which is entitled *Ilim ve Sanat* (Science and Art) and is a very useful, informative magazine compared to corresponding "secular" ones. Mardin regards it as "a unique accomplishment in capturing the views of 'secular' intellectuals in another Muslim society"<sup>6</sup>.

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6. Mardin, *op.cit.*, 230 and also: Fazlur Rahman, 1977, «Revival and Reform in Islam», Ch. 7 in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 2B, (Ed. By P.M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis), Cambridge University Press, 632-656, also; Schimmel, Annemarie, *And Muhammad is his Messenger*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1985, 216 and on, also: Friedmann, Johanan, *Shaykh Abroad Sirhindi*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal and London 1971, 74).

Kotku's political religious doctrine includes three features. First, Kotku encouraged his faithful to take full advantage of the new measures moderating the strict secular nature of the early republican period and to promote Islamic education throughout the nation in order to strengthen the faith. For example, after the government gave permission for lessons to be begun in the Koran (after 1949), Kotku rallied his supporters into creating as many Koran schools as possible.

Despite the fact that the İskenderpaşa monastery is *Tarikat*, it has not confined its activities solely to aims related to the Sufi and religion but is involved in daily social and political issues. Kotku had two roles: as sheikh, with his poetic and mystical style, he made a deep impression on the faithful by providing spiritual contentment, while as a social leader he taught the importance of strengthening one's faith in tandem with material development and technological progress. In addition, he considered it extremely important for the faithful to take an interest in issues which touch upon morality, society and politics. Kotku encouraged his faithful to take an active part in politics and influence the political mechanisms for the introduction of basic principles.

Secondly, Kotku closely followed social, economic and political developments on a national, regional and international level and responded to them by attempting to gain influence in public political life and notably with regard to national and international developments. In addition, he advised his faithful to take an active interest in national developments "as this was the duty of a devout Muslim". Indeed, Kotku encouraged his supporters to take an active part in politics – such as by forming political parties considered vehicles for achieving Islamization.

Thirdly, Kotku recognized the importance of penetrating state organizations and encouraged his faithful to become civil servants and be promoted to the upper echelons of the bureaucratic hierarchy.

At the end of the 1960s a considerable number of *Nakşibendi* worked for the National Planning Organization and later in 1973, when the National Salvation Party formed an alliance with the Popular Republican Party, it is said that a great number of Kotku followers were recruited as administrative staff in ministries of strategic importance such as the Ministry of Education and Internal Affairs.

The Islamists always attached particular importance to control of the Ministry of Education. However, in order to avoid friction with the state the İskenderpaşa Monastery tries to adopt its Islamic philosophy to secular principles. Of course, it does not hesitate to criticize the re-

gime and its rules under certain conditions. Despite this, the Islam it professes seems to be revisionist, modernist and pluralist, since compromising with the system and creating a political party to take part in the elections do not go hand in hand with Islamic political philosophy.

This Tarikat has strong support, but it is particularly strong in three provinces in the region of Marmara: Constantinople, Izmit and Adapazari and in the eastern province of Anatolia, Caesaria.

Among the supporters of Sheikh Kotku are included political personalities such as the late President Ozal and his brother, the former interior minister, professor and current member of the ANAP Korkut Ozal.

Among the contemporary orders that have continued the tradition of the *Nakşibendi* and *Kadirîyye* are the *Isikcilar*, formed by a *Nakşibendi* sheikh and former army officer Husseyin Hilmi Isik, now led by Isik's son-in-law, Dr Enver Oren, owner of the important enterprise "Ihlas Holding". Another is the *Süleymancilar* community, which was founded by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, who died in 1959. The group's leader is currently Tunahan's son-in-law, Kemal Kacar. On a political level both of them have supported center-right parties since the era of Menderes' Democratic Party.

Despite this, many *Nakşibendi* orders have chosen to turn changes to their own advantage and have managed to continue their traditions while growing considerably in size.

One of these is the Menzil (Dergah) Monastery, founded by Sheikh Abdulhakim Huseyni, who died in 1972. The monastery is situated in Menzil in the province of Adiyaman, and also belongs to the center-right.

The *Ismailaga tekke* is the most radical and traditional order (an impressive Islamic paradox) which has survived until today. The monastery sheikh is Sheikh Mahmut Ustaosmanoglu, who obliges his followers to wear a long garment called a cube and long beards in imitation of the appearance of Mohammed.

While the extremist orders such as the *Ismailaga* rely on the poor of the shanty towns, the main branches, supporting the center-right spectrum, are supported by the wealthier middle class. The financially more powerful orders can boast portfolios, investments and businesses, including access to the media, while the poorest rely on the income derived from their radical slogans in the cultural ghettos.

The following are large tekke belonging to the Naksibedi in modern day Turkey: 1) *İskenderpaşa Tekkesi*, 2) *Ismailaga Tekkesi*, 3) *Erenkoy Tekkesi*, 4) *Menzil Dergani*, 5) *Kibrisi Dergani* and 6) *Khalidi Dergani*, which is sub-divided into branches of the *Isiksi* and the *Süleymanci*.



### ***The Nakşibendi Süleymanci Cemaat***

Another *Nakşibendi* organisation which deserves our attention is that of the *Süleymanci*, which was founded in the 1940s on the spiritual principles of the Naksibedi Sheikh Süleyman Seyfulah's meditation (from Erzurum 1863-1946) whose main occupation was religious education. This brotherhood has strong characteristics of Islamic radicalism and has made considerable progress in the last few years in spreading its core network in Turkey but also among the masses of Turkish emigrant workers abroad.

Its ideology is not completely known since in contrast to other Islamic brotherhoods in Turkey, the *Süleymanci* consciously avoid voicing their views via the press. They are regarded as "fanatical anti-westerners and enemies of all things modern".<sup>7</sup>

Professor Sheikh Haydar Bas is the leader of another *Kadiriyye* brotherhood and maintained close ties with the new party of the Refa-Yol alliance.

### ***The Kadiriyye order***

The order was founded by Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani, who was born in Djilan, Persia in 1078 and died in Baghdad in 1166, where he was buried in a special mausoleum. He was a sheikh of the Hanbali order, and among his pupils were great teachers of Hanbali Muslim law. His monastic order (the *Kadiriyye*) reaches through the Djenabi Djunegid as far as the order of the Alevites.

Many modern day Shiite Sufi orders have either been influenced by or originate directly from the *Kadiriyye* order. The organizational structure and method of conversion to the order can be described as flexible and adaptable: these features allowed for the perpetual emergence of semi-autonomous, secondary orders away from the main body, a tendency which, despite appearing disruptive, helped the order to spread all over the world. In addition, it is known as one of the most peace-loving Sufi orders, distinguished for its piety, charity and humanity, an ethos instilled in it by al-Djilani.<sup>8</sup>

7. I.Th. Mazis, *Geografia tou Islamistikou kinimatos sti M. Anatoli* [Geography of the Islamic movement in the Middle East], Greek University Press, Athens 1992, 201.

8. Rahman, *Islam*, 159 in Sencer Ayata, «Traditional Sufi orders on the Periphery:

The credos of the *Kadiriyye* order are officially and lucidly put forward in *Icmal* magazine,<sup>9</sup> which is published in Trebizond on the Black Sea, whose coastal towns are regarded as bastions of Islamic zealotry.

### *The Nurdju order*

I focus on the brotherhood of the *Nurdju* (Nur = light, Brothers of the light) not only because it is one of the best known Islamic orders in modern day Turkey, but also because it most typically represents the essence of contemporary trends in the Turkish radical Islamic movement. In the political/ideological and philosophical/religious views of the Brotherhood of the *Nurdju* can be discerned the majority of equivalent views of Islamic cells in modern-day Turkey.

Confrontation in attracting supporters etc. with the orders of the *Süleymancı* and the *Muslim Brothers* invariably results in favor of the *Nurdju*, who have also gained considerable access and sympathy among the conservative parties of the Turkish right.

The staunch anticommunist character of the order has apparently led to it gaining support abroad, and its cells have spread through Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the USA and a number of European countries, among which the Federal Republic of Germany stands out for the number and level of activity of *Nurdju* cells.

According to the most representative of his biographers, the founder of the order, Said-i Nursî was born in the village of Nurs (N.B. he was Kurdish) in the province of Bithis, Northern Kurdistan. Legend has it that he displayed signs of genius and had a very powerful memory. He

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Kadin and Nakşibendi Islam in Konya and Trabzon», likewise in R. Tapper, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, I. B. Tauris, London 1991, 239 ff.

9. The *Icmal* is addressed to readers through an introductory article in which certain names are not given. In these pages appear topics of general politics, evaluations of the present situation and theological arguments regarding the legitimacy of the role and power of the Perfect Man. Social criticism and controversy with different approaches are usually carried out by Ali Gedik. The writings of Celal Misir are mainly of an eschatological nature. The presentation and criticism of western philosophical movements, ideologies and opinions on the world are attempted by Ali Yetimoglu. Dr. Abdullah Terzi focuses attention more on particular contemporary issues such as homosexuality, AIDS, government, modern psychology and radioactivity.

successfully completed studies in theology, history, geography, geology, mathematics, physics, chemistry and astrology.

It should be mentioned that the “official” biographies assiduously make no reference to the Great Master’s ties to the Kurdish separatist movement. Naturally, all his followers acknowledge Said-i Nursî’s Kurdish origins and firmly acknowledge that to the end of his days he had difficulty expressing himself in correct Turkish. On the other hand, they passionately deny the existence of any ties between Nursî and the movement for a free Kurdistan. Obviously there is nothing unusual in this response, as a display of Kurdish national conscience (Kürtülük) was just as dangerous in Nursî’s day as it is today, and could well have been punished by hanging.

Nevertheless, it seems that the Master did not stay too far away from the great Kurdish uprising in 1925.<sup>10</sup> His retreat to the cave in Van province at the most crucial moment in the Kurdish uprising was of much less use to him for meditation and prayer than was believed by some.

Besides, for what reason did the Kemalist authorities so eagerly and with such a strict surveillance procedure at all times send him away from the volatile regions of Anatolia where the crushed Kurdish rebellion had started out? Why was he exiled to locations in Western Asia Minor as other Kurdish leaders of the uprising had been?

Certainly, the opposite applies to his ties with the “Special Organization” (Teskilat-I Mahussa) proclaimed by all his biographers. This was a Young Turk organization, one of whose declared aims was to fight against “Western Imperialism”. Nevertheless, it seems that Said was entrusted, together with other Islam zealots with “Pan-Islamic Propaganda”.

The sector of propaganda was extremely fitting for him and he fought as hard as he could to create a common front of Islamic forces. It is also highly likely that his numerous travels to the Middle East on the eve of World War I were due to his participation in the clandestine “Special Organization”.

The above organization vanished after the end of the war at the same time as the Young Turk regime from which it originated. However, despite this, Said also maintained close ties with his old fellow combatants after the break-up of the organization. Is perhaps the successful spread of his teachings due to these friendships? It is difficult to argue.

10. Dumont, Paul, «Les Disciples de la Lumière: Le mouvement Nourdjou en Turquie», in O. Carré and P. Dumont (sous la direction de) *Radicalismes Islamiques*, volume L, L’Harmattan, Paris 1985, 229 ff.

Said's list of works numbers 130 short texts in Arabian script which can be found together under the title: *Letters of Light (Risale-I Nur)* and were distributed illegally in Turkey for a long time. With the advent of liberal attitudes towards Islam under the government of Menderes in the 1950s, the Master printed these works officially, freely and also in Latin script.

He took this step because on the one hand, Latin script was permitted by the regime and on the other, he wanted to make his texts accessible to young people who were studying or had studied at republican schools and were thus familiar only with this form of writing. Nowadays, the "Letters of Light" are sold in the form of cassettes, anthologies, collections, bulletins, etc. and they are the most successful and profitable product in modern-day Turkish publishing. They are obscure texts, of high literary value, which can be interpreted and explained in a variety of ways, which is of considerable assistance to their *Nurdju* interpreters. They are a mixture of hermetism, with literary devices and interspersed with extracts of the Koran exuding a mystic flavor within an atmosphere of rationalism, even that of religion, which render them attractive to those who have unappeased esoteric needs.

It would be useful to broadly describe the phases that the *Nurdju* movement went through, beginning with the period of clerical counter-revolution in 1909, when Said-i Nursî appeared as supporter and ally of traditional social and religious values against the Young-Turks, who were violating the commands of the Sharia. His movement, by the end of the 1950s, had managed to preserve its radical, revolutionary and reactionary (as to the new Kemalist reforms) character. He fought hard for many decades against the republican reforms which made the courts and the educational system secular, the abolition of polygamy and whatever was considered to clash with the teachings of the Koran. At that time the *Nurdju* movement was synonymous with obscurantism. Later the situation changed considerably. From the primitive radicalism of the early days, the theoreticians of the movement arrived at a more versatile view of reality. Naturally, the death of the Master in 1960 contributed to this since there was no longer anyone capable of overseeing the doctrinal and theoretical purity of the order. On the other hand, it was only natural in view of the tumultuous changes which would take place in the next two decades (rapid urban development, media growth, spread of education on a national scale, industrialization, etc.) for the Brothers of the order to realize that their backward-thinking rhetoric would have to be modernized to become more effective.

This evolution in nomenclature and the adaptation of the order to modern-day conditions owes much to its thinkers, among who are high-ranking intellectuals, scholars, publishers, professors and writers. Of course, as Paul Dumont acknowledges, “in the view of the largest proportion of Turkish public opinion, the movement is considered incurably backward thinking, obscurant and reactionary, and this can be explained by the fact that fundamentalist views are still very strong and the modernist talking of the new Brothers of the order cannot preserve the barrier of prejudices”.

Sufficiently enlightening with regard to the contemporary theoretical and philosophical orientation of the order is a small pamphlet issued by the movement entitled “The Course Followed”. The slogan heading the first chapter is “Science Above All”, with corresponding content in praise of scientific involvement which proves, on the basis of extracts from works by Said-i Nursî and verses from the Koran, that a love of science must be the main feature of a good Muslim. The views of Safa Mursel, one of the leading *Nurdju* intellectuals, are similar, judging from a text where the reader is somewhat surprised to read one of the best known quotes by Kemal Atatürk “Science is the real guide of life”. In confirmation of the above we can read in a Risale-I Nur Institute of America pamphlet addressed to American sympathizers of the order that “Muslims must glorify the Holy Word and assiduously serve scientific and technological progress”.

However, to be able to produce all their publications, the order’s publishing houses are also involved in publishing and promoting material containing popularized science on topics such as “The Mysteries of the Stars”, “From Cell to Man”, “Energy and Life”, “The Brain and the Nervous System”, “The Planets”, “The Big Bang : the Birth of the Universe” etc.<sup>11</sup>

The above leaflet encourages all good Muslim readers to study on a daily basis, for at least a quarter of an hour, these scientific themes which, it must be stressed, never fail to include God’s explanations of various scientific problems. In addition, it must be said that “false theories” are very often harshly attacked, as in the monograph which refers to Darwinism. Despite this, it must be acknowledged that they are works which are

11. Serif Mardin, in «The Transformation of Religious Symbols in Turkey», *Turcica*, XVI, 1984, stresses the interest of the order in popularizing scientific knowledge for its followers. Of course, there are clear similarities with corresponding scientific publications and monographs of modern-day Rosicrucian orders in the West.

largely written by experts and are the best that the Turkish publishing industry has to offer in topics to do with popularized science.

The explanation that might be given by some for the stance of the order's scholars and theoreticians is reasonable: it is, they will say, an attempt to "seize the order from within" by Kemalist elements who are slowly but surely attempting to change its theocratic orientation and force it to conform with the trends of the Kemalist military and diplomatic elite.

A Kemalist U-turn would then be observed in the order, which would have obviously concerned its late leader, yet certainly it would prove beneficial to the present Turkish regime as a uniting force between faithful Muslims, taught that they could be loyal Kemalists at the same time. This U-turn is natural and certainly was helped by the late Ozal, but also by the ideological influence of the by now renowned "Turkish Islamic Synthesis".

It is highly likely that something like this could be taking place yet it is certain that any attempts towards modernization by the movement have not been that simple or that successful, as seen above in the case of the *Nurdju* monograph on Darwin and other similar cases which will be examined immediately below.

For instance, the order's response to the question of what the position and role of Islam should be in the administration of secular affairs is not sufficiently clear. This is because on the one hand the order proclaims Islam as the keystone of private and public life and on the other accepts the separation of state and religion. Thus, while S. Mürsel accepts that for Nursî the ideal state was that governed according to the will of the Koran, he goes on to claim that despite this the Master was proposing a completely secular regime, that is a nation characterized by complete freedom of thought and religion and excluding any state control over the spiritual life of the faithful.

Of course, what I observe is that "the genuinely secular state" with the above features is the central plank of *Nurdju* demands, and genuinely puts forward one of the main features of the state model of urban pluralistic democracy which the West has been demanding for years from Turkey without success. That is no reason to describe it as an order of bourgeois democratic convictions, despite the fact that on the issue of *Nurdju* demands it is only natural for officials of the Kemalist military, diplomatic and, finally, judicial regime to discern the movement's "subversive tendencies".

Paul Dumont points out as an explanation that "in modern-day Turkey, where the republican authorities, have all the official religious

institutional structures under their influence (i.e. places of worship, schools of religious instruction, legal support, medical staff at religious establishments etc.), under the veil of a purely theoretical ‘secularism’, within this Turkish reality the *Nurdju* demands can be fully accounted for. “What they are demanding is not in the end a secular state, despite the right of sects, brotherhoods and other groups of popular Islam to associate and freely carry out activities”.

Appearing under the certainly opportunistic, yet discernible banner of “secularism” the *Nurdju* order has dissociated its position from the remaining conservative Islamist orders and any other kind of Islamic movements and organizations, and it is precisely here that its importance lies as a catalyst of political developments in modern-day Turkey. Regarding family structure and in particular the position of women, the order mostly accepts Kemalist principles on monogamy, the working woman (albeit not especially fervently), women’s access to all levels of education and the right of women to sue for divorce (under certain conditions), while at the same time accepting it as socially acceptable for a Muslim to have four wives. As far as the establishment of the Sharia is concerned, which is a central issue for every thinking Muslim, Mürsel says that the order considers holy law flexible enough to co-exist with the secular system.

On the subject of the financial system, the order takes a hard line against both capitalism and socialism. It regards the two as totally and abusively materialistic, with capitalism leading inevitably to the worship of profit and exploitation of man by man and socialism ending up as a totalitarian system devoid of even minimal freedom. They themselves propose a “third way”, “Islamic socialism”, a system with completely centralized structures and checks and balances between secular and religious elements. The views of the order’s theoreticians could, in short, be described as opportunistic, with it performing a balancing act or muddying the waters in order to create all the conditions for a secularized Islam to prevail.

The *Nurdju* were and naturally remain anticommunist. Despite anti-imperialist rhetoric, they never ceased during the Cold War to condemn the “red menace” and support the alliance of Turkey with the American armed forces and unreservedly support their neighbor’s position in NATO. Thus, they were against any preaching by other Islamic movements in favor of an “unaligned policy”, as long as there was still the “red menace” of the Soviet Union in operation. Apparently, however, *Nurdju* anti-communism was not totally genuine. They were very often accused of being financed by foreign organizations specializing in anticommunist activity.

Despite all this we cannot talk about enslavement of the order to the military might of the West. What the Brothers of Light demand from the West is military, diplomatic and financial assistance for their country, the transfer of Western technology and know-how, and, especially, models for political and financial organization; nothing more, nothing less. The element which characterizes them most is that in this *Nurdju* perception can be found all the key words from the reformist Muslim movement of the 19th century, thus vindicating S.P. Huntington when he describes reformist opinions in non-western states: "They have secured arms from the West for the rebirth of Islam, and at the same time remain rigidly tied to the words of the Prophet and Islamic civilization".

Generally speaking, it can be seen that the *Nurdju* ideologues have not modernized as much as they pretend. Admiration, mistrust and hatred of the West, the will to resurrect a great Islam via an innovative political approach, and their devout faith in science, are all without doubt closely related to the views expressed for more than a century by advocates of Islamic rebirth such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his numerous supporters.

Here it must be stressed that from the early 1970s until today all the *Nurdju* positions can be found in the political program of the Refah Netsbedin Erbakan. In this party, which recently lost power in Turkey under pressure from the military, diplomatic and judiciary regime, a large number of members who also belong to the "Brothers of Light" are to be found. This cannot help but reflect on the order and its supporters. In addition, it can only confirm the fears of Western analysts as regards the ideological position of the "Brothers of Light".

If western governments and analysts are genuinely being led to such conclusions, which probably do an injustice to the *Nurdju* ideology, the responsibility lies with the order, which wants to muddy the waters regarding its ideological stance. However, as its expansion, prosperity and continual growth of support shows, this tactic is finally being rewarded. But at what cost to its neighbor?

The spreading of the *Nurdju* word, as already mentioned, forms the basis of a considerable infrastructure consisting of publishing houses, institutes, teaching centers and magazines. Many magazines have helped to spread *Nurdju* teachings. Today the most important and influential is the monthly *Köprü* (Bridge) which deals with the popularization of scientific themes and *Yeni Nesil* (New Generation), a daily Islamic paper which succeeded *Yeni Asya* (New Asia) in October 1980.

Of course, the movement is backed in principle by its many faithful,



to which it owes its force. In the 1950s the *Nurdju* claimed to have half a million faithful, though this could not be confirmed. Today it is certain that this number is much bigger (about two million supporters) and with the rapid pace being maintained by the order this number is snowballing.

To become a member of the order one has to be proposed by other members. Blood relations and neighbors to the proposed new member are important in this. The new member must prove a genuine interest in religious matters and if possible be able to read the Koran in Arabic script and have a command of the basic facts about the life and works of Said-i Nursî. In contrast, it is extremely difficult for someone to rise to the upper echelons of the order.

From as early as the 1950s the Brotherhood supported the Democratic Party of Menderes, as it was considered by the “Brothers” as the “party of Islam” that managed to remove the unholy group of Kemalist republicans from power. For his support, Said-i Nursî received public thanks from the leaders of the Democratic Party. In the 1970s its voters were steered towards the Justice Party under Süleyman Demirel, which was the most powerful party of the right at that time and in particular towards the party of National Salvation under Erbakan, which was succeeded by the present-day Refah Party. The close ties of the order with these two parties led the Brotherhood to the brink of ideological schism with regard to the proper course to follow. This was because some of the Brothers (with a positive attitude toward cooperation with the West and liberal political tendencies) thought that Demirel should be supported, while supporters of Erbakan hurled accusations against Western civilization and capitalism and stood for a New Islamic world order as the only way of securing the moral, cultural and social restitution of the country.

In any case, after the coup of 1980 the Ozal era helped the order enjoy times of prosperity and progress and provided the opportunity to promote a cell-creating procedure within the body of the state machine, both religious and popular.

### ***Contemporary Nurdju orders and Brotherhoods (Cemaat) in Turkey – The Fethullah Gülen affair***

After the death of Nursî in March 1960, the *Nurdju* split into different groups and each of them operates as an independent Islamic

society. There are slight differences in the way they approach Islamic thought about the universe and politics. However, these differences have not grown into wide gulfs. All of them attempt to work within a framework except for a small minority. The *Nurdju* have allied with the center right (the Democratic Party, the Justice Party and the Party of the True Path) since the beginning of the 1950s. A small *Nurdju* group chose to support another centre-right party in the 1980s, the Motherland Party.

On the other hand, a radical minority, the Med-Zehra group, also known as *Hizbi Kuran* (the Party of the Koran) is against the modern-day regime and refuses to apply constitutional methods.

There is also a very radical group of *Nurdju*, the *Azcmendi*, who are based in the province of Elazig in eastern Turkey. They can boast many organized supporters in Istanbul and their political rhetoric contains many anti-establishment and anti-Western elements.

One of the main *Cemaat* which originated from the *Nurdju* is also the *Fethullah Gülen Faithful* (*Fethullah Hocanın Talebeleri*) who can boast influence in Istanbul, Smyrna, Adapazari, Afyon and Isparta. The *Fethullah faithful* are the group with the biggest influence that supports the Islamists and which can boast an enormous network of institutes, private schools (it has 35 schools in Turkey and over 200 in the Turk republics,<sup>12</sup> as well as another in N. Iraq in Kirkuk) and guest-houses. The *Cemaat* has a moderate approach to Islam and its philosophy combines neo-nationalist, neo-Ottoman and *Nurdju* thought.

This neo-nationalism is a new feeling of nationality which developed among Turks who saw Turkish speaking communities from the Balkans to China emerge and was cultivated thanks to the explosive national rifts within the Turkish state and in particular owing to the loudly voiced Kurdish nationalism.

Neo-Ottomanism is a re-evaluation of the Ottoman past combined with feelings of respect and nostalgia. It is being debated whether the Ottoman model could provide solutions to today's problems. Despite the fact that *Fethullah Gülen* was originally a well-known supporter of the *Nurdju*, he avoids being identified with the teachings of *Said-i Nursî*, the founder of the school of the Islamic thought. Whenever he refers to *Said's* teachings *Fethullah* does not mention the name of *Nursî*. His reluctance stems from the fact that the name of *Said-i Nursî* is reminiscent of radicalism and the Kurdish struggle.

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12. See *Tempo*, 28 December 1994, No. 52, 14-16.

Because of the cautious approach adopted by Fethullah Hoca over sensitive political issues and his moderate views, it is whispered among radical Islamist circles that he is an agent who is endangering the future of the Islamic movement and Islam by teaching the “wrong” Islam. A number of people holding radical ideas who were asked in a survey covering 500 students at Islamic universities expressed the same criticism towards Fethullah Gülen. They accused him of being involved in a *Fitne* (conspiracy) against Muslims, organized by the state to split them and remove them from politics.

In addition, it is reported that Gülen is supposed to have used a mild-mannered style in order to take over strategic points in the state mechanism with a view to the rapid and successful Islamization of the state. For example, it was revealed that Gülen’s faithful had infiltrated police academies and military schools with the aim of occupying high positions in the future.

Fethullah Gülen, consistently moderate in his approach, invariably advised obedience and faith towards the state and in fact stamped out the anti-state positions of radical groups; when young people demonstrated by shouting anti-government slogans before the coup of 1980, he stressed that this type of protest was “Islamic”. In addition, when national disqualification was implemented at the upper Islamic institutes in 1977 Fethullah Gülen said in his speeches that “there could be no disqualification of Islam”, thus providing his “good services” to the secular state.

Similarly, in 1989 Gülen appeared to be favoring state interests against Islamic ones on the issue of the veil worn by women, as thousands of them demonstrated against the government ban on them. Gülen dealt harsh criticism to the women. On November 26th, 1989, during his teaching at the Hisar Mosque in Smyrna, Gülen made a statement which surprised the majority of Islamists: “Many of the women in veils who demonstrated on the streets are nothing more than men in disguise or are unseemly women who have never worn serious clothing”. Besides, in February 1995 in his speech during the opening ceremony of the fasting period (the month of Ramadan) Gülen declared that whether a woman covered her head or not was of minor importance, a mere detail. This statement again bothered many Islamists, and the radicals accused him of collaborating with secular forces against Islam.

Political views and opinions held by the Fethullahi on Islam do not usually come into conflict with “official” Islam. Fethullah’s ideas often coincide with the official views and in particular in periods of political crisis.

For instance, during the Gulf War, Gülen's faithful supported co-operation of the Turkish government with the Western alliance against Iraq. The *Zaman* daily and *Sizinti* magazine, which spread the ideas of the Fethullahi, published many articles approving the country's policy in the 1991 Gulf War. Victory by the Party of Prosperity in the elections of March 27th 1994 further reinforced the confidence of Islam followers in their beliefs.

Did this give greater autonomy to Islamic groups? Would they refuse to compromise with the rules of the system?

To answer these questions we must examine recent developments in relations between the government and moderate Islamist groups such as the Fethullahi. Fethullah Hoca did not respond to Çiller in her request for approval of the anti-terrorist law of December of 1994. The law had already been drafted two months previously and was accepted by the board of Ministers. The *Zaman* daily, like other Islamist circles, attacked the law, arguing that it was reviving the dead article 163 of the penal code which banned "Islamist propaganda". Gülen, although he held no diametrically opposed views on the law, taught moderation and tolerance in February 1995 at a social level, and adaptation and compromise at a political level immediately after his meeting with the Prime Minister.

In his speeches he stressed the importance of being open to new ideas and dialogue with foreign cultures. This action was regarded as collaboration with the popular system against the radicals who are against compromise with the regime and involvement of Islam with other doctrines and foreign elements.<sup>13</sup> A survey carried out by Nilufer Narli on 500 students from different universities (see above)<sup>14</sup> in Istanbul in 1992 showed that Gülen's faithful hold nationwide influence and many followers are students. Narli's survey also showed that the magazine they publish, *Sizinti*, is what is most often read among the Islamic students surveyed. On the other hand however, as far as the Kemalist regime is concerned, rumors persist that Fethullah's mild-mannered style is an attempt to successfully infiltrate his people into the army and police force. In addition, it is thought in the same circles that although the Fethullahi have often been linked to the state, they are probably a group which can promote its interests while remaining dedicated to the ultimate covert goal of establishing an Islamic state.

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13. See «*Yeni Yuyil*» (15-17 February 1995) regarding the tension between radicals and Gülen as well as the rivalry between the Party of Prosperity and the Gülen group which originated from different approaches to Islamic issues such as the covering of the head, tolerance in Islam and relations of Islam with the state.

14. See «*Turkish Daily News*», 21 January 1997.

The relationship between state and Islamic groups is too complicated for there to be a cohesive picture. There are members of the *Tarikat* in strategic ministries such as those of Education and Internal Affairs. As quoted in the *Turkish Daily News*, *Cumhuriyet* wrote that “the cells in favor of the Prosperity Party are entrenching themselves in the ministry of Internal Affairs. About 700 of the 1,600,000 key staff members throughout the country (such as sub-prefects, mayors and ministry inspectors) are believed to support the Party of Prosperity, compared to around 400 during the term of the previous Minister of Interior Ismet Sezgin (1992-1993). The number has risen fast in the last twelve months. Of the 76 sub-prefects in the country, 24 made a pilgrimage to Mecca in the last few years on the invitation of Saudi Arabia. In 1994 the Minister of Interior, Nahit Mendese, refused permission to 20 sub-prefects to do likewise.<sup>15</sup> The Islamists (in particular the moderate groups) have managed to penetrate to a considerable degree into the state mechanism since, according to Ali Sirmen (a *Milyet* journalist), the state made concessions to Islamic groups and is itself involved with them in order to use them against other radical political groups including the radical Islamists. This claim is based on the journalist’s observations in Sanliurfa (a province in SE Turkey) and on February 27, 1994, he wrote in *Milyet*, “The director of National Education Mr. Ergen has been organizing frequent meetings (sohbet) to discuss religion with teachers. Ergen does not shake hands with the women because of his Islamic beliefs.” And Sirmen again asks in another of his articles, “Who is Ziyaeddin Akbulut, governor of Sanliurfa?” In reply he writes “according to an official document (dated 18 October 1992) Akbulut rented a property of 8,000m<sup>2</sup> (in the district of Pasabasi in Kosuyolu Street) which, under the regime administration of the province of Gaziantep, was the property of *Ipek Egitim ve Kultu Vakfi*. This organization is controlled by the Fethullahi. The monthly rental is 150,000 Turkish pounds (1994)”.

The aim of the organization is to provide Islamic education to top students according to the teachings of Fethullah Hoca and to send a group of them to military schools and the military academy. It is a means of avoiding hardship for graduates of the imam *hatip* who want to enter the military academies.<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that in modern-day Turkey the *Tarikat* are poised between the traditional path of mystical *tasavvuf* thought and

15. See «*Turkish Daily News*», 3 May 1994.

16. See article by Ali Sirmen entitled: «This is the Party of Prosperity but what is the state?», «*Milyet*» 27 February 1994.

absolute religious devotion, owing to the fact that some of them have transformed into secular and “practically orientated” organizations.

Of course, the *Tarikat* and the *cemaat* are organized around powerful bodies that play an important role in political and social life. They even operate as basic elements in politically mobilizing the people, and as deputies in networks of “relations” for those who have been uprooted from the traditional environment of the community and are now lost in the environment of the metropolis.

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