THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES IN ISRAEL AND TURKEY
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

DISSERTATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the past three decades, religiopolitical actors have asserted themselves as significant political forces in a variety of countries around the world. This dissertation examines the question of why the electoral strength of religious parties increases in democratic societies. In order to answer this question, I use a “most different” case design and compare the rise of the Shas party in Israel and the National Outlook parties in Turkey in the 1990s. The findings suggest that the interaction of three variables accounts for the rise of the religious parties in both countries. This dissertation argues that the existence of a historical sociocultural cleavage, the recent politicization of this cleavage as a result of social change, and the secular states’ co-optation of religion have led to the strengthening of the religiopolitical parties in both countries.

Using interviews with party activists, government officials, and other societal actors, the study delineates a causal narrative that links these explanatory variables to the dependent variable. I discuss how Shas and the National Outlook Movement emerged in the context of a politicized sociocultural divide and how these two movements addressed the grievances of the socioculturally marginalized segments of their society by using religion as a meta-narrative in their ideology and in their
communication with their constituents. Then, I illustrate how the secular states’ co-optation of religion (in the form of including religious actors in the government and increasing state funding for religious education) has unintentionally contributed to the success of the religiopolitical actors by enabling them to have access to the material and cultural resources of the state.

This dissertation contributes to several theoretical debates in the social sciences. In the literature on political religion, which has focused on the role of economic, political, and cultural variables, the role of the secular state is understudied. Even scholars who have focused on state policies have not systematically established a causal link between secular state strategies and the growth of religious movements. By systematically illustrating how state strategies of co-optation lead to religiopolitical mobilization, this dissertation aims to expand the boundaries of the literature. By specifying an exact context under which modernization leads to the emergence of religiopolitical actors, the study also contributes to the secularization debate, which lacks any contextualization of the modernization-secularization relationship. Additionally, the dissertation speaks to the theoretical debate in the comparative politics literature about the role of institutions vs. ideas in shaping political outcomes. Through its analysis of ethnoreligious discourses formed around state-funded religious schools, this dissertation reveals how ideas and institutions interact in affecting political change. Finally, through its comparative analysis of religious politics in Israel and Turkey, the dissertation provides insights regarding various arguments made in the literature on democracy and religion.
Dedicated to my Mom and Dad

Ida and Ruben Sarfati
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Question

Positivism and secular trends were seen as triumphant in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. Yet, in the past three decades we have observed the resurgence of religious politics in different parts of the world and in different cultural settings. Religiopolitical parties emerged as serious political alternatives in many democratic political systems that had been previously dominated by parties with secular programs. The pivotal role of the Christian right in contemporary U.S. politics, the increasing strength of the ultra-orthodox and messianic movements in Israel, the increasing public appeal of political Islam in many Muslim-majority countries, and the reemergence of religious groups in the post-communist countries with a history of heavy state repression of religion are a testament that religion is becoming a significant factor in politics.

Up until recently, many social science scholars discarded religion as an ephemeral phenomenon and contemplated that the public role of religion would disappear with
increasing socioeconomic modernization (Lerner, 1958; Wilson, 1966, 1978; Berger, 1967; Martin, 1979; Wallis and Bruce, 1992; Bruce, 2002). Yet, for the last two decades we also see a resurgence of political science scholarship that focuses on the intersection between religion and politics. Some scholars have studied the rise of religious parties (Marty and Appelby, 1994; Kalyvas, 1996; Munson, 2001; Wickham, 2002; Hedges, 2007), and others have focused on the relationship between democratic governance and political religion (Kalyvas, 2000; Wickham, 2004; Schwedler, 2006). While some scholars have tackled the normative concerns regarding the relationship between state and religion (Stepan, 2000; Kuru, 2006), others have evaluated the role of religion in international politics (Huntington, 1996; Carlson and Owens, 2003).

Drawing on these discussions in the political science literature, this dissertation tackles several questions, such as: Why does the electoral strength of religiopolitical actors increase in democratic settings? What factors contribute to the continuing success of religious parties in democratic politics? What is the effect of the increasing power of religiopolitical actors on democratic governance and stability? This dissertation investigates these questions by discussing two cases, namely, the political success stories of the Shas movement in Israel and the National Outlook Movement\(^1\) in Turkey in the 1990s.

\(^1\) The National Outlook Movement is an Islamist movement formed by Necmettin Erbakan in 1970. The National Order Party was formed as the political party of the National Outlook Movement the same year. When the National Order Party was shut down during military intervention in 1971, the National Outlook Movement was reorganized under the National Salvation Party in 1972. Afterwards, the political party that represented the National Outlook Movement was closed by the military or by the Constitutional Court three more times. Yet, each time the cadres of the National Outlook Movement formed a new party. Therefore, in this dissertation I refer to the National Outlook Movement or to National Outlook Parties to capture the political activities of the five parties, namely the National Order Party, the National Salvation Party, the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party, and the Felicity Party, with the same ideological core. The formation and evolution of these parties are discussed in Chapter 8.
Both Israel and Turkey provide prolific material for studying these questions. While both countries have a tradition of strong secularist, founding ideologies—namely Zionism and Kemalism—and political parties drawing on these secularist ideologies, recently, the political power of religious parties increased significantly in both Israel and Turkey. For example, in Israel, in the 1999 national election, the combined vote share of the religious parties peaked and passed twenty percent of the national vote. In the same election, the Shas party (Sephardic Torah Guardians) became the largest religious political party and the third largest political party by capturing 17 seats in the 120-seat Knesset. The party, which is seen by many as the strongest representative of the Oriental Jews, is still the largest political party in the religious bloc and holds 11 seats in the Knesset.

When the Virtue Party was closed down by the constitutional Court in 2001, a split occurred in the National Outlook Movement. The “old generation” created the Felicity Party, while the reformist “new generation” established the Justice and Development Party. Although the Justice and Development Party was formed by the same cadres, it is much more moderate and liberal than its predecessors, and the leadership explicitly stated its break from the ideology of the National Outlook Movement. Hence, this dissertation will focus on the National Outlook Parties, but a discussion of the Justice and Development Party and the party’s ideological differences from the National Outlook Movement is also discussed in Chapter 8.
Figure 1.1 Percentage vote share of the religious parties in Israel in the national elections

In the 1994 national election in Turkey, the Welfare Party (WP), which was the third party of Erbakan’s National Outlook Movement, captured the municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara, the two largest cities in Turkey. The party also emerged as the winner of the 1995 national election, and for the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic, a religious party became the bigger partner of a coalition government.

Moreover, the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which is a moderate offshoot from the National Outlook Movement became the governing party of Turkey after
the 2002 election. The JDP, which scored enormous election victories in the 2002 and 2007 elections, is still the governing party of Turkey.

Figure 1.2 Percentage vote share of the religious parties in Turkey (1973-2007)

These developments in Turkey and in Israel perplexed not only the political observers, but also the secular public. Thus, this dissertation is an effort to understand the electoral successes of the National Outlook and Shas in the political arena and
their ability to mobilize important segments of the society. By studying these two cases, we can gain a general understanding of the factors that contribute to the electoral success of religiopolitical parties elsewhere and also test the validity of existing hypotheses on the relationship between democratic governance and religious movements.

Analytically, comparing Turkey and Israel provides us leverage to control for alternative explanations. As I discuss further in Chapter 2, the selection of the Shas movement in Israel and the National Outlook Movement in Turkey for comparison constitutes a “most different” case design. These two countries differ in their level of economic development, in their level of urbanization, in their relative strength of center parties, in their majority religion, in their institutional arrangements to manage the relation between religion and state, and in their educational institutional arrangements. Despite these differences, I claim that a similar process in religiopolitical mobilization is traced in both countries. Hence, the comparison of two different cases helps us to control for the alternative explanations and to properly assess the explanatory variables. Yet in order to claim causality, it is also necessary to explicate causal mechanisms, and I attempt to explicate these mechanisms in the dissertation, specifically in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

1.2 Methodology and Data Collection

The causal narrative that describes the microprocesses connecting the independent variables to the dependent variable is at the heart of this dissertation. In order to make these causality claims and find out if empirical evidence supports these claims I conducted field research in Israel and Turkey.
My field work in Israel lasted six months (between June and December 2006), which also included language training. While in Israel, I conducted research in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Petach Tikva, and Tiberias. My field work in Turkey lasted four months (between December 2006 and April 2007). While in Turkey, I conducted research in Istanbul and Ankara.

My primary data come from open-ended qualitative interviews. During my 10 month visit in both countries, I conducted open-ended interviews with different actors, who participated in social and political life in the discussed periods. Altogether, I have conducted 48 interviews with different social and political actors, namely government officials, graduates of religious schools as well as political activists in religious movements. In the course of my interviews, I spoke to activists who work for the Shas party and National Religious Party in Israel, and for the Motherland Party, Justice and Development Party, and Felicity Party in Turkey. These interviews provided me with detailed accounts of political events as well as the actors’ interpretations of these events. This rich qualitative interview material also enabled me to assess the worldviews, interests, motives, and emotional states of the various social and political actors.

In addition to the interview data, I utilized newspaper archives and secondary literature on both countries. In Israel, I carefully scanned the daily newspapers Ha’aretz and the Jerusalem Post, as well as the weekly magazine Jerusalem Report for the past three decades. In Turkey, I scanned the daily newspapers Zaman, Milli Gazete, and Tercuman as well as the weekly magazine Nokta in the post-1980 period. These archival materials together with the secondary literature from both countries enabled me to situate
the interview data into the context of political events and to assess the validity of the causal claims made in the dissertation.

1.3 Summary of the Main Argument

My analysis suggests that the interaction of three variables accounts for the rise of the religiopolitical parties in Turkey and Israel. I argue that the existence of a historical sociocultural cleavage, the recent politicization of this cleavage as a result of social change, and the secular state’s co-optation of religion have led to the strengthening of the religiopolitical parties in both contexts.

In the dissertation, I first discuss how a sociocultural cleavage was created in both countries during the formative years of the state by modernizing elites. I then explore how this sociocultural cleavage was politicized when the two sides of the divide were brought into close contact with each other by social change and began to feel threatened. In this context, new religiopolitical actors, namely the Shas movement and National Outlook Movement, emerged in Israel and Turkey respectively. These religiopolitical actors addressed the grievances of the socioculturally marginalized segments of their society by using religion as a meta-narrative in their ideologies.

Next, I describe how the secular states’ attempt to co-opt these religious actors in the form of their inclusion in the government and increasing state funding for religious education backfired and unintentionally contributed to the electoral success of these new religious parties in the 1990s. I claim that this strategy of co-optation benefited the religiopolitical actors in several ways. First, the inclusion of religious actors in the state’s
administration opens the door for the creation of patronage networks through which these actors provide benefits to their constituents. Second, the religious actors got the opportunity to use cultural resources of the state to further their agenda. Third, state institutions, such as religious schools, became sites for the questioning of official-secular ideologies and education of alternative elites. Lastly, these state institutions also became sites utilized by religiopolitical actors for political mobilization of significant segments of the population.

In empirical terms, in Israel, an ethnic divide between Ashkenazim (European Jews) and Sephardim (Oriental Jews) was formed when large numbers of Jews from Muslim countries immigrated to Israel in the 1950s. These new-arriving Sephardi Jews faced symbolic and political exclusion, since the social and political institutions of Israel were shaped by the worldview of Zionist founders who were predominantly Ashkenazi. This cultural hierarchy between these two groups was perpetuated by the spatial isolation of the Sephardim in the peripheral development towns and the socioeconomic gap between the groups.

This sociocultural cleavage between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim was politicized in the 1970s when the two groups came into closer contact with attempts at school integration. Attempts to integrate Sephardi kids into Ashkenazi schools created a backlash from the Ashkenazi parents due to the threat perception of the Ashkenazim. This in turn increased the frustrations of the second-generation Sephardim with the Ashkenazi politico-cultural dominance. In this context, Shas was born as a political party that addressed the sense of frustration felt by the Sephardi community, especially those
living on the periphery.

After its formation in 1983, Shas was included in all the coalition governments, except for two. By taking a pragmatic stance on national issues and possessing a single-minded focus on the immediate needs of its constituents, the party emerged as a key coalition partner and always received key ministries. The party occupied important ministries, such as the Internal Affairs Ministry, Religious Affairs Ministry, Social Affairs and Labor Ministry, and Health Ministry, which have been crucial for its politico-cultural agenda. By using these ministries as patronage networks and sources of cultural propaganda, the party was able to materialize its political promises and cater to the demands of its constituents.

Another aspect of state co-optation was the channeling of state funding to the educational network of the Shas party, namely *Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani*. The number of pupils studying in the *Ma’ayan* schools increased significantly after the formation of this educational network in 1986. These schools became a significant alternative for the Sephardi families because they successfully created cultural pride around the Sephardi identity, something the Sephardi children lacked in schools until then. Moreover, discourses constructed around the *Ma’ayan* schools addressed the cultural grievances felt by many marginalized segments of the Sephardi communities. In Chapter 4, I unpack some of these discourses constructed around the *Ma’ayan* schools in order to show how state institutions were turned into spaces used for political mobilization. Another reason for the popularity of the *Ma’ayan* schools was the fact that they addressed the social marginalization of the Sephardim by acting as social provision
providers in the neighborhoods in which they operated.

A parallel causal narrative can be traced in the Turkish context. In Turkey, a sociocultural cleavage was formed during the Republican era, when the Kemalist elites, who ruled Turkey uncontested from 1923-1946, embraced a top-down modernization project and implemented a host of political and cultural reforms. The aim of these reforms was to create a modern Turkish nation, and for the Kemalists, modernization was very closely aligned with adopting Western cultural practices. In this period, many of the cultural practices associated with an Islamic way of life were debased and were depicted as a sign of backwardness.

Yet the new Westernized way of life promoted by the Kemalists did not penetrate the entire Turkish society. Especially in the villages, Islamic idioms still constituted the main cultural reference point for interpersonal relations. Hence, a cultural divide was created between the modernized elites living in the main cities and the more conservative, Islamically-oriented masses on the periphery. This center-periphery cleavage was perpetuated by the creation of a socioeconomic gap, when the industrialization efforts of the early Republican era were concentrated in the main cities and neglected the peripheral areas.

Similar to Israel, this sociocultural cleavage was politicized in the 1970s, when the center and periphery came into closer contact by increasing rural-urban immigration patterns. The rural immigrants started to live on the outskirts of the cities in shantytowns, called *gecekondu* neighborhoods. The optimism of the first-generation rural immigrants was replaced by a sense of frustration, when the second and third-generation immigrants
were stuck at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy and could not move up. Moreover, the enormous increase in the number of gecekondu dwellers increased the sense of threat felt by the oldtimers in the cities. Hence, the oldtimers started to perceive the gecekondu dwellers as the primary source of the cities’ problems, such as overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, and loss of urban manners. The National Outlook Movement emerged in such a context and constructed an ideology that addressed the social, cultural, and political grievances of the different groups within the periphery.

The co-optation of the religious actors started in the 1970s, when the National Salvation Party, as the second party of the National Outlook Movement, was incorporated into three consecutive coalition governments from 1974-1978. In this period, the NSP occupied important ministries and governmental agencies. Similarly to the Shas party, the NSP also used its ministries to create patronage networks in the state bureaucracy and cater to the interests of its constituents.

The co-optation of religion continued in the post-1980 era. First, the military government (1980-83) developed a symbiotic relationship with the Hearth of Intellectuals, a conservative think tank, to legitimate its authoritarian policies. It is during this time that the Hearth’s ideology of Turkish-Islamic synthesis started to shape the cultural and educational policies of the regime. In the following era, Turgut Ozal’s Motherland Party (MP) (1983-1991) included an Islamist faction, which consisted mostly of bureaucrats with a National Outlook background, under its umbrella, and this faction controlled important policy positions. During this period, state institutions, such as the education ministry, national television, family consultation centers, and the Ataturk
Culture, Language, and History Higher Institution emerged as institutional sites where a conservative ideology was constructed and communicated to the larger public. As a consequence of this, religious social actors found a receptive environment to increase their public appeal. On the other hand, the attempts to co-opt Islam drew criticism towards the instrumental use of religion by the government. Religious actors raised different criticisms towards the Motherland Party, and the periphery’s support shifted from the moderate MP to the Islamist WP.

Another aspect of religious co-optation can be seen in the politicization of Imam Hatip schools as religious educational institutions. With the inclusion of the NSP in the coalition governments in the 1970s, the number of the Imam Hatip schools increased. Moreover, these institutions turned into alternative educational institutions and became sites for the education of an alternative elite. Similar to the Ma’ayan schools, which created a positive Sephardi identity in the Israeli society, the Imam Hatip schools catered to the cultural grievances of the periphery and became a focus of public appeal by constructing a positive identity for the periphery.

1.4 Theoretical Significance of the Study

This dissertation speaks to several theoretical debates in political science. First, it can be read in the context of the literature on political religion. In the literature, cultural, economic, and societal explanations are used to explain the rise of religious movements. On the other hand, few scholars have emphasized the co-optation strategies of secular states as a potential cause for the rise of religious parties. So the dissertation attempts to
fill this void in the literature by focusing on state co-optation as an explanatory variable in examining the increasing electoral strength of religiopolitical parties. By making this assertion, I do not claim that the role of the state is totally neglected in the context of political religion. Hence, it is important to clarify in what context the state is discussed in the literature and how this study adds to these discussions.

Some scholars have analyzed different approaches states use towards the religiopolitical actors and shown how these approaches (e.g. accommodative vs. conflictual) varied in different periods (Toprak, 1988; Sakallioglu, 1996; Cohen and Susser, 2000; Kuru, forthcoming). These studies are rather descriptive in their analyses and do not propose any causal explanation. Others have analyzed the effects of repressive state policies on the radicalization of religious movements (Sivan, 1990; Hafez, 2003). While these studies are important in helping one understand the variation in the ideologies of religious movements, they do not explain why the popular appeal of religious actors changes over time. Lastly, the role of the state has been analyzed in top-down Islamization in the context of self-proclaimed religious regimes, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran (Schiraz, 1998; Kar, 2005). These studies are important for our understanding of the effects of state policies on societal and political change. Yet there is a significant difference between self-declared theocracies that use religion as a major ideology in defining the character of the state and secular regimes that co-opt religion to achieve other political ends. The difference between the two political usages of religion is analogous to the difference between a revolutionary and an opportunist. Although both of them might use similar symbols to persuade others, their aims, their level of dedication,
and their attachment to the used symbols are significantly different; hence, the response to their behavior is expected to be different as well. Therefore, I contend that the dynamics of state-society relations in secular regimes that attempt to co-opt religion are different from the dynamics in theocratic regimes.

This dissertation attempts to expand the boundaries of the literature by demonstrating how the co-optation strategies of secular states have had an inadvertent affect on the strengthening of the religiopolitical movements, and how certain state institutions have turned into spaces ripe for religiopolitical mobilization as a result of these strategies.

Second, the dissertation speaks to the theoretical debate in the comparative politics literature about the role of institutions vs. ideas in shaping political outcomes. Institutionalists maintain that political institutions constrain the behavior of political actors by providing incentives (Kathleen and Steinmo, 1992; Hall and Taylor, 1996). Hence, political actors follow the rules - or regularized practices with rule-like qualities - of their institutional context and respond to the incentives produced by these rules while making their political decisions. Both historical institutionalism, which defines the rules and actors’ interests as historically contingent, and rational choice institutionalism, which theorizes utility-maximization as the basis of institutional rules and actors’ interests, make this argument.

On the other hand, scholars who emphasize the importance of ideas and discourses on political outcomes claim that ideas shape political outcomes. For instance, scholars of nationalism (Anderson, 1991; Calhoun, 1997) show how master narratives
about the nation have been constructed through the use of cultural, linguistic, and other symbols. While the ideational approach has its strengths in bringing in the role of ideas into political analysis, this school of thought heavily relies on the analyses of written texts and neglects the importance of institutional context in which ideas operate.

As a response to the limitations of the institutional and ideational approaches, some scholars developed a new line of analysis, namely discursive institutionalism (Sikkink, 1991; Hay, 2006; Schmidt, 2006, 2008). Discursive institutionalists claim that norms, frames, and narratives do not only establish how political actors conceptualize the world, but also define actors’ interests. Moreover, the actors’ discursive interaction with each other and their ideas about how to reinterpret or subvert institutions affect institutional change.²

This dissertation takes a discursive institutionalist approach in its analysis of state co-optation and argues that ideas and institutions interact in producing political outcomes. In order to achieve their socio-political aims, state elites have utilized symbols and norms by embedding these symbols into state institutions. Yet these symbols and ideas, embedded into the law, education curricula, or cultural life, acquired different meanings, when they were interpreted by social and political actors. Moreover, as the cases of state-funded religious schools reveal, social and political actors created discourses that produced novel interpretations of the functions of Imam Hatip and Ma’ayan schools. These novel interpretations had important political consequences and have led to the empowerment of certain societal actors.

Third, the study provides insights that might help us to better conceptualize the relationship between modernization and secularization. Both proponents and critics of the secularization thesis posit a uniform relation between modernization and secularization. The proponents of the secularization theory argue that increasing socioeconomic modernization diminishes religion’s public, social, and political significance. On the other hand, the critics of the secularization theory assert that increasing socioeconomic modernization leads to religious revival. While the proponents and critics disagree which way the causal arrow goes, they do agree that there is a uniform relation between modernization and secularization.

The argument raised in this dissertation reveals that the relationship between modernization and secularization is not uniform but contextual. The comparative study of Israel and Turkey shows that modernization leads to increased political support for religious actors, once it politicizes a historical sociocultural divide. Hence, only in a specific context does modernization create fertile ground for religiopolitical mobilization. In Turkey and Israel, indicators of modernization, such as rural-urban migration, increasing literacy rates, and attempts at school integration, have led to successful religiopolitical mobilization only because they tapped into a historical sociocultural divide, and the socioeconomically marginalized segments found a channel of political expression in the eclectic ideologies of political actors that used religion as a meta-narrative.

Lastly, both Israel and Turkey have democratic regimes and significantly large religiopolitical actors that could have a significant impact on national politics. Therefore,
the comparative study of religious parties in these countries provides an opportunity for testing different hypotheses made regarding the relationship between religious actors and democratic governance. The findings suggest that there is a multi-layered relation between the politics of the religious parties and democratic governance in Israel and Turkey.

First, both religiopolitical actors have contributed to the quality of democracy by empowering the socially and culturally marginalized segments in their respective societies. Shas and the National Outlook Movement did not only carry the economic demands of their constituencies to the national agenda, but also gave effective political voice to the peripheral groups by constructing a positive identity for Sephardim/pious Muslims. This politics-of-identity angle paved the way for the recognition of excluded groups in the public arena and restored the sense of pride they lacked in the earlier periods.

On the other hand, the dismissive and divisive political rhetoric Shas and the National Outlook leaders employed against their political opponents harmed liberal democratic culture in both political systems. Specifically, the leaders’ references to political opponents as non-believers passed the boundaries of civil, democratic debate. Moreover, the increasing political fortunes of the religiopolitical actors instigated a reaction from the secular political actors and led to the intensification of the secular-religious cleavage in both countries. Lastly, the secular reaction and the threat of exclusion from government have led to the moderation of religiopolitical actors.
1.5 The Overview of the Dissertation

The rest of this dissertation is laid out as follows. Chapter 2 provides the definition of key concepts used in this study and lays out the rationale of the comparative research design. Additionally, the chapter discusses the theoretical aspects the study addresses.

Chapter 3 discusses the formation of a sociocultural cleavage in Turkey and Israel during the formative periods of both countries. The chapter also explores the politicization of this cleavage through the processes of social change. More specifically, it describes how the two sides of this socioeconomic divide were brought into close contact and how this close contact increased the threat perception of the privileged and the frustrations of the marginalized.

Chapter 4 is a comparative discussion on the politics of state-funded religious education. It demonstrates comparatively how the *Ma’ayan* schools in Israel and the *Imam Hatip* schools in Turkey were strengthened after the inclusion of religiopolitical actors in the government. It also describes how both school systems emerged as institutions that provide social provisions for the poor and empower the culturally marginalized segments of the population by creating an affirmative religious Sephardi/pious Muslim identity and also how these institutions were used as a tool for political mobilization.

Chapter 5 discusses the co-optation of Shas by the party’s incorporation into most coalition governments since 1984. It shows how the party’s grip on the interior ministry, religious affairs ministry, ministry of labor and social welfare, and health ministry strengthened over time. The chapter also demonstrates how the party used these
ministries as a cultural and material resource to benefit its constituents and how this co-optation affected the integration and economic well-being of Shas’s constituency.

Chapter 6 discusses the co-optation of the religious actors in the Turkish context. The chapter starts with a discussion of the National Salvation Party’s inclusion in the three coalition governments in the 1970s and the party’s instrumentalization of its ministries for patronage. Next, it focuses on the organic relationship cemented between the Hearth of Intellectuals and the military regime (1980-3) and the political activities of the Islamist faction under the umbrella of the center-right Motherland Party (1983-1991) as further co-optation of Islam. The chapter concludes with the two-fold consequences of these co-optation policies. On the one hand, the religious social actors found a receptive environment to increase their public appeal. On the other hand, the religious social and political actors criticized the instrumentalization of Islam by the government, and due to this criticism the periphery’s support shifted from the conservative center-right Motherland Party to the Islamist Welfare Party.

Chapter 7 discusses the ideology of Shas and shows how the party appealed to ultra-orthodox, traditional, and non-observant Sephardim in Israel by successfully blending religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic messages. Moreover, it evaluates different aspects of the multi-faceted relationship between Shas’s politics and democratic governance. Chapter 8 discusses the ideology and bases of political support of the National Outlook Parties in Turkey. It explores how - similar to Shas - the National Outlook parties appealed to different groups within the periphery by constructing an eclectic ideology consisting of religious, economic, and social messages. It also describes
how National Outlook’s political behavior affected democratic governance in Turkey. Chapter 9 concludes the comparative study and speculates on some directions for future research.
CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

2.1 Definition of Key Terms

This section discusses the way key terms are used in this dissertation. Specifically, I define the independent and dependent variables of the study. Moreover, I clarify how contested terms, such as religious parties and the state, are used in the context of this study.

2.1.1 Dependent variable

As discussed in Chapter 1, the main research question of this dissertation is “What factors account for the electoral strength of religious parties in democratic settings?” Hence, the dependent variable of this dissertation is the electoral strength of the religious parties, specifically the Shas party in Israel and the National Outlook parties in Turkey. The electoral strength of the religious actors is operationalized as increasing vote share of religious parties in national elections. Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1 show the increasing electoral vote share of the religious parties on the national level in
both Israel and Turkey.

In order to work with this variable, it is necessary to answer the question: “What is a religious party?” Defining a religious party as a party that uses religious symbols or imagery would be a very broad definition, since many political figures without any religiopolitical agenda pay lip service to religious symbols on a very superficial level. On the other hand, defining a religious party as a political entity that calls for the radical transformation of the state and society by any means or one that works for the formation of a theocracy would be a very narrow definition, since many religiopolitical actors use religion as part of their political ideology without explicitly demanding the creation of a religious state.

Following Tepe (2008), I define a religious party as a party that takes religion as a reference point for the solution of the major political problems of its country. This definition is flexible enough to include parties that do not explicitly state that they want to create a theocracy but also stringent enough to exclude parties whose leaders only make occasional references to sacred concepts in their speeches.

When researching religiopolitical groups, it is also important to make a basic distinction between two different forms of “religious politics.” There is a categorical difference between religious parties that perceive other religious communities as their main enemy and those that are organized against secular segments within their own religious community. Parties that belong to the former category can be seen as parties with an ideology of religiopolitical communalism. For instance, India’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which has a Hinduist political platform, defines Muslim and Christian

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minorities in India as its “others” and constitutes an example of religiopolitical communalism. On the other hand, religious parties, such as the Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt or the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria belong to the latter category, since their main political arch-rivals are the secular actors in their own societies rather than religious minorities. This dissertation also employs the latter category as its main focus. Both Shas and National Outlook parties are non-communal religious parties; therefore, the findings of this study are generalizable only to religious parties which are not communal.

2.1.2 Independent variable: State Co-optation Strategies

Most of the discussion about co-optation strategies is made within the corporatism literature in the context of state-labor relations (Stepan, 1978; Schmitter, 1979; Lehmburg, 1979; Collier & Collier, 1991; Wiarda, 1997). Corporatism is defined by Schmitter (1979) as “a form of interest representation in which social units are organized into non-competitive, hierarchically-ordered, and functionally differentiated categories recognized by the state in exchange for observing certain controls on their articulation of demands.” By implementing these corporatist arrangements, the state elites aim to shape the behavior of the labor movement, to acquire its political support (Collier & Collier, 1979), or to preempt the appeal of (socialist) political parties that might get support from workers and challenge the ruling elites. In short, these policies are seen as a social control strategy.

In this dissertation, I argue that similar co-optation policies are employed by the Israeli and Turkish state elites in order to manage conflict between the state and the
religiopolitical actors. Specifically, these policies aim to contain religiopolitical movements by preempting their appeal or to win the political support of the religious segments of the society. These co-optation policies are especially similar to what Stepan (1978) calls “inclusionary corporatism,” in which the state elites try to create Gramscian hegemony in the civil society through the installation of new state structures rather than the use of repressive mechanisms towards societal groups, and what Collier and Collier (1991) call “state (party) incorporation.” In this type of corporatist arrangement, the co-opted groups acquire important organizational benefits from the authorities through official recognition, access to important political decision-making structures, as well as subsidies from state resources. As Collier and Collier (1979) contend, these policies are not simply benefits but “inducements” through which the state attempts to motivate the co-opted groups to cooperate with its goals and to accept other constraints it imposes.

In the context of this dissertation, I claim that there are a number of co-optation strategies employed by the state elites in Israel and Turkey. The first and most visible strategy of co-optation is the inclusion of a religious party in the governing coalition or the inclusion of a religious faction within the governing party. Second, increased state funding for religious education also constitutes an important aspect of co-optation. Third, the strengthening of state agencies controlling religious affairs, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs or Directorate of Religious Affairs, is another attempt to co-opt religion. Lastly, the creation of a symbiotic relationship between the state and associations of religious intellectuals, such as the Hearth of Intellectuals in Turkey, is another method of co-optation that aims to create Gramscian hegemony in the civil
society. This list of co-optation strategies is not exhaustive. Different co-optation attempts might emerge in the context of different country experiences. The list provided above enumerates some of the measures employed by Israeli and Turkish state elites. These measures constitute the independent variable of this dissertation.

2.1.3 Conceptualization of the State

It is important to clarify how this dissertation treats the contested concept of the state. Unlike “society-centered” Marxist and pluralist traditions, which deny the independent effect of state institutions on political outcomes and treat the state either as a superstructure or a simple legal arbiter, this dissertation argues that the state matters. On the other hand, the “Bringing the State Back In” literature (Trimberger, 1978; Stepan, 1978; Skocpol, 1985; Evans, 1990) has overemphasized the political outcomes that are the result of a goal-oriented, resourceful state. So without dismissing the idea that state policies can change political outcomes, I follow Joel Migdal’s “state in society” approach, which views state-society interaction as an iterative process transforming both social groups and the state (Migdal, 2001). State actors try to design different policies that would be amenable to different social interests. These state policies are received and interpreted by political groups who base their actions upon their own interpretations of these policies and in turn affect politics (Migdal et. al., 1994; Migdal, 2001).

Moreover, the state apparatus is not a monolithic entity. It needs to be acknowledged that there is a multiplicity of spaces within the state institutions, and these multiple spaces might be occupied by political actors with different political agendas.
Hence, the research will focus on the interaction of various societal actors with the state actors in multiple spaces (e.g. religious schools, ministry of religious affairs, etc.). This dynamic interaction between these actors transforms both state actors’ policies and the power and agendas of the societal actors.

2. 2 Research Design

This dissertation employs a case-oriented comparative method, which is the systematic analysis of a small number of cases (Collier, 1993). More specifically, it is what Skocpol and Somer (1980) refer to as macro-causal analysis. Macro-causal analysis is both historically interpretative and causally analytic. It differs from a single case study in its emphasis on empirical generalizations rather than on the particularity of each case. Yet, it is similar to the single case study approach, because it uses qualitative data and reveals the rich empirical detail of the cases. On the other hand, macro-causal analysis is different from the quantitative (statistical) method in its focus on a few rather than a large number of cases. Yet, similar to quantitative methods, it makes causal inferences.

By employing a macro-causal analysis, this dissertation neither gives up the sensitivity of the interpretative single case study approach to particular case histories, nor does it abandon the aim to make generalizations about political phenomena. Thus, on the one hand, the study uses rich empirics regarding the rise of the Shas movement in Israel and National Outlook Movement in Turkey, and on the other hand, it makes causal inferences and produces hypotheses generalizable to other cases.

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This dissertation uses a “most different” case design, one of the various research design strategies employed in a macro-causal analysis. In a most different case design, the cases take the same value on the dependent variable and the independent variables but differ on the values of the alternative explanations. Israel and Turkey differ in their level of economic development, in their level of urbanization, in their relative strength of center parties, in their majority religion, in their institutional arrangements to manage the relationship between religion and state, and in their educational institutional arrangements. Despite these differences, a similar process in religiopolitical mobilization is traced in both countries.

Thus, as Barrington Moore (1966) asserts, “comparisons can serve as a rough negative check on accepted historical explanations, and comparative method can lead to new historical generalizations.” Yet, control by design is not sufficient to establish a causal relation between the independent and dependent variables. Hence, in order to assert causality, I propose a causal narrative that explicates micro-processes connecting the rise of religiopolitical movements to the state attempts of co-optation in lieu of the existence of historical sociocultural cleavage and the politicization of this cleavage. Below, I first explain why Israel and Turkey constitute a most different case design and then explicate the causal narrative that connects the dependent variable of the study to the independent variables.

### 2.2.1 Israel and Turkey: Most Different Cases

As shown in Table 2.1, Israel and Turkey differ in key explanatory variables used
to explain the rise of the religiopolitical movements. First of all, there is a significant
difference in the level of economic development in each country. While Israel has
$25,864 GDP per capita and is classified as a high income country by the United Nations
Development Programme (UNDP), Turkey has $8,407 GDP per capita and is classified
as a medium income country. Both countries also vary in their degree of urbanization. In
2005, 92 percent of Israel’s population lived in cities, while the urbanization rate of
Turkey was 67 percent. Both countries also differ on their level of human development
indices. While Israel is classified as a country with high human development, Turkey is
classified as a country with medium human development by the UNDP.

The (diminishing) strength of the mainstream parties is another variable that is
used as a potential explanation for the rise of the religious politics and intensification of
the religious cleavage. In Turkey, a sharp downward trend of the mainstream parties’
total vote share is clearly observable in the 1990s. The four main center parties (two
center left and two center right) captured 82.6 percent of the national vote in the 1991
general elections. Their total vote share dropped to 64.2 percent in the 1995 elections, to
56.1 in the 1999 elections, and finally to an all-time low of 26 percent in the 2007
elections. Thus, in only a decade, the center of Turkish politics eroded by losing more
than half of its votes. In Israel, the strength of the center right and center left stagnated in
the four elections between 1984 and 1992. Their combined vote share was in the range of
70-75 percent. In the elections between 1996 and 2009, their combined vote share

5 The figures are from http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/ . They reflect GDP per capita in US $ (PPP
adjusted) in 2005.
6 The human development index is a combination of measures of life expectancy, literacy, educational
attainment, and GDP per capita. The index is used to refer to the options and opportunities of people living
in a country.
diminished to the 50-60 percent range. In summary, the center parties’ power in Turkey has eroded over time, while in Israel, the center parties have lost some of their political power yet still retain a significant part of it.

Culturally, Turkey is a Muslim country, with Muslims constituting 99 percent of its total population. On the other hand, Israel is a Jewish country with Jews constituting 76 percent of the Israeli population. It is important to have this variance, because it gives us the opportunity to control for arguments made on Islamic exceptionalism. In other words, the demonstration of similar dynamics of religiopolitical mobilization in Islamic and Judaic contexts helps us to refute arguments positing the unique role of Islam in religiopolitical mobilization.

Lastly, both countries also differ in their initial institutional arrangements regarding church-state relations and education. Israel grants extensive autonomy to all religious groups in conducting their personal affairs. Matters of personal conduct, such as marriage, divorce, burial, or conversions are handled by religious courts of each religious community. There is no civil marriage, and married couples cannot get a divorce in a civil court. The Israeli state also imposes certain restrictions over the secular way of life in order to accommodate religious demands and protect the Jewish character of the state. For instance, public transportation is restricted during Shabbath in certain cities. In contrast, in Turkey the state authorities control all religious affairs, so much so that all the mosques are run by a state institution, the Directorate of Religious Affairs. In contrast to Israel, the state restricts certain religious freedoms, such as the wearing of religious symbols in public offices or the right to private religious education, in order to protect the
secular character of the state.

Similarly, the educational systems of both countries differ in fundamental ways. While separate educational systems operate in Israel in order for each cultural group to protect its own communal identity, in Turkey the Law on the Unification of Education demands that there is unified education across the board. Table 2.1 below summarizes these socioeconomic, political, cultural, and institutional differences between the two countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic variables</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic development (GDP per capita in 2005)</td>
<td>$25,864 (classified as high income by UNDP)</td>
<td>$8,407 (classified as medium income by UNDP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization (% living in cities in 2005)</td>
<td>Predominantly urban with a very small rural population (91.6% live in cities)</td>
<td>Urban with a significantly large rural population (67.3% live in cities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Indices Ranking by the UNDP</td>
<td>High Human Development (ranked 24 by UNDP)</td>
<td>Medium Human Development (ranked 76 by UNDP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political variable</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural variable</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant religion</td>
<td>Judaism (76% of the total population is Jewish)</td>
<td>Islam (99% of the total population is Muslim)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional variables</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State-religion arrangements</td>
<td>Extensive autonomy to religious groups. Some state-imposed religious sanctions that restrict secular lifestyle</td>
<td>Strict state secularism, control of religion from top. Restriction of some religious liberties to ensure secular public sphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Multiple educational streams</td>
<td>Unified education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Most different case design: Israel and Turkey compared on alternative explanations
Despite these differences in alternative explanations in both countries, we observe the increasing electoral strength of religiopolitical parties, which is preceded by state co-optation and politicization of a historical sociocultural cleavage. Thus, the comparison of two “most different cases” enables us to control for the alternative explanations.

Yet, control with design is not sufficient to claim causality between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable. The causal relationship between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable might be spurious and be due to an unknown variable. Therefore, in order to assert causality, it is necessary to explicate causal mechanisms between the explanatory variables – namely, the existence of a historical sociocultural cleavage, the politicization of this cleavage by social change, and state co-optation of religiopolitical actors – and the dependent variable, increasing electoral strength of the religiopolitical actors.

2.2.2 Causal Narrative

Below I present the main argument of the research and the micro-processes that connect the explanatory variables to the dependent variable. These micro-processes are empirical mechanisms and are discussed in detail in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Since these mechanisms are presented as separate claims, they can be empirically observed for the purpose of generalizing the findings of this dissertation to other cases.
A sociocultural cleavage is formed during the formative years of the nation-state.

Two sides of the divide are brought to closer social contact by social processes, such as urbanization and increasing literacy rates.

Closer social contact increases the threat perception of the privileged and the grievances of the marginalized.

The historical sociocultural cleavage is politicized.

In this context of a politicized sociocultural cleavage, a new religiopolitical actor is formed. The ideology of this new religiopolitical actor addresses the social and cultural grievances of the marginalized segments.

Secular government uses co-optation strategies towards the religiopolitical actor(s).

If the co-opted actor is moderate, criticism is pointed to the co-opted actor by non-moderate religiopolitical actors from outside the government.

As a result of this criticism, moderates are discredited and political support shifts to the non-moderate actor.

The co-optation of the religiopolitical actor in the form of inclusion in the government and administrative position enables the co-opted group to use state resources to provide material benefits for its own constituents.

The co-opted religious actor has access to the cultural resources of the state. By embedding religious symbols into the practices of the state, the religious actors are able to communicate their own ideology to larger audiences.

Due to increased state funding to religious education – another aspect of co-optation – religious schools emerge as spaces where an alternative elite is educated and religious discourses are transmitted to the society.

The religiopolitical actors increase their electoral strength.

Figure 2.1 Explication of the Causal Narrative
In the causal narrative explicated above in Figure 2.1, each conjecture is presented as a separate claim. These conjectures can be empirically observed when the main causal argument is applied to other settings. Hence, unlike the quantitative research strategies, which treat variables as separate social phenomena that vary together, this dissertation explicates a causal narrative that qualitatively links the dependent and independent variables.

In order to test the hypotheses presented in the causal narrative in Figure 2.1, I conducted 48 open-ended interviews with different actors, namely government officials, religious party activists, and graduates of religious schools in Turkey and Israel. These interviews provided detailed accounts of political events as well as the actors’ interpretations of these events. This rich qualitative interview material also enabled me to assess the worldviews, interests, motives, and emotional states of the various social and political actors. In addition to the interview data, I also utilized newspaper archives and secondary literature from both countries.

2.3 Theoretical Questions

The argument elaborated in this dissertation is grounded in four distinct theoretical bodies of literature. It speaks to the literature on the ascendance of religiopolitical movements, the secularization literature, the theoretical debate between the neo-institutionalist and culturalist/ideational schools of thought, and the literature that investigates the relationship between religious political actors and democratic governance.
2.3.1 Rise of the New Religious Politics

Political movements of the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other religious traditions have been gaining more political relevance in different parts of the world in the last three decades. Many scholars have tried to explain this current rise of the religiopolitical movements. The literature on the ascendance of political religious movements has primarily focused on socioeconomic, political, and cultural variables, while the role of secular states’ co-optation policies has not been as well studied. Some of the scholars who emphasize socioeconomic explanations argue that the emergence of a vibrant middle class among pious segments of the society contributes to the rise and success of religious political actors. According to this argument, increasing socioeconomic modernization leads to the emergence of well-educated professionals and businessmen among the religious community, and the rise of the religious movement is associated with the cultural demands of this rising middle class and their attempts to be a major force in the center of politics (Yavuz, 2006). Proponents of this argument also claim that religiopolitical movements that are anchored to middle classes are more moderate in their demands compared to movements in countries with no significant middle class (Yavuz, 2004; Gumuscu, 2005).

Another socioeconomic explanation for the rise of religious political actors is the “economic deprivation theory.” According to this theory, religious political actors appeal to the economically deprived segments in their society and prosper especially among the urban poor (Ahmad, 1988; 1991). Those at the margins of the society, the argument goes,
are more susceptible to manipulation by religious symbols and therefore serve as a recruitment base for political religious movements.

More sophisticated and slightly different versions of this theory maintain that the rise of political religion is caused by increased and unrealized expectations (Waterbury and Richards, 1996; Brown, 2003). According to these theorists, increasing immigration from rural areas to cities and increasing opportunities for higher education, especially in Middle Eastern countries, created a highly educated and young population. However, these highly educated youngsters became frustrated, because they could not find the jobs they had expected to or could not even find jobs at all. Those unemployed or underemployed youngsters became activists in political religious movements, because of their promise of an alternative to the existing regimes, which could not create sufficient opportunities for this segment of the population.

Some scholars point to the weakness of center parties as a potential reason for the de facto rise of the religious parties (Ozbudun, 2001). Since the mainstream parties of the center were not successful in solving the long-lasting economic problems, the religious right emerged as the only untried alternative. According to this hypothesis, a vote for the religious right is not ideologically based but only a protest vote due to the poor performance of the center parties.

Another political explanation is given for the regional rise of political Islam in many of the Middle Eastern countries in the 1970s. According to this argument, the ideologies that challenged the West in the post-independence period, namely liberal nationalism, Nasser’s socialist Arab nationalism, and Ba’athism, could not fulfill their
promises of economic growth, stable and representative political institutions, and international strength. “The failure of these models was a major driver for the rise of the Islamist model – the concept that ‘Islam is the answer’” (Rabasa et. al., 2004).

Last, some cultural theorists assert that certain religions are more prone to be politicized (Lewis, 1988). This claim is usually made for Islam. Scholars claim that the interwoven nature of political and religious leadership in Islam since the time of the Prophet Mohammad (Zartman, 1992; Lewis, 2002) is an explanation for the current resurgence of political Islam.

While these socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors are seen as the causes of religious activism, few scholars have studied the co-optation strategies of secular states as a potential cause for the rise of religious parties. This dissertation attempts to fill this void in the literature by focusing on the role of state co-optation as an explanatory variable to explain the increasing electoral strength of religiopolitical parties. By making this assertion, I do not claim that the role of the state is not studied in the context of political religion. Hence, it is important to clarify in what context the state is discussed in the literature and how this study adds to these discussions.

For instance, some scholars have analyzed different approaches states have used towards the religiopolitical actors – or religion in general – and showed how these approaches (e.g. accommodative vs. conflictual) have varied in different periods or different countries (Sakallioglu, 1996; Camroux, 1996; Cohen and Susser, 2000; Kuru, 2006). These studies tend to be descriptive or typological in their analyses and do not pose any causal explanation as to why religiopolitical actors strengthen over time.
Others have analyzed the effects of repressive state policies on the radicalization of religious movements (Sivan, 1990; Hafez, 2003). While these studies are important for understanding the variation in the ideologies of religious movements, they do not explain why the popular appeal of religious actors changes over time. Additionally, the role of the state has been analyzed in the expansion of religious control over societies in the context of explicitly theocratic regimes, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. While these studies are important in our understanding of how state policies politicize religion, there is a significant difference between self-declared theocracies that use religion as a major ideology in defining the character of the state and secular regimes that co-opt religion to achieve other political ends. Thus, the argument made in this dissertation differs from these studies by emphasizing the role of secular states.

As Nasr (2001) aptly asserts, religious movements and societal forces explain part of the story on the rise of religiopolitical movements. There is also a need to analyze the state as a potential religious actor, as it plays a key role in embedding religion in politics. Following this advice, I analyze the co-optation policies of the secular states in two different countries and show that the state plays a role in the ascendance of religiopolitical movements in both contexts. In order to do so, I show how the cultural and educational policies of the secular state elites created different institutional sites, such as state-funded religious schools and a ministry of religious affairs, both of which were suitable to be mobilized by religiopolitical actors.
2.3.2 Secularization Thesis

The findings of this dissertation speak to the debate on the relationship between socioeconomic modernization and secularization. Secularization theory goes back to the classical post-Enlightenment thinkers, such as August Comte, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, who observed the dissemination of positivist ideas and came to the conclusion, albeit in different ways, that secularization is an irreversible process, and the role of religion in public and social life would diminish radically with increasing socioeconomic modernization of societies.

This theoretical approach was still the hegemonic view among the social scientists in the 1950s, 60s, and even 70s. Daniel Lerner (1958), Bryan Wilson (1966, 1978), Peter Berger (1967), and David Martin (1979) were part of this wave of secularization theorists, who claimed that indicators of modernization, such as urbanization, increasing literacy rates, and increasing economic development would diminish religion’s public, social, and political significance.

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While most secularization scholars use an overarching definition, secularization can be disaggregated and conceptualized on different levels. One way to conceptualize secularization is defining it as diminishing participation in religious institutions. In this conceptualization, secularization is measured as the diminishing church, mosque, or synagogue attendance. Another way of defining secularization is conceptualizing it as diminishing religious belief. This is usually measured by survey data indicating one’s attachment to God and possession of other religious beliefs. Others see secularization as the diminishing performance of societal functions by religious institutions. According to this definition, the less the churches fulfill socioeconomic functions, such as providing welfare or health care benefits, the more these functions are fulfilled by secular institutions, such as state bureaucracies and the more secular the society becomes. Finally, secularization can be seen as the diminishing role of religion in the political sphere. This can be measured by the electoral support of the religious parties. This dissertation adopts the latter conceptualization. Hence increasing electoral support for the religiopolitical parties would indicate diminishing secularization, while diminishing electoral support for the religiopolitical parties would indicate increasing secularization.

In contrast, the definition of socioeconomic modernization is rather unproblematic. In this study, I will stick to the definition developed by the modernization theorists. Namely, modernization of a society is associated with increasing levels of urbanization (percent of population living in cities), increasing levels of economic development (increasing GDP per capita), and increasing levels of literacy (percent of population who are literate).
These theorists established the link between modernization and secularization by using various hypotheses. Some argue that urbanization leads to the disintegration of local communities (*gemeinschaft*), which are based on personal relations, and the emergence of societies (*gesellschaft*), which are characterized by contractual relations and norms of efficiency. Religion loses its preeminence in the latter, since it is more suited for contexts where everyone knows his place in a close-knit order (Lerner, 1958; Wilson, 1966, 1976; Wallis and Bruce, 1992; Bruce, 2002). On the political level, as Weber states, religion loses its significance in creating the basis of political authority and is replaced by “rational-legal” legitimacy in this modern context.

Another line of argument posits that the Judeo-Christian religious tradition carried the seeds of secularization within itself. According to Berger, the Old Testament posited a radical transcendalization of God, the historicization of worldly events, and the motive of ethical rationalization, and therefore contributed to the advent of industrial capitalism and scientific thinking.8

The “differentiation hypothesis” establishes a connection between increasing variety of religious beliefs and practices in the modern world and the process of secularization. According to this hypothesis, socioeconomic modernization creates diverse occupations and classes. This diversity in socioeconomic status creates a variety of lifestyles and concomitantly a demand for a plurality of religious teachings. The emergence of the plurality of religious teachings creates a plausibility problem for religion, which posits a monopoly on the truth (Berger, 1967; Wallis and Bruce, 1992; Bruce, 1996). In the modern world, people do not only make choices about their

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confessions but are aware that they are making choices on religious traditions (Aldrige, 2007). Hence, this pluralism in the religious sphere destabilizes people’s certainty about their faiths.

Lastly, the “existential security hypothesis” (Norris and Inglehart, 2004) posits that the need for religion in advanced industrialized societies diminishes, because people feel existential security due to high levels of wealth, literacy, and other welfare indices in these societies. On the other hand, in agrarian societies with low levels of wealth, literacy and welfare, citizens are concerned for their survival and therefore turn to religion.

The secularization theory is challenged by other scholars, who argue that religion is psychologically equipped to deal with problems caused by modernity. For instance, Peter Berger (1999) – who was one of the contributors to the secularization literature in the 1970s but later changed his position – argues that modernity undermines the old certainties, and uncertainty is a condition that many people find very hard to bear. Religious movements thrive, because they provide the certainties people yearn for. Similarly, Vergin (2000) asserts in her study of a coal-mining town in Turkey that industrialization threatens the communal values that shaped people’s identity in the town. Thus, she claims, the residents of the town embrace a militant religiosity as a defense of their threatened identity. Another critic of secularization theory, Carl Brown (2003), posits that socioeconomic modernization in the Middle East has raised the expectations of urbanizing classes. Yet, the expectations of the new literate urbanites could not be met by secular political movements. Hence, these disgruntled men became activists in the rising religiopolitical protest in the region.
Thus, both proponents and critics of the secularization thesis claim that there is a relationship between socioeconomic modernization and secularization. Yet, as Gill (2001) aptly points out, both sides to the debate use the same independent variable to explain opposing outcomes.

It is interesting that the primary explanatory variable proposed to account for decreasing levels of religion in the society is the same variable being posited for the increase in religious activism: modernization. This presents a theoretical conundrum. Where religion is said to be anemic or in decline (e.g. Europe), modernization is the culprit. Where religion is on the rise (e.g. in the United States and the Third World), again it is modernization at work. The same independent variable supposedly explains two diametrically opposed outcomes. Of course, this problem could be resolved by clearly specifying the mechanisms by which different aspects of modernization lead to different outcomes in different contexts.9

It is important to keep in mind Gill’s insights above and theorize the relationship between modernization and secularization as a complex one. Thus, there is a need to specify the context under which modernization leads to secularization and the context under which modernization leads to religious activism. Some scholars hint at the importance of contextual variables. For example, Nikkie Keddie (1998) argues that new religiopolitical movements arise in countries in which the religiosity of the population is high. Moreover, Steven Bruce (2001), one of the staunch defenders of the secularization thesis, admits that religious activism might replace a trend of secularization in the modernizing context, when it is used by an ethnic group to defend its identity as a minority.

Keddie’s and Bruce’s arguments are valuable steps in explicating the contexts under which modernization might lead to the rise of religious movements. Yet, they fall

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short in their elaboration of these contexts. For instance, Keddie does not specify why in countries with high religiosity (e.g. the United States), religious movements rise at certain periods. Similarly, Bruce does not explain why certain minority ethnic groups use religion as a defensive identity marker while others do not.

Following these insights, I claim that the relationship between modernization and secularization is dependent on contextual factors. More specifically, I argue that in Israel and Turkey increasing modernization, namely increasing rural-urban migration and increasing literacy rates, have led to increasing religious mobilization only because modernization politicized a historical sociocultural divide by bringing individuals from the two sides of the divide into closer social contact. As a result of this social contact, both groups felt that their cultural identity was under threat. In such a context, religiopolitical groups used religion as a metanarrative that addressed the need for recognition of the peripheral groups, namely the pious Muslims in Turkey and the Sephardim in Israel. Hence, these processes of modernization led to the heightening of particularistic identities, and religion emerged as a suitable tool to address these identities.

2.3.3 Institutions, Culture, and Ideas

The analysis in this dissertation also speaks to the theoretical debate in the comparative politics literature about the role of institutions vs. culture/ideas in shaping political outcomes. Institutionalists maintain that political institutions constrain the behavior of political actors by providing certain incentives. According to this school of
thought, political actors follow the rules – or regularized practices with rule-like qualities – of their institutional context and respond to the incentives produced by these rules while making their political decisions. Both historical institutionalists (Kathleen and Steinmo, 1992; Hall and Taylor, 1996), who define institutional rules and actors’ interests as historically contingent, and rational choice institutionalists (Levi, 1988), who theorize utility-maximization as the basis of institutional rules and actors’ interests, agree on the primacy of institutions in politics. While these insights of the institutionalists are important for understanding the effect of the institutional context on the political actors’ decisions and actions, this school of thought is not attentive to the role culture and ideas play in politics.

In contrast to institutional analysis, in the field of political science cultural analyses are rather rare or far less developed (Ross, 1997). The cultural turn that was seen in the disciplines of humanities, sociology, and anthropology did not occur in political science. In the mainstream political science literature, cultural analyses are primarily considered society-centered theories.10 Some of the most prominent culturalists maintain that the cultural map of the society is causally linked to political outcomes. Max Weber’s theory about the role of Protestant ethics in the emergence of industrial capitalism, Huntington’s thesis about the fundamental role of civilizational differences in creating international conflict, and causal arguments about the relationship between Confucian values (e.g. the emphasis on obedience and education) and the economic success of the

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10 It is not my aim to give a full literature review of cultural theories used in political science. I only discuss the theories which pertain to state-society relations. Outside this context, there is for instance a large body of literature on civic culture.
East Asian economic models (Kahn, 1979; Vogel, 1979) are some examples of how culture is used to explain political outcomes.

All of these cultural analyses have the same major flaws. First, they attribute an unchanging culture to entire societies without paying attention to the sub-cultures of different groups within societies. Second, they cannot accommodate cultural change in their unidirectional explanations. That is, in these society-centered theories, there is no room for understanding how the cultural norms of social groups are shaped by external factors.

The concept of culture is not as simplistic and deterministic as these theorists have used it in their works. Undoubtedly, culture has an important effect on how individuals see the world around them and on how they act. Moreover, culture interacts with the social and institutional context. Cultural norms shape their contexts and are shaped by their contexts. While it is valuable to conduct detailed anthropological cultural analysis (Geertz, 1973) to interpret the cultural map of societies or groups, it is also important to investigate how cultural norms interact with political strategy and power. This dissertation employs the latter approach and investigates how culture is used in politics.

For instance, political actors may strategically manipulate cultural norms to gain the loyalties of certain groups in their society (Laitin and Wildawsky, 1988). Cultural symbols, norms, and rituals can provide a “tool kit” of habits, skills, or styles from which political entrepreneurs can design strategic action (Swidler, 1986). These cultural norms and symbols also play an important role in the formation of political ideas. For example,
scholars of nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Calhoun, 1997) show how master narratives about the nation have been constructed through the use of cultural, linguistic, and other symbols. While this approach has its strengths in bringing in the role of culture/ideas into political analysis, this school of thought heavily relies on the analyses of written texts and neglects the importance of institutional context in which ideas and culture operate.

As a response to the limitations of both the institutional and cultural/ideational approaches, some scholars developed a new line of analysis, namely discursive institutionalism (Sikkink, 1991; Hay, 2006; Schmidt, 2008). Discursive institutionalists claim that cultural norms, frames, and narratives do not only establish how political actors conceptualize the world but also define actors’ interests. Moreover, the actors’ discursive interaction with each other and their ideas about how to reinterpret or subvert institutions affect institutional change.11

This dissertation adopts a discursive institutionalist approach in its comparative analysis of state co-optation of religion. It argues that ideas and cultural symbols interact with political institutions in producing political outcomes. The state institutions provide a suitable context for co-opted political actors to disseminate their own ideological agendas. More importantly, they gain access to spaces (i.e. religious schools) through which they can propagate their ideological worldview to larger audiences through the production and dissemination of certain frames and discourses. As Wuthnow (1989) aptly states, “Within these [institutional] contexts, the producers of culture gain access to

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necessary resources, come into contact with their audiences, and confront the limitations posed by the competitors and persons in authority.”

Following Wuthnow’s description, this dissertation employs a cultural/ideational analysis that ties ideas to both actors’ articulation of them and to the institutional context in which they operate. More specifically, in this study, I analyze discourses of social and political actors to illustrate the relationship between ideas and political outcomes. In Chapter 4, I will attempt to show how religiopolitical actors construct discourses around the cultural needs of the peripheral groups in order to receive their political support. Moreover, I will show how these discourses are disseminated through different venues, such as the social networks formed around religious schools. Along the same line with Schmidt (2008), in this context, I define the notion of discourse as a narrative that reflects what social/political actors think, why they behave the way they do, and how they perceive the political phenomena around them. In this definition, discourses reveal a) the kinds of meaning the actors give to social/political events, b) the way they frame those events, and c) the way they connect these meanings and frames to their own actions.

In the context of Israeli and Turkish politics, religious schools were important means for understanding the production and dissemination of discourses, because producers, consumers, and subjects of cultural artifacts came together around these institutions. As Wuthnow (1989) says:

[Discourse] occurs, however, within communities in the broadest sense of the word: communities of competing producers, of interpreters and critics, of audiences and consumers, and of patrons and other significant actors who become the subjects of discourse

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12 Wuthnow, R. Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 7
itself. It is only in these concrete living and breathing communities that discourse becomes meaningful.\textsuperscript{13}

Similarly, actors such as students, principles, religious activists and journalists formed various communities around religious schools in Israel and Turkey. These actors constructed their own meanings of how society should be organized and used the religious schools as a means to disseminate these meanings to larger audiences. This type of discursive institutionalist analysis shows that ideas need to be articulated by social/political actors in order to gain political relevance. Moreover, it attempts to illustrate how ideas interact with their institutional context and how this interaction leads to political mobilization.

\textbf{2.3.3.1 Identity Politics}

One of the important mechanisms that served as a link between these discourses and political action was the formation and/or transformation of collective identities. These discourses had important political consequences and led to the empowerment of marginalized segments in the societies. The formation of collective identities and the use of identity politics played a key role in the cultural empowerment of peripheral groups. This function of identity creation does not exclusively occur in discursive spaces within state institutions. As will be explained in Chapters 7 and 8, both Shas and National Outlook Movement used cultural symbols and religious idioms also in their own ideologies in order to create a positive identity for their own constituents, namely Sephardim and pious Muslims.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 16
It is important to clarify what is meant by the term identity politics in the context of this dissertation. Until the 1960s, social groups fought to gain equal legal and political rights in the political arena. Many thought that gaining equal rights would lead to the concept of equal citizenship and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups (i.e. blacks, women, cultural minorities) into the political system. This demand for legal equality was blind to particularities – it was color-blind, gender-blind, and culture blind. In other words, all the disadvantaged groups were to be included into the mold of citizenship “in spite of their differences.” Participation in the public sphere presupposed casting aside one’s differences and assumed a neutral national political sphere based on universal values.

Yet, when these groups acquired equal legal and political rights, it became apparent that the rules and practices of the public sphere were very much dominated by the norms and codes of the privileged groups. Thus, political inclusion in such a political sphere required assimilation to those norms and codes. Hence, the oppressed groups, which acquired equal legal and political rights, were still at a disadvantage and lacked meaningful access to political power.

As a response to the inadequacies of this homogenizing politics, a new understanding of social justice was developed. This demand for social justice was based on the recognition of differences (i.e. racial, religious, gender-based, cultural) in the public and political spheres (Young, 1990, 2000; Taylor, 1994; Kiss, 1999). Hence, minorities did not accept being included “in spite of their differences” to a public sphere that was dominated by the rules and norms of the privileged groups; rather, they
demanded to participate “with their differences” or as “different members” in their national political community. Trends of cultural globalization that had started to undermine the power of the nation-state in the 1970s also contributed to the emergence of this politics of difference.

With respect to this concept of identity politics, the Shas party in Israel and National Outlook Movement in Turkey show similarities to new social movements that represent culturally oppressed groups. Both movements tried to carve ideological spaces where they assert a group specificity and pride against ideals of assimilation. For instance, the new language that Shas employed for the articulation of a religious Sephardi identity challenged the secular Zionist identity, which was the bearer of cultural homogenization in Israel. Similarly in Turkey, the National Outlook Movement articulated a new Islamic identity, and the political expression of this Islamic identity challenged the cultural homogenization of the secular Kemalist nationalism. These political expressions of difference were significant for the deepening of democracy in both contexts in the sense that they led to the political recognition of the culturally marginalized peripheral groups in both societies.

2.3.4 Religious Parties and Democratic Governance

The comparative analysis of the concomitant rise of Shas and the National Outlook parties in this dissertation provides an opportunity for testing some of the hypotheses made in the literature on the relationship between democratic governance and religion. One of the heated debates in the social sciences revolves around the question of

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whether it is possible for religion and democracy to coexist. Two separate questions emerge from this literature. Are certain religions compatible with democracy? Can religious actors accept democratic norms and operate in a democratic political system?

With regards to the first question, some scholars have investigated whether, theoretically, certain religious traditions (and today the debate is mainly focused on Islam) are compatible with democracy. Those who answer this question negatively argue that religion is governed by absolute dogma, while democracy requires an adherence to the pluralist rules of the game and bargaining with political actors representing multiple worldviews. Therefore, the argument goes, democracy and religion cannot coexist in the political arena, and the latter needs to be relegated to the private sphere.

This argument is challenged by other scholars, who argue that, theoretically, democracy can be legitimized by concepts authentic to religious traditions. For instance, many scholars have analyzed Islamic concepts, such as shura (consultation), ijma (consensus), and ijtihad (independent analysis) to show that Islam authentically contains the basic doctrines for the justification of liberal democracy, pluralism, and human rights (Esposito and Voll, 1996; Mousalli, 2003; Abou El Fadl, 2004).

While this theoretical question on the compatibility of religion and democracy can provide intriguing insights, this dissertation focuses on the second question stated above. Thus, the study takes a political perspective and claims that the religious teachings or theological debates are not the best place to assess the relationship between religiopolitical actors and democracy (Entelis, 2004). It is more important to focus on the political ideologies and institutional constraints of the religiopolitical actors in order to
evaluate these actors’ relationship to democratic governance.

In the context of this question, some scholars claim that religiopolitical actors advocate political ideologies that are inherently antidemocratic and are therefore unable to adhere to democratic values and practices (Tibi, 2008). Others maintain that religious parties participating in the democratic elections are using the democratic system to come to power and to establish an authoritarian theocracy from above (Pipes, 1995). The evidence from the two empirical cases discussed in this dissertation does not support these claims.

Both Shas and the National Outlook parties have utilized religious concepts and practices in order to appeal to their constituents. Yet, this use of religious idioms is not inherently undemocratic. Rather, these religious concepts, as further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, provide a form of communication between these political actors and societal groups for whom religious idioms constitute an important part of their daily lives. Moreover, both Shas and the National Outlook parties have participated in the democratic game and engaged in democratic bargaining as any other party in their respective political systems. While the leaders from both parties sometimes made illiberal political statements against their opponents undermining democratic political culture, both parties also accepted the constraints imposed on them by the democratic system.

Another debate in the literature revolves around the moderation-inclusion thesis. This debate evaluates the relationship between a political regime’s approach towards religiopolitical actors and the ideology of those actors. According to the moderation-inclusion thesis, religiopolitical actors that are allowed to participate in democratic
settings moderate their demands because they learn how to operate within the rules of the game (Wickham, 2004; Schwedler, 2006). On the other hand, exclusion from the political system prompts their radicalization.

The evidence from the Turkish and Israeli cases does not support the moderation thesis either. In Turkey, the main moderation of religiopolitical actors occurred when the JDP broke with the Islamist ideology of National Outlook and emerged as a conservative democratic party. Yet, this moderation followed the removal of the WP from power by a “postmodern coup” and the closure of the WP and VP respectively in the aftermath. Hence, the moderation of the religiopolitical actors followed a period of exclusion.

But it is important to understand the nature of exclusion in Turkey and how its interpretation by religiopolitical actors might differ from other cases. Unlike in other countries (i.e. Algeria or Egypt), in Turkey, exclusion does not mean violent state repression and/or total exclusion from the elections. Despite the fact that the parties of National Outlook were closed down by the Constitutional Court, the religiopolitical actors knew from past experiences and a history of protracted democratic regime that they could reorganize themselves in the political field. Moreover, they were already adapted to the rules of competitive elections from their thirty-years of participation in Turkish democracy, despite their momentary exclusion from the political system at the end of the 1990s. Hence, the JDP leadership rationally decided that it would be in their best long-term interest to continue to participate in the Turkish political system with a more moderate agenda in order to not face similar exclusionary reactions from the state institutions.
In Israel, the Shas party underwent a moderation of rhetoric to a far lesser extent in the past decade. This moderation did not follow any change in the political regime’s approach towards Shas. Rather, Shas leadership’s decision to tone down some of its uncompromising rhetoric was based on an assessment of the political events. The vocal secular opposition against the party, spearheaded by the secularist Shinui, and Shas’s inability to be part of Ariel Sharon’s government in 2003 played an important role in this assessment. Thus, both in Turkey and Israel, moderation occurred when the religiopolitical actors decided that moderation would be in their long-term interest after an assessment of the political climate.

Lastly, the Israeli and Turkish cases show that the electoral strengthening of religious parties in countries with strong secular traditions can have a destabilizing effect on democracy. As discussed further in Chapters 7 and 8, the rise of the Welfare Party to power in 1996, and the Shas party’s winning of an unprecedented 17 mandates in the Knesset in the 1999 election, increased the anxiety of secular segments in both societies. This anxiety instigated the formation of secular blocs against the WP and Shas, and this has led to the polarization of politics around the secular-religious divide. Moreover, the continuing secular opposition against the moderate JDP and the ongoing polarization around the secular-religious divide in Turkey shows that the secular reaction is not solely dependent on the ideology of the religious party, but rather on its relative political power.
CHAPTER 3
SETTING THE STAGE: THE CREATION AND POLITICIZATION OF SOCICULTURAL CLEAVAGES IN ISRAEL AND TURKEY

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

This comparative chapter lays the foundation for the following chapters of the dissertation. The aim of this chapter is to comparatively discuss how a sociocultural cleavage was created both in Israel and Turkey during the formative years of the respective states by modernizing elites and how this cleavage was later politicized when the individuals from the two sides of the divide were brought into close contact through social change.

More specifically, in Israel, an ethnic divide between Ashkenazim and Sephardim was formed with the immigration of large numbers of Jews from Muslim countries in the 1950s. This ethnic divide, which cuts across the already existing secular-religious categories, was perpetuated by the increasing socioeconomic gap between the two groups. Starting in the 1970s, increasing literacy rates of the Sephardi children and
attempts at school integration increased the social contact between the two groups. When these attempts to integrate the Ashkenazi and Sephardi schools created a backlash from the Ashkenazi parents and increased the frustrations of the Sephardim, the sociocultural divide was politicized.

Similarly, during the formative period of the new republic in Turkey (1923-1946), a cultural hierarchy was formed between the modernist center and the more conservative periphery. The economic policies of the early republican regime also created economic inequalities between the center and periphery. The two sides of this sociocultural divide came into closer contact with increasing immigration from rural areas to big cities starting in the late 1950s. The lack of socioeconomic integration into the city life increased the frustrations of the second and third-generation immigrants who lived on the outskirts of the metropolitan areas. Moreover, the oldtimers projected a negative cultural view on these immigrants, and these factors led to the politicization of the sociocultural cleavage.

3.2 Israel

3.2.1 Western vs. Eastern Jews: New Immigration Waves and the Creation of Ethnic Hierarchy in Israel

Cultural, political, and religious diversity has characterized the Jewish population in Palestine since the new Yishuv15 era. As a consequence of this diversity there is a de-facto enclave system, meaning that a separation between different ethnic, ideological, and

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15 The word Yishuv refers to the Jewish residents of Palestine prior the establishment of the State of Israel. Old Yishuv refers to the Jewish settlements that existed in Palestine prior to the arrival of the Zionist pioneers. Beginning from 1881, many Zionists started to come to Israel in different immigration waves. The New Yishuv refers to the Jewish settlements that were formed by these Zionist settlers.
religious traditions exists in different spheres of life, such as neighborhoods, schools or social movements.

There were four main institutionalized political groups in the pre-state Israel. The Socialist Zionists, who were mainly represented by Mapai, came to Palestine with plans to create a secular state, and also radically to transform the life of the Jews in Palestine according to principles of socialism and European enlightenment (Haskalah). On the other hand, the ultra-Orthodox Jews, who primarily lived in the holy cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias, dedicated most of their time to Torah study and were organized politically under Agudah Israel. Apart from these two groups the General Zionists, who embraced secular Zionism, but rejected socialist principles in economics, and Religious Zionists, who embraced the idea of the creation a Jewish nation state in Palestine, while keeping a religious life style, were the other two main groups.

These four political groups also preserved autonomy in their educational arrangements until the passage of the State Education Law in 1953. According to this law, the General Zionist and the Socialist Zionist educational streams were merged into a secular state education system, while the Religious Zionist educational stream was transformed into a state religious education system. While both of these newly created educational streams were officially part of the Education Ministry, the ultra-orthodox Agudah stream did not become official.16

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16 Yet the Law of Education of 1953 gave the minister of education the authority to recognize unofficial educational institutions, if these institutions adopted a basic curriculum (liba), and the training of their staff conformed to the training in the official schools. Accordingly, the minister of education could decide to grant some funding to these “unofficial recognized” institutions. Due to this provision in the Law of Education, some of the Agudah schools became “unofficial recognized”, while others chose to be “exempt” institutions, meaning their education would not be recognized by the Israeli state. The fact that the level of funding for the unofficial recognized schools was left to the decision of the education minister was later exploited by the ultra-orthodox parties to secure more funding for their schools.
Despite the religious and cultural divisions between them, the secular, Religious Zionist (modern-Orthodox), and ultra-orthodox communities were all predominantly Ashkenazi communities because Ashkenazim constituted 85-90 percent of the Jewish population in Palestine when the State of Israel was established in 1948. Yet, Israel’s demographics changed dramatically by the arrival of large numbers of Sephardim, Jews from Muslim countries. From 1948 to 1956, a total of 450,000 Jews arrived in Israel from Asia and Africa, compared to 360,000 Jews from Europe and America.

Although these immigrants came from many different countries, such as Morocco, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, etc., once they arrived in Israel, they were subsumed under the category “Mizrachi” (Easterner). In the eyes of the Ashkenazi founders, who saw themselves as the bearers of Western Enlightenment values, Easterner had a derogatory meaning, and even the labeling itself was indicative of the cultural hierarchy that was being formed between the two groups. This distinction between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim created a long-lasting ethnic cleavage in the Israeli society.

Unlike the Ashkenazim, the Sephardim were not adamant in rejecting the cultural norms of the societies from which they had emigrated. For instance, they spoke Arabic

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18 The distinction between the terms Sephardi and Ashkenazi does not strictly correspond to the distinction between European Jews and Jews from Middle East and Africa. For instance, Jews from the Balkans were Sephardim, and the Jews of Southern Africa are Ashkenazim. Moreover Sephardic Jews originated from Spain, a European country. Yet most of the Jews who were expelled from Christian Spain came to the Ottoman Empire and then settled in countries ruled by Muslims. A plethora of names are used to describe these newcomers as Arab Jews, Jews of Dar-ul Islam, Middle Eastern Jews, Oriental Jews, *Edot HaMizrach* (Eastern Communities) etc. I will use the terms Sephardi and Ashkenazi interchangeably with Jews from Europe and Jews from the Middle East and Africa, since these terms are used in Israel by the communities themselves. The distinction is a real distinction that is felt by the communities residing in Israel.

and listened to oriental music. Their sense of Jewishness was interwoven with the culture they were raised in, and this “Easternness” was perceived to undermine the “Israeliness” that the Labor Zionists tried to create. Furthermore, the ideology of Zionism, a secular Jewish nationalism, was alien to most of the Sephardi newcomers. Many of them did not come to Israel for ideological reasons, but made *aliyah* for pragmatic reasons of a better life or escaping oppression. Moreover, the sense of religiosity of the Sephardim did not fit in the categories of the secular-religious divide in the predominantly Ashkenazi society in Israel. Most of the Sephardic Jews considered themselves religious and observed the basic religious commandments, such as eating kosher or attending the synagogue on Shabbat. Yet their religious observance was not strict according to the standards of the ultra-Orthodox and the Modern Orthodox Jews in Israel. Therefore, most Sephardim in Israel are today defined as “*masorti*” (traditional), which is different both from “secular” and “religious” categories.

Because of these differences, the Sephardim had to undergo some humiliating practices. For instance, some Yemenite children had their side locks cut off, so that they would look like their Ashkenazi counterparts, or entire families were sanitized with pesticides in the airports. Moreover, the Oriental culture of the Sephardim was devalued by the Ashkenazi establishment, and they were forced to assimilate to the mainstream Israeli society, which was heavily influenced by Ashkenazi practices. The comments of two Israeli prime ministers reveal this discriminatory mindset developed by the Ashkenazi establishment. David Ben Gurion wrote in an article published in the Israeli Year Book in 1949 that

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20 *Aliyah* refers to the Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel. Literally the word means “ascent”.

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those [Jews] from Morocco had no education. Their customs are those of Arabs. . . . The culture of Morocco I would not like to have here. And I don't see what contribution present [Jewish] Persians have to make. . . . We do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are in duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies, and preserve the authentic Jewish values as they crystallized in the [European] Diaspora.  

Just after the establishment of the state, these remarks by the most influential person in Israeli politics clearly show that cultural assimilation was a deliberate goal of the government. Moreover, the statement reveals how in the mind of the Ashkenazi political elite values of the European Diaspora defined the values of the Jewish state. After twenty years, a similar tone underlined Prime Minister Golda Meir’s statement upon the arrival of the Russian immigrants

You are the real Jews. We have been waiting for you for twenty-five years. You speak Yiddish! . . . Every loyal Jew must speak Yiddish, for he who does not know Yiddish is not a Jew. You are a superior breed-you will provide us with heroes.

The Russian immigrants did not just receive a warmer welcome in words, but also in public policies. For instance, they received better housing facilities than their Sephardi counterparts. Sammy Samoha, a world-known Sephardi sociologist who grew up in Israel, describes the frustrations of the Sephardim

We were told not to speak Arabic, but we didn’t know Hebrew. Everything was strange. My father went from being a railroad official in Baghdad to an unskilled nobody. We suffered a terrible loss of identity. Looking back, I’d call it

cultural repression. Behind their lofty ideals of ‘one people’, they were acting superior, paternalistic.23

This cultural marginalization of the Sephardim was perpetuated by spatial isolation and socioeconomic gaps. Most of the Sephardic newcomers were placed in peripheral towns, called ‘development towns’. These towns, which were created as part of Israel’s absorption policy, “were far removed from the Israeli urban centers. The towns were populated through the provision of public housing to (mainly Mizrachi) homeless and dependent immigrants who had few other residential choices.”24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Population (in thousands)</th>
<th>Percentage of Jewish population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>180.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>303.1</td>
<td>15.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>448.9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>447.2</td>
<td>17.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>646</td>
<td>18.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>702.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 3.1 Population and Percentage of Jews living in the Development Towns25

Until the arrival of significant number of Russian immigrants in 1991, Sephardi residents made up more than 80 percent of the population in these development towns. In

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24 Tzfadia, Erez and Yiftachel, Oren “Between urban and national: Political mobilization among Mizrahim in Israel’s ‘development towns’” (paper presented at UC Irvine Department of History Workshop on Socio-Religious Movements and the Transformation of the Community: Israel, Palestine and Beyond, 2002)
25 Adapted from Goldscheider, 2002, Table 6.3
addition to their geographic marginality, the socioeconomic indicators in these new development towns have been much worse compared to other parts of the country. Hence, these places are characterized by lower wages, a younger population, lower literacy rates, poor schools, higher delinquency rates, higher levels of unemployment, and poor social services. The development towns with a very high concentration of Sephardic Jews, such as Dimona, Kiryat Shmona or Kiryat Gat, also face a net out-migration, which makes ethnic residential segregation more acute. Moreover, ethnic segregation at the neighborhood level continues to be a reality in the mid-sized and big cities. In spite of some integration in certain urban centers, still many pockets of poverty, which were created in the peripheries of mid-sized cities or unpopular inner city neighborhoods of big cities, are populated predominantly by Oriental Jews.

The ethnic gap still exists today. Although it has decreased on some indicators, such as years of schooling, significant inequalities continue to persist in income, in holding prestigious jobs, and participation in higher education. For instance according to the figures of the Statistical Abstract of Israel 2000, 38 percent of the foreign-born Ashkenazim and 50 percent of the Israeli-born Ashkenazim held prestigious occupations compared to 24 percent of the foreign-born Sephardim and 26 percent of the Israeli-born Sephardim. Moreover, the percentage of Sephardim who continue to higher education is significantly lower than the percentage of Ashkenazim.

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29 Academic professionals, associate professional and technicians, and managers and administrators are considered as having prestigious occupations.
Figure 3.1 Percentage of students in higher education according to father’s country of origin

Figure 3.1 above shows that both first and second generation immigrants from Asian and African countries are far less likely to attend a university than first and second generation immigrants from European and American countries. Since higher education is the most important determinant of income, the lack of a higher education for most Sephardi youth has an adverse impact on their future life prospects. Accordingly, data

30 Source: Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2002
from the mid 1990s suggest that “the overall earnings gap between second-generation Eastern and Western immigrant men has increased in the period 1975–1992.” Due to the persistence of these inequalities, ethnicity is still salient in Israel, and this salience is felt by many second generation Sephardim, who scarcely find opportunities to move up the socioeconomic ladder.

3.2.2 Increasing Literacy and Sephardi-Ashkenazi Conflicts

This cultural hierarchy between Ashkenazim and Sephardim had important consequences for the education system. With increasing school attendance of the Sephardim, it became apparent that Sephardi children faced discrimination in all three educational streams. Furthermore, the state’s attempts to integrate the Sephardi children into the state and especially state-religious systems created a backlash from the Ashkenazi parents.

3.2.2.1 Discrimination against the Sephardim in Ultra-orthodox Schools

In the ultra-orthodox stream the ethnic hierarchy between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim was very explicit. In many of the educational institutions that belonged to the Agudah party, there have been quotas for a limited number of Sephardi children. For instance, Beit Yaacov schools, which are the most prestigious ultra-orthodox girls’ schools in Israel, still impose a 30-35 percent quota for students from Sephardi families. These quotas, which are mainly constructed by asking the ethnic origin of the registering students, survive up to today despite drawing strong criticism from the Sephardi

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community and civil rights groups. Many of the central figures, who played an important role in the establishment of the Shas party, such as the first party chairman Ariyeh Deri and party’s spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia’s son David Yosef, were educated in the Ashkenazi yeshivas of the Agudah network and felt this ethnic discrimination first hand.

Moreover, in the Agudah network the number of religious high schools and *yeshivas* specifically catering to the Sephardim was inadequate, and those existing Sephardi institutions were very poorly funded. The closing of the Sephardi yeshivas due to a lack of funding under the Agudah network is one of the main reasons why the movement of Shas was born.

3.2.2.2 The Sephardim in the Secular State Schools

Since the state-secular system was based on the General Zionist and Socialist Zionist education streams of the Yishuv era, the curriculum of the schools was also influenced heavily by secular Zionism. This Zionist education was alien to many of the newcomer Sephardi children, and the culture of the Sephardi children posed an important challenge to the curriculum. For instance, Oriental Jews were represented as backward in school textbooks until 1967, when the textbooks were rewritten. Even until today, Zionist historiography scarcely pays any attention to the histories of the Sephardim. For instance, little mention is made of the fact that major Sephardi texts in

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32 Jerusalem Post, October 26, 1990; Ha’aretz August 5, 2003
33 Religious post-secondary institutions
34 Interview with Roni Huri on 13 December, 2006. Huri, who has studied in a Sephardi yeshiva under the Agudah network and then became a Shas activist, based his claims on his prior experience.

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philosophy, linguistics, poetry and medicine were produced when Jews were living in the Arab lands.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to cultural alienation, Sephardi children also struggled in terms of academic achievement because of their lower socioeconomic standing. To deal with the gap a tracking system was introduced. Accordingly, students took a scholastic aptitude test in the 9\textsuperscript{th} grade and were placed in a non-academic vocational track or in an academic track. Due to the academic achievement gap between the two groups vocational tracks were predominantly filled with Sephardim, while Ashkenazim constituted the overwhelming majority in the academic tracks. This early placement in a vocational track significantly hindered the Sephardi pupils’ ability to continue to higher education. Thus, despite the increase in the rate of post-primary education, the proportion of Sephardim entering higher education has remained stable at about 15 percent as compared with about 40 percent for the Ashkenazim in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{37} Even in the mid 1990s, most of the students who could not pass the national matriculation examination were Sephardim.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{3.2.2.3 Attempts of School Integration and the Religious-state Education System}

The greatest tension surfaced in the state-religious education system, because the percentage of the Sephardi pupils in the state-religious schools was greater than in other schools. Predominantly masorti Sephardi parents preferred to send their children to the state-religious schools because they wanted their children to receive some level of


\textsuperscript{38}Zameret, Z. “Fifty Years of Education in the State of Israel,” http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern%20History/Israel%20at%2050/Fifty%20Years%20of%20Education%20in%20the%20State%20of%20Israel
religious consciousness in the school. When there was significant segregation between Ashkenazi and Sephardi students due to ethnic segregation of the neighborhoods in the 1950s and 60s, the issue of school integration started to get attention in political circles.

Possibilities for different ways of implementing school integration were discussed at the Education Ministry and Knesset for the years to come. In 1963 Joshua Prawer prepared an Education Reform Program for the Education Ministry. Integration of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi pupils in the public schools and the closing of the ethnic gap were two of the aims of the proposed Program. The issue of integration received more political attention during the workings of the Rimalt Committee (1966-1968) and entered onto the Knesset’s agenda. In 1968 a big majority in the Knesset approved a bill endorsing the integration of the public schools as an educational goal.

Yet the passage of this bill by the Israeli parliament did not mean that the Education Minister would follow strict policies to enforce integration, such as busing students from low opportunity neighborhoods to schools in high opportunity neighborhoods. On January 1976 it was decided that school integration would be not enforced, but authority would be given to district directors and local authorities to guide the process of rearranging school districts if they deem this necessary in their region.39 Subsequently many battles have been fought between Ashkenazi and Sephardi parents over school integration at the local level.

Modern Orthodox Ashkenazi parents were concerned about school integration because of i) the social class gap between their children and Sephardi pupils, ii) the

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alleged negative impact of the Sephardim on education quality, and iii) threat perception towards their way of religious life from Sephardim. This last concern is expressed cogently by an NRP activist:

The religious modern-Orthodox and the *masortiim* go to the same *mamlachi-dati* (state-religious) schools. But the religious modern-Orthodox also have their limits, if there are too many *masortiim* [in the school], especially more *masortiim* than *datiim* (religious). The question is very complicated, but most of the time its hinges on Shabbath…Most of the *masortiim* are going to the synagogue and saying the Kiddush. The question is whether you are going to the synagogue and then coming back and driving the car or watching the game….If they [the *masortiim*] are more secular than religious, then this has an important impact on the climate of the school, and the regular *datiim* are not ready to live in such a climate. Hence, many problems are caused based on that. Especially in Petach Tikva, this created a big crisis.⁴⁰

Hence, the modern Orthodox community perceives the growing numbers of the *masorti* pupils in state-religious schools as a threat to their own religious way of life. The changing climate within these schools leads them to believe that they are losing a historically won collective right, namely having of an autonomus educational stream.

Because of this threat perception, similar to the secular schools a tracking system was introduced as a defensive strategy against integration. Due to this tracking system, vocational tracks were predominantly filled with Sephardi pupils, while the academic tracks were mostly filled by Ashkenazi pupils.⁴¹ More importantly, a separate private religious school network, *Noam*, was established by Ashkenazi modern Orthodox parents who broke away from the state-religious education in 1972.

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⁴⁰ Interview with Rami Hoffenberg, the head of state-religious education in Petach Tikva, on 4 December, 2006
⁴¹ In 1995, the head of the Religious Education Council, Matityahu Dagan, abolished most of the vocational tracks within the state-religious schools because of the system’s racial consequences.
Noam schools did not accept any Sephardim in their schools because they were seen as the root cause of diminishing quality of education and loosening of religious observance in the state-religious schools. The parents preferred to pay a large amount of money for the education of their children rather than seeing them integrate with the masorti Sephardim. Due to the flight of a significant number of Ashkenazi pupils to the Noam schools, the percentage of the Sephardi students within the remaining state-religious schools increased significantly, and this caused only more problems. As one parent explained:

When they opened Noam in Petach Tikva, all the [modern Orthodox] families, let’s call them good families -including mine- , said that Noam is a better Orthodox school. [They said] let’s send our children there….So when it [the student composition] was seventy percent from Kfar Ganim [a modern Orthodox neighborhood] and thirty percent from Shaariya [a Sephardi neighborhood], it was O.K. Then thirty to forty good families sent their children to Noam. Now they [Sephardi students] were seventy percent and we were thirty percent…Now this is not integration. Because thirty years ago they told us that they need integration, so that they can learn with students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds….The idea of integration is that you take seventy to eighty percent from a good community and you take twenty percent from a socioeconomically low community, so that the strong people can push up the low people. Once it becomes the other way around, seventy percent of -the so called -not good and twenty percent good. They take us down.

Due to similar reactions against school integration, cultural resentment felt by the Sephardi community grew.

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42 The Noam school system refused to come under the authority of the state-religious system after its formation. After long negotiations that lasted more than two decades, most of the Noam schools accepted to be part of the state-religious education system. As part of the deal, the Noam schools also agreed to accept a certain number of Sephardim to their schools.

43 Interview with Yehuda Lanskron on 13 December, 2006. The formation of the Noam schools did not only exacerbate the already existing problems in the state-religious schools, but they also signified the creation of a new life-style within the Religious Zionist community. The families around the Noam schools adopted some of the cultural norms of the ultra-orthodox, such as growing earlocks and segregating themselves in neighborhoods, while still trying to keep their Religious Zionist identity. Therefore they are named as haredi-leumim, meaning ultra-orthodox nationalist Jews. This trend created an important cultural split and internal debate within the Religious Zionist community.
3.3 Turkey

3.3.1 Sociocultural Cleavage in Turkey

Similar to the pioneers in Israel, Turkey’s republican elites had a secularist ideology and aimed to modernize their society from top down. Unlike their Israeli counterparts, who emigrated from Eastern Europe, however, these elites mainly came from the Ottoman bureaucratic and military class, who had an exposure to the ideas and institutions of modernity. Their secularist, elitist, and western worldview was the culmination of the modernization efforts during the late Ottoman period.

With the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, Turkey underwent a rapid political and cultural transformation. Reforms like the abolition of the caliphate, religious courts and other religious institutions, the introduction of the Latin alphabet and Gregorian calendar in place of the Arabic alphabet and lunar calendars, and the banning of the traditional fez in favor of Western style hats not only aimed to secularize the political sphere, but also attempted to create a new Turkish nation with a modern culture.

For the republican elites, modernization was very closely aligned with adopting Western cultural practices. Hence, during the one-party rule of the RPP (1923-1946), the oriental culture and way of life were depicted as the main reason for the decline of the Empire and Turkey’s current underdevelopment. The official stance of the governing Republican People’s Party (RPP) was to label the local and more Islamic culture of the masses as relics from the dark ages and deny any ethnic or religious differences in

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Anatolia. Accordingly, many religious and oriental cultural practices were debased, while Western cultural practices were depicted as superior. For instance, while the performance of oriental music in public was banned, Village Institutes (Koy Enstituleri) were formed in the villages in order to socialize the villagers into a Westernized Turkish culture. The paternalistic and derogatory view of the elites towards village life can also be found in the novels of the times, such as Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoglu’s Yaban.

However, the republican elites were careful not to directly attack Islam. According to their statements, Islam was fully compatible with the ideas of progress and science. Yet a superstitious version of Islam that had been disseminated through existing religious institutions and by existing religious figures needed to be erased. Therefore, the republican elites engaged in full scale radical reforms against established religious institutions, religious education, and religious functionaries with an aim of replacing them by the guidance of science. This process, however, was complemented by a reformed and strictly state-control version of Islam disseminated by the newly formed Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Yet the transformation of the Islamic way of life to a Westernized way of life and the inculcation of the Kemalist ideals of secular nationalism, progress and positivism did not penetrate the entire Turkish society, especially in the villages, which were far from the big cities. The cultural idioms associated with Islam survived in the daily lives of the

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masses, and Islamic consciousness remained the foundation of communal identity among large segments of society.

Accordingly a duality between the more traditional, Islamic masses residing in the villages and the secular, westernized elites residing in the big cities was created. This duality in Turkey was analogous to the drift between the oriental Sephardim and secular Ashkenazim in Israel. This division, which was named the center-periphery cleavage, became one of the most important divisions in Turkish social and political life in the years to come.

The economic policies of the republican elite also produced stark socioeconomic inequalities between the center and the periphery. During the great depression the Turkish state, like its counterparts in most of Europe, implemented a state-led industrialization program, which is known as etatism. In 1929-39 through the implementation of protective measures, the import of consumer goods was thwarted, while the import of intermediary goods was made easier through reduction of custom duties in order to create infant industries. These policies led to major industrialization in the big cities. Moreover, the state bureaucracy, which controlled a big part of economic activity, and the newly emerging industrial bourgeoisie emerged as the main

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47 Ibid. p.372-3
48 Yavuz H. Islamic Political Identity in Turkey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 55
49 The general distinction between the center and the periphery was first introduced by Edward Shils in Shils, Edward A. “Centre and Periphery” in The Logic of Personal Knowledge: Essays Presented to Michael Polanyi on his Seventieth Birthday, 11th March 1961 (London: Routledge, 1961) and further elaborated in Shills, Edward, A Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). The division between the center and the periphery is applied to Turkish politics by Serif Mardin. See Mardin, Serif “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics” Daedalus (1973): 169-190.
winners of these policies.\textsuperscript{51} For instance, in 1931-1940, 72.4 percent of all the new firms were established by state bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{52}

On the other hand, these industrialization efforts heavily taxed and exploited the agricultural sector, and the farmers emerged as the main losers.\textsuperscript{53} The exploitation of the agricultural sector continued during the years of WWII. The government bought crops, such as wheat, sugar beets, or cotton from the small farmers under market price and sold them with great profit after processing them.\textsuperscript{54} In 1944, the passage of the Soil Products’ Tax (\textit{Toprak Mahsulleri Vergisi}), a flat tax on all gross agricultural products of 10 percent, created a very heavy burden for the poor and small farmers. At the end of the war, the agricultural sector, which constituted 85 percent of the Turkish population at the time, had much resentment against the state.\textsuperscript{55}

Hence, by undertaking extensive state-led economic initiatives, the young Turkish state managed to transform socioeconomic life in the big cities. Yet, at the end of the same period the periphery was not only culturally and politically marginalized, but also socioeconomically disadvantaged and dependent on the center.

\textbf{3.3.2 The Encounter between the Periphery and the Center: Failed Attempts at Integration}

After Turkey’s transition to a multi-party democracy in 1946, the new government under the Democratic Party (DP) (1950-60) pursued a liberal economic

\textsuperscript{51} Keyder, C. \textit{Turkiye’dede Devlet ve Siniflar} (Istanbul: Iletisim, 2000), 147
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. p.149.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. p.150.
\textsuperscript{55} Gursel, S. Cumhuriyet Doneminde Turkiye Ekonomisi, in \textit{75 yilda dusunceler tartismalar} (Istanbul: Turk Tarih Vakfi Yayinlari, 1999), 142
policy. With the help of the Marshall Plan, mechanization of agriculture became pervasive, and this led to a decreasing need for agricultural labor. By taking advantage of the new democratic era and liberal political opening, the unemployed villagers started to immigrate to the major cities in great numbers. This rural-urban immigration characterized the movement of the periphery to the center. As seen in Figure 3.2 below, this rural-urban immigration, which started in the 1950s, accelerated significantly in the 1980s and 1990s. By 2000 two thirds of Turkey’s entire population was already urban dwellers.

Figure 3.2 Urbanization in Turkey in 1927-2000

Yet the state did not have any resources to make any infrastructural plans to integrate new-comers into the cities. Hence, most of the rural immigrants started to live in shanties called *gecekondu* (literally meaning put up by night), indicating how fast they were erected. These dwellings were erected overnight because of a legal loophole that made it impossible for the state authorities to tear down a building if it was completed (if it had a roof) between dusk and dawn without having been noticed by the state authorities. Rather than tearing down the building, the state authorities had to start proceedings in the legal system. These shanties were most often built on state land without any legal permit and without any infrastructural plans. Yet most often, the erection of the shanties were done close to election time, so that squatters could get amnesty from politicians as election approaches and receive legal permits and/or other services for their *gecekondu*.

The first squatter settlements were built in the outskirts of the cities, although today many of them are also close to city centers due to the outgrowth of the cities. These settlements were characterized by poverty, by a large number of young residents, and by too many infrastructural problems, such as lack of sewerage, transportation, paved roads, clean water, electricity, etc.\(^{57}\) Most of the *gecekondu* dwellers worked in the informal economy with no social security. The men usually worked as street vendors, construction workers, or *dolmus* (collective taxis) drivers, while the women either produced for the market in their homes or became servants in upper-middle class

\(^{57}\) Ibid. pp. 99-100
homes. Hence, despite their physical closeness to the center, these settlements still constituted a periphery, this time the ‘urban periphery.’\textsuperscript{58}

However, despite their socioeconomic marginality in the major metropolitan areas of Turkey, the first generation \textit{gecekondu} dwellers held optimistic attitudes towards city life. Kemal Karpat’s (1976) extensive study of the three squatter settlements in Istanbul shows that the \textit{gecekondu} residents, who mostly immigrated to the cities for better economic and educational opportunities, earned on average more than the villagers, yet significantly less than the established urbanites. The immigrants had a positive attitude towards the city, because of this increase in their income.\textsuperscript{59}

Moreover, 92 percent of the interviewed residents stated that they thought the future of their children would be better due to economic and educational opportunities.\textsuperscript{60}

However, the optimism of the first generation \textit{gecekondu} dwellers did not extend to the second and third generations, since the opportunities for the \textit{gecekondu} dwellers did not improve. These city-born youngsters “were stuck at the level of their parents’ low-income, low-prestige jobs in industries that had advanced beyond them.”\textsuperscript{61}

Moreover, second and third generation \textit{gecekondu} dwellers were more cognizant of both their lack of economic opportunities and the discriminatory outlook of the oldtimers towards them. In addition to this, some of the urban oldtimers started to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Erman T. & Eken, A. 2004. The “Other of the Other” and “unregulated territories” in the urban periphery: \textit{gecekondu} violence in the 2000s with a focus on the Esenler case, Istanbul. \textit{Cities}, 21, no.1 (2004): 58
\item \textsuperscript{59} Karpat, K.. \textit{The Gecekondu: Rural Migration and Urbanization} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976). 105-6
\item \textsuperscript{60} ibid. pp.107-109
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
move to suburbs of the major cities that were far away from the city centers. Because of this movement towards the new suburbs, the gecekondu dwellers witnessed in the 1990s the growth of middle or upper class settlements in their backyards. Due to this closer contact, the second and third generation gecekondu dwellers, who already felt frustrated due to their severe socioeconomic situation, became more aware of the social and cultural hierarchies that existed between themselves and the urban elites.

Another important factor that exacerbated the sociocultural frustration of the gecekondu dwellers in the 1990s was the narratives that were created around them. Erman (2001) eloquently shows how in the 1990s with the help of the proliferation of the media outlets in Turkey, the degrading term “varoslu” replaced the more neutral term “gecekondu dweller.” According to Erman, the representation of the gecekondu dwellers changed significantly in the 1990s:

The gecekondu/migrant population is not constructed any more as a rural population that failed to become urban, but as a population that is attacking the city, its values, its political institutions and, more importantly, the very core of its ideology (a secular and democratic society built on consensus and unity ) and its social order…[Urban dwellers stigmatized] people of rural origin as the ‘threatening Other’, as the ‘dangerous and violent Other’ and as the illegal occupiers and holders by force not only of some city space (that is, the gecekondu land), but today also of the social, cultural and political space.  

Hence, the urban elites blamed the gecekondu dwellers not only for ruralizing the city, for the mounting infrastructural problems, for overcrowding, for diminishing high urban manners, and for increasing criminal activity, but also for posing a cultural and political threat to their very existence. Although some of these depictions were part

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of the discourse of the urban elites since the start of the rural-urban immigration, they
became much more prevalent in the 1990s, because the number of the gecekondu
dwellers skyrocketed, and the same problems of the earlier periods not only persisted,
but also increased.

For instance in the 1980s, 55 percent of Ankara, 70 percent of Istanbul, and 50
percent of Izmir lived in gecekondus.63 According to another count conducted in 1993,
the number of gecekondus was 1.6 million, with the vast majority living in Turkey’s
seven biggest cities and almost three quarters of a million in Ankara, Istanbul, and
Izmir alone. According to the estimates the gecekondu dwellers constituted 17 percent
of the national electorate.64 By the year 2000, the gecekondu residents in Istanbul
constituted 75 percent of the city’s total population.65

In sum, the sociocultural divide between the periphery and the center became
much more acute in the 1990s: a) due to the socioeconomic frustrations of the second-
and third-generation gecekondu dwellers; b) due to the increasingly negative
representations of the gecekondu dwellers because of an increasing threat perception by
the urbanites; and c) due to a closer contact of the gecekondu dwellers with the middle
and upper socioeconomic classes in the suburban neighborhoods.

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Regional Research 22:2, pp.283-302
International Labor & Working-Class History, 64, pp. 94
3.4 Conclusion

The chapter provided a comparative description of how a sociocultural cleavage was created during the formative years of Israel and Turkey and how this cleavage was politicized due to increasing literacy rates and rural-urban immigration. The discussion in this chapter provides the groundwork for the remaining chapters. Chapter 4 discusses how *Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani* as an ultra-orthodox Sephardi educational network addresses the sociocultural discrimination faced by the Sephardi families in all sectors of Israeli society. The same chapter also shows how the *Imam Hatip* schools were politicized in the mid-1970s and then emerged as institutions addressing the sociocultural grievances of the periphery.

Moreover, reliгиopolitical actors emerged in both countries at the time the sociocultural cleavage was politicized. As Chapter 7 further discusses, the Shas party in Israel formed an eclectic ideology that addressed the cultural and socioeconomic grievances of the economically marginalized Sephardim. Similarly, Chapter 8 discusses how the National Outlook parties addressed the social and cultural demands of different groups in the periphery.
CHAPTER 4

POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter comparatively discusses the role of religious education in political mobilization in Israel and Turkey. First, it shows how the inclusion of religiopolitical actors in the government has led to both increased funding for religious education and to the politicization of religious schools. This has led to the creation of alternative educational spheres within the state, namely *Ma’ayan* schools in Israel and the transformation of already existing institutions to alternative educational tracks, namely *Imam Hatip* schools in Turkey. By presenting the religious schools as an alternative to the secular schools, both Shas and National Outlook Movement deliberately politicized the issue of religious education. By agreeing to increase public funding for religious schools, secular coalition partners aimed to have a say in the curriculums and the instruction given in these schools. Yet, contrary to their intentions in both contexts, the religious schools have become vehicles for political mobilization for the religious
Next, the chapter illustrates how these schools have addressed the sociocultural needs of peripheral groups, who already had heightened grievances due to a politicized center-periphery divide as described in the previous chapter. Both the *Ma’ayan* and *Imam Hatip* schools appealed to the disadvantaged strata by acting as social provision providers. Moreover, these schools created identities for the Sephardim in Israel and the pious Muslims in Turkey. These identities constructed pride among these groups and led to their cultural empowerment vis-à-vis the assimilationist worldview of secular Zionism and Kemalism. While providing this explanation, the chapter also illustrates how ideas and identities are formed within institutions and how these ideas are disseminated to larger audiences through social networks in order to mobilize them politically. Thereby, the chapter attempts to show the interactive role of ideas (cultural constructs) and institutions in affecting political change.

### 4.2 Israel

#### 4.2.1 Formation of *Ma’ayan Hahunich HaTorani* (The Source of the Torah Education): An ultra-orthodox Sephardi educational network

The educational trends in Israel reveal that the percentage of students who receive a religious education increased in the past three decades. Moreover, a closer look into the religious camp show that the percentage of students who attend ultra-orthodox educational institutions increased, while the number of students who attend state-religious schools diminished.
Figure 4.1 Percentage of students in different primary educational streams in Israel (change over years)
Figure 4.2 Percentage of students in different secondary educational streams in Israel (change over years)

One of the explanations for this dramatic rise in the popularity of ultra-orthodox education lies with the creation of a new ultra-orthodox Sephardi educational network, namely *Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani* by Shas. As will be further discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, Shas party was born in 1983 as an ultra-orthodox Sephardi party and was incorporated in most of Israeli coalition governments formed thereafter. One of the consequences of Shas’s incorporation into the coalition
governments was the increased funding its educational network received from the state budget.

Ma‘ayan schools, which were established by Shas in 1986, first operated under Shas’s civil society network, El Hama’ayan (To the Source). In 1988 the schools became a separate, autonomous network, namely Ma‘ayan Hahinuch HaTorani. In a short period, the Ma‘ayan schools succeeded in attracting a very significant number of religious, masorti, and non-religious Sephardi students. The network started to receive ad hoc state funding in 1988, and in 1992 the funding for the Ma‘ayan network was institutionalized thanks to Shas’s political leverage in the twenty-fourth coalition government. The number of institutions and the pupils in the network increased significantly in the following years. In 2006 Ma‘ayan Hahinuch HaTorani operated 96 elementary schools and 233 kindergartens which had 18,340 and 9,753 students, respectively, according to the figures provided by the Education Ministry.66

The relationship between the Ma‘ayan schools and Shas has been a virtuous cycle. The political success of Shas and its control over state resources helped the Ma‘ayan schools to grow, and the growth of the Ma‘ayan network helped Shas to become politically more powerful. Due to Shas’s pragmatic and aggressive stance in the coalition governments Ma‘ayan network receives more funding per pupil than any educational network in Israel.67 In return, Shas supports the bigger partner of the

66 The figures are received from the Department of Unofficial Recognized Education under the Education Ministry. The Ma‘ayan network officials, on the other hand, claim to have around 50,000 students in their schools. There is always a discrepancy between the numbers published by the Education Ministry and the numbers provided by the Ma‘ayan network, since the number of students determine the state funding allocated to the schools.

67 Schiffer, V. The Haredi Education in Israel: Allocation, Regulation, and Control (Jerusalem: The Floersheimer Intsitute for Policy Studies, 1997), 14
coalition on national issues, such as the peace process or national economic policy. This pragmatism of Shas on national issues and its indispensability in the fragile coalition governments of Israel give it the power to extort the big coalition partners on school funding.

The practice of allocating state funding to autonomous ultra-orthodox education did not start with the Ma’ayan schools. Since 1953 the Agudah channeled state resources to its own school system, Hinuch Atzmai (Independent Education) network. Yet the institutionalization of Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani drew more attention and criticism from the other political actors, especially those in the secular and Religious Zionist segments, since the network targeted not only ultra-orthodox children, but also secular and masorti children. Some of the criticisms raised against the Ma’ayan schools reveal the political opposition of the Religious Zionist and secularist sectors.

The relations between the National Religious Party and Shas turned very sour during the budget debate in 1991, although both parties were part of the coalition government under Shamir’s Likud party. The special allocations for the Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani network constituted the focus of the debate.68 The NRP, which controlled the education ministry, fiercely opposed giving special allocations to the Ma’ayan network. Once the NRP members were challenged by the Shas politicians as to why their educational network was not entitled to special allocations, while the Agudah’s school network was, they claimed that the Ma’ayan network was not properly organized.69

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Yet this clearly did not reveal the real concern of the Religious Zionist community. As one senior NRP educator commented, the real reason behind NRP’s rejection of the special allocations to the *Ma’ayan* network was its target audience. Hence NRP politicians understood very well that the *Ma’ayan* network was becoming a competitor in the educational field, since it was appealing to the children of *masorti* Sephardim, who constituted an important segment within the state-religious schools. The Agudah network, on the other hand, did not pose any threat to state-religious education, since it only targeted ultra-orthodox Ashkenazim and did not extend its recruitment beyond its target population.\(^{70}\) This political conflict over the special allocations to the *Ma’ayan* network continued for a month and a half, until the prime minister pressured the NRP to give in to Shas’s demands.\(^{71}\)

In the next coalition government, formed after the 1992 national election, an ultra-orthodox education authority was established within the ministry of education to institutionalize allocation of state funding to different ultra-orthodox networks, including the *Ma’ayan*. The NRP, which for the first time in the history of the state of Israel remained outside of the coalition, fiercely reacted to this initiative. Influential NRP MKs, Shaul Yahalom and Yitzhak Levy, started a petition stating that the formation of the ultra-orthodox authority is a violation of the 1953 Education Law.\(^{72}\) Yahalom’s attacks on the government clearly reveal the concerns of the Religious Zionist community: "The government and the education minister were, and are still, willing to seriously harm Religious Zionism by establishing the *haredi* [ultra-orthodox] education

\(^{70}\) *Jerusalem Post*, 6 December 1991.
\(^{71}\) *Jerusalem Post*, 12 December 1991.
\(^{72}\) *Jerusalem Post*, 31 August 1992
authority, which would have damaged the State-Religious education system and Religious Zionist culture.”

The controversy over state funding to the \textit{Ma’ayan} schools continued throughout the 1990s, and this paved the way for many more political crises. The Religious Zionist community was not the only party concerned about the steep growth of the \textit{Ma’ayan}. Secularist parties, such as Shinui and Meretz, often criticized the concessions given by the state authorities to the \textit{Ma’ayan}. For instance, a very major crisis broke out when the \textit{Ma’ayan} network declared bankruptcy and demanded that the state pay off its debt in 1999. The education minister of the time, Yosi Sarrid from Meretz, resisted such a demand for a long time despite the threat of resignation by 17 Shas MKs from the coalition government.

Due to this conflict over the financial allocations to the \textit{Ma’ayan} schools, the 2000 budget could not pass for six weeks. At the end of the six weeks a compromise deal was reached. According to the deal, the treasury agreed to cover most of the \textit{Ma’ayan}’s debt. In return, Shas agreed that the \textit{Ma’ayan} schools would adopt a financial restructuring plan for the next five years, more time would be devoted to secular and technical subjects in the \textit{Ma’ayan} schools, each class would have at least twenty pupils, and no new schools would be opened in a locale, unless another \textit{Ma’ayan} school has hundred and fifty pupils.

This compromise did not end the contentious relations between Meretz and Shas over school funding. When these relations culminated in a showdown between the two political parties in the middle of the Camp David peace talks, all of the 10 MKs from

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{ibid.}
  \item \textit{Jerusalem Post}, 29 December 1999
\end{itemize}}
Meretz, including the party leader Yosi Sarrid, were forced to resign from the coalition on June 22, 2001, so that the 17 member Shas would stay in the government. This episode is a very revealing example of how Shas used its leverage in the coalition to pursue single issue politics for its constituency. By being flexible on national security issues, it was able to blackmail the governing Labor party to meet its demands.

Hence, state co-optation and the single-minded pursuit of Shas to allocate the state resources to its own institutions played an important role in the sustenance and proliferation of the Ma’ayan schools. The political conflict over religious education between Shas and other political actors also contributed to the growing interest in the network. This is an example of how political entrepreneurs make particular cleavages salient by politicizing issues (Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Zielinski, 2000). Yet it needs to be explained further why some political entrepreneurs succeed, while others fail in their attempts to do so. In other words, it needs to be explained how Ma’ayan schools succeeded in attracting so many students in a short period of time.

I argue that Ma’ayan schools became popular among the Sephardi families and tuned into a political mobilization vehicle for Shas because they successfully addressed the sociocultural marginalization of the Sephardim. These schools acted as social provision providers for the economically marginalized Sephardim.

4.2.2 The Ma’ayan schools as social provision providers

One of the main reasons for the success of the Ma’ayan network is its ability to attract low-income parents to its schools. Unsurprisingly, the Ma’ayan schools are mainly
located in low-opportunity neighborhoods of the main cities and development towns, whose population is predominantly Sephardi. The schools provide economic incentives, such as smaller classes, free hot lunches, and subsidized transportation for the pupils. Furthermore, the school day is longer compared to the state-secular and state-religious schools. The pupils study until 4 o’clock in the Ma’ayan schools, while in the state-secular schools usually the school day finishes at 1 o’clock. The extra hours provided by the Ma’ayan schools also create competition among schools. For example the state-religious schools in Beit Shemes added two hours to each school day extending the school closing hour from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm, in order to be more competitive with the Ma’ayan schools in the city. More and more working-secular parents living in low-opportunity neighborhoods are sending their children to the kindergartens operated by Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani for the lack of a better option.

A report published by the Ne’eman committee in 1999 found that the average number of pupils in the Ma’ayan institutions is smaller than the average number of pupils in the state and state-religious schools (125, compared to 387). Moreover, the Ma’ayan schools had a smaller average class size (20 pupils, compared to 29) and a smaller number of pupils per teacher (13, compared to 19). Similarly, another report published in 2004 by the Central Bureau of Statistics revealed that the ultra-orthodox schools, including those that belong to the Ma’ayan network, receive significantly more funding than the state and state-religious schools per pupil.

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75 Lehmann, D. and Siebzehner, B. Remaking Israeli Judaism The Challenge of Shas (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 172-3
76 Jerusalem Post, 24 September 1999
There are several reasons why the Ma’ayan network can secure more funding than the other networks and can provide cheaper services to its students. The main reason for the discrepancy in funding is the critical role Shas plays in the coalition governments and its ability to channel state resources to its institutions in return of giving concessions on national issues. In addition, the education ministry’s lack of ability in supervising the Ma’ayan network gives it the flexibility to allocate state funding to different needs. For instance, the teachers in the state and state-religious schools receive their salaries directly from the state, while in the Ma’ayan schools the teachers are paid by the principals.78 This arrangement gives the Ma’ayan network the opportunity to pay smaller salaries to its teachers and divert the remaining funds to other services, such as providing longer hours and free meals. The teachers in the Ma’ayan network are likely to accept the smaller salaries, because they are usually less qualified than the teachers elsewhere. Yet more importantly the teachers have a high level of ideological commitment to the Shas party and are therefore willing to work for less money. For example, during the 1999 near bankruptcy of the Ma’ayan network, the teachers continued to work without pay for months.

Hence, the social provisions provided by Ma’ayan HaHinuch HaTorani attracted socioeconomically disadvantaged Sephardim to the network’s schools. Through these provisions the Shas party was able to be a new power broker between the poor Sephardim and the state and receive electoral support from this community. Yet it was not only the social provisions, but also identity politics that helped Shas to mobilize the Sephardim.

78 Interview with a high-level official in the Recognized Unofficial Education Department on 10 December, 2006
4.2.3 The Ethnoreligious Discourses constructed around the *Ma’ayan* schools and the Cultural Empowerment of the Sephardim

In addition to providing material advantages to the Sephardic community, the *Ma’ayan* schools also catered to the cultural needs of Sephardim. They addressed the cultural discrimination faced by the Sephardim in Israeli society and created as well a positive Sephardi identity around piety through the use of different discourses. Following the discursive institutionalist school of thought (Schmidt, 2006; 2008), I approach to the concept of discourse from a social constructivist perspective (Hay, 2005). Hence, a discourse is defined as a narrative that reflects what social/political actors think, why they behave the way they do, and how they perceive the political phenomena around them. In this definition, discourses reveal a) the kinds of meaning the actors give to social/political events, b) the way they frame those events, and c) the way they connect these meanings and frames to their own actions. In the context of religious schools, these narratives are articulated by activists in religiopolitical parties, by graduates and educational staff in religious schools, and by religious/conservative media outlets. By discussing some of the discourses around the *Ma’ayan* schools, it is possible to understand how the meaning world constructed around these religious institutions addressed the cultural needs of the Sephardim.

The main goal of the Shas party is captured in its motto “*Lehahazir Atara Layoshana*” (To restore the crown to its rightful place). The statement indicates that the Sephardim possess a glorious tradition that comes from their history in various Oriental countries, and Shas will lead them in re-embracing the values of this glorious
tradition. The spiritual leader of the Shas movement, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, continuously emphasizes the importance of a Sephardic religious education for the construction of a positive Sephardi identity. Hence, the Ma’ayan schools play a critical role in the creation of this identity by re-educating Sephardi children in Israel on specific Sephardi values, such as Jewish-Oriental family cohesion, respect for the father and the rabbi (the collective father), and respect for Jewish law as practiced in accordance with Sephardi tradition.79

When asked how Ma’ayan’s education was different from the education provided in other religious schools, Nissim Zeev, a Shas MK who is also the head of Nevat Yisrael, a Ma’ayan school, emphasized this distinction: “Our public [the Sephardi public] wants to learn specifically more about the Masorti Yahadut (Traditional Judaism). They want to understand specific traditions.”80 By emphasizing their Sephardi roots and including specific Sephardi traditions in the school curriculum, the Ma’ayan schools teach their pupils to be proud of their Sephardi heritage. This sense of ethnic pride is in sharp contrast with the loss of self respect of the Sephardi pupils in other educational streams.

Another discourse, which is closely related to the previous one, revolves around the appropriate behavioral traits the pupils acquire in the Ma’ayan schools and their role in bringing positive societal change. Ma’ayan activists advertise their school system to the residents in their neighborhoods by claiming that the main value they teach to the pupils is “respect for parents.” In some cases Ma’ayan officials sign agreements with non-religious parents of pupils to insure appropriate behavior at

80 Interview with Nissim Zeev on 5 December 2006
home, such as not smoking on Sabbath or cursing. Although these agreements are scarcely enforced, they are shown as indicators of the high propriety standards of the schools. Moreover, the Ma’ayan activists are proud of their education that emphasizes respect for figures of religious authority. They claim that their pupils learn to revere their teachers, who are at the same time rabbis.

For example when the lecturer goes into the classroom, all the students are quiet and they stand up for the teacher out of respect. They have to stand up when he goes out. It is a small thing, but it has a big impact. It is very symbolic. Does this happen in a secular school?...[Here] the student learns how to respect the rabbis and this also influences the home, it continues outside.

According to this narrative, the pupils in the Ma’ayan schools do not simply adopt appropriate behavioral traits in their schools, but they also become agents of societal change. These pupils are expected to become examples and therefore initiate a positive change in Israeli society starting from their own homes. The Ma’ayan officials are not short of stories of how non-religious parents return to religion due to the education of their children. This claim is usually accompanied by a narrative that emphasizes the forceful secularization of the Sephardim in the hands of the Zionist establishment. Hence the ethno-religious message is complete: ‘The Sephardi parents, who have forgotten about their ties to traditional Judaism due to the policies of the secular Ashkenazi establishment, are returning to their roots thanks to their children who are receiving a proper religious education in the Ma’ayan schools.’ This change at home is then depicted as the first step in the Judaization of Israeli society.

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81 Lehmann, D. and Siebzehner, B. Remaking Israeli Judaism The Challenge of Shas (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 177
82 Interview with a high-level Ma’ayan official in Jerusalem on 12 December, 2006
A third discursive strategy depicts the Ma’ayan schools as safe havens from the corrupting influences of the secular society. The principle claim is that the pupils who continue in secular schools engage in violent activities or are attracted to drug use, while such tendencies do not exist among the Ma’ayan pupils. As one activist put it:

Secular schools are already in bankruptcy for a long time with all the violence going on there and all the rapes. It is proved that Ma’ayan’s religious education with all its values is a different world, a different league...A boy who comes out of our education system comes out as a complex of things, where he is ready to begin his Jewish life.  

Hence, these schools are depicted as institutions that protect Sephardi children from the adverse trends of secularization. Moreover, the children learn how to be good Jews in order to cope with problems in larger society. To their credit, Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani and El Hama’ayan deliberately opened schools and activity centers in poverty stricken parts of the country, where crime and drug use are rampant. Thus, the Ma’ayan institutions created alternative spaces for many Sephardi children who otherwise would be engaged in illicit behavior. Therefore, both the Ma’ayan schools and the El Hama’ayan activity centers, which provided free extra-curricular activities to poor children, received praises from the residents of the poor areas.

Lastly, Shas activists often employ a discourse of victimization using the Ma’ayan schools. During governmental debates over school funding, Shas activists often claim that their schools lack funds—although that is often not true—and this is a

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83 Ibid.
84 For a report that describes the opening of El Hama’ayan activity centers in the poverty stricken Ofakim and the residents’ reactions see Jerusalem Post 26 January, 1990.
sign of ethnic discrimination against the Sephardi community. According to this narrative, the Ashkenazi establishment intentionally harms the interests of the Sephardi children, who try to receive a proper education in the Ma’ayan schools. By emphasizing the cultural oppression the Sephardim have been facing at the hands of a secular state since their arrival in Israel, Shas activists use the schools as a tool to deepen ethnic divisiveness in Israeli society. After emphasizing the ethnic divide, Shas then designates itself as the sole representative of the Sephardic community.85

4.2.4 The social networks around the Ma’ayan as vehicles for political mobilization

Delineating the discourses around the Ma’ayan schools that blended ethnic and religious messages is important in order to understand why these schools appealed to many Sephardic families. Yet this is not sufficient to explain the relationship between the Ma’ayan network and the political success of Shas as a religiopolitical party. There is a need to show if and how these discourses became political messages and how they were disseminated to larger audiences to attract political support.

It is well known that Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani, El Hama’ayan, and Shas are organically linked. The Ma’ayan schools and El Ham’ayan are run by rabbis who are very close to Shas or are Shas political activists. Eitan Schiffman’s study (2005) investigates whether this organic link between Shas and Ma’ayan’s educational activities is translated into political support for the party. The study reveals that the

vote share of Shas is significantly higher in the statistical districts\textsuperscript{86} where the Ma’ayan schools are located. Specifically, Schiffman shows that support for Shas in districts in which there is a Talmud torah school is 28.8 percent, while in districts where a regular Ma’ayan school (beit sefer) operates the vote share of Shas is 25.9 percent.\textsuperscript{87} Hence in both type of districts the political support for Shas is significantly higher than the party’s national average, which is around 10 percent.\textsuperscript{88} After controlling for the demographics favorable to the Shas party, the study confirms that the presence of a Ma’ayan school in a statistical district increases the political support of Shas.\textsuperscript{89}

Yet, the number of votes Shas receives nationally far exceeds the number of parents whose children study in the Ma’ayan schools. Hence, the vote share of the Shas party can not solely be explained by the political support of the parents who send their children to the Ma’ayan schools. According to Schiffman, the greater political support for Shas can be explained by the existence of social networks formed around these schools

Non-ultra-orthodox Jews who support the existence of Ma’ayan Hahinuch HaTorani without partaking of its services constitute a larger group than the few thousand non-ultra-orthodox parents who enroll their children in schools in the network. Those with secondary ties to the network include friends and neighbors of families with enrolled children, as well as school bus drivers, custodians, secretaries, and shopkeepers near schools who do business with parents of enrolled children.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{86} The Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel reports demographic and election data for local urban units. The statistical districts in Schiffman’s study refer to these units.
\textsuperscript{87} There are two different types of schools within the Ma’ayan network. The Talmudei Torah cater to the children of the ultra-orthodox Sephardim, while batei sefer accept children from all backgrounds, primarily the masortim. In the Talmudei Torah, the children are given a more rigorous religious education, and the religious atmosphere of the school is stricter than the batei sefer.
\textsuperscript{88} Schiffman, E. 2005. “The Shas School System in Israel” Nationalism and Ethnic Politics 11 p. 105
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. p.106
\textsuperscript{90} ibid. p. 107
The benefits provided by the *Ma’ayan* schools, which are most of the time established in low-opportunity neighborhoods, extend to the parents and many of the residents residing in the neighborhoods. Yet these social networks do not only extend material benefits as Schiffman claims, but also communicate the ethnic and religious messages constructed around *Ma’ayan*’s education to larger segments of the society. *El Hama’ayan* also extends these messages to other Sephardim, who participate in its extra-curricular activities. Through these social networks, many Sephardim who do not send their children to *Ma’ayan* schools hear the ethno-religious messages constructed around *Ma’ayan*’s education and provide a fertile political support base for Shas.

4.3 Turkey

4.3.1 Co-optation of Islam and the Politicization of Religious Education

In contrast to Israel, there was no pluralism in the education system of Turkey. To the contrary, the Law on Unification of Education, which was passed on 3 March 1924, abolished the Ottoman pluralism in education and established total state control over the new unified education system. Although all the religious schools (*madrasas*) were abolished, article 4 of the law on the unification of education stipulated that vocational schools for the training of religious functionaries needed to be opened under the ministry of education. Accordingly, the state opened 29 new vocational schools under the title “*Imam Hatip* schools” (preacher and prayer leader schools) in 1924 in order to train religious functionaries. Although the number of these
schools fluctuated in different periods\textsuperscript{91}, the number of \textit{Imam Hatip} students as a percentage of the entire student body was marginal and never exceeded four percent until 1973.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.3.png}
\caption{Number of students in Imam Hatip middle and high schools as percentage of all students in middle and high schools}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{91} The number of the \textit{Imam Hatip} schools, which provided a four year education similar to other middle schools, decreased in the 1920s due to a lack of demand, and the last two schools, which operated in the 1929-1930 academic year, were closed down in 1930. In 1947, one year after the introduction of the multi-party system, the RPP made some reforms regarding religious education and reopened these schools in the form of “\textit{Imam Hatip} programs”. These new programs provided a 10 months long education and a certificate to middle school graduates who desired to become religious functionaries. With the new government of the Democratic Party (DP), which was much more sympathetic to the cultural values of the conservative masses than the elitist RPP, the \textit{Imam Hatip} programs were transformed to full-fledged vocational high schools, which provided seven years of education to their students. Between 1951 and 1972 the student body of these state-based religious high schools increased. Yet despite this increase, the number of \textit{Imam Hatip} students as a percentage of the entire student body was marginal and never exceeded four percent. For more on the history of religious education in Turkey see Ayhan, Halis, \textit{Turkiye'de Din Egitimi} (Istanbul: Dem Yayinlari, 2004); Unsur, Ahmet, \textit{Imam-Hatip Liseleri Kurulusundan Gunumuze} (Istanbul:Ensar Nesriyat, 2005).
The inclusion of the religiously oriented National Salvation Party (NSP) in the coalition government of 1974 was an important conjuncture for the Imam Hatip schools because both the number and the status of Imam Hatip schools changed significantly during the NSP’s coalition partnerships. For instance, just during the 10 months of the RPP-NSP government, 29 new schools were opened, and in 1980 the Imam Hatip school students constituted over 9 percent of all middle and high school students.

In addition to the changes in the number of Imam Hatip schools, the NSP succeeded in changing the public’s perception of these state religious schools. The NSP never hid its interest in the Imam Hatip schools and saw them as a tool through which it could realize its self-declared goal of spiritual development (manevi kalkınma) for Turkey. In its political propaganda, NSP activists portrayed the graduates from the Imam Hatip schools as “a new and moral generation,” which would transform Turkey. According to the NSP the best students, who would be able to rule the country without corruption, came out of these schools. Hence, by depicting the Imam Hatip schools as the source of spiritual awakening, the NSP politicized the issue of religious education in Turkey in the late 1970s. Many pious families started to see the Imam Hatip schools as an alternative educational track to the secular schools, while the secularists depicted these schools as the hinterland of political Islam.

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92 As further discussed in Chapter 6, the NSP became for the first time a coalition partner with social democratic RPP in 1974, yet the coalition lasted only 10 months. Afterwards the NSP was included in the first and second Nationalist Front governments headed by the center right Justice Party in 1975-77 and 1977-8.
95 During the latter half of the 1970s- which was a period of extreme political volatility in Turkey- the campuses of these schools became places where the youth organizations of different political parties struggled for hegemony. The main competitors were Ulkuculer, the youth organization of the
In addition to the politicization of the Imam Hatip schools, many grassroots organizations were formed around these schools in the social arena. These organizations provided scholarships and free boarding opportunities to many of the students, so that these schools became more accessible to the children of the poor families. Moreover, they collected charities from the citizens in order to build new buildings for the Imam Hatip schools. Accordingly, 65 percent of the Imam Hatip school buildings were built by private donations, while only a little bit more than nine percent were built by the state with no help from citizens.

In the 1980s and 1990s religious newspapers, such as Tercuman, Zaman, or Milli Gazete, frequently reported news about finished school buildings which were built by private donations awaiting the approval of the education minister for opening and assignment of academic staff. This news was usually complemented with the important social achievements of the Imam Hatip graduates. Hence, starting with the NSP’s participation in the coalition governments in the 1970s, the Imam Hatip schools emerged not only as a salient political issue, but also as a salient social issue in the public sphere.

During the governments of the Motherland Party (MP), which contained a religious faction under its roof, the number of the religious schools did not considerably increase because of the remaining military influence in politics, yet the quality and the

ultranationalist Nationalist Action Party (NAP) and the Akincilar, the youth organization of the NSP. It was the latter which could most of the time control the campuses of the Imam Hatip schools. Ibid., p. 224


Unsur, Ahmet, Imam-Hatip Liseleri Kurulusundan Gunumuze (Istanbul:Ensar Nesriyat, 2005), 202-3. The rest of the schools buildings were built through cooperation of the citizens and the state.

Erbakan’s NSP was closed down by the military coup of 1980, like all the other political parties of the pre-coup era. The MP, which was headed by Turgut Ozal, emerged as the most powerful new party in the aftermath of the 1983 elections. The MP claimed to unite four different factions under its roof. One of the factions was the Islamist faction, which contained politicians and bureaucrats, who were part of the pre-coup NSP team. For an extensive discussion of the MP see Chapter 6.
capacity of these schools improved significantly. Rather than opening new schools, the education ministers, who belonged mostly to the religious faction, opened new buildings as new campuses of already existing high schools. In 1983-1991 the number of Imam Hatip students increased from 207,006 to 309,553.99 Moreover, the MP established “Anatolian Imam-Hatip” high schools, which provided a more elite education including the instruction of a foreign language.

In the 1990s political discussion around religious education became more acute with the increasing political successes of the Islamist WP, the reincarnation of Erbakan’s NSP. The religious-secular divide in Turkish politics culminated in the 1997 military intervention into politics,100 which demanded among other things the closing of the middle sections of the Imam Hatip schools and a change in the status of vocational schools in the university entrance examination. This latter provision specifically targeted the Imam Hatip schools and practically prevented the graduates from entering any department other than the Divinity Faculty in higher education.

4.3.2 Imam Hatip schools: Addressing the sociocultural needs of the periphery

As seen in Table 4.3, the number of the students going to the Imam Hatip schools diminished significantly after 1997, since the aforementioned new provisions regulating the university entrance examination made it almost impossible for their graduates to continue to the faculties of their choice. Yet the question of why the Imam Hatip schools

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99 Education Ministry, in Ocal, M. Imam Hatip Liseleri ve İlk Öğretim Okulları (İstanbul: E�sar Nesriyat, 1994), 68-9
100 The military intervention in politics in 1997 that is known as “28 February Process” is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.
became so popular among Turkish citizens between 1974 and 1997 still needs to be answered. The argument that I raised above about the politicization of religious education by the Islamist NSP explains part of the story and needs to be further elaborated. Similar to Israel, political entrepreneurs made the center-periphery cleavage salient by politicizing religious education in Turkey. Yet it needs to be explained why the political entrepreneurs succeeded in their attempt to politicize the issue. In this section, I argue that the Imam Hatip schools became popular starting from the mid 1970s because they addressed and to a great extent fulfilled the sociocultural needs of the periphery. This occurred in a period when the periphery came in closer contact with the center because of the increasing rural immigrants in the big cities. As explained in Chapter 3, sociocultural marginalization of the periphery became more evident in the 1990s because of the economic frustration of the second- and third-generation urban migrants and the increasingly negative cultural representations of the rural immigrants.

The changing residential backgrounds of the Imam Hatip students also reflected the movement of the periphery from the villages to the cities. Aksit (1986) found that 55.8 percent of the Imam Hatip students in his study in 1977 were from rural origins, while Aksit and Coskun (2004) found in their study in 1997 that only 14 percent of the students came from rural backgrounds. In this context, the Imam Hatip schools attracted poor students from the gecekondu and low-income neighborhoods in big cities by providing extensive scholarships and free boarding opportunities. At the same time, the Imam Hatip schools addressed the cultural needs of the periphery, which had been defined as the “cultural other” by the republican elites, by creating an affirmative
“Muslim” identity. Therefore, Imam Hatip schools were opened in all of the provinces in Anatolia and became popular for providing an alternative to regular state schools, which operated in the framework of a homogenizing Kemalist ideology.

4.3.3 The Imam Hatip schools as social provision providers

Since the Imam Hatip schools are state educational institutions, they receive income from the state budget. Yet more importantly, they receive material resources from societal sources. For example Unsur’s (2005) study showed that Uskudar Imam Hatip High School, a prestigious religious school in one of the city centers of Istanbul, received three times more money from the Istanbul Uskudar Imam Hatip Beneficent Society (Istanbul Uskudar Imam Hatip Lisesi Koruma Dernegi) than from the state budget. These monies were used both to increase the quality of education by contributing to the infrastructural needs of the school and to help to students from disadvantaged families.101

In addition to these direct contributions to the schools, civil society organizations provide material and logistical support to students and graduates alike. For instance, the Association for the Dissemination of Knowledge (Ilim Yayma Cemiyeti), which has 85 branches in 45 cities across Turkey, has provided material help to the Imam Hatip students since 1963 and to successful graduates in their university education since 1973.102 The organization also runs 60 boarding houses, which provide accommodation for the students in secondary and higher education. Similarly, the Alumni Association of

101 Unsur, A. Kurulusundan Gunumuze Imam Hatip Liseleri (Istanbul: Ensar Nesriyat), pp.209-211
102 In http://www.iyc.org.tr
Imam Hatip High Schools (ONDER) and Ensar Foundation provide scholarships primarily for Imam Hatip students based on need and academic merit.

According to data provided by the Education Ministry, in the academic year 1996-1997 28.1 percent of all the boarding facilities in the primary and secondary education belonged to the General Religious Education Administration.\(^\text{103}\) If we consider that the percentage of Imam Hatip students was about twelve percent of the entire student population in the same year, we can see that the boarding facilities available for Imam Hatip students far exceeded those facilities available for other students. This difference is primarily due to the fact that many of the boarding houses are donated to the state by civic associations or private foundations to be used specifically as boarding facilities for Imam Hatip schools.\(^\text{104}\)

These material incentives made Imam Hatip schools very attractive for students from lower socioeconomic families. A Felicity Party activist explained this function of the Imam Hatip schools eloquently:

[In the past] in Turkey, which is ruled by a political and economic elite, a big segment of the population could not send their children to the schools. They could not do that due to a lack of material opportunities….Imam Hatip schools constituted the most important social project in the history of the republic…I met many people, who told me: “We couldn’t have studied if these schools had not existed. We wouldn’t have a profession, if these schools had not existed.” Hence [these schools] became the only space where the poor and deprived masses could get an education.\(^\text{105}\)

\(^{103}\) Cakir, R., Bozan, I., and Talu, B. Imam Hatip Liseleri Efsaneler ve Gercekler (Istanbul: TESEV Yayinlari, 2004), p.73
\(^{104}\) According to Turkish law, if a building is donated for specific purpose to the education ministry, it can not be used for something else.
\(^{105}\) Interview with Numan Kurtulmus on 4 March, 2007.
Thus, these schools provided a venue for the children of the deprived masses for upward mobility. While some parents chose to send their children to Imam Hatip schools due to economic accessibility and a good quality of education, others preferred it due to expectation that their children would have a guaranteed job in the Directorate of Religious Affairs, once they graduated from school.\textsuperscript{106}

4.3.4 Cultural Empowerment through Imam Hatip schools

Material incentives were not the only reason for the periphery’s embracement of the Imam Hatip schools. Many families preferred to send their children to the Imam Hatip schools because of cultural motives. In order to grasp how these schools addressed the cultural needs of the conservative periphery, it is necessary to illustrate some of the narratives constructed around the Imam Hatip schools.

First and foremost, these schools built a positive pious Muslim identity, which the republican elites tried to erase for so many years. This positive pious Muslim identity partly stemmed from the socialization process within the schools and was expressed in different ways. Some of the Imam Hatip graduates, whom I interviewed for the study, pointed to a special consciousness that existed within the schools. Zeynep, a graduate from Kutahya Anadolu Imam Hatip High School, said that there was a different type of atmosphere in her school compared to the secular schools. This atmosphere, which she named as hissiyat (emotions), inculcated spiritual principles in the students, such as valuing others because they are Allah’s creation. Another graduate, Metin, claimed that there was a spiritual atmosphere in his school, because

\textsuperscript{106} Cakir, R., Bozan, I., and Talu, B. \textit{Imam Hatip Liseleri Efsaneler ve Gercekler} (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınlari, 2004)
“we could talk with others about religious matters, we could pray in the mescid within the school.”107 This spiritual atmosphere created a consciousness of being an Imam Hatip member (Imam-Hatiplilik suuru). According to Metin, this consciousness is “not something that is taught in the classes, rather it is a situation that emerges during your years of education in the school108.”

This atmosphere in the school campuses also affects the religiosity and ideological orientations of the students. A survey conducted in the 1977-1978 academic year revealed that “the Imam-Hatip students were much more religious or much less secular than general high and technical vocational students.”109 Another comparative survey, conducted in the 1997-1998 academic year, found a significant cultural and ideological difference between the students in the Imam Hatip schools and the students who went to secular high schools. For instance, while more than 55 percent of the Imam Hatip students read Islamic/conservative newspapers, in secular high schools only 5 percent did.110

Similarly, Onay (2005) found in his survey conducted among university students in the 1999-2000 academic year a significant difference between the Imam Hatip school graduates and secular high school graduates in their level of attitudinal and behavioral religiosity.111

107 Interview with Metin, an Imam Hatip graduate from Oltu Imam Hatip High School in Erzurum, on 31 March, 2007. All the names used in the text for the Imam Hatip graduates are pseudonyms.
108 Ibid.
Another narrative on the education of Imam Hatip schools, which is frequently brought up by the representatives of the conservative segments of the Turkish society, is almost identical to claims made about the Ma’ayan schools in Israel. Imam-Hatip schools are represented as institutions that are immune from the ill effects of modernization, and consequently Imam-Hatip students are said to stay away from improper behavior, such as violence, criminal activities or drug use due to their religious education. In comparison, the narrative goes, students in the secular schools are more likely to engage in those illicit activities due to a lack of religious teaching.

Metin, an Imam Hatip graduate sums up this claim eloquently:

Since I have done my internship in a normal [secular] high-school, I know that weekly one hour religious instruction [in secular schools] is not sufficient. Currently, you can observe that students engage in strange movements, such as Satanism, or commit homicides. I think these happen due to a lack of religious knowledge. Let me give you an example. For instance you tell people not to steal. Yet if you can not make the person internalize this, if this person can not assimilate this spiritually and conscientiously, then [this instruction] is to no avail. Hence, I want to say that education is not solely mental. Today you see that people who received a very good education, go, and rob banks, embezzle state resources, steal. Why? And [they do these] despite the fact that you gave them a good education…The reason is because you approach to education one dimensionally.112

This discourse, which emphasizes the better moral equipment of the Imam Hatip students against illicit behavior, is used not only by students, graduates or teachers from Imam Hatip schools, but also by religiopolitical activists and conservative media. This discourse is sometimes supplemented by a more positive aspect of the Imam Hatip identity, namely the pro-active social role the Imam Hatip students should take in their larger social setting. According to this claim, Imam Hatip

112 Interview with Metin on 31 March, 2007
students and graduates are expected to be role models for the larger Turkish society. As one graduate puts it: “Once you say that you are an Imam Hatip member (imam hatipli), you need to beware of your behaviour, because you subscribe to a mission. Hence you develop an auto-control mechanism.”

This exemplary behavior of the students is also expected to have larger social consequences. For instance, the caricature below depicts a pious Imam Hatip student cleansing the society of social problems, such as corruption, drug use, bribery, adultery, burglary, terror, etc. The caricature, which is published in the quarterly magazine of the national Alumni Association of Imam Hatip High schools, is a very good example of how the Imam Hatip students are depicted as agents of social change that will form a less corrupted Turkish society.

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113 Interview with an Imam Hatip graduate in Diyarbakir, in Cakir, R., Bozan, I., and Talu, B. Imam Hatip Liseleri Efşaneler ve Gerçekler (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2004), p.126
Image 4.1
Caricature published in the quarterly magazine of the National Alumni Association of Imam Hatip High Schools
Others go one more step and claim that the *Imam Hatip* generation should be seen as the engine of societal Islamization in Turkey. Hayreddin Karaman, who is one of the first graduates of the *Imam Hatip* schools and a very authoritative figure in *Imam Hatip* circles, summarizes this argument very cogently:

> How does Islamization occur? What is the means to achieve Islamization?...According to my opinion Islamization occurs through education and instruction. It occurs through generating faith and action among those we educate....As a result our people will become Muslims again...Those who are deficient Muslims will become complete Muslims. The more you turn people into complete Muslims, the more the country becomes Muslim with her morality, with her image, with her actuality, with her institutions, and with her order....But who will undertake this effort?...We claim that under current conditions the most suitable community for this job is the *Imam Hatip* community, this generation.  

Another important frame that is used by the *Imam Hatip* community is that these schools became the only venue for the education of girls from conservative backgrounds. According to this claim, conservative families, which would not send their daughters to regular schools, were more likely to send them to *Imam Hatip* schools because of the more acceptable gender relations within the schools. The majority of the parents who Pak (2002) interviewed for his study in three *Imam Hatip* schools asserted that these schools were the only option for the education of their daughters due to the propriety standards they provided. The spatial segregation between the sexes in curricular and extra-curricular activities and the lack of mingling between boys and girls play an important role in the maintenance of these propriety

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115 Pak, S-Y. *At the Crossroads of Secularism and Islamism* (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002), 183
Although girls were accepted to the Imam Hatip schools for the first time in the 1977-1978 academic year, the number of girls in religious education rose exponentially in the following years. In the academic years after 1990, girls have always constituted at least 40 percent of all Imam Hatip students.\(^\text{117}\)

Secularist circles in Turkey often voice dismay on the acceptance of girls to the Imam Hatip schools, since it is impossible for the girls to become either Imams or Hatips. Most of the female graduates from Imam Hatip schools, like most of the boys, move to secular professions or attend universities to study secular subjects. This way, the female graduates from the Imam Hatip schools played an important role in the upward mobility of the periphery. Moreover, this led to the increasing visibility of Islamic symbols, such as the headscarf, in professional jobs and institutions of higher learning.

Lastly, very similar to the victimization rhetoric around the Ma’ayan schools in Israel, the Imam Hatip schools have always been depicted as victims at the hands of the secular establishment. This discourse became much more prevalent after the draconian February 28 decisions of the NSC that led to the closing of the middle sections of the Imam Hatip schools, as well as blocked opportunities for graduates to continue to the faculty of their choice. Yet victimization has always been a major narrative emphasized by conservative politicians and media. According to this narrative, the reason for the proliferation of the Imam Hatip schools was the society’s embrace of Islamic values. Yet in spite of the demand from the society for more Imam Hatip schools and religious...

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\(^{116}\) Ibid, pp.184–5

\(^{117}\) Cakir, R., Bozan, I., and Talu, B. *Imam Hatip Liseleri Efsaneler ve Gercekler* (Istanbul: TESEV Yayinlari, 2004), 13
education, secular intellectuals and state elites, who are alienated from their Turkish-Islamic roots and aspire to become Westerners, try to harm these schools by depicting them as sources of religious extremism\textsuperscript{118}. Moreover, conservative newspapers periodically publish reports about \textit{Imam Hatip} school buildings, which are donated to the state by private initiatives and await the approval of the education minister to open. The subtext of these news reports emphasizes state-society tensions. According to this message, the \textit{Imam Hatip} schools represent the demands of the society for more religious education, yet these demands are not sufficiently met by the authoritarian Turkish state, which is controlled by a powerful secular minority elite. Hence, the \textit{Imam Hatip} schools were at the center of the discourse that portrayed the victimization of a religious society at the hands of a secular state, and this portrayal sharpened the religious-secular divide in the 1990s.

\textbf{4.3.5 Dissemination of discourses through social networks}

It is important to understand how these discourses discussed above were disseminated to the larger society and translated into social and political power. Unlike the organic relationship between the Shas party and the \textit{Ma’ayan} schools in Israel, there was not an organic relationship between the \textit{Imam Hatip} schools and the National Outlook Movement. Although the National Outlook parties used some of these discourses in their propaganda, there were other important social networks independent

\textsuperscript{118} For examples of this discourse see the presentations delivered by Cemil Cicek, an ANAP parliamentarian, who later joined VP and JDP, “Milletin Gozuyle Imam Hatip Okullari ve Beklentileri” and Mustafa Gozubuyukoglu, the principal of Kartal Imam Hatip high school, in a conference about the future of the Imam-Hatip schools in 1994. In \textit{Kurulusunun 43. Yilinda Imam Hatip Liseleri}, (Istanbul: Ensar Nesriyat, 1994), 23-6; 73-83.
of the National Outlook Movement through which these discourses were communicated to the larger society.

The graduates of the Imam Hatip schools come together around several associations and foundations and form a tightly knit community. Ensar Foundation, Alumni Association of Imam Hatip High Schools, Community for the Dissemination of Knowledge, and Foundation for the Dissemination of Knowledge are the main organizations that bring the Imam Hatip community together. These organizations provide several opportunities for social and political mobilization. First of all, they actively promote the idea that the Imam Hatip schools are the primary sources of spiritual values in Turkey and Imam Hatip students are the agents of social change towards a more pious Turkish society.

Secondly, these institutions provide spaces, where the members of religiopolitical parties and the Imam Hatip graduates could physically meet and interact. It is also known that many of the members of the NOM were Imam Hatip graduates. These politicians preserved their ties with the other graduates, who became prominent members in other social or business circles. Mukadder Basegmez, a member of the Turkish National Assembly from the Welfare Party from 1991-1999, explains how social networks of Imam Hatip graduates turned to political and economic networks:

I am a graduate from the Imam Hatip (schools). The most effective aspect of the Imam Hatip (schools) is this: We received a better education than other schools in all the subjects such as physics, chemistry, foreign language, biology, law, health. But at the same time we were also learning religious sciences. For this reason we were raised as individuals who had a strong social side, but at the same time we knew the religion. Afterwards, these [Imam Hatip
schools] have proliferated. Their proliferation was not forced. People were giving the money themselves, they were building [the schools] themselves. Hence this was a popular demand. But those, who could not create such organizations felt uneasy. These cadres[from the schools] became at the same time political cadres, at the same time commercial cadres.\textsuperscript{119}

As Basegmez mentions, the secular camp, which lacked such effective networks to mobilize its supporters, felt uneasy about this social potential of the Imam Hatip graduates and therefore demonized these schools as the backgarden of political Islam. Hence, the capacity of these networks to mobilize the Imam Hatip constituency through its social networks not only helped the Islamist actors to strengthen politically, but also sharpened the religious-secular cleavage by drawing strong criticism from secular actors.

Lastly, through their participation in these social networks Imam Hatip graduates were able to talk about and act on political issues which were their common concerns. For instance, many of the graduates were engaged in political protests against the headscarf ban in universities, and these social networks emerged as the hotbeds of such protests. Naturally these social networks were active on the policies on religious education. For example, on 11 May, 1997, Ensar Foundation, the Alumni Association of Imam Hatip High Schools, and the Community for the Dissemination of Knowledge organized a huge rally against the draconian 28 February decisions of the NSC in the Sultanahmet Square.\textsuperscript{120} In this rally 300,000 people, including many prominent figures from the Welfare Party as well as from other center right parties, gathered in order to protest the change in the education law, which closed the middle sections of the Imam Hatip schools.

\textsuperscript{119} Interview with Mukadder Basegmez, 26 February, 2007  
\textsuperscript{120} Zaman, 12 May, 1997.
4.4 Conclusion

The comparative discussion of the Ma’ayan and Imam Hatip schools illustrated how state co-optation led to the creation of institutional spaces that were used by religiopolitical actors to promote an alternative worldview to the secular homogenizing official ideologies. The Ma’ayan schools were formed in 1986 by Shas, and they grew because of increased state funding provided to the educational network thanks to Shas’s participation in the coalition governments. Similarly in Turkey, the issue of religious education was politicized by the NSP’s participation in the coalition governments in the 1970s, and the number of Imam Hatip schools grew significantly afterwards. Both school systems emerged as institutions that receive state funding, provide social provisions for the poor, and empower the culturally marginalized segments of the population by creating an affirmative religious Sephardi/conservative Muslim identity. This positive identity was constructed through different discourses that depicted the Ma’ayan and Imam Hatip schools as victims of a secular state, as safe havens from the modern world, as the source of societal transformation, and as the source of cultural pride. These narratives were disseminated through the social networks formed around the religious schools and led to political mobilization for the National Outlook parties and the Shas party. The role of these narratives, which emerged within institutional spaces, demonstrates the intertwined effect of ideas and institutions in producing political outcomes.
CHAPTER 5

SEPHARDIM IN POLITICS AND THE CO-OPTATION OF SHAS

5.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter starts with a description of the role of Sephardim in Israel until 1983, when the Shas (Sephardic Torah Guardians) party was born. In this section, I discuss how Sephardim changed the political landscape of Israeli politics by shifting their loyalties from the center left Labor Party to center right Likud in the mid-70s. Then, I describe the representation of Sephardim in the ethnic and religious parties prior to Shas’s mobilization of the Sephardi constituents. By evaluating two examples, namely the establishment of Tami with Aaron Abuhatzeira’s split from the National Religious Party (NRP), and the controversy over Chief Sephardic Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s term limits, I discuss how the road for Shas’s formation was paved.

In the following section, I discuss how, from its inception on, Shas was incorporated in every coalition government except two instances and how Shas’s co-optation in the state institutions gave the party special access to state resources. With this special access, Shas was able to further its particularist agenda. In this section, I also discuss how the
interior ministry, religious affairs ministry, ministry of labor and social welfare, and health ministry are used by Shas to create patronage networks within the state and how other political actors responded to the creation of these patronage networks. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how Shas’s co-optation by the state affected the party’s constituency in terms of its economic well-being and integration to the Israeli society.

5.2 Sephardi Influence in Politics until the Advent of Shas

5.2.1 Sephardi Representation and Center Parties

In the 1950s and 1960s, new Sephardi immigrants mainly gave their electoral support to the governing parties. Until mid-1970s Mapai (later Labor) always formed the government and included the National Religious Party (NRP) as its junior coalition partner. Because of these parties’ grip on the allocation of the state resources, especially absorption services, Sephardim supported these parties. Yet, rather than an ideological support, there was a patron-client relationship between these governing parties and the new Sephardi immigrants. Until the 1977 elections, the leading Labor party always acquired the plurality of votes and formed the government.

Yet, as explained in Chapter 3, the social and cultural resentment of the Sephardim grew in the 1970s. Oriental Jews became more and more critical of Labor and the NRP, which they associated with the Ashkenazi establishment that prevented their social mobility and thwarted their meaningful political representation. While first generation Sephardim, who accepted the premises of Socialist Zionism as the only way of

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121 Giladi, G. N. *Discord in Zion Conflict Between Ashkenazi & Sephardi Jews in Israel.* (Scorpion Publishing, 1990), 106-7
expression for the ideals of Jewish nationalism and modernization, overwhelmingly voted for the Labor Party, second and third generation Sephardim changed their allegiance from Labor to Herut (later Likud). This change of allegiance in the new generations mainly revealed a protest against the status quo, which exacerbated the sociocultural frustrations of the Oriental Jewry.

The center right Likud appealed to the Sephardim by meshing traditionalist values into an uncompromising Jewish nationalism. Although Likud did not define itself as a religious party, it projected a positive view of Jewish tradition and supported the strengthening of the role of religion in public life. Menachem Begin, the leader of Likud, made it clear in his public speeches that he saw Jewish tradition as one of the main elements of Israel’s civil religion.

The Sephardim perceived the Labor leaders as an elite, who did not have any contact with Oriental Jews. On the other hand, Menachem Begin was perceived as a closer figure with traditional values and more amenable to Sephardi interests. The words of a Sephardic Jew in a development town, Beith Shemesh, reveal why the Sephardim tended towards Likud and Begin:

The Mapainiks just wiped out everything that is imprinted on a person. As if it was all nonsense. And then they put what they wanted into him. From that ideology of theirs. Like we were some kind of dirt. Ben-Gurion himself called us the dust of the earth. That’s written in Bar Zohar’s book about Ben-Gurion. But now that Begin’s here, believe me, my parents can stand up straight, with pride, and dignity. I’m not religious, either, but my parents are; they’re traditional, and Begin has respect for their

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As the quotation shows, support for Likud was not only prompted by Sephardic sociocultural frustrations or Likud’s image as a traditional party, but also by the perception that Begin was an outsider figure for the establishment. Hence it was easier for the Sephardim, who felt that they were outsiders in politics, to associate with such a figure.

Sephardim’s change of support became most visible in the 1977 national elections when Likud became the larger coalition partner and formed the government for the first time in Israel’s history. The percentage of Oriental Jews voting for Likud went from 22 percent in the 1969 elections to 65 percent in the 1977 elections and 71 percent in the 1981 elections. Considering that the Oriental Jews constituted 55 percent of the entire Jewish population in Israel, this was definitely a deciding factor in Likud’s accession to power.

Despite the decisiveness of the Sephardi vote, the number of Sephardim in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy and governmental positions did not increase significantly after the formation of the first Likud-led coalition government. Despite the fact that some Sephardi figures climbed to the upper echelons of their parties, such as David Levy and Moshe Katsav in Likud or Aharon Abuhatzera in the NRP, proportionally the number of influential Sephardi politicians lagged behind the Ashkenazi numbers. Moreover, the number of Sephardi MKs, although increasing steadily as

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125 Oz, A. In the Land of Israel (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, Inc. 1983, New York), 34
percentage of all MKs, always significantly lagged behind the percentage of the Ashkenazi MKs.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jewish MKs</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>113</td>
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<td>114</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>116</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Sephardi MKs</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Sephardi MKs among Jewish MKs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Percentage of Sephardi MKs among all the Jewish MKs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>1963</th>
<th>1975</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Percentage of Sephardim among the Jewish population in Israel

Hence, Oriental communities started to show signs of disappointment with the Likud governments in the mid-1980s, since their expectations of far-reaching social and

129 Adapted from Sammy Smooha, Israel, Pluralism and Conflict (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1978), 281
economic improvement did not materialize.\textsuperscript{130} Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, ethnic discrimination plagued the educational institutions.

This paved the way for the emergence of the specifically Sephardi parties, like Tami and Shas. The formation of Shas and its participation in the successive coalition governments made a much bigger impact on the lives of the Sephardim and in terms of political representation. As one El Hama’ayan activist stated:

Let me give you another example. I was driving in a cab, and the cab-driver was a non-religious Sephardi, and he told me that he votes for Shas. And I asked him ‘Why do you vote for Shas?’ He said because it is the only movement that delivers to its public. If you cast your ballot for the other parties, say Likud, you will see them in the next elections, say in four years. You don’t hear from them. But if you cast a ballot for Shas, then they build more mikves, synagogues, and yeshivas. They work for their constituents. What they do is for their own constituents. The more political power we have, the more we can do both about general things, but also about things that are important particularly for us [Sephardim]. Today we have our own representatives in the municipal councils, we have deputy mayors, or mayors. And with them we can influence more policies. We can have the strings and also can help the people. In the past we chose Likud for example, it is not that I could not request anything from him [a Likud mayor], but it is not the same as to go to your own representative in the municipality. It is another way of getting power and influencing policies.\textsuperscript{131}

As the remarks of this Shas activist reveals, although Sephardim felt a closer affinity to Likud compared to Labor, Likud was only perceived by them as a temporary home. It was not until the formation of Shas that the Sephardim felt that their interests were truly represented by a political party.


\textsuperscript{131} Interview with Shas activist on 12 December, 2006
5.2.2 Sephardi Representation and Ethnic Parties

In the formation period of the state of Israel (1949-1984), Sephardim participated in Israeli politics outside of the center left and right parties as well. In the very early years of the state of Israel, ethnically Sephardic lists which were supported by mainstream political parties participated in the elections and won Knesset seats. For instance, in the first Knesset, Mapai supported Sephardic Federation, and the General Zionists supported the Yemenite List. Yet after the first two elections, this practice of supporting semi-independent lists was replaced by offering Sephardi leaders ‘safe places’ from the lists of major parties. Therefore, in 1955-1981 the Sephardic parties failed to pass the one percent threshold and receive Knesset representation. In the 1950s and 1960s, the practice of running independent ethnic parties or lists was portrayed as separatism and a betrayal of the ideal of ingathering of exiles (mizug galuyot).

This stigma of running on ethnic lists/parties started to change slowly in the 1970s in the eyes of the public opinion, and this led to the emergence of ethnic parties within the religious camp. This development was the beginning of a major realignment in the religious camp.

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133 Ibid., p. 168
134 The term means ingathering of the exiles and represents the unity of the Jewish people, who immigrate from different parts of the world, to the state of Israel. This biblical term which goes back to Moses’ promise to the Jewish people became one of the principle tenets of Zionism.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Vote share and Knesset representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Sephardic Union (3.5%, 4 MKs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yemenite Association (1%, 1MK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Sephardic Union (1.8%, 1 MK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yemenite Association (1.2%, 1MK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Tami (2.3%, 3MKs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Tami (1.2%, 1MK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shas (3.1%, 4MK)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Ethnic parties and political representation until the advent of Shas

5.2.3 Sephardi Representation and the Religious Parties

In the religious camp, Sephardim were engaged in the religious Zionist NRP and also in the ultra-orthodox Agudat Israel. In order to understand the relation of the Sephardim to the religious parties, it is important to understand different conceptions of religiosity in Israel. Before the influx of the Sephardim to Israel in the 1950s, the main dividing line was between the mainly Ashkenazi secular Zionist settlers and the ultra-orthodox Jews. While most of the ultra-Orthodox Jews were Ashkenazim, who came to Israel in the 18th and 19th centuries, there was also a significant Sephardi ultra-orthodox community living in Israel during the Ottoman period since the expulsion of Jews from Christian Spain. Although the Sephardim were settled in Palestine much earlier than the Ashkenazim, it was the latter that spearheaded the formation of the first ultra-orthodox party, namely Agudat Israel in 1912. The Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox Jews established Agudat Israel as a resistance against the political institutions created by the Zionist

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135 Ethnic Sephardi parties did not receive enough votes in the Knesset elections between 1951 and 1981.
settlers of the second Aliyah. The fact that Agudat Israel was formed in Europe\textsuperscript{136} was a sign that the party was an Ashkenazi political machine. In this political party, the Sephardim occupied, at best, secondary positions.

The Religious Zionist NRP also attracted a significant number of Sephardim. Yet the Sephardim who supported the NRP were not ultra-orthodox, but traditional (\textit{masorti}) Jews. The traditional Jews kept the basic religious precepts of Judaism; yet they were not considered sufficiently strict by the standards of modern Orthodox Jews, who constituted the main body of the religious Zionist movement. These traditional Jews preferred to support the NRP, because the party presented itself as a moderate party bridging the differences between the secular and religious publics.\textsuperscript{137} Yet the number of the Sephardi MKs in the NRP was always limited, despite the fact that the Sephardim constituted a significant part of the party’s support.

\textbf{5.2.4 Defection of Sephardim from the Religious Parties and the Path towards the Formation of Shas}

The representation of the Sephardim in the ultra-orthodox and religious Zionist parties started to crumble in the 1980s, with the defection of significant figures from these parties. Two events signified these defections and ultimately paved the way for the formation of Shas.

\textsuperscript{136} The party was formed in Katowice, Poland in 1912 and then later institutionalized in Palestine.
\textsuperscript{137} In its election campaigns, the party argued that it is a gesher (bridge) between the Zionist secular constituents and ultra-orthodox religious constituents and can restore peace and stability in the state of Israel.
The first transformative event with regard to the political representation of the Sephardim occurred within the religious Zionist camp, when Aharon Abuhatzeira, who served as the Social Welfare Minister under the NRP, broke off from the party on May 25, 1981, shortly before the elections for the 10th Knesset. Abuhatzeira defected from his party, because Sephardim in the party were not nominated from higher places in the election list, although Sephardim constituted an important electoral base for the NRP. Abuhatzeira, who was of Tunisian origin, immediately formed Tami (Movement for Israeli Tradition) and received the financial support of the Sephardi Swiss millionaire Nissim Gaon for political operations. The 1981 election was a major success for Tami, which was able to garner 2.3 percent of the national vote and put 3 MKs into the Knesset. This was a major blow to the NRP, which lost half of its seats and shrank to six seats in the Knesset.

Tami’s main support came from development towns with high concentrations of Afro-Asian Jews. In these settings, entire party branches defected from the NRP and moved to Tami and political support of the NRP decreased significantly. Furthermore, the ethnic segregation of synagogues helped Tami, since the party was able to use Sephardic synagogues as an efficient means of political mobilization in the very short period between its formation and the elections and in the absence of an institutionalized party structure.

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In the 10th Knesset, the party followed a very populist agenda and tried to represent the poor segments of the Sephardi public. Mainly, Tami opposed budget cuts in welfare, health, and education and filled the posts in its ministries with Sephardim.\textsuperscript{141} As the number two of the party Aharon Uzan claimed, the main aim of Tami was to undo the wrongs made to the North Africans in particular, and to the Sephardim in general and to place as many Sephardim as possible in power positions.\textsuperscript{142} Yet the party could not keep its strength in the 1984 elections, when it lost two of its Knesset seats and later merged with Likud before the 1988 elections. One of the major reasons for Tami’s loss of power was the corruption charges pressed against Aharon Abuhatzeira and Nissim Gaon. Yet, more importantly, unlike Shas, Tami was not able to produce a positive Sephardi identity by only focusing on the socioeconomic problems of the Afro-Asian community.

Another important catalytic event for the formation of Shas happened when a dispute over the term-limits of the Chief Rabbis alienated the then Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Rabbi Shlomo Goren, the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi, made a deal with the governing NRP in order to have an election for the Chief Rabbi posts for one limited ten-year period, instead of having elections for five-year periods with no limit. Due to his charisma among the Sephardim in Israel, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, would probably have been able to get elected in every election until his death, while Goren could not. Despite protests by Ovadia Yosef, the new election rules were instituted, and he lost his position as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi on March 16, 1983. After this incident, Yosef channeled his

\textsuperscript{142} Interview with Aharon Uzan, Jerusalem Post Magazine, June 18, 1981
resentment into gathering political support and forming a new political party partly against the NRP.

Parallel to this development there had been also some internal struggles within the ultra-orthodox Agudat Israel. The new emerging religious Sephardi elite within the yeshivot and kollels of the Agudat Israel realized that Sephardic religious and educational institutions within the party were funded poorly by the top levels of the party, despite the fact that Agudat Yisrael increased its share of state funding for its educational institutions due to its participation in Begin’s coalition government. The use of Yiddish in internal dealings, the lack of representation of the Sephardim in the top positions of the party added to the disenchantment of the ultra-orthodox Sephardim within the party. Hence the Sephardic yeshiva students within Agudat Israel, such as Nissim Zeev and Raphael Pinhasi, rebelled against the party leadership before the Jerusalem municipal elections of 1983, and formed the Shas party. Ovadia Yosef, who was disgruntled because of the loss of his position as the Sephardic Chief Rabbinate, used this opportunity and poured his political support behind this newly formed party during the municipal elections. When the newly formed Shas list did surprisingly well in the municipal elections and won 3 seats in the City Council, Ovadia Yosef announced the creation of national Shas in February 1984. Yosef explained the rationale behind the need for the formation of the party: “The religious parties never gave fair representation to Sephardim, although much of their support came from observant Sephardim.”

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143 Jerusalem Post, July 13, 1984
5.3 Shas in the Coalition Governments: A Story of Co-optation

Shas received four Knesset seats in the 1984 national elections, two more than Agudat Israel from which it splintered, and in the following years emerged as the biggest political party in the religious camp. An important aspect of Shas’s success has been its participation in the coalition governments. The party participated in all, except two, coalition governments in the 24 years of its history\(^{145}\) and always occupied important ministerial positions.

Before explaining how Shas’s inclusion within the coalition governments created important resources for the party to provide pork for its constituencies, it is important to mention the ideological novelty of Shas’s engagement with the state institutions. Before the formation of Shas, the ultra-orthodox parties have always been cautious in their involvement in the government posts. For instance, Agudah parties declined to occupy any ministries in the government since occupying a ministry within the government would grant legitimacy to the State of Israel, which is not run according to Halacha.

In order to balance the need to be part of the political process and maintaining religio-ideological consistency, Agudah members received the post of deputy minister within the governments they participated or acted as heads of Knesset committees, but never became ministers. This way they could claim that they were not fully participating in the workings of a secular government while being able to deliver some pork to their own constituencies. Ideologically, Shas has been much more pragmatic in its stance towards the Israeli state compared to the Agudah parties and accepted to occupy

\(^{145}\) Shas left the 25\(^{th}\) government led by the Labor Party on September 14, 1993 and did not join the 26\(^{th}\) government that was formed after Rabin’s assassination and lasted only seven months (November 22, 1995-18 June, 1996). The other government that did not include Shas was the 30\(^{th}\) government of Israel led by Likud in 28 February 2003-4 May, 2006.
ministerial positions. This different ideological stance of Shas towards the Israeli state is summed up by a Shas party member:

Now according to Rav Ovadia Yosef we are part of the State [Medina]. We are here because God wanted us to be here. But if anything does not go by the Torah, we try to change it. We only go by the line of the Torah. The moment Torah says us to do something, we have to do it. This is why we get the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Communication, etc. and we make changes according to the Torah. This is Zionism for us.

This new interpretation of Zionism gave Shas the leverage to become a major player in the coalition governments and to claim significant power over governmental resources through its occupation of critical ministries such as Ministry of Religious Affairs, Interior Ministry, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Communication.

In 2008, when negotiations between Kadima’s Tzipi Livni and Shas representatives to form a new coalition failed and Israel headed for early elections, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef summed up in simple terms Shas’s strategy with regards to participation in the next coalition government during one of his weekly sermons:

Now we have the Knesset elections ahead of us. If we gain 15 [seats], or if we are 18, how good it will be. Whoever is prime minister, would love to have them. He would receive them honorably. He would do anything he is told. “Give us the Housing Ministry.” “You are welcome to it.” “Give us the Social Affairs Ministry.” “Sure thing.” “Give us the Education Ministry.” “You can have it.” If they [Shas MKs] are strong, they could demand anything.

These statements of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef reveal that the Shas leadership is very well aware of the virtuous relationship between its command over governmental resources and the government’s willingness to accommodate their demands.

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146 Shas’s ideological stance towards Zionism will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7
147 Interview with Roni Huri, Shas representative in the city Barkan, on December 11, 2006
resources and the party’s electoral success. The more governmental resources
Shas commands, the more it allocates resources to Sephardi needs, and this increases the
party’s popularity among the Sephardim. This popularity, in turn, increases the party’s
electoral strength, and the increased number of MKs gives Shas a better bargaining
position in coalition negotiations to demand the ministries Shas needs.

5.3.1 Allocation of State Resources and Institutionalization of Pork

As stated in the introduction, the NRP was the main religious party participating
in the coalition governments of Israel and constituting the coalition partner of the Labor
party until the 1977 national elections. This partnership, which was known as the
‘historic covenant’, was convenient for both parties because the NRP could have control
on issues pertaining to its religious agenda (e.g. Religious Zionist education, religious
laws, etc.), and Labor could implement its agenda on national issues (e.g. foreign policy,
economic policy, etc.). Likud’s growing political strength starting in the late 1970s
transformed the religious parties (as a matter of fact all small parties) into kingmakers in
the Israeli political scene, since both the left and right center parties needed the smaller
religious parties to form viable coalition governments.

Once this political reality was coupled with the realignment in the religious camp,
Shas emerged as the main religious party in the coalition governments. As I will discuss
below, Shas has gradually replaced the National Religious Party as the main religious
player in the coalition governments and acquired the control of the ministries, which had
been historically NRP strongholds.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Prime Minister/Large Coalition Partner</th>
<th>Ministries of Shas</th>
<th>Deputy Ministerships of Shas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry without Portfolio (Yitzhak Haim Peres) (1987-88)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995-1996</td>
<td>Shimon Peres (Labor)</td>
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Table: 5.4 The ministries and deputy ministerships Shas occupied in the coalition governments in 1984-2008 (Continued)\(^\text{149}\)

\(^{149}\) The data in the table is compiled by the author. Source: Knesset Website, available at http://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber_eng.asp
Table 5.4 (Continued)

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<td>Ministry of Health (Shlomo Benizri) (1999-2000)</td>
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<td>Ministry of Communications (Yitzhak Vaknin) (1999-2000)</td>
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<td>2001-2003</td>
<td>Ariel Sharon (Likud-Labor)</td>
<td>Interior Ministry (Eli Yishai)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Religious Affairs (Asher Ohana)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (Shlomo Benizri)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs (Eliyahu Suissa)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Health (Nissim Dahan)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Deputy Prime Minister (Eli Yishai)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Education (Meshulam Nahari)</td>
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<td>Ministry of Finance (Yitzhak Cohen)</td>
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<td>Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (David Azoulay)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interior Ministry (Yitzhak Vaknin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2006</td>
<td>Ariel Sharon (Likud)</td>
<td>Ministry of Communications (Ariel Atas)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor (Eli Yishai)</td>
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<td>Ministry without Portfolio (Meshulam Nahari)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry without Portfolio (Yitzhak Cohen) (2006-2008)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2009</td>
<td>Ehud Olmert (Kadima)</td>
<td>Ministry of Communications (Ariel Atas)</td>
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<td>Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor (Eli Yishai)</td>
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<td>Ministry without Portfolio (Meshulam Nahari)</td>
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<td>Ministry without Portfolio (Yitzhak Cohen) (2006-2008)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister (Eli Yishai)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Yitzhak Cohen was responsible for religious affairs, a department under the office of the prime minister, at the time. In 2008 this department was reinstituted as the Ministry of Religious Services and Cohen became the minister or religious services.
5.3.2 Shas and the Interior Ministry

As seen in the table above, the primary former NRP stronghold captured by Shas is the interior ministry, which was headed by the veteran chairman of the NRP, Yosef Burg, during the NRP’s long partnership with Labor. After 1984, Shas consistently sought the ministry in the coalition negotiations.

For Shas, the occupation of the interior ministry was significant both for ideological and material reasons. Ideologically, the authority of the ministry over the registration of the personal status of Israeli citizens gives the party controlling the ministry some say over the “Jewish identity” of the Israeli state. In Israel, all matters of personal status, such as marriage, divorce, conversion, or burial, are handled by religious courts of the respective religious communities. Within the Jewish community, the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate and the rabbinical courts have a monopoly over the handling of these questions of personal affairs. Yet, while these matters concerning personal status are dealt within the Orthodox rabbinical courts, the interior ministry also has some discretion, since the officials in the ministry are responsible for registering matters of status change. This duality sometimes creates tensions, since some secular Jewish Israelis evade Orthodox religious practices- e.g. by having a secular marriage in Cyprus and registering their status change in the interior ministry. Therefore, occupying the ministry gives Shas some leverage on deciding issues that would have an effect on the “Jewish” character of the Israeli state.

One case in point is the controversy over the registration of Soshana Miller, who was converted to Judaism in a Reform congregation in the United States and then applied
for Israeli citizenship. While she was granted Israeli citizenship, the officials in the Interior Ministry refused to register her as a “Jew.” When this administrative fait accompli of the ministry, which was controlled by Shas at the time, was overruled by the Supreme Court, Yitzhak Peretz, the Minister of Interior insisted that the word “convert” be added next to the category of religion in Miller’s identity card. This insistence of Peretz started an uproar among the Reform and Conservative congregations in Israel and abroad and also among the secular public in Israel. Finally, the Supreme Court denied the Interior Ministry the right to add the word “convert” next to someone’s religion in the identity cards. To protest this decision, Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, the chairman of Shas, resigned from his post as the Interior Minister. In his resignation letter he revealed clearly his party’s position on the strict interpretation of Jewishness: “The High Court of Justice demanded that I list a non-Jew as a Jew…As a Jew and a rabbi loyal to the tradition and Bible of Israel, I have declared and declare again that my hand will never ever sign for a fraudulent conversion that was not conducted according to the Halacha.”

Similar controversies surfaced during Shas’s command of the ministry regarding the status of the Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s, since many of these immigrants lacked necessary documents to prove either that their mothers were Jewish or that they underwent a proper conversion to Judaism. As will be discussed in the coming chapters, this behavior of Shas vis-à-vis Russian immigrants

150 The “Law of Return” in Israel stipulates that anyone who is a Jew can get Israeli citizenship. According to the law, a Jew is defined as someone who is born of a Jewish mother or who is converted to Judaism. There is intense discussion about the religious legitimacy of the conversions performed by the Reform and Conservative movements. The orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel argue that these conversions are not done according to halacha (Jewish law). Therefore, the argument goes, the converts should not be accepted as authentic Jews and not granted Israeli citizenship.

151 The Associated Press, June 25, 1986


had adverse effects on the ethnic relations between the Russian immigrants and the Sephardi residents.

In addition to turning to the Interior Ministry as an ideological asset through its influence of decisions on personal status, Shas also used the ministry as a means of channeling material resources to its own constituency. The political patronage through the Interior Ministry became especially noticeable in 1988-1993, namely during the ministry of Ariyeh Deri, the second chairman of Shas and arguably the most influential person in the Shas circles after Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.

In the Israeli government, the Interior Ministry has the authority to fund municipal councils for the allocation of funds to local needs. Yet the ministry does not have any authority to fund religious institutions, since funding to these institutions are allocated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs via the religious councils. During his ministry Deri by-passed these laws by systematically making allocations to municipal councils conditional on handing some of these funds to religious institutions affiliated with Shas.\footnote{The Jerusalem Post, November 27, 1989} In this process of unlawful allocations, Deri used his political power over the municipal funds. As a Jerusalem municipal council member explained: “Deri will approve, let's say, NIS 5 million for municipal needs and then tack on another NIS 1 million for religious institutions.”\footnote{Interview with Ornan Yekutieli, The Jerusalem Post, May 25, 1990} It was estimated that every year during his ministry, Deri had diverted 100 million NIS, almost a quarter of the Interior Ministry’s budget, year to religious institutions close to Shas.\footnote{The Jerusalem Post, March 30, 1990}
In addition to these practices, Deri and four of his friends were convicted in 1999 for bribe-taking, aggravated fraud, breach of trust, and falsifying corporate documents. Most of these unlawful practices involved Shas affiliated voluntary non-profit organizations that inappropriately diverted funds for personal gain.

5.3.3 Shas’s Grip on the Chief Rabbinate and the Ministry of Religious Affairs

The Ashkenazi and Sephardi Chief Rabbis in Israel are elected by the votes of an electoral college that include Knesset members. Since the election mechanism is politicized, the candidates are always backed up by different political parties in the Knesset. During the 1992 coalition government, an important change of leadership occurred in the Sephardic Chief Rabbinate, an institution which is not only a source of halachaic authority for the Israeli Sephardim but also commands a significant number of jobs within the religious sector. In the 1993 elections for the post of Sephardic Chief Rabbi, the candidate backed by Shas, Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, beat the candidate backed by the NRP. Hence, on February 21, 1993 Bakshi-Doron, who claimed to be a disciple of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, became the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel. For the first time, a Sephardi Chief Rabbi who was not backed by the NRP was elected to the post. In this incident, Shas used its power within the governing coalition and received the political support of Labor for Bakshi-Doron in return for supporting the candidacy of Ezer Weizmann for the presidency.

In addition to the post of the Sephardic Chief Rabbinate, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, another NRP stronghold in the pre-1984 era, turned into a fiefdom of Shas in the

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157 *The Jerusalem Post*, March 17, 1999
158 *Jerusalem Post*, February 22, 1993
1990s. Shas acquired the deputy ministership of Religious Affairs for the first time in 1992, but considering that the ministry was headed by the then prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, it was clear that the strings of the institution belonged to Shas through its deputy minister Raphael Pinhasi. Thereafter, Shas MKs became the Minister of Religious Affairs in four coalition governments.

The Ministry’s primary official responsibility was to provide basic religious services to the Israeli public. The Ministry commanded the religious sector in the Israeli society through different means. First of all, it appointed 45 percent of the members of each local religious council, which manages local synagogues, ritual baths (mikva’ot), and kashrut enforcement services for businesses. In addition to this, the ministry pays the salaries of over 600 local chief rabbis and administers the rabbinic courts that handle religious issues concerning personal status, such as conversion, marriage, and divorce. The Chief Rabbinates and the Chief Rabbinate councils are also supported by the Ministry.

The ministry was also a source of an enormous number of jobs in the religious sector, such as kosher food inspectors, ritual bath managers, religious court judges, or yeshiva school administrators. These jobs were very important for the survival of the ultra-orthodox Sephardim, who do not receive any skills for the job market except religious expertise. As one secular Israeli journalist, who closely follows the ultra-orthodox community in Israel and is critical of it, says: “The religious councils have a lot

159 Jerusalem Report, June 15, 1995
of jobs, [they are] a big price. We are talking about a community that doesn’t learn to work. They have to work in these jobs.”

Moreover, according to the law the ministry also distributed funds to voluntary non-profit organizations (amutot), which provide religious activities such as evening Torah classes for adults. Lastly, the Ministry subsidized full-time yeshiva students, whose sole occupation is studying the Torah.

After Shas took control of the ministry the budget of the ministry increased significantly. While in the 1980s, its budget was only couple of hundred thousand NIS, it rose to 240 million NIS in 1990, became 1.2 billion NIS in the fiscal year 1996, 1.6 billion NIS in 1997, and in 2001 it reached over 4 billion NIS.

There were different ways by which Shas used funding and employment resources under the authority of the ministry for patronage. First of all, the ability of the minister to appoint almost half of the members of the religious councils gave Shas the opportunity to fill these positions with its own supporters and also use these councils’ political authority to favor Shas-based institutions, such as Sephardi synagogues and ritual baths.

Secondly, Shas became famous for overfunding its own voluntary non-profit organizations from the budget of the ministry. Before 1999, the ministry had discretion over allocating special funds to voluntary non-profit organizations to support Torah study. For instance, when Shimon Shetreet took the ministry from Shas in the middle of

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160 Interview with Shahar Ilan, journalist in the daily newspaper Ha’aretz on October 8, 2006.
161 The Jerusalem Post, March 30, 1990
162 The Jerusalem Post, July 12, 1996
163 Globes, December 17, 1996
164 Ha’aretz, February 14, 2001
Rabin government in 1993, he declared that almost the entire budget that has been set aside for Torah and Haredi\textsuperscript{165} culture was spent, and that the money was distributed to Shas institutions.\textsuperscript{166}

Most of these overfunded voluntary non-profit institutions are run by figures very close to the party’s leadership structure. For example, Yahaveh Da’at headed by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s son David Yosef, Ma’or Yisrael headed by another of Yosef’s son Moshe Yosef, Or Hamizrach headed by yet another son of Yosef Avraham Yosef, and Rosh Pina an institution run by Arieh Deri’s brother Nissim Deri, all received preferential funding from the Ministry of Religious Affairs for their “outstanding” work totaling 2 million NIS during the 1999 budget year.\textsuperscript{167} The assessment of “outstanding work” was done by the ministry and based on political criteria, rather than on any objective criteria.

Moreover, under Shas leadership the Ministry was able to transfer funds to many fictitious entities. An audit by the State Comptroller\textsuperscript{168}, Miriam Ben-Porat, revealed that in 1998, 30 percent of the yeshivas that got funding from the Ministry were either fictitious or already closed by the time of funding. In addition, more than a fourth of the yeshiva students registered for funding did not exist at the time of the audit.\textsuperscript{169}

The funding of the teachers in the Ma’ayan network was another venue through which the Ministry of Religious Affairs was used to disproportionately fund Shas-related organizations. While the teachers in the Ma’ayan schools were funded through the Education Ministry due to their status as educational workers, they were also funded by

\textsuperscript{165} The term Haredi is the Hebrew word used to describe the ultra-orthodox. Literally Haredi means the one who fears [God].
\textsuperscript{166} Jerusalem Post, July 23, 1996
\textsuperscript{167} Ha’aretz, November 3, 1999
\textsuperscript{168} State Comptroller in Israel is an institution which is responsible for reviewing and supervising government policies.
\textsuperscript{169} The Jerusalem Report, August 13, 2001
the Ministry of Religious Affairs, since they were also registered as full-time yeshiva
students, whose sole occupation is studying the Torah.\textsuperscript{170} A Jerusalem District Labor
Court defined this practice as “the fraudulent obtaining of moneys from the State
authorities on the basis of misrepresentations.”\textsuperscript{171} In order to prevent the exposure of its
fraudulent practices to the larger public, Shas put special provisions into the contracts of
the teachers working in the \textit{Ma’ayan} network stipulating that any dispute between the
school and the teachers should be taken to the ultra-orthodox run religious courts rather
than to any government-run secular courts.\textsuperscript{172}

To prevent Shas from using the ministry as a pipeline for its own activities and to
alleviate the criticism of the secular public, the government under Ehud Barak introduced
in September 1999, a new regulation package for the funding transferred by the ministry
to voluntary non-profit organizations. The package included the following criteria for the
control of the government monies distributed by the ministry: “a) for the first two years,
each organization would have to operate on its own, before becoming eligible for
government money; b) the government would retain the right to audit the flow of money
in the \textit{Haredi} non-profit organization accounts; c) the non-profit organization directors
would have to furnish bank guarantees as collateral for subsidies received; d) an
independent accounting process would continue to audit non-profit organization’s
financial activity.”\textsuperscript{173}

Despite these new regulations, Shas continued its illegal or law-evading practices
of transferring government funds to its own organizations.

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Jerusalem Post}, June 30, 1999
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Ha’aretz}, March 2, 2000.
5.3.4 Religious Affairs Ministry and Other Political Actors

The transformation of the Religious Affairs Ministry to a pipeline for Shas affiliated organizations and the concomitant rise in the electoral strength of the Shas party instigated an important reaction from other political actors, mainly the Religious Zionist and secular parties.

The National Religious Party was clearly the major loser from the fact that Shas took the control of the Religious Affairs Ministry from the Religious Zionist camp. Hence, during its participation in the coalition governments together with Shas, the NRP tried to resist this and demanded to regain the control of the ministry. These demands led to important political crises in the late 1990s. The first dispute broke during the formation of the 1996 coalition government, when both parties demanded from Benjamin Netanyahu the same ministry. At the end of long negotiations the dispute was resolved by an agreement, which effectively split the ministry. According to this agreement each party appointed one deputy minister and the ministership rotated every year between the two parties.

During the formation of the Barak government in 1999, the same dispute between Shas and the NRP surfaced during the coalition negotiations. While both parties demanded the control of the ministry, Shas this time emerged as victorious thanks to its stronger representation in the Knesset. Hence Shas received the ministry, while agreeing to appoint the deputy minister and the director general from a list submitted to it by the NRP.
Lastly, the patronage related to the Ministry created a big resentment on the part of the secular public. As a consequence, the strictly-secularist Shinui party started to run on a platform promising the abolishment of the Religious Affairs Ministry. When Shinui became a part of the coalition government after the 2003 elections, it abolished the ministry and distributed its tasks among other government offices. Shinui was able to realize this promise, since Shas was not part of the coalition government in 2003-2006. Yet the Religious Affairs Ministry was reinstated very recently under the name, “Ministry of Religious Services”, and a Shas MK, Yitzhak Cohen became its new head. These recent events of the abolishment and reinstitution of the Ministry shows the continuing political salience of the Religious Affairs Ministry for the agenda of Shas and the reaction it draws from its political opponents.

5.3.5 Social Policy and Shas Ministries

In addition to the Interior Ministry, the Sephardic Chief Rabbinate, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Shas also tried to acquire to the best of its ability government positions that would help the party to implement its socioeconomic agenda. The occupation of the Social and Welfare Ministry and the Ministry of Health provided Shas the opportunity to distribute vital resources to the poor segments of the Sephardi community, which constitutes one of the backbones of Shas support.

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor during the leadership of Eli Yishai did not approach the material problems of the lower social classes with a social-democratic or socialist lens. Rather than distributing funds to the needy according to universal
criteria and trying to find ways to move them up in the socioeconomic ladder, Yishai ran his ministry in a partisan manner and catered to the needs of the mostly ultra-orthodox community. For instance, in 1999 he allocated 10 million NIS to an ultra-orthodox charity organization, called Matan, in order to locate distressed ultra-orthodox children and to place them into state-run boarding schools.\footnote{Ha’aretz November 25, 1999.} According to the accounts of the ministry, social workers outside of the ultra-orthodox community did not know how to handle these children. Hence, it was not surprising that in 1999, more than half of the children designated as “in poverty” came from the ultra-orthodox community.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Health Ministry under Shlomo Benizri also operated with a similar logic. Rather than strengthening the health services for everyone, Benizri allocated big amounts of money to partisan non-profit organizations. The complaints of a MK from the secular Shinui critical of Benizri’s methods shed light on such patronage practices: “If someone wanted to offer dental treatment and apply universal socioeconomic standards, I’d be all for it. The Health Ministry could build clinics, then go into the schools and offer the care to children who need it, many of them Arabs. But they are creating a private organization, funded by the Health Ministry. There's little doubt that it will have a big picture of the Shas spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, in the clinic. Is that the way to spend state money?”\footnote{Interview with Shinui MK Yosef Partizky, The Jerusalem Report, August 13, 2001} In 2001 alone, the Ministry of Health supported 161 non-profit organizations, and distributed them funds totaling 32 million NIS.\footnote{The Jerusalem Report, August 13, 2001} The Health Minister Shlomo Benizri, like most of the other ministers from Shas, also used his ministry to further the party’s agenda on the religious identity of the Israeli state. One of the first statements of
Benizri, when he became the health minister in 1999, was that he would appoint hospital rabbis and kashrut supervisors.  

5.4 Effects of State-Cooption on the Constituency of Shas

These policies of state co-optation and the institutionalization of pork through government ministries have important material consequences for the constituencies Shas claims to represent. The ultra-orthodox Sephardim affiliated with Shas institutions became more and more dependent on state resources, since their livelihood was dependent on limited jobs offered by the Religious Affairs Ministry or the Chief Rabbinate.

Moreover, it is clear that Shas played an important role in the Haredization of the Sephardi community in Israel by creating a culture of segregation and state-dependency. The fertility rate of the ultra-orthodox sector among the Sephardim increased from 4.57 child per family in 1980-1984 to 7.24 child per family in 1994-1996, surpassing any other sector – including the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox - in Israeli society.  

Similarly for men aged 25-52 the percent of the Sephardi ultra-orthodox population studying full-time in yeshivas increased from 38 percent to 56 percent, surpassing the percentage of the full-time yeshiva students among the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox population. These material changes in the lives of the ultra-orthodox Sephardi population in the first ten year of Shas’s existence testify how the party’s aggressive transfer of state resources to its constituencies had a significant social impact.

178 Ha’aretz, July 30, 1999.
180 Ibid. 35
The poor strata of non-ultra orthodox Sephardim also became more dependent on the state resources in two ways. First, there is an important trend within the masorti Sephardi population to send their children to Ma’ayan schools due to the sociocultural incentives discussed in Chapter 4. Despite the fact that these schools are much cheaper than the state and state-religious schools, their quality of education is much lower. Furthermore, these schools do not prepare the children to become active participants in the workforce. Therefore, it is almost certain that the graduates from the Ma’ayan schools will not attend universities and will be disadvantaged compared to the graduates from other schools in the job market.

Secondly, Shas’s control of the Labor and Social Welfare Ministry created a new culture of state dependency in terms of the provision of welfare measures. Unlike programmatic social democratic parties that define welfare benefits in the context of social rights, Shas defined the welfare benefits, such as child allowances or unemployment benefits, in the context of pork-barrel politics. Hence the disadvantaged Sephardim received these benefits in return for supporting the Shas party, not as a matter of citizen rights.

Therefore, Shas policies worked almost as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The party thwarted the effective integration of the ultra-orthodox Sephardim into the workforce and the upward mobility of the non-ultra-orthodox poor Sephardim on the socioeconomic ladder. On the other hand, it offered state-based jobs and welfare benefits to these groups and satisfied their short-term demands through its control of the key government ministries. Hence, Shas created a Sephardi community that would permanently need the
party in power in order to receive these short-term benefits. Unlike the successful integration of the Modern Orthodox community into Israeli society in the 1950s and 1960s through the policies of the NRP, Shas does not work for the full socioeconomic integration of the marginalized segments of the Sephardi community. By providing short-term benefits to its constituents, the party makes sure that this constituency becomes permanently dependent on the political fortunes of Shas and its occupation of key ministries.

5.5 Conclusion

In Israel, Sephardim participated in and voted for center and religious parties until the 1980s. This representation of Sephardim, which was not defined in ethnic terms, was challenged by the Sephardi leadership in the religious camp. Two catalytic events, namely the formation of Tami by NRP’s Aharon Abuhatzeria and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s disappointment at the expiration of his term limit as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi led to a major realignment in the religious camp and paved the way for the formation of Sephardic Torah Guardians, a religious party with an explicit ethnic Sephardi identity.

After its formation, Shas was incorporated into almost all coalition governments. This policy of co-optation gave Shas the opportunity to access important governmental resources. Shas was able to command important governmental resources, since the party pursued a very particularistic agenda and acted very pragmatically on national issues, such as the peace process. Hence, one by one Shas acquired the ministries which had been traditionally NRP strongholds. The party created extensive patronage networks
through its grip on the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, The Ministry
of Labor and Social Affairs, and the Health Ministry. The party’s grip over these
ministries gave the party both cultural and material resources. Through the Chief
Rabbinate and the Interior Ministry Shas could influence matters pertaining to the
“Judaic” identity of the Israeli state, such as the religious status of the newly-arriving
immigrants. Moreover, Shas provided countless jobs for ultra-orthodox Sephardim and
transferred money to its own non-profit organizations in order to meet the needs of the
poor Sephardim.

Hence Shas’s participation in the coalition governments gave it the opportunity to
distribute pork to its constituencies. Since the party could deliver for Sephardi needs, its
popularity and vote share increased, especially in development towns and slums of big
cities, where poor Sephardim constitute a majority. Yet these policies of Shas had an
equivocal impact on the life of the Sephardim. While the short-term needs of these
Sephardim were met through pork provided by Shas, the trends towards Haredization and
a culture of state dependency thwart the chances of Sephardim for upward mobility and
also create a trend toward more segregation rather than integration into Israeli society.
CHAPTER 6
CO-OPTATION OF THE RELIGIOPOLITICAL ACTORS IN TURKEY

6.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes how in Turkey religiopolitical actors were incorporated into the government and high-level bureaucracy by secular elites in the 1970s and 1980s and how this co-optation paved the way for the electoral successes of the Welfare Party (WP), as the representative of the National Outlook Movement (NOM), in the 1990s. The chapter initially describes the co-optation of religious actors in the state institutions starting in the 1970s with the participation of the religious National Salvation Party (NSP) in three coalition governments from 1974-1980. Then, it discusses the close relationship of the military government (1980-83) with the Hearth of Intellectuals and how the military used Islam for legitimizing its authoritarian policies. Next, it talks about the inclusion of a conservative faction within the Motherland Party (MP) and how the members of this faction influenced important legislation and policies. I also analyze the intra-party debate within the MP between the conservatives and the liberals in order to show how this affected the shifting dynamic in the religious camp.
In the second part, I illustrate how the attempts to co-opt religion triggered a double movement in the political arena. On the one hand, state institutions, such as the education ministry, the national television network, and Ataturk Culture, Language and History Higher Institution, emerged as institutional sites where a conservative outlook has been promoted. As a consequence of this, religious social actors have found a receptive environment to increase their public appeal in the post-1980 era. On the other hand, the attempts of the military regime and the MP to co-opt Islam drew criticism towards the instrumental use of religion by the government from the societal actors. The WP activists, religious newspapers, and Islamist intellectuals raised different criticisms towards the MP. As a consequence, the periphery’s support to the moderate MP waned, and the Islamist WP emerged as the new center of appeal for the peripheral groups.

6.2 Political Representation of the Periphery until the Advent of the National Outlook Movement

Until the 1970s, center-right parties appealed to the periphery in Turkey without acquiring an explicit religious character. While the Republican People’s Party (RPP) was perceived as an elitist party and the representative of the center’s ideology, the Democratic Party in 1950-60, and the Justice Party in 1961-1970 received political support of the periphery. Similar to the Likud Party, which appealed to the Sephardim in Israel by embracing traditional values, the center-right parties in Turkey were more amenable to the cultural sensitivities of the periphery.

Suleyman Demirel’s center right Justice Party even contained a religious group
led by Saadettin Bilgic. Yet this group never achieved a powerful position within the party to be able to influence major policy decisions. Thus, the formation of the National Order Party by Necmettin Erbakan as the first party of the National Outlook Movement in 1970 was a watershed in Turkish politics because for the first time a religiously-oriented political party participated in politics. As will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 8, Erbakan’s party emerged as the champion of the economic interests of the small merchants in Anatolia against the big industrialists’ interests in Ankara and Istanbul. The party also addressed the periphery’s cultural concerns with a religious vocabulary, which was not used by the center-right parties until that time. The party’s dual agenda on economic and cultural issues was reflected in its party program. Thus, the twin goals of the NOP were material development (maddi kalkınma) and spiritual development (manevi kalkınma).

The NOP’s political life did not last long, and the party was shut down during the military intervention by the Constitutional Court in May 20, 1971, because “it acted against the principles of the secular nature of the state and the protection of Atatürk’s reforms.” Yet this development did not prevent Erbakan and his friends from engaging in politics, and the NOM was reorganized under the name National Salvation Party (NSP) in October 11, 1972. The party was quite successful in the first national election, in which it participated in 1973. It captured 11.8 percent of the vote, and sent 48 members to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Yet more important than its electoral success was

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181 Saadettin Bilgic assumed the post of acting party chairman briefly in 1964 after the party’s first leader Ragip Gumuspala died. Yet Suleyman Demirel won the elections for the chairmanship in the first party congress in the same year.

182 The decision of the Constitutional Court, which was mainly based on the speeches of the party leadership in political meetings can be read at http://www.belgenet.com/dava/mnp_dava.html.
NSP’s participation in the three coalition governments in the hyper-volatile years of Turkish politics between the two military interventions.

6.3 Co-optation of Religiopolitical Actors in Turkey: Three Periods

6.3.1 The NSP in the coalition governments (1974-1978)

On January 24, 1974 to many observers’ surprise Erbakan joined a coalition government with the social democratic Republican People’s Party (RPP). In the government the NSP received seven ministries, including the Ministry of Justice, Interior Ministry, Ministry of Industry, and important government agencies, such as the Directorate of the Religious Affairs and General Directorate of Vaqf (Vakiflar Genel Mudurlugu).183

The provisions of the coalition agreement reveal that NSP’s socioeconomic goals became part of the government’s agenda. Some of the articles of the coalition agreement that reflected those goals were: “the implementation of a regional industrialization program according to criteria of social justice and regional balances; the formation of an industrial bank within the Ministry of Industry; the development of national war and arms industry; putting caps on the profits of foreign investment; legalization of the already built illegal squatter-settlements in the major cities.”184 These provisions were indicative of the government’s desire to create a national economy based on heavy industry without hurting the small industrialists in the small cities; the NSP’s desire to create an

183 For the entire list of the ministries and government agencies see the 7th and 10th articles of the coalition agreement at http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukumetler/KP37.htm
184 The coalition agreement can be found at http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukumetler/KP37.htm
independent nationalist economic system that is less dependent on international capitalism; and the goal of integrating the *gecekondu* residents into the city life.

Holding the Ministry of Industry in its hands was crucial for the NSP to realize its goal of material development through pervasive industrialization in Anatolia. For this reason the NSP was insistent to secure the same ministry in all the three coalition governments, in which it participated. The NSP leaders thought that pervasive heavy industrialization is a sine qua non for creating a strong and independent Turkey that would recreate the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire.

In addition to its goal of material development, NSP also implemented policies that were concordant with its goal of spiritual development. For instance, NSP put into the budget money for more than 5,000 additional Quranic course teachers and imams.\(^{185}\) It also put morality lessons to all elementary, middle and high schools; opened the middle-school sections of the *Imam Hatip* schools;\(^ {186}\) and opened 29 more of these schools bringing their total number to 101.

Yet, the coalition did not last long. The government resigned eleven months after its formation due to difficulties between the two parties, and Ecevit’s belief that an early election would give the RPP a mandate to rule alone. However, the parliament did not decide to hold early elections, and after an independent Senator’s unsuccessful attempt to form the government, the first “Nationalist Front” government, a coalition between right-wing parties in the parliament was formed. Before discussing the place of the NSP in this

\(^{185}\) Saribay, A. Y. *Türkiye'de Modernlesme Din ve Parti Politikasi : Millî Selâmet Partisi Ornek Olayi* (İstanbul: Alan Yayinlari, 1985), 190

\(^{186}\) Yalcin, S. *Hangi Erbakan?* (İstanbul: Basak Yayinlari), 97; Saribay, Saribay, A. Y. *Türkiye'de Modernlesme Din ve Parti Politikasi : Millî Selâmet Partisi Ornek Olayi* (İstanbul: Alan Yayinlari, 1985), 190
coalition government, it is important to mention that the Hearth of Intellectuals, a think-
tank that was comprised of conservative-nationalist university professors, played a
significant role in the formation of the “Nationalist Front” government. According to the
members of the Hearth, who tried to synthesize Turkish nationalism with Islamic values,
the left, hence the RPP, was the biggest threat to the future of Turkey. Therefore they
opposed the divisions within the right, and worked hard for the alliance of all right-wing
parties, namely the center-right JP, the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (NAP),
the elitist Republican Trust Party (RTP), and the religious NSP.\footnote{Alper, E. and Goral, O. S. “Aydınlar Ocagi”. In \textit{Muhafazakarlik} ed.by Ahmet Cigdem (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayinlari, 2003)} As will be discussed
in the next section, the Hearth became a much more influential political player in the
post-1980 era.

In 1975 the NSP was again a “key”\footnote{The NSP’s party emblem was a key. Hence the analogy between the NSP’s critical role in the coalitions
and the symbol of the party has been made by many political observers.} member of the coalition government, and
the party’s twin goals were clearly visible both in the coalition agreement and the policy
initiatives of the government. According to the coalition agreement: “the morality lessons
in the elementary and high schools will be foremost taught according to their philosophy
by the graduates of the divinity faculty, Institute of Islamic Higher Education or \textit{Imam Hatip}
schools; educational curriculum will be purged from elements not suiting Turkish
national\footnote{The Turkish word “\textit{milli}” is translated as national in English. It stems from the root nation (\textit{millet}). Yet
the NSP uses the word “\textit{millet}” for describing a religious community rather than an ethnic or civic nation.
Hence the word “\textit{milli}” in the “\textit{milli kultur}” (national culture) has religious connotations for the NSP
activists and constituency.} culture; the place of religious functionaries in our society will be recognized
by utilizing them in our social and economic development.”\footnote{The coalition agreement can be found at http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukumetler/KP39.htm.} Moreover the NSP also
attempted to give the graduates from the Imam-Hatip schools the opportunity to become officers in the Turkish army, but failed in its attempt.\textsuperscript{191}

In order to fulfill its promise of material development, the NSP undertook a heavy industrialization program, and started to build factories in many peripheral cities. The Minister of Labour of the government at the time explains the industrialization effort of NSP:

At that time [during the first nationalist front government], Turkey was developing. If you look at the map of Turkey, you can see that there were factories all over. Especially, in eastern Turkey. Meat factories, milk factories, fodder factories, sugar factories. Why here? Because there was animal husbandry, so animal husbandry develops as well as employment is provided. In addition to those, there were other factories, for example airplane engine factories. In Diyarbakir TUSAS was built. The foundations of concrete factories were laid….For example in Mazi the emphasis was put on facilities for coal reserves. Hence in all of Turkey heavy industry moves were made, foundations were laid, but we could not stay in the government for long.\textsuperscript{192}

Parallel to these claims the NSP became famous at the time for pressuring the Justice Party to put into the 1977 budget a program that would increase public investment in heavy industrialization 15 times over.\textsuperscript{193} Yet due to early elections that were held in June of 1977, the NSP could not harvest the results of that year’s budget and its industrialization proposals. Moreover, Erbakan’s too frequent factory openings without sufficient infrastructural plans became points of criticism and ridicule in parts of the media. In the 1977 election NSP’s national vote share fell from 11.8 percent to 8.7 percent, and the number of NSP members in the parliament decreased from 48 to 24.

\textsuperscript{191} Ahmad, F. \textit{Demokrasi Surecinde Turkiye (1945-1980)} (Istanbul: Hil Yayin, 1992), 383-384
\textsuperscript{192} Interview with Sevket Kazan on March 2, 2007
\textsuperscript{193} Mardin, S. “Religion in Modern Turkey”, \textit{International Social Science Journal}, 29, no.2 (1977): 279-299
While NSP activists claimed that the abrupt halt of their heavy industrialization program was the sole reason for NSP’s erosion of public support in the elections, internal conflicts within the party were also an important factor. In the aftermath of the elections NSP participated in the second national front government, but the life of this government was less than four months.

The NSP’s involvement in the coalition governments was important for two main reasons. First, participating in the governments—especially in the coalition government with the RPP—helped the party to improve its public image. The NSP erased its previous image of being a threat to the secular regime, when its predecessor the National Order Party was shut down by the Supreme Court in 1971. Erbakan’s movement showed that it could fulfill important political functions, including governing the state. Second, occupying important ministries and government agencies gave the NSP the leverage to create patronage networks within the state. As will be discussed later, an important part of NSP’s political and bureaucratic staff joined the center-right Motherland Party and came to influential decision-making positions within the state during the democratic era following the military government.

6.3.2 The Military Regime and the Institutionalization of Turkish-Islamic Synthesis

On September 12, 1980 the military intervened in democratic politics by making a coup d’état. In the following three years the military establishment ruled Turkey through the National Security Council (NSC), and carried out an immense program of institutional reform by rewriting the constitution and changing the law on political parties. Due to these changes all party leaders and parties that operated before 1980 were
banned from politics, since political polarization between left and right parties, the uncompromising attitudes of political elites, and a growing violence on the streets were depicted as the major reasons for the military takeover.

During its governing years the military developed a closer relationship to religion, and redefined nationalism by co-opting certain elements of Islam. The junta used Islam as an instrument of social control rather than genuinely embracing Islamic idioms of the society. For the scholars of Turkish politics this change of ideology was mind-boggling, because the military establishment has been the bulwark of Turkish secularism since the proclamation of the republic.

What was the motivation of the military for such a political move? Promoting a benign form of Islam was a logical way to create organic solidarity within the Turkish society, which had been torn by ideological polarization and violence in the latter half of the 1970s. Hence the military elites’ new ideology tried to create an “umma” from the conflict-ridden Turkish society. Both right and left extremist ideologies were the targets of the military’s authoritarian campaign, and both sides were punished during the military junta. Yet the socialists and the leftist Kurdish nationalists, who were a major political force in southeastern part of Turkey in the 1980s, became the foremost political victims of the regime.

The co-optation strategy of the military can be analyzed on three levels. First, the military establishment nurtured a symbiotic relationship with the conservative Hearth of Intellectuals especially in designing the cultural policies of the state. Second, it altered national policy regarding religious education. Finally the head of the state, Kenan Evren,

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frequently used Islam in his speeches to legitimize the authoritarian policies of the military regime.

As mentioned in the previous section the Hearth of Intellectuals was a think tank that was formed in 1970 by conservative academicians in order to counter the intellectual hegemony of the left in the universities and among the youth. Their aim was to promote the idea of “native intellectuals” against the cosmopolitan left intellectuals, and to become the trusted, organic intelligentsia of the regime. One of the most important projects of the Hearth was the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis”, namely the creation of a new historical narrative by intermeshing Turkish nationalism with Islamic culture. The authoritarianism of the military years produced an important window of opportunity for the Hearth, which was an elitist association with a statist aim of transforming the society from the top down according to its own ideology. Since the ideology of the Hearth suited the aims of the military to create an apolitical organic society, the personnel and activities of the Hearth were incorporated into the institutional reform efforts of the new regime.

On November 2, 1981 the military announced the formation of a constitutional assembly that was comprised of the NSC and a Consultation Assembly (Danisma Meclisi) for the preparation of a new constitution. The responsibility of the Consultation Assembly, which was comprised of members who had no connection to any political party before the coup d’etat, was the preparation of proposals for a new constitution. Yet the NSC had the ultimate authority for the finalization of the constitutional provisions. During the preparation of the constitution, it was prohibited to submit recommendations

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to the Preparatory Committee of the Consultation Assembly in the name of any institution or association.

In spite of this ban, the Hearth submitted its own draft directly to the National Security Council. In addition two of the members of the Preparatory Committee, namely Sener Akyol and Yılmaz Altuğ, were members of the Hearth.\textsuperscript{197} After the ratification of the constitution by a plebiscite in 1982, the president of the Hearth stated in an interview that “the constitution and their draft overlapped 75-80 percent.”\textsuperscript{198} In another interview in 1987 he added “Yes, certainly we have supported [the coup of] 12 September. We supported its constitution. It is true that some of the proposals were suggested by members of the Hearth of Intellectuals. Therefore, it is true that we have problems with the scientific community, which demands significant changes in the [1982] constitution.”\textsuperscript{199}

In addition to the Hearth’s influence on the preparation of the 1982 constitution, members of the Hearth were brought to important positions in the bureaucracy. For example the State-Planning Office, which was responsible for the formulation of the five-year plans including public education and culture policy, was filled with the members of the Hearth.\textsuperscript{200} In 1983 the State-Planning Office published a document called 'Report on National Culture’ that became the basis of the culture and education policies of the ‘Fifth Five-Year Development Plan’. This document was prepared mostly by the professors

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\textsuperscript{200} Kaplan, S. 2005. “Religious Nationalism”: A Textbook Case from Turkey” \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East} 25, no. 3 (2005), 666
\end{flushright}
who belonged to the Hearth, and it suggested different methods to incorporate religion into the promotion of national consciousness.\textsuperscript{201}

The program included the following articles on cultural planning: “i) The state needs to make religious and moral planning, and to create a ‘religious map’ of Turkey; ii) The importance of religion and morality needs to be emphasized through public communication mediums, and in formal education; iii) The workers need to work with a religious devotion; iv) The cultural policies of the republican era need to be changed. Due to these policies, which did not support religious life we could not respond to the complex problems that emerged during industrialization; v) We need to encourage our people with spiritual education, religious and moral discipline, and national and historical consciousness; vi) Materialistic worldviews like pragmatism or positivism need to be removed from the curriculum of education.”\textsuperscript{202}

As these statements make clear, the state elites depicted the lack of religion in the previous periods as a major problem, and tried to create a religious consciousness in harmony with Turkish nationalism in order to create docile future citizens. The reference to the need of the workers to work with religious devotion is a clear criticism of the Marxist, revolutionary tendencies of the workers in the 1970s. Furthermore, a very hostile stance is taken in the report against the secularist and scientific worldviews or methodologies. These are depicted as the root causes of the political ills of the previous era. Not only the extreme left ideologies, but anything that is related to a rationalist, materialistic worldview is condemned in the report.

\textsuperscript{201} Timuroğlu, V. \textit{12 Eylül’un Eğitim ve Kultur Politikası Türk-Islam Sentezi} (İstanbul: Basak Yayınları, 1991), 91

Another venue for the dissemination of the Hearth’s ideology within the state was the Ataturk Culture, Language and History Higher Institution (Ataturk Kultur, Dil ve Tarih Yuksek Kurumu) that was formed under article 134 of the 1982 constitution. This institution was responsible for the coordination of the activities of the Turkish Historical Society (Turk Tarih Kurumu) and the Turkish Language Society (Turk Dil Kurumu). Since the Hearth members occupied the most important places in this newly formed institution, the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis became one of the official historical narratives of the state. In a report that was prepared by the institution in June 1986, Kemalism was defined “as a movement that directs the Turkish-Islamic culture to a new synthesis with the Western culture.”203 Due to this new interpretation of Kemalism, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, alongside the secular version of Kemalist ideology, became clearly visible in the narratives of the history books, which were prepared for elementary and high schools between 1980 and 1993.204

In addition to increasing presence of the Hearth members within the state institutions the new religious nationalism was also promoted by the military establishment itself. The General Staff published a three-volume work, “Ataturkculuk,” which explained among other things the compatibility of Ataturk’s views with Islamic teachings. The self-declared aim of these three volumes was “to guarantee that the future generations are systematically educated according to a national morality based on Ataturkist principles

and become good citizens, who embrace this ideology.” Thus, these three volumes were published “in order to provide source materials to the ‘History of Ataturkism and Reform’ classes taught in the educational institutions.” These source materials prepared for the education of primary and secondary students contained sections on religion.

The claims made in these sections demonstrate how Ataturkist principles were reinterpreted with a new twist by the military establishment in the aftermath of 1980. For instance, under a section entitled ‘Ataturk and the religion of Islam’ it is stated:

“Ataturkism understands and practices the basic tenets of Islam according to the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad’s path. These words belong to Ataturk: ‘I believe in my religion as I believe in reality. [It] does not contain anything contrary to consciousness or progress. Yet among this Asian nation [referring to the Turks’ pre-Islamic, Central Asian origins] that gave Turkey its independence, there is also a more complex, more artificial religion that is full of empty beliefs. These illiterates, these helpless people will be emancipated, when time comes’.”

On the one hand the paragraph conveys to the reader that Ataturk’s principles are fully compatible with the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammed’s teachings- without explaining how this compatibility works. On the other hand it is also asserted that the state should fight against a superstitious version of Islam. This dual stance towards religion describes very well the military regime’s behavior towards the religious actors. While the military was incorporating the rhetoric of the Hearth and very selective elements of Islam in its cultural policies, it also acted severely against the members of the closed NSP by prosecuting them in Military Martial Law Courts. For the military leaders the NSP was using a superstitious version of Islam and exploiting people’s religious

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206 Ibid. p. I
207 Ataturkculuk volume 3, (Istanbul, Milli Egitim Basimevi, 1988), 234
beliefs for political gain. While the use of religion by politicians for political gains was seen as harmful for the society, the true form of Islam needed to be protected, disseminated, and controlled by the guardians of the state. The following quotation from the same volume reflects the same logic:

“In Qur’an, shura 22, Verse 17 it is stated that ‘God will give his final judgment on the judgment day between the believers, the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and those, who worship others besides God. The truth is God is witness over all things.’ According to this clear statement, God did not give to anyone, to any religious or worldly institution the authority to control his commandments and to punish individuals due to their religious activities. There is no coercion in Islam. Ataturkism, which accepts the necessity of religion for the individual and the society, foresees the struggle against religious bigotry, the abolition of false religious institutions, the education of healthy religious functionaries, and the control of religious education in order to prevent religion’s control over institutions that are out of its jurisdiction”  

In addition to the publication of these three volumes, a new Department of Propagation (Irsad Idaresi) was formed in the Directorate of Religious Affairs with an aim to promote a new national consciousness based on the alliance of nationalism and religion.  

The military establishment also made effective use of the media for the dissemination of religious consciousness by increasing the number of the religious television programs in the national television, the only television broadcast in Turkey until 1990.

Second, changes in the religious education policy reveal important aspects of the co-optation strategy of the military regime. In 1981 a report with the title “Religious

208 Ibid. p.230  
Education and the Abuse of Religion” (*Din Egitimi ve Din Istismari*) was submitted to the prime ministry and the NSC.\(^{210}\) Among other things the report stated that the elective nature of the religious classes in primary and secondary education had created divisions among students. Therefore a national culture, the desired aim of these classes, could not be created.\(^{211}\) The report also added that the lack of religious instruction had led many people to unofficial religious education, and this benefited some groups that worked against the state. Consequently, it is suggested that the formerly civics classes and the voluntary religion classes should be combined and made compulsory.\(^{212}\) The generals seem to have listened to the advice of the report, since religious education was made compulsory in the primary and secondary schools, and this provision was put into the 1982 constitution.\(^{213}\)

The aim of this new compulsory religious education was explained in detail in an article written for the Turkish daily *Milliyet* by Necati Ozturk, the director general for religious education in 1981.

Compulsory religious education will conform to Ataturk’s principle of secularism by not mixing religion with the affairs of state. Such courses will meet the needs of family and community, as they are designed to fill the void in our children by imparting knowledge of morality and faith with a scientific bent. From a sociological point of view, the school is an extension of society; it reflects society’s characteristics. A

\(^{210}\) This report was prepared by high-level politicians and bureaucrats. The signatories of the report included, Mehmet Ozgunes, the minister of the State, Cevdet Mentes, the minister of Justice, Selahaddin Cetiner, the minister of Interior, Hasan Saglam, the minister of Education, Munir Guney, the minister of Rural Administration and Cooperatives, Vecdi Ozgul, minister of Sport and Youth, and Tayyar Altikutulac, the director of Religious Affairs.

\(^{211}\) *Nokta*, 26 March, 1989, p.19

\(^{212}\) Dilipak, A. 1990. *Bu Din Benim Dinim Degil*, (Istanbul: Isaret Yayinlari, 1990), 132

\(^{213}\) Article 24 of the 1982 constitution stated that “education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools”. See http://www.byegm.gov.tr/mevzuat/anayasa/anayasa-ing.htm. These new compulsory religious classes were named as “Culture of Religion and Knowledge of Moral” (*Din Kulturu ve Ahlak Bilgisi*) classes.
school devoid of the mores and values of its society cannot be considered an educational institution. It is thus impossible to ignore the fact of religion present in the mores and values of Turkish society.

Religious instruction in our schools is grounded on three general aims. (1) The individual aim: Religious sentiment has its place in the developmental stages of the child. (2) The historical and cultural aim: Compulsory education for the new generation must promote a self-identification with our history, literature, art- in short, with our national culture- through scientific and emotional modes of appreciation. (3) The social aim: Education must take into account the role religion plays in interpersonal and intergroup relations.\textsuperscript{214}

Ozturk’s claims reflect the organic understanding of society that the generals were trying to promote. According to him, the compulsory religion classes helped the students not only to internalize the moral values of a unified Turkish society in the present, but also to identify with the national culture that emerged throughout generations.

Furthermore, the military regime passed a law regarding the status of the Imam Hatip schools. The Basic Law of National Education that was passed on June 16, 1983 stated in Article 31 that graduates from the Imam Hatip high schools could enter any department in the university.\textsuperscript{215} Yet, the number of the Imam Hatip schools did not increase during the military government.

Lastly, the co-optation strategy of the military was clearly visible in the public speeches of the president, who used religious rhetoric to legitimize his authoritarian policies. Kenan Evren, who was a pious believer and the son of a prayer leader, used quotations from the Qur’an to give advice to the citizens on matters varying from how to


\textsuperscript{215} This was an improvement in the status of the graduates from the Imam-Hatip schools. Due to their vocational school status, in the centrally administered university entrance exam the graduates from these schools could either enter to the faculty of divinity or to departments related to literature.
dress to how to pray. Evren often emphasized that state-taught Islam is an important bulwark against the misguided attempts of those who try to use religion for political purposes. During one of his speeches in Malatya in 1981, Evren said “People ask me about why we made religious education compulsory. As I have said many times before, secularism does not mean atheism… We made religious education compulsory so that our children would not be brainwashed with superstitions.”

Furthermore he emphasized the importance of religion as a source of unity rather than conflict, as he states: “There is no distinction in our religion, such as Alevism or Sunnism. We cannot make distinctions between Alevi or Sunni. We are a nation that believes in the same religion, in the same book, in the same prophet and in the same God. Whoever makes this distinction should be punished. Here the most important job belongs to our teachers and religious preachers. If we teach our children in the schools that we belong to the same religion, they will not make these distinctions, once they grow up.”

All of these remarks by the president and other co-optation strategies discussed above show that Islam was a very important instrument utilized by the military regime to induce its de-politicization agenda into the once politically and ideologically torn society. The main aim was to create an organically united society with no important distinctions along religious, ethnic, class or ideological lines. Religious rhetoric was very selectively utilized for this aim, and was injected into an Ataturkist national narrative.

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216 Baskin, O. *Kenan Evren’ in Yazilmamis Anilari* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayinevi, 1989), 87. Translation is mine
6.3.3 The Motherland Party and a New Democratic Era

The military regime handed over the political power to the civilians, when general elections were held on November 6, 1983. The political parties of the turbulent pre-1980 era and their new incarnations were not allowed to run in the first highly restrictive multiparty elections. In these elections, the Motherland Party (MP, Anavatan Partisi), headed by Turgut Ozal, the Deputy Minister responsible for economic matters under the military government, received 45.2 percent of the votes and a comfortable majority in the parliament despite president Evren’s open criticism of the MP on the national television a few days before the elections.

During the MP governments (1983-1991), the political regime of Turkey became more civilianized, and the party initiated many political and liberal economic reforms. Yet there were also some important continuities between the military junta and the MP era. For instance the idea of creating an ‘organic unity’ in the Turkish society, which was one of the main pillars of the military regime’s ideology, was endorsed by the program and policies of Motherland. Ozal stated in many of his speeches that the ideological, divisive understanding of politics of the pre-coup era should be abandoned. He tried- and to a certain extent succeeded- in defining ideological and political issues in a technical manner, and to create a “new professional politician”, who thought as a rational, neutral technocrat.218 Hence the MP internalized a Weberian rationalism, and defined politics as a “competition for service to the society” in its party program. These new concepts promoted by the MP overlapped very much with the de-politicization agenda of the military regime.

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Furthermore, technocratic, non-ideological politics coupled with neo-liberal economic policies has created an “Ozalist youth” who put concerns on personal well-being over commitments to political ideologies. This yuppie consumerism and the new neo-liberal economic ideals were also in line with the growing global trends, which were known as Reaganism in the United States and Thatcherism in Britain.

Another sign of this organic understanding of politics was Ozal’s claim that the MP was unifying four different tendencies in the society. Accordingly, in its party program the MP defined itself as a party that is nationalist, conservative, committed to free market enterprise, and to social justice. In order to achieve this eclectic ideological goal, Ozal recruited politicians from the four main pre-coup political parties which represented different ideological agendas, namely the center-left Republican People’s Party, the center-right Justice Party, the ultranationalist Nationalist Action Party and the Islamist National Salvation Party. The new motto of the party became “the unification of the four tendencies under the roof of Motherland”. One of the founders of the party explained this logic of organic unity eloquently:

Mr. Turgut [Ozal] has read a poem in the first party congress: The rightist calls us leftist, the leftist calls us rightist. We neither belong to this nor to that, we belong both to this and that….The Western media has presented us as progressive conservative. We thought, and decided that we would not use even this label; we would not divide the nation. The aim of politics is not to divide the nation, [the aim is] to unify, to heal the wounds, to bring the rightist and the leftist under the roof of the same party.220

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219 During my interviews, one MP member stated that Ozal preferred to use the concept of “committed to free market enterprise” rather than liberal, since it would be hard for the populace to comprehend the latter term. Also he was afraid that using the concept “liberal” would give an impression to the people as if the party was contradicting its other tenet, hence “conservatism”.

220 Interview with Mehmet Kececiler on 21 February, 2007
6.3.3.1 Factions within the Motherland Party

Despite this rhetoric of politics without ideology, and an effort to assimilate all the four ideological tendencies into Motherland’s pragmatist worldview, political factions within the MP started to emerge, once party congresses triggered political competition for the party leadership. The three powerful factions within the party were the conservative faction, the nationalist faction, and the liberal faction. These factions were not firm groups with set policy agendas, and membership in these factions was fluid. It became clear in the interviews with the party activists that membership was based more on past-political commitments and life-style than well-developed programmatic differences:

...In MP, the distinction between conservative, nationalist, and liberal was not based on ideology...the distinction between liberals and conservatives was a nonsensical distinction based on people’s lifestyles. For instance the liberals used to define their liberalism by sipping whisky in the five-star hotels, while we defined our conservatism by going to the Friday prayer...This was an artificial distinction. If we look according to the roots, the conservative group came from the old Justice Party and the NSP....The individuals who are known as liberals in our party were rather social democrats, hence people with RPP roots. This group was labeling itself as ‘liberal’. Additionally they did not have any nationalistic or conservative worries. Mr. Turgut [Ozal] was interestingly a very pragmatic person, he was practical.221

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that this statement squares well with the political culture in Turkey, where people base their political decisions more on symbols and rhetoric than well-established programs. Within the MP during party congresses, factions started to compete with each other or to form alliances in order to influence the elections for the party leadership, and to put their own members in the party administration. Hence, despite the lack of clear boundaries between them, factions operated within the Motherland Party. The competition between those factions helped the

221 Interview with Hasan Celal Guzel on 13 February, 2007
media and the society to situate the ideology of the party, and recognize in which
direction the governing party was moving.

From the appointment of a bureaucrat to the interpretation of a law, anything
could be a point of friction between the different factions. For instance the liberals were
very insistent on the annulment of the articles 141 and 142 of the Turkish penal code,
since these articles interfered with freedom of speech. On the other hand the conservative
wing was more vocal on the need to get rid of article 163, which was restrictive of
religious freedoms. Similarly, conservatives were at the forefront of the struggle against
the ban on the headscarf in educational institutions.

The appointment of Cem Duna as the General Director of the Turkish Radio and
Television Institution (TRT), which had a monopoly over television broadcasting in
Turkey at the time, is a good example of how a bureaucratic appointment could instigate
an inter-factional dispute within the party. Duna’s appointment was bitterly criticized by
a city council member during a meeting of the party’s Ankara organization: “The general
director of the TRT has troubled us. It is clear what he stands for. I won’t speak much on
this issue. But in a country, where 99 percent of its population is Muslim, the General
Director of TRT should at least have the consciousness of Turkishness and the
consciousness of Islam.” When Duna claimed that he would permit the usage of any
word that is part of the living language in the television, he was protested by the members

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222 The Motherland Party has passed a bill that established liberty of dress in higher education in 1990. The
intent of the bill was to enable girls with headscarves to enter universities. After its passage, the bill has
been sent to the Constitutional Court by president Kenan Evren. Although the bill was not found
unconstitutional by the court, the judges put a footnote claiming that this bill can not be interpreted against
the dress code of the Turkish revolution. In the aftermath of this Constitutional Court decision, this footnote
is interpreted as a ban on headscarves in higher education. The issue of wearing headscarves in universities
and public institutions is still a burning political issue in Turkey.

223 Tercuman, 13 June 1988
of the conservative and nationalist factions, who thought that the decision would lead to
the frequent usage of English words in the media and a contamination of the purity of the
Turkish language.224

The competition between different factions got tenser during the party congresses.
In the first big party congress of the MP in 1985, a major struggle was prevented due to
Ozal’s undisputable charisma and the fact that the party was relatively new. Yet the
politics of competition between different factions intensified before and during the
second party congress of the MP in 1988. Mesut Yılmaz and Bülent Akarcaşlı were
portrayed as the two main leaders of the liberal group, while Mehmet Kececiler was seen
as the leader of the conservatives in the party. Just before this party congress the
conservative and the nationalist factions made what they called a “holy alliance”, against
the liberals. During the party congress this alliance passed a ‘key list’ in opposition to
Ozal’s will, so that more of their candidates would get elected to the Central Decision
Making and Executive Board.225 When they succeeded in their aim, and many liberal
MPs -even some ministers- could not get elected to the Board, a heated debate ensued in
the party.

This debate was so intense that one political observer claimed after the party
congress: “It [MP] is not the party in which four tendencies are united anymore. It

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224 Nokta, 17 April 1988
225 For the election to the Central Decision Making and Executive Board two lists were prepared. The first
list consisted of sixty candidates that were recommended to Ozal by the heads of the local party
organizations. The second list was Ozal’s special quota that consisted of twenty names out of which the
deleagtes were supposed to elect ten. The lists were unknown until the day of election. Yet minutes after
the lists were publicized in the congress, the conservative faction distributed its own list on which twenty-
five names from the first list and ten from the second list were crossed out. By doing this the conservatives
succeeded to put most of the candidates they supported to the Board.
became the party, in which four tendencies are quarrelling.” After the party congress both the liberals and nationalist-conservatives were disappointed. The liberals were unhappy, since they had lost their influence in the Central Decision Making and Executive Board, and saw that their support among the delegates was diminishing. The conservatives were not satisfied, since contrary to their expectations the results of the party congress were not reflected in the cabinet reshuffle or in Ozal’s new appointments to the top party administration. For instance, the leader of the conservative faction Mehmet Kececiler—allegedly the party’s most influential persona after Turgut Ozal—did not get any ministry in the cabinet in addition to losing his position as the head of the party administration. This created disappointment in the party’s base, and this disappointment was voiced by a declaration of 21 leaders of the local party organizations.

Turgut Ozal, as the leader of the party, reacted very pragmatically to these inter-factional debates. He tried to balance the power among different factions in his party, so that no split would occur, and neither faction would acquire a too powerful position within the party. Furthermore, he denied that different factions existed within the MP, when he spoke to the media. After the party congress of 1988 he said: “MP is a disciplined political organization and there are no factions or groups within MP as you and others in the media claim.” He even tried to persuade the party activists about this: “Let’s stop saying that there are four tendencies within MP. This was said in the

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226 Bekir Coskun, Gunaydin, 27 June, 1988
227 At the time it was frequently alleged in the media that president Kenan Evren rejected the appointment of Kececiler to the cabinet. Yet this was always denied both by Ozal and Evren.
228 Tercuman, 1 July, 1988
beginning. At that time this was said, because we were a new party and needed to explain where we came from. Yet there are no longer four tendencies; there is a merged MP.’”

Even Ozal’s position as the balancer could not prevent the internal strife within his party. Especially when he left the chairmanship of the MP to become the eighth president of the Turkish Republic in 1989, the leadership competition became the competition for ultimate hegemony within the Motherland Party between the conservatives and liberals. These political developments paved the way for the purge of the conservatives from the party. Yet before dealing with this ultimate showdown, it is important to focus on the activities of the conservative faction of the MP within the government and bureaucracy.

6.3.3.2 The Conservative Wing of the MP and its Relation to State Institutions

Another important continuity between the military regime and the Motherland Party governments was the co-optation of religion. The co-optation of Islam during the Motherland Party governments in 1983-1991 can be analyzed on four levels. First, Ozal’s personal piety and his ability to explain profane subjects with religious idioms appealed to many voters. Second, members of the conservative faction, who were civilian figures with close ties to the religious segments in the Turkish society, were appointed to important governmental positions. This led to an increased public display of Islam as well as the creation of patronage networks within the state. Third, conservatives within the government were influential in passing conservative legislation especially in social areas.

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Last, close ties between the state and the Hearth of Intellectuals continued during the MP era.

As mentioned before, Turgut Ozal had a very pragmatic stance as far as intra-party competition and national politics were concerned. However, on a personal level he was a practicing believer and very well connected to the religious circles in Turkey. He was a member of the Nakshibendi Sufi order (*ehl-i tarik*), and his brother Korkut Ozal, also a member of the order, had served as the minister of food, agriculture and animal husbandry and as interior minister during the NSP coalitions. Turgut Ozal was also nominated as a candidate from the NSP during the 1977 national elections in Izmir, but he could not get elected to the parliament.

Since Ozal knew very well that religious values played an important role in people’s lives in Turkey, he did not hesitate to emphasize them in party propaganda for communicating with the larger public. For instance on November 1, 1983, just before the elections, he declared in a televised address that “One of those [main points we emphasized when we created MP] is our being a nationalist-conservative party. Hence we have expressed our commitment to our traditions and practices in educational and cultural matters. We respect nationalist and moral values. We want to glorify these values. That’s why we can be named a nationalist-conservative party, and we believe that in Turkey, 90 percent of our society has this belief.”  

In addition to appealing to the masses with these broad conservative messages, Ozal was not hesitant to use Islamic concepts to explain profane subjects such as economics. When the Motherland Party was adopting liberalization measures in the field

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231 Dogan, K. *Turgut Ozal Belgeseli* (Ankara: Turk Haberler Ajansı Yayınları, 1994), 83
of economics, Ozal made the following remarks as the prime minister: “Order in Islam is based on the concept of unity (tevhid). In this order everything has a specific place and function, and moves in an organic relation according to certain rules. In the contemporary context what we mean by an organic relation is a functioning free market with its basic principles…There have always been similarities in the Western and Islamic market principles. First of all, both of them are free. In the Islamic market the prices are set freely and by the market mechanism as well. The Islamic market is superior in dealing with the formation of monopolies. On the one hand there is almsgiving (zekat) and on the other hand the principle of profit sharing instead of interest prevents monopolies.”

These references to Islam never became a significant part of the MP’s ideology; rather they were used in a very superficial way to appeal to the religious segments in the Turkish society.

Second, many bureaucrats or mayors from the closed NSP were appointed to bureaucratic positions during the MP period. Turgut Ozal took the entire team of his brother Korkut Ozal, who was the interior minister of the NSP, and brought them into important positions in the bureaucracy or party organization. Patronage networks that were built around this staff were especially active in the police department under the interior ministry of Abdulkadir Aksu, and in the ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Rural Affairs under Husnu Dogan. The existence of these patronage networks bothered others in the MP, so that Mustafa Tasar, an influential parliamentarian from MP, mentioned them in a memo that he prepared for the prime minister in 1990. In this memo Tasar

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233 Interview with Korkut Ozal. In Birand, M.A., and Yalcin, S. The Ozal: Bir Davanin Oykusu (Istanbul: Dogan Kitapcilik, 2001), 173-4
argued that the Welfare Party was benefiting from MP’s government through the appointment of its supporters to key positions in the bureaucracy. This, according to Tasar, also helped the WP to improve its public image.\footnote{Nokta, 18 November, 1990.} In addition to these patronage networks, the presence of pious members in the governing party led to an increasing display of Islamic lifestyle in the public places. The building of mosques in the Grand National Assembly and public universities was an example of this increasing public display.\footnote{Toprak, B. “The State, Politics and Religion in Turkey.” In State, Democracy and Military: Turkey in the 1980s ed. by Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin. (New York: W. de Gruyter , 1988), 133}

Third, a closer examination of the educational and cultural policies of the Motherland Party clearly reveals that conservative members of the party were intentionally placed in positions that could potentially influence cultural politics. This is not only revealed in the interviews with parliamentarians, but can also be inferred from legislation passed during the MP governments. Four ministers of education served in the MP governments in the course of 8 years.\footnote{The first minister of education, youth and sport was Vehbi Dincerler, who served in 1983-1985. In 1985 Ozal has replaced him with Metin Emiroglu, who served in 1985-1987. Hasan Celal Guzel succeeded Metin Emiroglu in 1987 and served until 1989 in this post. Avni Akyol was the Minister of education in the last two years of MP’s governments. Only Akyol did not belong to the conservative faction within the MP. In the following sections more will be said how the conservatives in MP started to lose their influence and were initially purged from the party, especially after Ozal left MP for presidency in November of 1989.} The first three ministers of education were members of the conservative faction, and according to Hasan Celal Guzel, minister of education in 1987-1989, Turgut Ozal intentionally appointed them as ministers of education due to their conservatism.\footnote{Interview with Hasan Celal Guzel on February, 13 2007} With these appointments the MP was giving to the periphery the message that the education of their children was in the hands of people with proper moral values.
When asked how they have interpreted MP’s conservatism and how they tried to apply it at the policy level, these ministers of education talked about a synthesis between modernity and Turkish-Islamic values:

I said that we need to make peace between Asim and Haluk. As you know Asim’s generation is [that of] the discourse of Mehmet Akif…This is a nationalist, patriotic generation that holds to its own cultural values…Haluk is Tevfik Fikret’s son, who later changed his religion….The poems that Tevfik Fikret wrote for his son are also beautiful. There, Tevfik Fikret expresses a humanist understanding, and Haluk is in a way a world citizen. This conflict between Mehmet Akif and Tevfik Fikret passed to future generations. On the one hand there was a nationalist-conservative understanding, on the other hand a liberal, humanist understanding that is open to the left. First, I said I would unite, reconcile these two understandings…Second [I said] a youth holding the Qur’an in his hand and wearing a space suit. And then I explained these two symbols: a youth who would not forget his identity, his essence, but would be open to science and development.238

Hasan Celal Guzel’s description of reconciling two different worldviews is in line with Ozal’s aim of bringing together different worldviews under the roof of the party. His portrayal of the youth with space clothes and the Qur’an also fits very well with MP government’s attempts to modernize Turkey technologically on the one hand, and to protect the moral values of the Turkish society on the other. Similar to Hasan Celal Guzel’s remarks, Vehbi Dincerler, the first minister of education in the MP government, also referred to a synthesis:

When you go to Japan, they do their weddings with clothes from thousands of years ago, they give salutes like they did thousands of years ago. The upbringing of the children, the perfection of their family life…The protection of the family life is one of the main pillars of our conservatism…This is why we tried to prevent everything that would create a chasm between the parents and the children. For instance we put in place a restriction on selling alcohol to the youth under 18…As the minister of education, I played an important role on passing

238 Interview with Hasan Celal Guzel on February 13 2007
this restriction…When we brought this restriction, we also prohibited selling beer in the villages. If anyone wants [to buy alcohol], he can go to the city and buy it from there…This was the sharpest thing [we did] according to our program.„239

By alluding to Japan, Dincerler emphasized the dual aims of the Motherland Party that Hasan Celal Guzel described above. Yet according to Dincerler, there was a need to enact laws that would ensure the preservation of the moral values of the Turkish society. Hence during his education ministry a law was enacted in 1984 to ban the opening of new bars within 200 meters of schools, sport clubs and mosques.240 In the realm of education, Dincerler was also active in promoting a religious worldview. For instance, he put creationism into the school books as an alternative to the evolutionary theory of Darwin. According to him, evolution was taught to the students as a law in the biology classes, and this practice hinted to the students that there could be a contradiction between science and religion.241 In order to prevent this misunderstanding, Dincerler sent a report to the schools on March 25, 1985, and demanded that “the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin should not be thought as a law in the course books.”242 Moreover, books written in the creationist circles in the United States were translated to Turkish, published by his ministry, and were distributed to all school teachers.243

239 Interview with Vehbi Dincerler on February 7, 2007
241 Nokta, 14 April, 1985.
242 Quoted from education ministry’s website: http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/1985/mart1985.htm. In his later interviews Dincerler claimed that his aim was to include both evolutionist and creationist theories in the curriculum so that the students would learn different theories about the origin of humans.
243 Acts and Facts 21 no.12 (1992). Some of these books that were translated by Turkish academics were: Gish, D. T. Yaratilis Evrim ve Halk Egitimi (Ankara: Milli Egitim Basimevi, 1985). Yaratilis Modeli (Ankara: Milli Egitim Basimevi, 1985). There were also some books written by Turkish academicians, such as: Yilmaz, I. and Uzunoglu, S. Alternatif Biyolojiye Dogru (Ankara: Milli Egitim Basimevi 1985); Tatli, A. 1985. Evrim ve Yaratilis (Ankara: Milli Egitim Basimevi 1985)
The conservative policies of the MP were not restricted to the realm of education, but also extended to other social spheres. For instance, in 1986 the government passed a law named the “law for protecting minors from harmful publications” (*Kucukleri Muzir Nesriyattan Koruma Kanunu*) and formed under the prime ministry an eleven member censorship committee that would supervise the appropriateness of written publications for the spiritual development of children. According to this law, the sale of certain publications, which would be labeled “harmful for children,” would be restricted to limited shops. Additionally, the owners of these publishing houses needed to pay monetary fines in significant amounts.\(^\text{244}\) The law provided the government with an important tool of social control in the realm of communication, since the censorship committee was part of the executive power, rather than the judiciary.

The MP also took a pro-active stance in protecting the institution of family that was portrayed as the most basic pillar of a healthy society in its party program. With the initiative of the conservative Minister of State, Cemil Cicek, the government passed a decree law for the formation of ‘Family Research Institution’ in 1989. One of the first activities of this institution was to prepare a serial named “Home” for the national television. The theme of the serial is indicative of how the state television was used as a site for the construction of a conservative ideology.

The heroine of the serial, the wife of a woodcarver, led a happy life as a housewife and mother until she was attracted to the dynamic life style of her friend, who is a single businesswoman. As she started to spend more time with her and to engage in social activities, she realized that she was neglecting her family. At the end of the serial

\(^\text{244}\ Nokta, 23 February, 1986\)
she understood that her friend was lonely and the life she chose was wrong. Therefore she decided to continue to her life as a happy housewife. The plot clearly aims to construct the idea of women as breeders and homemakers, and also gives the message that woman’s work outside of home might be a threat to the order of the family.

The formation of twelve public “Family Consultation Centers” that were headed by Melih Gokcek followed the opening of the Family Research Institution. One of the main aims of these centers was the preservation of the extended Muslim family that was threatened by new sociological trends. The main activity of these centers was to give consultation to the partners who were considering divorce and to convince them to continue to their marriage. Since divorce was still a taboo in Turkey at the time, and many women saw it as a last resort, the policies of the government were criticized in the socially progressive circles. Feminists claimed that the aim of these centers was to force women, who were already vulnerable, to stay in unbearable marriages. On November 2, 1989 forty feminists filed symbolically for divorce in order to protest these centers. The minister of state, Cemil Cicek’s response was harsh: “Feminism corrupts the order of the family…Like drug addiction, feminism is a deviation.”

The aim of the conservatives within MP in designing this type of legislation and the political importance of this legislation were summed up very well by Mehmet Kececiler, the head of the conservative faction:

245 Kapan, A. “Cemil Cicek’in Aileyi Kurtarma Harekati” Birikim 20 (1990), 74
246 Melih Gokcek was a government bureaucrat in 1989-1991 from the Motherland Party. He was transferred to the Welfare Party before the 1991 elections. From WP he was elected to the parliament in 1991, and became the mayor of Ankara in 1994. Today he is serving his fourth term as the mayor of Turkey’s capital.
247 Nokta, November 11, 1990
248 Kapan, A. “Cemil Cicek’in Aileyi Kurtarma Harekati” Birikim 20 (1990), 74
The type of person, who believes that he will need to account for his actions after his death, is actually a good type of citizen. It is much easier to govern such a person and to direct him to goodness. It is harder to govern people, who do not believe in anything or in any value. This is why the order that the conservative people would form in Turkey could develop much better.249

These remarks show the striking similarity between the military regime’s agenda of using Islam as a tool of de-politicization and the aspiration of the conservatives within MP by pointing to the relationship between the God-fearing character of the believers and the state’s ability to govern. These words also reveal the elitist view of Kececiler, since he defines politics as a matter of governing people from above, rather than society’s self-government.

Finally, the last sign of co-optation of Islam by the MP was the continuation of the Hearth’s influence within the state institutions. Important ministers in the Ozal governments –such as Hasan Celal Guzel and Kazim Oksay- were members of the Hearth. In the Fourth Nationlists’ Congress prepared by the Hearth in January 1987, two ministers (Dincerler and Guzel) and the vice head of the Grand National Assembly (A.S. Bilgin) from the MP delivered speeches. Turgut Ozal, as the prime minister, sent a congratulatory message to the congress.250

The close relationship between the Hearth and the governing party was also reflected in the state’s educational policies and bureaucratic appointments. For instance, the education ministry had all textbooks completely revised to conform to the tenets of

249 Interview with Mehmet Kececiler on 21 February, 2007
250 Copeux, E. 1998. Tarih Ders Kitaplarinda (1931-1993) Turk Tarih Tezinden Turk-Islam Sentezine. (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfi Yurt Yayinlari), 63. Although Turgut Ozal never became a member of the Hearth, he was very close to the social circles around this institution. For instance he outlined his famous 24 January economic program at one of Hearth’s meetings in April 1979.
the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, and the new textbooks emphasized “the alliance between
the military and religion as native to the Turks’ cultural essence.”251 In my interview with
Vehbi Dincerler, he also stated that religion is the most important cement of national
identity.252 Furthermore, permanent staffs of the public universities, the Higher Education
Council, and the TRT were filled with members of the Hearth.253

These bureaucratic appointments, passage of conservative legislation, and the
statements of the conservative members of the MP indicate that state institutions such as
the education ministry, national television, family consultation centers within the ministry
of state, or Ataturk Culture, Language and History Higher Institution emerged as sites,
where a conservative ideology was constructed. These cultural resources of the state
were used by the conservative faction of the MP to communicate its religious messages.
Hence, although the MP was composed of different factions, due to Ozal’s pragmatism
the party succeeded in presenting itself as a conservative party to the various religious
constituencies. Yet, the support of the religious segments of the society for the MP waned
and shifted due to the heavy criticism directed to the MP’s co-optation policies by
different religious actors. Before describing these criticisms of the religious actors
towards the MP, it is necessary to deal with some of the political developments that
occurred within MP after Ozal’s ascendance to presidency.

251 Kaplan, S. “Din-u Devlet All over again? The Politics of Military Secularism and Religious Militarism
in Turkey” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 34 (2002), 121
252 In the interview Dincerler emphasized that religion, rather than Islam, should be seen as the most
integration element of a nation.
253 Alper, E. and Goral, O. S. “Aydinlar Ocagi”. In *Muhafazakarlik* ed.by Ahmet Cigdem (Istanbul, Iletisim
Yayinlari: 2003)
6.3.3.3 Ozal’s Presidency and the Struggle for Hegemony within the MP

As mentioned above Ozal succeeded in sustaining a carefully crafted balance between different factions within the party during his leadership. Yet this balance started to crumble as soon as he declared his decision to become a candidate for president of Turkey just before Kenan Evren’s term expired. Since Ozal knew that a struggle between the conservatives and liberals would ensue in the party, he tried to make all factions agree to a common candidate to replace him as the chairman of the party. When there was no consensus between the sides, he nominated Yildirim Akbulut, a low-profile, non-ideological member, who was the head of the Turkish National Assembly at the time. Although Yildirim Akbulut’s candidacy was unexpected for almost everyone in the party, he was elected with little opposition, and replaced Ozal as the next prime minister.

During the first year of his presidency, Ozal concentrated all the political power in his hands by effectively controlling the actions of the prime minister. Akbulut was seen as a mere puppet of the president. However, since Akbulut was not a competent leader and Ozal lost his official ties to the MP, the competition between the liberals and the conservatives soon surfaced for the control of the party. The leadership race in the Istanbul party congress in February 1991 was a vivid example of this competition. Gaining the control of the Istanbul party organization was very important for both sides, since the city held one sixth of all the national party delegates. Also both factions saw the Istanbul party congress as the most important step for the foreseeable national party congress.

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254 Hasan Celal Guzel was the other candidate, who could not pose a significant challenge to Akbulut. At the time Ozal was still the most influential person in the party and his support was still decisive. In addition, Akbulut’s low profile and his equal distance from both factions reduced opposition to his candidacy.
Under these conditions, Turgut Ozal’s wife Semra Ozal was declared as the candidate of the liberals. It was no secret that Semra Ozal, who was known as the secular aunt (*laik yenge*), did not have any sympathy towards the conservatives within the MP since the formation of the party. The conservative wing of the party nominated Talat Yilmaz, the head of the party organization in the conservative county Fatih, and threw all of its support behind him. For Turgut Ozal the primary concern was not the struggle between the conservatives and the liberals, but rather his influence over the party and the government. Hence, he saw his wife’s nomination as an opportunity for regaining his waning control over the party organization. Therefore, he used Machiavellian tactics, and manipulated the liberal-conservative divide for the election of his wife.

For instance, despite his status as the president, who should stay above party politics, he harshly criticized the conservatives in the party with these words: “I prefer that the MP should stay as a modern, secular, reconciliatory party. The indispensable elements of a constitutional democracy are political parties. If one of them, particularly the one with a majority, is in danger of conquest by obsessed people, who desire to go back to the pre-Islamic *jahiliyyah*²⁵⁵ times, I would definitely support anyone, who is standing by modernism, women’s rights, and secularism.”²⁵⁶ In addition to these unfounded accusations, the conservative minister of labor and social security, Husnu Dogan, was removed from his post because he took an openly critical stance against Semra Ozal’s nomination.²⁵⁷ Before the convening of the Istanbul congress, there were

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²⁵⁵ *Jahiliyyah* refers to the condition of the Arabs in pre-Islamic Arabia. The word literally means the state of ignorance.

²⁵⁶ Sabah, 2 March, 1991

²⁵⁷ Husnu Dogan was the first cousin of Turgut Ozal and one of the prominent founders of Motherland Party. Since the formation of MP he has been very close to Ozal. In spite of this backgorund, the
also some changes in the powers of the ministries that belonged to the conservative faction. Although these changes within the government were undertaken by the prime minister, it was clear that Ozal was the orchestrating force behind Akbulut.

Conservative members within the party reacted to the words of Ozal and to other attempts to weaken the powers of the conservative ministers within the government. For instance, one conservative member within the party stated: “Under normal circumstances Ozal would not exclude the conservatives. Thanks to them, [the Motherland Party] got all the votes and formed the government. Until today they have fought together. A person does not throw away the foundation of the building…The one who denounces his origin engages in wrongful behavior…It is wrong that [Ozal] changes sides.”

The MP’s Istanbul party congress which convened on 28 February 1991 was full of tension, arm twisting, and irregularities. Due to the high level of tension, the voting could not be finished, and the congress was postponed to 28 April 1991. On this date, Semra Ozal won the leadership of the Istanbul organization, when she received 351 votes against her opponent’s 269. This election was the precursor of the national party congress that convened the next month.

The national congress was seen as the ultimate showdown between the conservatives and the liberals for the leadership of the party. In this congress the conservatives gathered around the candidacy of Yildirim Akbulut, who they thought could sway the moderate vote in addition to getting the conservative support. Mesut Yilmaz, who resigned from his post as the foreign minister in Akbulut’s cabinet two

relationship between the two soured over Semra Ozal’s candidacy and Ozal’s hostile behavior towards the conservatives.

258 Zaman, 8 March, 1991
months before the congress, became the candidate of the liberals. Also Hasan Celal Guzel participated in the party’s leadership race, although he was a marginal candidate. In the first round of the election Mesut Yilmaz received 580 against Yildirim Akbulut’s 557, while Hasan Celal Guzel could only collect 20 votes. Yilmaz swayed the second round with 630 votes, although Hasan Celal Guzel quit the race in favor of Akbulut before this round. Turgut Ozal’s position in this race is unclear to this day. According to my interviewees, Ozal declared to both factions that he supported their candidates in order to retain some kind of leverage over the party after the elections.

Yet, Mesut Yilmaz was not willing to share his power as the chairman of the party with anyone. Hence, he effectively pulled the MP out of the orbit of Ozal, and asserted his absolute control over the party organization. More importantly, Yilmaz’s election signaled to the MP constituency that the MP was losing its conservative character, and that the conservatives were being purged from its party. Immediately after his election as the MP chairman, Mesut Yilmaz emphasized the relevance of the conservative-liberal factional dispute in the party congress: “It is a happy development for Turkey that the use of religion, which is very important for our people, for political purposes is not credited even in a rightist party”²⁵⁹.

Although no split occurred within the MP at that time, the power of the conservative faction was significantly reduced. Many conservatives were distanced from the party administration, and others were either not nominated or were nominated to

²⁵⁹ Nokta, 30 June 1991.
weak places in the party lists in the upcoming national elections in October 1991. Some openly criticized the developments within the party. For instance, Cemil Cicek, who served as the minister of the state in 1987-1991, openly criticized the purge of the conservatives from the party, and declared publicly that he would vote for the Welfare Party in the next national elections. Obviously Erbakan did not miss this opportunity in the election campaigns, and accused the MP of becoming a ‘masonic party’, due to the purge of all of religious members from the party organization.

Even the Hearth of Intellectuals withdrew its political support from the MP. Members of the Hearth, especially its president Nevzat Yalcintas, worked hard for an electoral alliance between the Islamist WP, the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (NAP), and the small Reformist Democracy Party (RDP) for the 1991 national elections. Once the three parties agreed to form an alliance under the roof of the WP for the national election, the Hearth gave its full support to the WP. The members of the Hearth thought that only this “holy alliance” could secure the representation of their conservative ideas in the National Assembly.

The results of the national elections were an upset for the MP. Its vote share shrank to 24.1 percent, and it became an opposition party after governing Turkey for 8 consecutive years. The new government was a coalition formed by the center right True Path Party and the center left Social Democratic Populist Party. On the other hand, the WP doubled its national vote share from the previous elections, and received 16.2 percent

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260 Yet this does not mean that all of the conservatives were purged from the MP at that time. Some important conservative figures were able to keep positions in the party administration or to get elected to the parliament from the MP.
262 Tercuman, 3 October 1991.
263 The electoral alliance between these parties is named as the holy alliance by the three parties and by the media throughout the campaign.
of the votes. After these elections the Islamist WP became the new center of attention for the conservative constituency, and constantly increased its vote share until its remarkable success in the 1994 municipal election and 1995 national election. Moreover many important conservative activists gradually resigned from the MP, and joined the WP in the years following Mesut Yilmaz’s election in the Motherland Party.\footnote{One of MP’s founders and the former mayor of Ankara, Mehmet Altinsoy, minister of interior Abdulkadir Aksu, the mayor of Samsun, Vehbi Gul and Melih Gokcek were the most well-known political figures who joined WP after resigning from the Motherland Party. Yet in addition to these figures, entire party organizations left MP, and joined WP in 1991-1995.}

After the national elections, the weakened conservatives within MP made a last attempt for the party leadership in the national party congress in December 1992, and nominated Mehmet Kececiler to replace the liberal Yilmaz as the party chairman. Turgut Ozal, who realized that he had lost his control over the party to Mesut Yilmaz, this time put all of his weight behind Mehmet Kececiler’s candidacy. Yet, this attempt was not successful and the inevitable split occurred in the MP. First, Kececiler and 15 members of the parliament resigned from the party. These resignations were followed by many who were founders, ex-members of the parliament and ex-ministers.\footnote{Mehmet Kececiler, Husnu Dogan, Abdulkadir Aksu, Oltan Sungurlu, Yildirim Akbulut, Mehmet Altinsoy, Cemil Cicek were among those, who resigned from their party.} In addition 6 county organizations in Istanbul announced that they were leaving the party in an attempt to spark more resignations. The aim of Kececiler’s team was to create a new splinter party, but these plans did not materialize, since the resignations that Kececiler’s team was expecting from the MP were not sufficient to form a new party. Hence, Kececiler and some of his friends returned to the MP after three months. Yet, it was too late for the MP and Mesut Yilmaz to create the synergy that Ozal had created by his “four tendencies”
rhetoric. Moreover, although Kececiler returned to the MP, many conservatives did not. These Islamically-oriented conservatives gradually joined the ranks of Erbakan’s WP.

The reaction the WP showed to Mehmet Kececiler’s run for the party leadership and then to his consequent resignation is worth analyzing to demonstrate the debates within the religious camp. After Kececiler declared that he would run for the party leadership, many articles that speculated on the reasons of this move appeared in “Milli Gazete”, the mouthpiece of the National Outlook Movement. One of the common narratives in the paper stated that Ozal was trying to bring the conservatives to the forefront of the party to counter the WP’s recent electoral success and to portray the MP as a conservative party in order to deceive the electorate.

When Kececiler lost the congress and resigned from the MP, an open letter to the conservatives of the MP emerged in the first page of Milli Gazete. The letter invited these conservatives to their real home, next to their brothers. This invitation was repeated several times by Erbakan in his public speeches in the following days. Although Kececiler never joined the WP, many conservatives who left the MP joined the ranks of the WP. This move strengthened the WP in organizational terms as well as in terms of electoral support.

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266 The electoral success that these articles were referring to is related to partial municipal elections held on November 1, 1992. The elections were not nationwide. They were held only in 20 districts with 2 million voters. In these elections WP won more than 24 percent of the national vote that was more than any other political party. In Istanbul, it received 27 percent of the vote and four out of the six municipalities to the surprise of many political observers.

267 For example see Zeki Ceyhan “Daha onceleri nerelediye diniz?” Milli Gazete, November 19, 1992 and “Ozal takunyalarini mi ariyor” Milli Gazete, November 21, 1992

268 Milli Gazete, December 2, 1992
6.4 Critique of the Co-optation Strategies by the Religious Actors and Shifting Allegiance of the Periphery

Even after the 1992 National Congress the MP tried to retain its conservative image. Mesut Yilmaz transferred some heavy-weight conservatives before the 1995 elections, such as Ali Coskun or Korkut Ozal to boost his party’s conservative outlook. Yet these were futile attempts in convincing the electorate. The strategy of religious co-optation had been discredited due to heavy criticism from the religious actors outside the Motherland Party. Due to these criticisms, the periphery has put its political support to Erbakan’s National Outlook Movement, which was represented by the Welfare Party in the 1990s.

Despite the MP’s self-identification as a conservative party, religious actors voiced three different lines of criticism towards the MP’s policies in particular and towards co-optation of religion in general. First, the WP activists and related media criticized the MP for its economic policies. This line of criticism emphasized that the liberal economic policies of the MP were harmful to the citizens in the moral realm. According to the WP members economic policies were strictly tied to the cultural-moral realm as indicated by the ideology of the National Outlook Movement.

Second, criticism towards the MP in the conservative media proliferated, once the power of the conservatives started to wane within this party. Religious newspapers, such as Zaman and Milli Gazete depicted this development as the purge of the state institutions from conservative elements. Furthermore, they have severely criticized the statements and actions of the education minister Avni Akyol, who they saw as a threat towards the
continuation of the conservative hegemony in the sphere of national education.

Last, the strongest and most principled attack came from Islamist intellectuals towards the co-optation of Islam during both MP and military governments. These intellectuals stated that the instrumental use of Islam by the state institutions and the incorporation of selective elements from Islam into the official state narrative aimed to tame the rising authentic Islamist tide. According to this line of thought, state co-optation of religion also corrupted people’s understanding of the authentic Islam.

First, the common criticism voiced by most of the WP activists whom I have interviewed was geared towards the MP’s economic policies. According to these party activists there was a significant relationship between the socioeconomic realm and the spiritual/cultural realm. Therefore, the neo-liberal economic policies of the MP inevitably affected its cultural politics. The words of a WP activist sum up this line of argument very well:

[National Outlook] is more for social justice and more egalitarian [than the Motherland Party]. Particularly in terms of receiving a fair share from the budget, it protects the rights of low-wage, poor milieus…Yet the MP was not like this…for instance Ozal’s claims such as ‘I like the rich very much’ distinguished us from MP…[National Outlook] was a movement that opposed the economic policies [of the MP] and also exposed that this economic model would corrupt national values and the understanding of morality….The MP said just free market economy, but did not put any filter to it…we, however, stand for a free market order that is for social justice and is morally equipped …These criteria set us apart from the MP. Inevitably this understanding in economy was reflected in social life and moral sphere.269

Accordingly, WP activists emphasized throughout the election campaigns of 1987 and 1991 that the neo-liberal economic policies of the MP paved the way for wild

269 Interview with Seref Malkoc on February 22, 2007. Malkoc was elected as a member of parliament from the WP in 1995 and from the Virtue Party in 1999 from Trabzon.
capitalism, which in turn weakened the citizens in the moral/cultural realm. In WP’s election rallies, it was not uncommon for Necmettin Erbakan to use phrases such as: “You see the Motherland Party. Isn’t it this MP that opens casinos and induces more than half a million of our women into prostitution? The paint came off the tin”\textsuperscript{270}, or “[during the MP governments] the disease that is called AIDS is coming here from Europe. Youngsters are starting to use drugs in their schools. From the six channels in the national television, dirt is flowing. In Turkey divorces are increasing 28 percent each year. In ten years there won’t be any notion of ‘family’ in Turkey.”\textsuperscript{271} With these statements Erbakan was pointing to a common concern among the religious constituents, namely Turkey’s integration into global capitalism and the hyper-modernization of the society under the MP governments. He emphasized in the WP’s campaigns that these developments, which were detrimental to the social fabric of the Turkish society, were the consequences of MP policies. The effects of the integration into the global economy could be felt through increasing tourism, the opening of the casinos, or through the proliferation of the television channels.

In addition to this hyper-modernization/global capitalism criticism, both the religious media and the WP activists started to emphasize the purge of the conservatives from the Motherland Party, and how the MP began to lose its conservative identity in the wake of the 1991 elections. The bitterest criticism was pointed towards Ozal, when he depicted the conservatives within the party as “people from the jahiliyya times” due to their challenge to his wife’s candidacy in the 1991 Istanbul party congress. This rhetoric

\textsuperscript{270} Tercuman, 9 November, 1987
\textsuperscript{271} Tercuman, 18 October 1991.
created immediate reactions from the conservative circles, and it was interpreted as Ozal’s denunciation of his own past.

Ahmet Tasgetiren’s long diatribe against Ozal in the daily *Zaman* is a good example of how a narrative critical of Ozal was constructed at the time. In his article Tasgetiren first argues that one of the reasons for Ozal’s ascendancy to the prime ministry and afterwards to the presidency was his piety. According to him, many of the conservative MP activists convinced people to vote for the MP by depicting a prime minister who was doing his daily prayers, so that ordinary people would identify with him. People also approved his presidency, since -contrary to prior presidents, who were all ex-military men- a president who regularly goes to mosque was appealing to the man on the street. Yet Tasgetiren claimed that Ozal’s direct attack against his conservative colleagues due to Machiavellian considerations was simply inexcusable and constituted a horrible example of backstabbing. He added that Turkish citizens will not remember him for his piety after these words. He finished his article by stating that Islam is necessary for one’s life not only for a period of time, but all along one’s life and even in the afterlife.272 This long and harsh article is a good example of how closely the conservative-liberal struggle in the governing party was followed by the religious segments and how sensitive the issue was for the religious actors.

A similar line of criticism focused on the MP’s changing political commitments. The religious media harshly criticized the weakening of the conservatives within the MP. Ahmet Selim, a columnist of *Zaman*, critiqued the purge of the conservative elements from the MP. After he discussed the changes in the MP’s ideology in the party

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congresses, he stated that an ideology of modernization without the conservation of core values is doomed to failure: “An understanding of modernization that humiliates conservatism (muhafazakarlık) does not have any place and mission in any era. Such [an understanding] is just created to impede the rotation of the wheels, and this is exactly fanaticism (tutuculuk). That it tries to call others by its own name is a futile attempt to conceal its own situation…We, as a nation, as the believing people of this nation, should show the virtue to act with patience and effort. We need to understand that we are on the verge of a historical development.” Selim’s statements showed that the religious media was discontent with the MP’s weakening commitment to conservative values and depicted it as a party harming religious fabric of the Turkish society.

Furthermore, Avni Akyol, who served as the education minister of the Motherland Party government in 1989-1991, became one of the targets of the religious newspapers during his ministry. The religious media criticized Avni Akyol for having a leftist agenda during his education ministry and for having a close affinity with the secularist civil society organization ‘Association for Support of Modern Life’ (Cagdas Yasami Destekleme Dernegi) that is known for having an antagonistic stance against the religious life style. Akyol was also criticized harshly for i) purposely discriminating against the graduates from the Imam Hatip schools in his bureaucratic appointments; ii) not opening more Imam Hatip schools; iii) and for decreasing the share of religious instruction in the overall budget for education. These criticisms, which appeared in different religious newspapers, confirm the existence of the competition for cultural hegemony in the field of education during the MP governments. These newspapers,

which were content with the previous education ministers due to their conservative
leanings, started to criticize the MP and the liberal leaning Avni Akyol, once they
realized that his appointment was threatening the hegemony of the conservatives within
the field of education.274

A more principled attack is voiced by Islamist intellectuals not directly against the
MP’s conservative character, but against the co-optation of Islam by the military regime
and by the MP governments. Bahri Zengin, the author of numerous books and articles, is
the most influential ideologue within the National Outlook Movement. When asked how
the National Outlook Movement differed from the conservative MP, Zengin responded:

Throughout history, particularly during the times of the prophet, it is clearly
observed. The movements that are first weak, but have very strong ideas, are
countered by their opposites. However later, when these opposites appear to
be insufficient, and these movements get stronger, they are countered by their
likes. And to differentiate these similar movements is a more difficult job; it
is the job of professionals.275

Zengin, who was the head of the publicity campaign of the WP in 1985-87 and
1990-93, argued that the aim of the MP was just to appear religious. The National
Outlook Movement was an authentic religious social movement, and the aim of the MP,
as of its analogues in history, was to hinder the increasing Islamic awareness that the
NOM represented in the Turkish society. Zengin also mentioned that the WP activists had
very clearly communicated to the citizens that the MP was just a bad imitation of the
National Outlook. Characterizing the MP as an imitation of National Outlook to impede

274 The same observation is also valid for the secularist media that constantly criticized the conservative
275 Interview with Bahri Zengin 7 March, 2007
authentic religious revitalization definitely played a role in the rise of the WP in the 1990s.

There were also independent Islamist intellectuals, who criticized the practices of co-optation. Ali Bulac, one of the most influential Islamist intellectuals in Turkey, implicitly criticizes the idea of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis adopted as the official ideological narrative in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d’état. In his book “Religion and Modernism”, he categorically criticizes nationalization of religion in any context: “Those who want to see and present Islam as the religion of the Middle Eastern nations are making the mistake of blocking this universal salvation message by restricting it to limits of a geographical and historical region. Hence the most vivid evidence of this is the idea of spiritual community in Islam that transcends the concept of nation and accepts the umma as the correct and ultimate aim.”

Bulac also takes issue with the instrumental use of religion by the military and MP governments: “[The great powers of the world system] are trying to neutralize religion in the Islamic world by ‘Islamization’…Here the aim is to promote the functional role of an “anti-Islamic Islam.” According to Bulac the clear aim of these political efforts is to tame the Islamic tide that is on the rise in the Islamic world.

Bulac does not stop his criticism there. He also sees important problems in MP’s attempts to reconcile Islamic values and the modern life style. According to Bulac attempts to reconcile the two would ultimately corrupt Islamic practices: “The biggest threat is modernism’s claiming mastery of Islam, although it [modernism] is ‘outside religion.’ This policy leads us to an interest-free banking system, to beaches with real

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276 Bulac, A. Din ve Modernizm: Tarihın Kırilma Anında Tufan (Istanbul: Endulus Yayınları, 1990), 243
277 Ibid. p.236
Sharia shorts and bathing suits…The formula is quite innocent: ‘Bank without interest, adultery without sin, beer without alcohol.’”278 Bulac was very well aware of the commodification of Islam during the Motherland Party era. The conservatives within the MP were also the economic elites of the religious segments in the Turkish society. Due to their class position and due to the MP’s ideological attempt to synthesize economic modernism and conservatism, these elites initiated new concepts like “headscarf fashion shows”, “interest free banking”, “iftar dinners in luxury hotels”, etc. These concepts started to be part of the daily practices in the religious milieu in the following decades. Bulac astutely observes these developments and argues that these attempts to synthesize modernity and religious practices would inevitably contaminate the religious beliefs and practices.

Different from Bulac’s sociological critique, Abdurrahman Dilipak, one of the more radical Islamist intellectuals, directly targets the compulsory religion classes initiated by the military government.

It is important to note that all of these lines of criticism by social actors were directed towards the state’s attempts to incorporate religion and the close relationship between the conservative actors and the state institutions. This multilayered criticism voiced by different actors within the religious sector discredited the MP and any other attempt to incorporate religion into the state institutions by secular actors. It also helped the WP to emerge as the center of attention for periphery’s political support. The WP started to be seen- and presented itself- as the authentic Islamic political movement that would best represent the religious concerns in Turkey. In the post-1980 politics this shift

278 Ibid. p.236
of political support by the religious constituents proved to be pivotal for the future of political Islam in Turkey in the 1990s.

6.5 Conclusion

In Turkey, incorporation of religious actors into the government and high-level bureaucratic institutions started in 1974 and continued throughout the 1980s. During its coalition membership in the Ecevit government and in the two Nationalist Front governments in the 1970s, the Islamist NSP was recognized as a legitimate political actor in Turkish politics, and Erbakan’s party used its ministries and governmental agencies to create patronage networks, which survived into the post-1980 politics.

The military government (1980-83), which ended the tumultuous era of the coalitions and street violence, used selective elements from Islam in its ideology in order to create an organically unified society. Moreover the creation of a symbiotic relationship between the Hearth of Intellectuals and the military helped the members of this conservative think-tank to come to prominent positions in the bureaucracy. It is during this time that the Hearth’s ideology of Turkish-Islamic synthesis started to shape the cultural and educational policies of the regime.

The MP governments (1983-1991) also co-opted religion through the inclusion of a conservative faction -part of which was Korkut Ozal’s team from the NSP- within the government and through the continuation of the close relationship between the Hearth and the state. Although the MP was composed of different factions, the party succeeded in presenting itself as a conservative party to the religious constituents in various
avenues. Similar to Shas in Israel, during this period, the conservative faction within the MP used the cultural resources of the state. State institutions such as the education ministry, national television, family consultation centers, or Atatürk Culture, Language and History Higher Institution emerged as institutional sites where a conservative ideology was constructed and communicated to the larger public. As a consequence of this, religious social actors found a receptive environment to increase their public appeal.

On the other hand, the instrumental use of religion by the state triggered a totally different dynamic. Autonomous religious actors, such as religious newspapers, the Welfare Party and the Islamist intellectuals criticized MP policies in particular and the instrumental use of Islam in general. While the WP activists and related media claimed that liberal economic policies of the MP were harmful to the citizens in the moral realm, others protested the weakening of the conservative influence within the MP in general and in the education ministry in particular. Moreover, Islamist intellectuals claimed that both the military government’s use of Islam and the MP’s lip service to conservative constituents were harmful to the authentic Islamic movements. Due to these criticisms the support given to the MP by the religious actors waned, and the Welfare Party emerged as the new center of attention for the strengthened religious actors. At the same time the interfactional struggle within the MP led to the weakening of the conservatives within the party and the government. Hence, many of the conservatives from the MP moved to the WP adding to its political strength.

In sum, the co-optation of the religious actors by the state created an important dynamic that paved the way for the WP’s success. On the one hand state institutions
emerged as important institutional sites for the Islamic movement to flourish. On the other hand the co-optation strategy drew criticism towards the MP, so that the MP lost its conservative image and the WP emerged as the new political force to mobilize the religious constituents.
7.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter starts with a description of Shas’s formation, decision-making structure, and bases of political support. Then, it evaluates different parts of Shas’s ideology. As discussed in Chapter 3, Shas emerged in Israel at a time when the sociocultural cleavage between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim was politicized because of the closer contact between these two groups. In this context, Shas addressed both ideologically and in terms of policy the social and cultural frustrations of the Sephardi underclass in Israel. Shas was able to emerge as the main representative of the Sephardim, because the party’s ideology successfully blended religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic messages and mobilized ultra-orthodox, traditional, and non-observant Sephardim.

This eclectic ideology of Shas has different dimensions. First of all, different from other ultra-orthodox parties, Shas articulates a novel position vis-à-vis Zionism to carve for itself a place in Israel’s ideological spectrum and to appeal to different sectors of the
Sephardi public. The religious message of Shas is based on Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s aims to revive the glorious religious tradition of Sephardi Jewry. Moreover, the party also utilizes religious returnees\textsuperscript{279} and folk religious practices to disseminate its political message. The main ethnic message of the party emphasizes the discriminatory treatment Sephardim face at the hands of the secular Ashkenazi establishment. Lastly, the socioeconomic message of Shas focuses on social ills affecting the development towns, such as chronic poverty and drug abuse.

After elaborating different aspects of Shas’s ideology, in the final section of the chapter I evaluate the relationship between the rise of Shas as a religious party and democratic governance in Israel. On the one hand, the party contributes to democracy by bringing the voice of the peripheral segments of Israeli society to the center. On the other hand, the party’s illiberal rhetoric against secular actors and especially the Supreme Court of Israel undermines democratic political culture. Lastly, I discuss how the electoral successes of the party and its aggressive stance in the government led to the intensification of the secular-religious cleavage, exemplified by the rise of the secular Shinui. When this increased tension between Shas and the secular actors threatened Israel’s democratic stability during the 1999 and 2003 elections, Shas started to show signs of moderation.

7.2 Formation of Sephardic Torah Guardians

As mentioned in chapter 5, Shas was formed in 1983 during the municipal elections in Jerusalem, and became a national party in 1984. The Hebrew letters that form

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{279} A religious returnee is a Jewish person who decides to become observant after leading a secular Jewish life. The concept is different from a convert who changes his/her religion.
\end{footnote}
the name of Shas (namely shin and samech) stand for an acronym for the Talmud, namely Shisha Sedarim (the six sections of the Talmud). While originally the party was known as The Worldwide Sephardic Association of Torah Keepers (Hitahdut HaSfaradim HaOlamit Shomrei Torah), many refer to it with a shorter name namely Sephardic Torah Guardians (Sfardim Shomrei Torah).

During its formation period, Shas profited from the internal strife between the Hassidim and Mitnagdim within the Agudat Yisrael. Rabbi Eliezer Shach, who was the leader of the mitnagdim and headed the Lithuanian Pozneh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, supported the formation of Shas. Rabbi Shach was concerned that the ultra-orthodox Sephardim were very much influenced by the Hassidic trends within the Agudah. Hence by supporting Shas as an ultra-orthodox Sephardi party against Agudah, Shach wanted to show the Hassidic elements within Agudah that they needed to pay more attention to Mitnagdim or otherwise lose support. Since many of the rabbis who formed Shas were students in the Pozneh Yeshiva, they did not have trouble accepting the spiritual guidance of Shach, who was also Yosef’s senior.

Yet the relations between Rabbi Shach and Rabbi Yosef were severed, when Shach openly criticized the autonomous political activities of the Sephardi ultra-orthodox sector in a public speech in 1992: “the Sephardim are not ready yet to manage affairs of

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280 Mitnagdim literally means those who oppose. Mitnagdim are known for their emphasis on bookish learning and analytical thinking as opposed to the emphasis on mysticism by the Hassidim.

281 Heilman, S.C. “The Orthodox, the Ultra-Orthodox, and the Elections for the Twelfth Knesset.” In The Elections in Israel-1988 ed. by Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (Westview Press, 1990), pp.146-147 Shach also formed and supported another splinter party from the Agudah, namely Degel HaTorah. This party, which was based on Ashkenazi Mitnagdim, run for the 1988 elections and then rejoined with Agudah in 1992 elections, and the new party was named Yahadut Hatorah (United Torah Judaism).
religion and state…they are growing and developing and returning to their roots, but they still need more time to learn.”

After these patronizing statements, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef cut Shas’s ties to Shach and proclaimed the party’s total autonomy from the Lithuanian Mitnagdim. Shas activists used these statements to galvanize the development towns against Shach. These statements were read in loudspeakers in these towns again and again. On the other hand, Shach followers harassed many Shas activists in their synagogues and neighborhoods in response to Yosef’s decision to break his party free from the tutelage of Rabbi Shach.

7.3 Decision-Making

The decision-making process in Shas is conducted very similarly to the decision-making in the ultra-orthodox Agudat Israel. Similar to the Council of Torah Sages [Greats] (Moetzet Gdolei HaTorah) of Agudat Israel, the ultimate decision-making power in Shas lies in the hands of the four-member Council of Torah Sages [Wise] (Moatzei Hachmei HaTorah). The party’s Knesset members, who are always ultra-orthodox Sephardim, bring impending political questions to the agenda of the council, and the rabbis in the council give the ultimate decisions on these questions.

Although there is no formal hierarchy among the four members of the council, it is Rabbi Ovadia Yosef who holds the ultimate authority within the council. To this day Ovadia Yosef is considered the spiritual leader of the party and the unequivocal religious

283 Shapiro, M. B. “Mi Yosef ad Yosef Lo Kam ke-Yosef” Meorot 6:1 Shevat 5767 (2006), 6
284 Shahak, I. and Mevzinsky, N. Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel (Pluto Press, 1999), 53-54
authority within the Sephardi world. He also holds a much respected position within the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox community. As the first chairman of the party, Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz said in an interview: “His [Ovadia Yosef’s] rank in the world of Torah is higher than of chief rabbi…Renowned Torah scholars from all over the world turn to Rabbi Yosef for his opinion.” Hence, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef is at the top of the decision-making hierarchy. Below him is the Council of Torah Sages, and only then comes the lay party chairman. Yosef usually decides on the names of the Knesset list in consultation with the party chairman. In public all the MKs including the chairman pledge their ultimate allegiance to Yosef. Hence, the party does not have either elected representative institutions, or registered membership as do modern political parties.

7.4 Bases of Political Support

In spite of its ultra-orthodox identity, Shas drew support from different segments of the Sephardi population. Basically Shas appealed to three different strata. First, as discussed above, there is a core group of ultra-orthodox Sephardim –mainly rabbis and yeshiva students– who constitute the activists of the party. The students studying in the Sephardi yeshivas work very dedicatedly for the electoral campaign of Shas with the encouragement of their rabbis.

285 During the course of Shas’s political career, some Sephardic rabbis tried to challenge Rabbi Ovadia Yosef but always failed. For instance Agudah tried to draw Sephardi constituencies to its list by placing Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, who defected from Shas in 1990, on the second place of its national list in the 1992 elections. In the same elections, Rabbi Yosef Azran found himself outside the Shas list when he questioned Yosef’s leadership. In 2003 elections, Rabbi Yossi Kedourie formed a new Sephardi party with the name Ahavat Yisrael. Yet all of these attempts were ineffective and failed to attract any significant support from the constituency of Shas.

286 Interview with Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, in Jerusalem Post, August 3, 1984
Secondly, Shas also takes many votes from traditional Sephardim, who follow the ultra-orthodox rabbis out of respect. And lastly the party appeals to the low-income Sephardim, who are not religious. These low-income non-religious Sephardim vote for Shas, either because of the ethnic pride they receive from being part of the larger movement or are drawn to the party because of the party’s socioeconomic messages. A closer look to the vote share of the party across several elections shows that the party has a much stronger electoral showing in development towns, where the low-income Sephardim constitute a majority of the residents, than its national average.

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Table 7.1: Vote share of Shas in selected development towns in the last five national elections

7.5 Ideology

The emergence of Shas signified an important change in the Israeli political-ideological spectrum, since the ideology of the party cannot be easily understood within the previously established categories of Israeli politics. The party does not have a written
party program, but instead it runs on an eclectic ideology in order to mobilize the Sephardim and address their ethnic, religious, social, and economic concerns. This section will explore different parts of Shas’s ideology and the way these parts are used to mobilize different segments of Sephardim.

First, I discuss how Shas redefined Zionism and created a new understanding of the concept that appealed both to ultra-orthodox and traditional Sephardim. Second, I discuss the religious aspect of Shas’s ideology and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s vision of the redefinition of the Judaic nature of the state of Israel. In this section, I also show how symbols of folk religion and the movement to return to religion are used to mobilize constituencies. The next section will deal with the ethnic aspect of Shas’s message and the ways in which ethnic grievances are used to appeal to Sephardim. Lastly, the socioeconomic message of Shas will be explored.

7.5.1 Shas and Zionism

One of the main political distinctions in Israel has been between the Zionist and non-Zionist parties. The Zionist parties, including its secular and religious variants, accept the legitimacy of the state of Israel and participate fully in the workings of the state institutions, including the army and government ministries. On the other hand, the ultra-orthodox Agudah parties are considered as non-Zionist parties, because these parties do not accept the legitimacy of the symbols of the State of Israel and reject full participation in the army or in the government ministries.

Since Shas was formed as an ultra-orthodox party, many observers labeled it as a
non-Zionist party. Yet the pragmatic ideology of Shas and the statements of the party leadership reveal that the party’s stance on Zionism is not so straightforward. The first chairman of the party, Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, states his party’s position in an interview:

> If Zionism means love for \textit{Eretz Yisrael} (Land of Israel), making sacrifices for it, and willingness to live here at all times and under all conditions, then we are super-Zionists. But if it means abolishing any part of the \textit{Halacha} for the alleged needs of the state, or as part of the concept of the state, then we’re as far from Zionism as East from West.\textsuperscript{287}

Peretz’s statements show that Shas does not define Zionism as an ideological precept, but rather as an emotional attachment to the land of Israel and a willingness to make sacrifices for it. Hence, for the Shas activists a lofty ideal, namely \textit{Ahavat Yisrael} (Love of Israel), becomes the main basis of Shas’s Zionism. In this manner, Shas differs from the National Religious Party which created a principled synthesis between Jewish orthodoxy and Zionism by defining the creation of the Israeli state as a step towards redemption.\textsuperscript{288}

Shas activists also blend their understanding of Zionism with popular religious beliefs. The following quote from an El Hama’ayan activist in response to the question whether Shas is a Zionist party shows how popular religious beliefs are used to promote Shas’s definition of Zionism

> “We are the true Zionists. We say in our prayers everyday, in the \textit{Amidah}: ‘bring back the presence (shehina) to Zion.’ We pray everyday for going back to Zion. Those, who are calling themselves the real Zionists, are not true Zionists. Jews, who have suggested the Jews to go to Uganda are not Zionists. Zion

\textsuperscript{287} Interview with Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, in \textit{Jerusalem Post}, August 3, 1984

\textsuperscript{288} The main formulation of religious Zionism is made by Rabbi Avraam Kook. For more on Kook’s synthesis see chapter 3 of Ravitzky, A. \textit{Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism} (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 79-144.
is the name for Israel. The Zionists first would come to Israel." 289

Defining Zionism not on the ideological level, but on the popular-emotional level is especially appealing to traditional Sephardim, who form a very important part of Shas’s constituency. Most of the Sephardim did not ideologically embrace Zionism at the time they arrived in Israel, but came to Israel either to flee persecution or for the opportunity to lead a more comfortable Jewish life. Moreover, Zionism as a political ideology did not develop in the Middle Eastern and North African countries due to the different socio-historical circumstances in these countries compared to Europe. Hence, this very loose reference to Zionism meshed with religious sentiments attracted an important following among the traditional Sephardim.

While Shas uses this rhetoric to differentiate its brand of Zionism from the parties in the Zionist camp, the party’s policies are also different from the ultra-orthodox parties. As one of the first founding fathers of the party, Nissim Zeev, states:

> Of course Shas is a Zionist party. For example 14% of the army votes for Shas. People who believe in Bnei Torah (people of the Torah), they go to the army. 290

This stance of promoting the army service is radically different from the stance of the other ultra-orthodox parties, who see the army service as antithetical to their own survival. By embracing this position Shas opens itself to constituencies outside the ultra-orthodox community. Yet again, acting with pragmatism, Shas also pushes for army exemptions for Sephardi full-time yeshiva students. In this regard, Shas does not alienate its core ultra-orthodox constituencies.

289 Interview with Shas activist, on 12 December, 2006.
290 Interview with Shas MK Nissim Zeev on December 5, 2006.
In addition to the army service, Shas also takes direct ministerial positions. This
direct participation in the government ministries has ideological consequences. For
instance, Shas ministers participate in Zionist rituals, such as singing the national anthem,
which was categorically rejected by Agudah parties due to their non-Zionist stance.291 In
sum, Shas carved itself a new ideological place in the Israeli ideological spectrum by
carefully differentiating itself both from the secular and religious Zionists on the one
hand, and from the non-Zionist ultra-orthodox parties on the other.

7.5.2 The Religious Message of Shas

In addition to being a political party, Shas also represents a “religious
movement.”292 As the central spiritual figure of Shas, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef emphasizes
the “religious” aspect of the party’s identity. Yosef’s main aim is to create a Sephardi
elite that would succeed him in rabbinical authority. In order to realize this aim, Yosef
trains a cadre of ultra-orthodox rabbis and specifically rabbinic judges (dayanim), who
can succeed him and fulfill his role as a rabbi, judge and arbiter.293 According to Yosef,
the formation of this religious elite is a step in creating a society in which the Sephardi
authorities become prominent within the halachaic world. In this society, the Jewish law
should be based on the opinions of Rabbi Yosef Karo as stated in his famous work
*Sulhan Aruch.*294 As Yosef stipulates in his book, Karo’s book was the most authoritative
codification of the Jewish law in the world in the 16th century. Thereafter, according to

291 Friedman, M. “The Haredim and the Israeli Society” In Peters & K. Kyle (eds.), *Whither Israel: The
292 To read more on defining Shas as a religious movement see Willis, A. *Sephardic Torah Guardians:
294 Shapiro, M. B. “Mi Yosef ad Yosef Lo Kam ke-Yosef” *Meorot* 6:1 Shevat 5767 (2006), 9
Yosef, the Sephardi rabbis gradually lost ground in the world of *halacha* to Ashkenazi rabbinic authorities:

> It is known that the Sephardi chief rabbis before me were subordinated to their colleagues, the Ashkenazic rabbis. And for the sake of peace, they said nothing, but I, who am not subordinate, praise God, will uphold my mission to restore the crown to its rightful place and ordered that the ruling of *Maran* [Rabbi Yosef Karo] be adopted.¹²⁹⁵

*Lehahzir atara layoshna* (restoring the crown to its rightful place), which was mentioned in the above quotation from Yosef became the motto of the Shas party and was embraced by Shas activists and supporters alike. The motto has multiple meanings and is interpreted differently by various Shas supporters. While some see it as an ethnic message, others find a religious way of life in it:

> “This is the real thing: Introducing the right *poskim*²⁹⁶ by the Sephardim and the right methods (*shitot*). According to me this is the meaning of *lehahzir atara layoshna*. And we make those available through our brochures. This was part of the revolution. What is “*lehahzir atara layoshana*?” It is to go according to what *maran* Rabbi Ovadia Yosef teaches.”²⁹⁷

In line with the above quotation, Shas, *Ma’ayan* schools and its other non-profit organizations transmitted many of the *halachaic* rulings and Torah commentary of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef to Shas’s constituency. Shas published and subsidized special prayerbooks or seasonal guides to the laws of holidays with Yosef’s picture on the
cover. 298 Many of Yosef’s televised Torah lectures were broadcast in screens around the country before the elections. 299 Yosef’s message was also used in the election posters. For instance an election poster before the 2003 national elections posed Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s picture with the sentence: “Those who are for God follow me”, a use of the call of Matityahu against the Greeks in the second century B.C. 300 Hence, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef used the political and social network of Shas to disseminate his religious message, while Shas as a political party benefited from Yosef’s charisma and influence among the Sephardim in Israel.

One of the intriguing successes of Shas is that this religious message constructed by an ultra-orthodox core appealed to the traditional Sephardim. Many traditional Sephardim supported the party, since, irrespective of their level of religious practice, they showed a great reverence towards their religious leaders. 301 Despite the fact that Shas defines itself as an ultra-orthodox political movement, it is more inclusive of less observant Jews compared to modern-orthodox NRP and ultra-orthodox Agudah parties. Even the opponents of Shas acknowledge that Shas is more inclusive than other religious parties in Israel. As one activist from the National Religious Party frankly admitted:

“Rabbi Ovadia Yosef is a wise man, who knows the Torah, who knows the society, and who also knows what the public wants… We [at the National Religious Party] are more closed, like the ultra-orthodox…. If there is someone, who throws away the kippa (skullcap), among us [the National Religious Party], he is done. But he [Rabbi Ovadia Yosef] said to him [the person who threw away his kippa]: you can be one of us…So he brought

298 Willis, A. Sephardic Torah Guardians: Ritual and the Politics of Piety (Princeton University, 1993), 176
300 Bick, E. “A Party in Decline: Shas in Israel’s 2003 Elections” Israel Affairs 7, no.4 (2004): 108
301 Shapiro, M. B. “Mi Yosef ad Yosef Lo Kam ke-Yosef” Meorot 6:1 Shevat 5767 (2006), 6
everyone together and recognized their traditions…..I think this is very healthy…. the National Religious Party also tried to do something similar to this, but much later.”

In contrast, Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz gives a different explanation as to why the traditional Sephardim supported their party: “[they] deep-down feel that Torah should be the law of the land despite the fact that they are not very observant.” This explanation is a novel interpretation on the religiosity of the traditional Sephardim, who faced exclusion by the modern Orthodox NRP due to their lack of strict observance. As Peretz’s statements make clear Shas rationalizes the inclusion of less observant traditional Sephardim into an ultra-orthodox movement with an assertion that these Jews have the potential to become observant due to their historical cultural background. This is also indicative of how Shas weaves religious and ethnic elements in its ideology.

The transformation of the traditional Sephardim to observant Jews is not only a rhetorical goal for Shas, but also a concrete aim. The party fulfills this aim through different means. One of the means is the party’s educational network, namely the Ma’ayan schools, which were extensively discussed in Chapter 4. In addition to religious education through its primarily elementary schools, Shas is also known for taking the lead of the “return to the religion” (chazara betshuva) movement in Israel. A chazara betshuva is a person who returns to religious observance. In the last two decades, there is an enormous increase in the number of non-observant Jews who embraced a religious way of life. While this phenomenon also exists among the ultra-orthodox Ashkenazim,

302 Interview with the NRP activist Yaacov Soler in Tel Aviv on November 15, 2006
303 Interview with Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz in Jerusalem Post, August 3, 1984
304 The word tehuva has a double-meaning. It means both “answer” and “repentance”.

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these communities look down on the returnees and consider them less respectful than people who have been observant all their life.

In contrast, Shas made these returnees a central part of its religious message and political network. Shas supports many yeshivas dedicated to returnees, such as ‘Light of Life’ (OrChayyim) yeshiva led by Rabbi Reuven Elbaz. In addition, the party put these returnees into important positions within the party. Shlomo Benizri, who was a Knesset member and three time minister from Shas, is a case in point. Shas also uses popular means, such as sober sermons by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef broadcast through illegal stations or mass public gatherings in stadiums, to bring back mainly low income traditional Sephardi youth to religious observance.\(^{305}\) For instance, each year Shas holds “repentance awakening gatherings” in September.\(^{306}\) Furthermore there is also close affiliation between Shas and popular media figures who lead tshuva events similar to those of the tele-evangelists in the United States. Rabbi Amnon Yitzhak, a Yemenite Jew, who leads a Bnei Brak-based organization named Shofar, is a case in point.\(^{307}\) Yitzhak draws many young, poor Sephardi back into religious observance through his humorous, charismatic personality and stories, which he shares through public meetings and numerous video clips and tapes.\(^{308}\)

Shas also uses elements from folk religion to attract the traditional Sephardic vote, although these elements are not totally consistent with Ovadia Yosef’s aim of creating a yeshiva culture based on bookish learning among the Sephardim. For instance

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\(^{307}\) *Jerusalem Post*, May 20, 1997
\(^{308}\) Some of the professionally prepared clips of Rabbi Amnon Yitzhak are available at his well-maintained web-site at http://www.shofar.net/site/index.asp. Some of the clips are available with English subtitles.
the party distributed stickers with “blessing over the home” or “prayer for the road” before elections. Furthermore, Shas recruited Rabbi Yitzhak Kedouri, an elderly mystic, for its election campaigns in 1992 and 1996. Kedouri not only appeared side by side with Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in Shas rallies, but also became famous for distributing chameot (lucky charms) before the elections to potential Shas voters. These practices appealed to the sensitivities of the traditional Sephardim whose religiosity is very much tied to folk practices, such as the visiting of the tombs of religious sages. Yet, secular actors heavily criticized this practice by claiming that Shas was buying people’s votes in exchange for religious favors, and therefore the election law was amended to prohibit use of these lucky charms during the election campaigns.

In sum, the religious message of Shas was composed of three main components. First, the party followed Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s ideal of reviving Sephardic ultra-orthodox practices and creation of a Sephardi religious elite through promoting and spearheading rigorous Torah education. In addition, the party also appealed to the traditional Sephardim through the popularized “Chazara beteshuva” events, which converted traditional Sephardi youngsters to ultra-orthodoxy. Furthermore Shas instrumentalized folk religious practices to receive the backing of traditional Sephardim. These different goals were only possible because of the flexibility and inclusiveness of Shas’s ideology.

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These aspects of Shas’s ultra-orthodoxy were a novel synthesis and created a powerful alternative to the more strict and exclusive ultra-orthodoxy of Agudah parties and the modern orthodoxy of the NRP:

The aim of the Sephardi scholars to gain roles of religious leadership in their communities of origin necessitated that they accommodate themselves, at least to some extent, to the practices of their flocks. Hence the development of a new variety of Sephardi religiosity: enhanced devotion to bookish learning, but also acceptance and even participation in folk practices, pilgrimages to saintly graves in particular. In the chasm that developed in the early years of mass immigration, between the small minority of Middle Eastern immigrant youth who moved to Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodoxy and the majority of youth who moved toward secularism, a new type of Middle Eastern Israeli youth has emerged. Namely, those who accept the authority of Sephardi ultra-Orthodox figures while themselves living a life of many doctrinally inconsistent parts. These practices dovetail with the contemporary narrowing of the gap between Sephardi rabbinic elitism and Sephardi folk religion. The meeting and fusion of erstwhile distant socio-religious positions constitute salient elements of the new ultra-Orthodox Sephardi movement.312

7.5.3 Shas and its Ethnic Message

In addition to being a religious movement, Shas also draws many non-observant Sephardim to its ranks due to the party’s ethnic message. Many of these non-observant Sephardim support Shas because the party addresses their feeling of ethnic discrimination. Shas uses different ways to make the case for ethnic inequalities. For instance, Shas leaders point out that the Sephardim constitute the huge majority of the prison inmates in the state of Israel,313 while among Sephardim in Diaspora communities incarceration is not a problem. Similarly they highlight increasing drug use among the poor Sephardi youth in the development towns as a social problem.

In these ethnic narratives the blame is usually put on the secular Zionist establishment for the plight of the Sephardim in Israel. According to this narrative, the Sephardim become second-class citizens once they arrive in Israel. The main reason for this, the narrative goes, was the racist attitude of the Ashkenazim toward them. A Shabbaton, free weekend paper distributed in synagogues every Shabbath, published by Shas’s civil society arm El Hama’ayan provides an example of such a narrative:

“The founders of the state didn't want us from the beginning. They dreamed of bringing Russian and Polish Jewry here. The Holocaust disturbed their plans, and they had to fill up the area. So what did they do? They brought our fathers here. Did they think about them? Come on! They only thought about themselves and their visions…They dreamed about Israelis cut off from their heritage, so they tore it away from us…Why, and by what right? Don't ask; they didn't ask themselves.”

Yet the appeal of Shas lies not only in its emphasis on the discrimination that the Sephardim have been facing in the state of Israel, but also in its attempt to create a positive Sephardi identity. This is the main difference of Shas from other failed ethnic parties, such as the radical Black Panthers or traditional Tami, which solely focused on the narrative of discrimination without trying to create a positive Sephardi identity. For many non-observant Sephardim Shas represents the reestablishment of Sephardi pride.

For instance, a leaflet, which was distributed before the 1992 election and juxtaposed a picture of the Ramle prison to a class of Torah-studying children gives the message that voting for Shas leads to the transformation of the Sephardi youth from a

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314 Jerusalem Post, January 19, 1993
315 Interview with Eliezer Don-Yehiya, professor of sociology at the Bar-Ilan University, November 2006.
marginalized group of incarcerated youth to a proud, pious Sephardi generation. To realize this goal and to show the Sephardi public its transformative potential, Shas is known to closely work with drug addicts in deprived areas and to rehabilitate them by drawing them to a religious life. For many, the party’s motto lehahzir atara layoshna (to restore the crown to its rightful place) has an ethnic connotation and signifies the recreation of a glorious past, namely the historical period the Sephardim lived in Andalucia between the eight and eleventh centuries.

The process of investigation and ultimately the imprisonment of Ariyeh Deri, the charismatic second chairman of Shas, is a very dramatic example that showcases how Shas has used the ethnic card during election campaigns. As discussed in Chapter 5, Ariyeh Deri had been tried for receiving bribes and money from government-funded yeshivas during his Ministry. The trial came to an end just before the 1999 elections, when the District Court of Jerusalem announced the indictment of Ariyeh Deri. Shas did not miss this opportunity and used the trials of Deri as an election asset. Long before the trial was over, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef declared that Deri was innocent. In his weekly sermons, he repeatedly asserted that Deri was convicted based on one witness testimony, while the halacha requires at least the testament of two witnesses. This led to the “Deri is innocent” campaign, which was propagated by Shas’s propaganda network, including a TV station, radio channels, and a daily newspaper. In this campaign Shas activists asserted that Deri’s indictment clearly signified the persecution of a successful Sephardi politician from a modest background by the affluent Ashkenazi establishment represented by the Court.

316 Willis, A. “Shas-The Sephardic Torah Guardians: Religious “Movement” and Political Power.” In The Elections in Israel-1992 ed. by Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (Sunny Press, 1995), 123
This ethnic message surrounding the trial of Deri also used some symbolism. For example, the Shas rallies were full of slogans that equated Aryeh Deri’s trial with the infamous trial of Alfred Dreyfus, who was a Jewish military officer persecuted unjustly by the French authorities at the end of the 19th century. Shas distributed tens of thousands of copies of a videotape, named “J’accuse,”317 which referred to Emile Zola’s famous letter criticizing French authorities for antisemitism during the Dreyfus trial. In this videotape, Deri accused the Supreme Court justices for not trying him properly and persecuting him unjustly, only because he was a Moroccan Jew. Deri equates his struggle with the struggles of the impoverished Sephardi youngsters and narrates: “There’s a small group of people in Israel who feel they own the country. They took our youngsters in the hundreds of thousands, cut them off from their rabbis and their families. A whole generation sprouted without ties to Judaism. They degenerated to a life of drugs.”318

While Deri associates himself with the low-class Sephardi youth, the videotape depicts the luxurious homes of the District Court Judges who convicted him. This way the ethnic message of the videotape was strengthened by an overlapping message based on class difference between the Ashkenazi judges and the Sephardi underclass.

This message of the tape was reinforced by the statements of the Shas party officials and the emotional reactions of the Shas supporters. For instance, the minister of interior Eliayhu Suissa criticized the court by these words: “We would have preferred that Deri be tried in Arafat’s military court rather than this one... It’s always the ‘black man’ that's the scapegoat. As a minister, I am obliged to honor the justice system, but if it

317 Jerusalem Post, April 30, 1999
318 The Toronto Star, April 30, 1999
were up to me, I wouldn’t agree to be tried by it.”319 Another Shas MK directly connected the court’s decision with Shas’s future electoral prospects: “The more they persecute us, the better we do in the polls.”320 Shas supporters and many Sephardim also showed solidarity with Deri and accused the state institutions of being ethnically biased against them. As one youngster attending a Shas rally asserted: “I’m not an Israeli, I’m a Sephardi Jew. Israeli is Ashkenazi.”321 As this Shas voter’s reaction shows, the political campaign around Deri’s trial deepened the ethnic division between the secular Ashkenazim and Sephardim within the Israeli society and became a political asset for Shas.

Starting from the mid-90s Shas also leveled its political criticism at another group in Israeli society, namely the Russian immigrants. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1990 alone, the Russian immigrants settling in Israel increased the Jewish population in Israel by five percent.322 The immigration in the following years continued, and today close to one million immigrants from Soviet Union live in Israel, constituting close to twenty percent of the entire Jewish population. These Russian immigrants mainly settled in the development towns, and this changed the ethnic dynamics in these towns. In 1990-2000 the overall population of the development towns increased by 20 percent due to the influx of the Russian immigrants, and the percentage of the Sephardim in these development towns fell from 75 percent to 61 percent.323

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319 Jerusalem Post, April 28, 1999
320 Statements of David Tal. In Associated Press Online, April 15, 1999
321 The Jerusalem Report, April 12, 1999
323 Peled, Y. “Progressive Struggle Under Religious Guise? The Shas Party in Israel”, paper prepared for delivery at the conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association, Canberra, October 4-6, 2000, p.3
Hence, both groups started to compete for the allocation of already scarce resources in these development towns. This competition was translated into a rivalry between Shas and the Russian parties Yisrael Ba‘aliyah (Israel in Ascendance) and Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel is our Home) both at the local and national levels. One of the most memorable campaign ads used by Yisrael Ba‘aliyah before the 1999 elections read: “Interior Ministry under Shas’s Control? No! Interior Ministry under Nash (Our) Control.” With this ad the Russian Immigrant party demanded the Interior Ministry, which Shas used to allocate state resources to its constituency.

This competition induced by structural forces soon turned to a cultural conflict. There is an important cultural divide between the Sephardim and the Russian immigrants, most of whom lead a very secular life-style. For instance, the minister of interior from Shas, Eliyahu Suissa, caused many difficulties for the citizenship rights of some Russian immigrants, who the Shas party leadership said were not Jewish according to halacha. In its TV broadcasts, Shas claimed that Yisrael Ba’aliyah demanded the control of the ministry so that it can allow prostitutes and criminals from the former Soviet Union into State of Israel. Furthermore, the local party leadership in Beith Shemesh enraged Russian immigrants by calling them: “hundreds of thousands of Gentiles flooding the land with pork, prostitution, impurity and filth.” This heated rhetoric around ethnicity benefited both Shas and the Russian immigrant parties. As Table 7.2 shows, both Shas

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324 Associated Press, May 2, 1999. In the slogan Nash has a double-meaning it refers to Nathan Sharansky, who was the leader of the Yisrael Ba‘aliyah. The word also means our.
325 Ibid.
327 Mideast Mirror, November 23, 1999.
and the Russian immigrant parties increased their vote share in the 1999 election in the towns with a high concentration of Sephardi and Russian immigrant residents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Russ. Imm. parties</th>
<th>Russ. Imm. parties</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ashdod</td>
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<td>Ashkelon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiryat Gat</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migdal Haemek</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netivot</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>43.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Or Akiva</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sderot</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<td>19.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shlomi</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
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Table 7.2: Vote share of Russian Immigrant Parties and Shas in selected cities in 1996-1999 national elections

### 7.5.4 Shas and its Socioeconomic Agenda

The unmatched increase in Shas’s electoral strength is described in Israel as a “machapecha” (revolution). While some interpret this revolution as a religious or ethnic revitalization movement, others clearly interpret it as a socioeconomic upheaval. Accordingly, Shas has been very deliberate in using a populist rhetoric in the socioeconomic realm and pushing for policy that would benefit the poor.

Tepe and Baum (2008) show how this egalitarian socioeconomic message became the focus of the party’s 2006 election campaign and foreshadowed the ethnic and

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religious messages of the party during this election period. In this campaign Shas
delineated a “social road plan” and emphasized the importance of adopting anti-poverty
measures.\textsuperscript{329} In a videotaped advertisement, Shas showed the image of a hungry boy with
tears and discussed the pervasive effects of poverty in the life of youngsters.\textsuperscript{330} One of
the measures that Shas consistently emphasizes in its social agenda is the need to raise
the child allowances provided by the state for big families. As a Shas minister explains in
an interview:

“Today, with Israel’s economy, which is a fairly strong economy-among the
strongest economies in the world- it is possible to give a glance at the lower
classes which were badly hurt over the last years. It is a strong economy with
one million poor people. This is not a (good) economy…The direct care for
families is the child allowances, or call it what you want. The important thing
is that a poor family or a poor child will directly receive support from Israel.
This is his budget. His allowance is the only thing that can save him from his
terrible distress.”\textsuperscript{331}

In addition to poverty, Shas activists also emphasize the importance of other
social issues, such as drug use, in the decline of the Israeli society. As one Shas MK
claims:

“To me, the biggest domestic problem of Israeli society is drug
abuse. Right now, there are 13,000 addicted and 200,000 drug
users living in different social groups in Israel. We are trying
to make laws in order to stop the decline [of the Israeli
society].”\textsuperscript{332}

The attention given to these social issues does not only constitute part of Shas’s
rhetoric, but also its practice. In many poor neighborhoods, Shas and its civil society
network El Hama’ayan gained the respect of the community for helping drug addicts to

\textsuperscript{329} Tepe, S. and Baum, R. “Shas’s Transformation to “Likud with Kippa?”: A Comparative Assessment of
the Moderation of Religious Parties” in ed. Asher Arian The Elections in Israel-2006 (Transaction
Publishers, 2008), 75
\textsuperscript{330} ibid. p.76
\textsuperscript{331} Interview with Yitzhak Cohen on Israeli Army Radio Federal News Service October 31, 2006
\textsuperscript{332} Interview with Shas MK, Nissim Zeev on December 5, 2006
overcome their addiction and become functioning members of the society. The party also passed legislation that increased the child allowances or at times threatened to leave the government when its demands were not met.\footnote{Very recently, Shas refused to enter into the government of Tzipi Livni, who was elected in the party primaries in place of Ehud Olmert, because its demand of raising the child allowance for big families was not met. This refusal forced Livni to take the decision to go to early elections in February 2009.}

The modest background of Shas’s leaders gives more credibility to the populist socioeconomic message of the party, since the public perceives these political figures as authentic and close to themselves. For instance, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who was born in Iraq and came to Palestine when he was four, was raised in a poor family in the Beit Yisrael neighborhood in Jerusalem and lived in destitute conditions until his mid-30s when he found permanent employment in the rabbinical courts.\footnote{Ha’aretz October 1, 2004} Similarly, Morocco-born Aryeh Deri grew up in a poor family, before he was discovered by Yosef.

Another factor that makes Shas’s socioeconomic message credible and draws the support of the poor Sephardim to the party is the very effective social network Shas keeps active in the development towns and poor neighborhoods of big cities. Unlike other political parties, Shas activists maintain a very close relation to the residents of these neighborhoods not only during the elections, but throughout the year. Shas activists, MKs, and even ministers often visit the neighborhoods and try to meet the needs of the Sephardi public. As one of the Shasniks claims:

“Shas is very attentive to the public, to the people’s needs. They are not like government clerks. They listen to you and they care for you. They treat you as their equals….They are part of the people”\footnote{Interview with Roni Huri, Shas representative in the city Barkan, on December 11, 2006}
This observation should not be seen as pure party propaganda by one of the activists, since many others from rival parties also pointed out in interviews how Shas maintained an active social network between elections and addressed welfare needs of the population.

In addition to its extensive school network, Shas also draws many Israelis from lower socioeconomic strata to its ranks through the welfare services it provides, such as child care. In cities, where socioeconomically marginalized segments constitute a majority, such as Ofakim, Sderot, or even Eilat, Shas has already replaced the state as the main provider of community services.336

7.6 Shas and Democratic Governance

Much has been written on the relationship between religiopolitical actors and democratic governance. While some scholars analyze the effect of democratic participation on the moderation/radicalization of the ideologies of religious parties, others contemplate how the political behavior of religiopolitical actors affects the quality of democratic governance in a particular polity. It is clear that both variables affect each other and that the relationship is not uni-directional. Four main lessons can be drawn from the relationship between Shas and the quality of democratic governance in Israel.

First of all, Shas played a significant role in increasing the quality of democracy in Israel by channeling the concerns of a peripheral group to the center of politics. In its political life over two decades, Shas emerged as the champion of Sephardi concerns, especially those who are socioeconomically marginalized. The number and percentage of

336 Kook, R., Harris, M., and Doron, G. “In the Name of God and Our Rabbi: The Politics of the Ultra-Orthodox in Israel” Israel Affairs 5, No.1 (1998): 16
the Sephardi MKs increased significantly since mid-1990s when Shas started to score important electoral victories. This increased representation in the Knesset also led other political actors to pay more attention to Sephardi concerns in order to compete with Shas for this particular constituency.

Yet, Shas’s success did not only signify a quantitative increase in Sephardi representation in the Knesset, but also enhanced the recognition of the ethnic Sephardi identity in the Israeli political center. While before Shas, Sephardi parties were seen as sectarian formations undermining Israel’s ideal of “Mizug galuyot” (ingathering of the exiles), Shas changed this stigma. Many Sephardim felt empowered and took pride in their traditional heritage. This celebration of the Sephardi identity was recognized by other political and social actors as well. Hence, from a normative perspective Shas succeeded in contributing to the recognition of a Sephardi culture in Israel.

In contrast to this positive role played by Shas in voicing Sephardi concerns and creating a positive Sephardi identity, some of the rhetoric the party leaders utilized against their opponents undermined democratic political culture in Israel. Shas leaders, and especially Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, did not refrain from dehumanizing their political opponents by using religious texts or attacking basic human rights of groups with whom they don’t agree.

In the political arena, the dehumanizing rhetoric was mainly used towards the secular parties and the judges of the Supreme Court. The secularist parties, namely Meretz and Shinui, had been the arch political rivals of Shas as far as religion-state relations in Israel were concerned. To indicate his disagreements with these parties
Ovadia Yosef used uncivil language that would be counted as hate speech in many liberal democracies. For instance, while Shulamit Aloni from Meretz served as the education minister in the Rabin government, he promised “to declare a celebration and throw a banquet the day that wicked woman Shulamit Aloni dies.” Similarly, when Yossi Sarid acted as the education minister in Ehud Barak’s coalition government, Yosef gave one of his most hateful speeches against Sarid to indicate his protest over Sarid’s proposal of including two poems from the famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish in the high school curriculums:

... God has sorely tried us. He brought upon us this Yossi Sarid, this Satan, may his name be erased! And how can we continue to restrain ourselves, how much more can we take? How can we continue to suffer from this wicked person? God will uproot him just as he uproots Amalek, that is how he will uproot him. Haman is cursed? Yossi Sarid is cursed!... “Where is his sense, what does he want to do? He wants Mahmoud Darwish? That's his sense? Where is his sense? Doesn't it pain him that the secular Jews don’t know Torah? That they don’t know how to say the Shema Yisrael. No. It pains him that they don’t know Mahmoud Darwish. God will confound his plans and strike his thoughts. He will repay him as he deserves. Just as He showed us with Haman’s death. The revenge wrought upon Haman will be wrought upon him. And when you say “Cursed is Haman” after the reading of the Book of Esther, say too “Cursed is Yossi Sarid, Yossi... Darwish.”

The above quotation shows how language that vilifies political opponents through the use of selective religious texts can seriously undermine democratic political culture that is based on tolerance and respect for rule of law. In this speech, Yosef not only attacked the secular Israelis in the person of Sarid, but also Palestinians in the person of Darwish. By collapsing two groups that he perceives as the ‘enemy,’ Yosef attacks both

337 The Jerusalem Post, February 8, 1993
338 Ha’aretz, March 28, 2000
groups severely to the point of dehumanizing them. This kind of rhetoric clearly harms any meaningful democratic public debate.

Similar statements were also directed towards the judges serving in the Supreme Court of Israel. The Supreme Court drew stark criticism from the religious sectors because of the Court’s liberal interpretation of the law and its extension of the scope of individual rights. Due to this new liberal interpretation, which became conspicuous with Aharon Barak’s term as the head of the Court (1995-2006), the Supreme Court was accused of judicial activism and changing the status quo agreement on the state-religion relationship in favor of the secularists. When Rabbi Ovadia Yosef called the Supreme Court judges “empty-headed and wanton evildoers, who are unclean and desecrate the Shabbath,” the Attorney General opened a criminal investigation against Yosef for incitement.

This illiberal stance of Shas was also revealed in the party’s treatment of the Reform and Conservative Jewish groups’ demands for religious freedom. In 2006, these groups sent a petition to the Supreme Court demanding the right to have access to public mikvehs (ritual baths) in order to perform ritual immersions for their convert candidates. The Religious Affairs Minister Yitzhak Cohen from Shas not only opposed but also ridiculed the Conservative and Reform Movements when he said: “conversions of the Reform and Conservative organizations are virtual conversions,

339 The status quo agreement refers to the agreement made between David Ben Gurion and the Agudat Israel during the formation of the State of Israel. This agreement is based on a letter that Ben Gurion sent to the leadership of Agudat Yisrael in 1947. According to this letter: 1) The state will not engage in matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce, and these matters will be handled solely by the Chief Rabbinate in the Jewish sector; 2) The Shabbath and major Jewish holidays will be legal days of rest in Israel; 3) The ultra-orthodox will have autonomy in running their educational institutions; 4) Kashrut (Jewish dietary laws) will be kept in all kitchens opened by the state.
340 Knight Ridder Washington Bureau, February 14, 1999
341 The Forward, June 9, 2006

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and therefore are deserving of a virtual immersion…the only immersion familiar to the
Reform movement is baptism….they should continue walking on water and leave the
people of Israel alone.”342 The Shas minister’s dismissive attitude, which was backed
by the party leadership, towards Conservative and Reform Judaism showed how
exclusionary the party’s ideology is towards the rights of minority groups. Similar
restrictive practices were also put in place by Shas in the case of pork raising and
selling, which became an issue with the arrival of secular Russian immigrants.

Thirdly, the co-optation of Shas by the government and the concomitant
increase in the party’s electoral fortunes had an adverse effect on democratic stability
by leading to the intensification of the secular-religious cleavage in Israel. The
disproportionate funding and the outrageous pork-barrel tactics in the ministries
heightened sensibility among the secularist public in the 1990s. Moreover, Shas
practices, such as the restriction of Conservative and Reform conversions in public
facilities, or curtailment of pork-selling rights also created the perception on the part of
the secular public that their religious freedoms are at stake. Hence secular segments
started to voice more forcefully their criticism of the ultra-orthodox practices, and this
also led to the increasing vote share of secular parties, particularly the Shinui.

A cursory look at the national political climate surrounding the 1999 and 2003
national elections shows how polarized the nation was over the secular-religious issues
in this period. The greatest testament to the intensification of the religious-secular
divide was the demonstration organized by the ultra-orthodox parties in Jerusalem on
February 14, 1999. That day a quarter million ultra-orthodox men came together to

342 Ibid.
protest the decisions of the Supreme Court on the rights of the Reform and
Conservative rabbis to serve on the religious Councils and on the unacceptability of the
draft exemptions for the ultra-orthodox men.\footnote{Knight Ridder Washington Bureau, February 14, 1999} In this demonstration, which turned
into a huge communal prayer event, Shas and other ultra-orthodox parties fiercely
criticized the Supreme Court judges for changing the status-quo on the religion-state
relationship.

On the same day, the secular parties led by Meretz and Shinui also brought
together fifty thousand people in a nearby park to show their solidarity with the
Supreme Court judges and protested the excessive political power the ultra-orthodox
exerted on the lives of Israeli citizens. The secularist sentiment was explained by
Meretz Party leader Yossi Sarid: “You must understand this is a war, a war over the
character of our beloved country.”\footnote{Associated Press, February 14, 1999} These demonstrations, which brought the city to
a halt, were the largest since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and were covered well
by national and international media.\footnote{Despite expectations of violence, the demonstrations were held peacefully with few exceptions.}

Similar concerns were raised by the constituents of the secularist parties during
the 1999 election on the increasing political power of the ultra-orthodox in general, and
Shas in particular. One of the famous slogans embraced by parties like Meretz, Shinui
and even some Laborites was “\textit{Rak Lo Shas}” (Anyone but Shas). This slogan indicated
that these supporters can tolerate any party in the government, except Shas. These
simmering tensions surfaced again in 2000, when the Supreme Court approved the jail
sentence of Shas’s ex-chairman Aryeh Deri. While Shas supporters organized continuing
vigils to show their support for Deri and to protest the Supreme Court, secular intellectuals made a public call for the creation of a Shas-free, secular “New Israel.”

An opinion poll taken in 1998 showed that 60 percent of the population thought the conflicts within the Israeli society was much more dangerous than the conflict with the Palestinians. Of the domestic conflicts the religious-secular conflict was ranked first with 63 percent. A post-election poll taken after the 1999 national elections, when Shas sent a record number of 17 representatives to the Knesset, showed that people expected all conflicts to improve except the religious-secular conflict.

This heightened tension between the religious and secular segments led to the rise of secular Shinui as a party with a single domestic issue platform, namely secularization of Israeli government. The Shinui party, which scored important electoral victories as part of the Democratic Movement of Change in the 1970s and of Meretz in the early to mid 1990s, started to run as a single party with a strict secularist program in 1996 under the leadership of Avraham Poratz and later Tommy Lapid. The party ran on a strict secularist platform that demanded the writing of a constitution, the curtailment of funding to ultra-orthodox yeshivas and institutions, changing the law that exempts ultra-Orthodox men from military service, the running of public transportation during Shabbat, the institution of the civil marriage, and the abolition of the Religious Affairs Ministry. The party leader Tommy Lapid also promised that in no circumstance would his party sit in a coalition government with any ultra-orthodox party.

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346 Canadian Jewish News, September 14, 2000
347 Survey conducted by Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Reseach, Tel Aviv University, January 1998. In Hazan, R. “Religion and Politics in Israel: The Rise and Fall of the Consociational Model” Israel Affairs, 55, no.1 (1999) 128
348 Survey conducted by Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Reseach, Tel Aviv University, May 1999. In Hazan, R. “Religion and Politics in Israel: The Rise and Fall of the Consociational Model” Israel Affairs, 55, no.1 (1999) 130
In a very short period, Shinui became the focal point of public discontent with the politics of Shas in particular and the ultra-orthodox in general, and it won six and fifteen seats in the 1999 and 2003 elections respectively. During the 2003 elections, the religious-secular cleavage was crystallized in the struggle between Shas and Shinui. Shinui presented itself as the representative of the secular and middle class interests. As one observer wrote, Shas and Shinui had radically different visions for the future of the Israeli society:

“The constituencies of the two parties have agendas that include issues that do not seem to be part of the national agenda: whether the country's character will be Jewish or democratic, Western or Mediterranean; whether the dominant way of life will be that symbolized by Tel Aviv or that of Netivot and the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem; whether we will hate the gentiles who live among us or incorporate them into the society; whether the voters of Shinui will continue to underwrite the way of life of Shas voters, and whether Shas’s elected representatives will continue to dictate the way of life of Shinui voters. The two parties direct a great deal of mutual arrogance at each other, and their voters are supposedly motivated by self-identity and loathing. There is in fact a core of truth in this description.”

This sharp difference in worldviews and lifestyles was exacerbated with harsh political rhetoric the parties directed towards each other, and this created an important element of instability in the democratic system. The results of the 2003 national elections was a serious blow for Shas, not because of the record number of MKs Shinui sent to Knesset, but because of Likud leader Ariel Sharon’s decision to include Shinui in the coalition government at expense of the ultra-orthodox parties, including Shas.

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349 During its participation in the coalition government the party underwent serious splits over corruption charges and personal vendettas and did not receive any Knesset seats in the 2006 national elections. Then, the party merged with the new-born center party Kadima.

350 Ha'aretz, 5 January, 2003
This development led to the last lesson that can be drawn from Shas’s relationship to democratic governance, namely its strategic moderation. Being left out of the coalition government hurt Shas and sent a serious message to its leadership. Therefore, the party toned down its anti-secularist rhetoric in the aftermath of the 2003 elections. The chairman Eli Yishai demanded from all the MKs to be careful in their criticism towards the secular actors, specifically state institutions, such as the Supreme Court. This new stance gave Shas a more moderate outlook. The party veteran Nissim Zeev’s statement on the importance of the democratic regime is an example of this new moderate rhetoric of the party:

“Shas is representing a very big segment of the society and in general these people want the state to be a secular state. In the society there are traditional people and they want to respect the state as secular. We are talking to the traditional population. The secular people want to depict Shas as if Shas wants that State of Israel to be a Judaic state first and then a democratic state. But Shas wants to have first a democratic state, then a Judaic state.”351

This moderation of Shas was clearly a strategic move to change the party’s image in the eyes of the non-religious parties and constituents. With this strategic moderation Shas aimed to prevent any future possibility of being left out of the coalition government and being cut from its precious control of state resources.

7.7 Conclusion

To the surprise of many observers Shas exponentially increased its electoral strength and political power in the Knesset after its formation in 1983. This ultra-orthodox Sephardi ethnic party’s appeal lies in its eclectic ideology that appeals to broad

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351 Interview with party MK Nissim Zeev on December 5, 2006
segments within the Sephardi public. Shas successfully meshed national, religious, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic messages in an ideology that addressed the Sephardi sentiment at a time when the sociocultural cleavage between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim was politicized.

Each part of Shas’s ideology attracted different Sephardi groups. While the ultra-orthodox Sephardim supported Shas as a religious movement, Shas’s use of folk religious symbols also appealed to traditional Sephardim. Moreover, the party aggressively supported “religious returnee” activities that incorporated many Oriental Jews from low-economic classes into the party ranks. The party’s ethnic message had twin components. While Shas emphasizes the discriminatory practices committed against the Sephardim by the Ashkenazi establishment, it also creates a positive message around ethnicity by promising the recreation of the glorious past of the Sephardi tradition. Lastly, the egalitarian rhetoric of Shas that emphasized big government drew the support of the development towns and the slums of big cities with a high concentration of poverty.

The relationship of Shas with other political actors within the Israeli political system gives us also an opportunity to evaluate hypotheses made about the relationship between religiopolitical actors and democratic governance. Shas’s positive contribution to Israeli democracy lies in its achievement of bringing the voices of peripheral groups into the public debate and creating a venue for the recognition of differences. On the other hand the exclusionary rhetoric and practices of the party leaders towards the secular parties, the Supreme Court judges, the Russian immigrants, and Conservative and Reform communities severely undermine democratic political culture and threaten the civil rights
of certain groups. This uncompromising stance of Shas and its parallel electoral strength stimulated a severe reaction from the secular community, exemplified by the rise of the Shinui party in the 2003 elections. The political conflict between the constituents and the leaders of both parties increased the religious-secular tension within Israel and undermined the political stability of the country. When Shas was left out of the coalition in 2003 due to its contentious relation with Shinui, the party toned down its anti-secular rhetoric and moderated its stance on the religion-state relationship.
CHAPTER 8
THE POLITICS OF THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK PARTIES

8.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the National Outlook Movement’s (NOM) ideology and bases of political support by drawing parallels with the Shas movement. I start with a brief discussion of the formation and evolution of the National Outlook parties. Then, I show how the National Outlook Movement, which is represented by five different political parties in its forty year history, blended religious, economic, and social messages in its ideology in order to form bases of electoral support among different subgroups of the periphery.

The movement’s religious message is based on a critique of the Kemalist Westernization project. Both in domestic and foreign politics, the movement aims to recreate the glorious era of the Ottoman Empire by selectively appropriating certain practices from this period and proposing them as solutions to current problems. Furthermore, the movement tries to construct bridges with the Kurdish constituents by
emphasizing the significance of Islamic brotherhood as opposed to ethnic nationalism.

The NOM has succeeded in appealing to different segments of the periphery with its socioeconomic message as well. By emphasizing the importance of state intervention into the economy for remedying inter-regional inequities in Turkey, the NOM prospered in the underdeveloped provinces of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. With its egalitarianism and economic program of a “Just Economic Order”, it drew support from the urban poor in the *gecekondu* neighborhoods. The dynamic party organization created by the WP in the 1990s also played a significant role in door-to-door mobilization and circulating the party’s message to households. Lastly, the WP was successful in forming an alliance around the concept of “justice” by bringing together groups who felt social, economic, or cultural exclusion.

In Sections 8.5 and 8.5.1, I deal with the effect of the National Outlook Movement’s electoral success on democratic governance in Turkey. On the one hand, the NOM contributed to the quality of democracy by integrating peripheral groups’ demands for recognition into the center of politics and facilitating the discussion of religious liberties in the public sphere. On the other hand, the party leadership’s use of divisive and exclusivist rhetoric regarding its political opponents and its ideology of top-down change harmed democratic political culture.

Furthermore, the electoral success of the WP in the 1990s and the party’s policies during its brief period of governing increased the threat perception on the part of the secularist social and political actors. This paved the way for the breakdown of Turkish democracy with the ousting of the WP-led government by the military. Lastly, Section
8.5.2 discusses the moderation of the religiopolitical actors in the example of the Justice and Development Party, which is an offshoot of the NOM and embraced a new identity based on conservative democracy.

8.2 Formation and Decision-Making

The birth of the National Outlook Movement goes back to the frustrations of a group of politicians with the center-right parties at the end of the 1960s. In the 1969 national election, Necmettin Erbakan and seventeen of his friends were nominated as independents or from other center-right parties with the aim of forming a parliamentary group after the elections. Despite the fact that only Erbakan was elected to the Grand National Assembly from Konya as an independent member, this Independents Movement (Bagimsizlar Hareketi) formed the core of the NOM. From his years as the president of the Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges of Turkey (Turkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birligi, TOBB), Erbakan was known as the champion of the interests of the Anatolian small merchants against the big industrialists in the major cities. By using this economic divide within the center right, he formed his new political movement, the NOM. On January 26, 1970 Erbakan founded the National Order Party (NOP) with the organizational help of the Nakshibendi Sheikh Mehmed Zahid Kotku from the Iskenderpasa Congregation. Hence, the NOP became the first political party of the NOM.

Kotku and Iskenderpasa Congregation played an important role in the formative stages of the National Outlook Movement. Kotku did not only provide an electoral base for Erbakan, but also provided the social networks of the Nakshibendi Order for the
political mobilization efforts of the NOP. In return, Erbakan emphasized his *biat* (obeisance) to Kotku and claimed that his political activities were in line with the will of the Sheikh and the teachings of his order.

Despite these close relations between the Iskenderpasa Congregation and the NOM, the parties of the NOM do not intertwine religious and political authority as does the Shas movement in Israel. Although Kotku and the Iskenderpasa Congregation played an important role in the formation stages of the NOM, the party leaders asserted independence from the religious authority structures as their party commanded more power over significant segments of the Turkish population. The clear break between religious and political authorities occurred in 1990, when Esad Cosan, Kotku’s successor as the leader of the Iskenderpasa Congregation at the time, declared his suspension of support for the Welfare Party in a speech he delivered to his followers.\(^{352}\)

Although the NOP had been shut down during the military intervention in 1971, other parties that accepted the ideological tenets of the National Outlook reemerged under different names despite their closure each time by the military or the Constitutional Court. Hence, the National Outlook Movement has been represented in five different political parties throughout its 40 year history in Turkey, namely the National Order Party, the National Salvation Party, the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party, and the Felicity Party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Party</th>
<th>Leader-Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>National Order Party</td>
<td>Necmettin Erbakan (1970-1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suleyman Arif Emre (1972-3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ahmet Tekdal (1983-7)</td>
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<td>Recai Kutan (2001-2008)</td>
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<td>Felicity Party</td>
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Table 8.1: The National Outlook Parties and Their Leaders

In addition to these five parties it needs to be mentioned that a significant split occurred within the National Outlook Movement. The younger generation within the Virtue Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, and Bulent Arinc contested the old guard led by Recai Kutan in the first congress of the Virtue Party in 2000, but lost by a narrow margin. When the Virtue Party was closed down by the Constitutional Court, these young leaders from the Virtue Party formed the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2001 instead of joining the Felicity Party formed by the old guard. Although the JDP incorporated significant segments of the party grassroots from the VP, it would be a mistake to brand the party as a party of the NOM, because its leadership explicitly stated that they are breaking with the ideological program of the National Outlook. A discussion of the Justice and Development Party will be given in Section 8.5.2. Yet, the main focus of the chapter will be on the ideological premises of the National Outlook parties.

Unlike Shas, which bases its political decisions on the decisions of a council of
rabbis, the parties of the National Outlook functioned as modern mass political parties. At the top of the decision-making structure lies the Central Decision and Executive Board that is elected by the delegates in each party congress. While this mechanism of decision-making appears very democratic, like most other political parties in Turkey, internal democracy in the NOP parties has been very weak. Necmettin Erbakan had the last say on important issues, even at times when he was banned from politics and was not the official party leader. An old guard of politicians—figures such as Sevket Kazan, Fehim Adak, Oguzhan Asilturk, Temel Karamollaoglu, Cevat Ayhan, and Recai Kutan—known for their complete loyalty to Erbakan since the 1970s had always been in top tiers of the party organization. As mentioned above, the only significant grassroots’ revolt against Erbakan’s leadership by the new generation of politicians resulted in the split of the movement in 2001.

8.3 Bases of Political Support

The National Outlook Movement appealed to the cultural and economic demands of the periphery in Turkey. Yet, the periphery is not a monolithic group and consists of many different economic, social, and cultural sub-groups. The parties of the National Outlook won important electoral victories in the 1990s, because the movement constructed an eclectic ideology that appealed to these different sub-groups in the society.

One of the bases of support for the National Outlook Parties was the underdeveloped cities in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. By emphasizing the inequalities between regions of Turkey in its party program and promising to take policy
measures to remedy these inequalities, the NOM appealed to the population living in these regions. As Table 8.2 below reveals, the National Outlook Parties received votes above their national average in the national elections in the poor and underdeveloped parts of Turkey, especially in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolian provinces.

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Table 8.2 Vote share of National Outlook Parties in selected provinces in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia (1973-1999)

Moreover, the party appealed to the Kurdish constituents in southeastern Anatolia and in the squatter settlements of the big cities. Instead of emphasizing a homogenizing Turkish nationalism that denies ethnic and cultural differences in the Turkish society, the parties of the National Outlook promoted the concept of Islamic brotherhood. By using this concept, National Outlook attracted the electoral support of many Kurds, who lead a traditional religious life. Therefore, in the post-1980 era the parties of the National Outlook and currently their offshoot Justice and Development Party have been the only serious contenders for the Kurdish vote against the Kurdish nationalist parties in the
predominantly Kurdish southeastern provinces, such as Diyarbakir, Siirt, Batman, or Mardin.

In the 1990s, the shantytowns of the metropolitan cities also became an important basis of support for the Islamists in Turkey. The residents of the shantytowns were drawn to the National Outlook Parties because of the message of justice promoted by the movement. The Welfare/Virtue Party not only win control of the municipalities of boroughs with a concentration of shantytowns, such as Gungoren, Sultanbeyli, Umraiyiye, and Bagicilar in Istanbul, or Altindag and Kecioren in Ankara, but also captured the city governments of Ankara and Istanbul due to the increasing number of gecekondu residents in the two biggest cities of Turkey. Ozler (2000), for instance, empirically shows that the neighborhoods with a concentration of squatter settlements preferred the Welfare Party in the 1991 and 1995 national elections.

Lastly, the National Outlook Movement also represented the interests of the new emerging Islamist bourgeoisie. The small and medium-sized manufacturing firms based in the Anatolian cities, such as Kayseri, Gaziantep, Denizli, or Kahramanmaras, benefited greatly from the export-oriented development strategy that Turkey adopted in the post-1980 period. These new conservative businessmen rose to economic elite status, although culturally they were seen as part of the periphery. Hence, they supported the Islamist party in order to assert their conservative identity in the public sphere. Since the National Outlook Movement appealed to groups from diverse socioeconomic classes, some defined it as a cross-class alliance.353

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8.4 The Ideology of National Outlook

The National Outlook Movement was formed in 1970 when the center-periphery cleavage was politicized due to the closer social contact between these groups as explained in Chapter 3. The Movement’s ideology, known as the National Outlook primarily targeted the peripheral groups, which felt economic, cultural, and political exclusion. Similar to Shas’s ideology in Israel, National Outlook also successfully blended religious, cultural, national, and economic messages in order to address the concerns of the periphery in Turkey.

Below, I discuss some of the main tenets of the movement’s ideology and show how they appealed to different sub-groups within the periphery. Section 8.4.1 discusses the expression of the NOM’s Islamist ideology on different levels, namely the movement’s aim of spiritual development in Turkey, its discourse on recreating the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire, its use of religious vocabulary in framing political questions, its anti-Western foreign policy agenda, and its emphasis on Islamic brotherhood as it relates to the Kurdish question. Section 8.4.2 discusses the socioeconomic message of the National Outlook Parties by focusing on the movement’s emphasis on state-led heavy industrialization, its egalitarian proposals, its emphasis on remedying regional inequalities, and its anti-corruption platform. Lastly, Section 8.4.3 focuses on the concept of justice in NOM’s ideology and the societal alliance the movement created around this concept.
8.4.1 The Religious Message: Islamism of the National Outlook Movement

The National Outlook Movement has been Turkey’s only serious Islamist actor which has contested in national politics. Despite their Islamist character, the parties of National Outlook never explicitly embraced the label “Islamist” due to the institutional context in which they operated, namely Turkey’s state-imposed strict secularism. In spite of this caution, they became the target of Turkey’s constitutional court and were closed down each time only to reappear under a different name. Hence, unlike Shas which openly stated itself to be a Judaic movement, National Outlook parties were more subtle in their use of Islam as a political tool.

Five aspects of National Outlook’s ideology reveal how the party used Islam as a political ideology. First, the party emphasized the importance of spiritual development in Turkey through the creation of a more religiously oriented populace. Second, the party tried to recreate a glorified Islamic cultural tradition based on the Ottoman and Seljuk traditions. Third, the movement used Islamic idioms in framing political questions. Fourth, the National Outlook emphasized the importance of Islamic solidarity with respect to the Kurdish question. Lastly, the party used Islam as a vital reference point in its foreign policy agenda.

As stated in its party program one of the twin goals of the NOM was spiritual development (manevi kalkınma). When asked what the priorities of the National Outlook Movement were, one party MP stated:

First of all we think that the moral and spiritual fabric [of this nation] needs to be strengthened. This can be achieved through education. To state it more clearly it can be achieved through religious education, moral education... A shared destiny, spiritual fabric, morals, respect for one another’s rights, these are at the basis of the elements that keep a nation together. This is how a sound social fabric and family structure are
formed; this is how people with strong moral and spiritual values, a strong society, a strong family comes into being... For that reason, we call all of these spiritual development. 354

In addition to using religious and moral education to strengthen the spiritual character of the Turkish society and citizens, the activists in the National Outlook Movement think that the web of religious institutions in Turkey needs to be used more effectively to achieve these ends. The Directorate of Religious Affairs needs to coordinate this attempt at spiritual development, as one MP from the WP asserted:

And certainly the Directorate of Religious Affairs needs to be made much more functional. In essence, the Turkish constitution is not a constitution that rejects religion. Just the contrary; article 24 envisages a compulsory religion class. This is an exceptional thing in a secular system...Hence in Turkey there is a legal foundation of religiosity, moreover, the Turkish Penal Code stipulates legal sanctions against the defamation of religion, defamation of religious people, and defamation of religious values...Even more important than these, the Political Parties Law states that a political party which puts the abolition of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in its party program should be closed down... Hence in Turkey both in the constitution and in the laws there is respect for religion and religious values. Yes there are deficiencies, but the main problem is in practice. For instance to remove the spiritual weakness, religion needs to be made much more active, much more functional, because – according to published statistics – in Turkey today 25 million people go to Friday prayers. Now, this is very important; such an organization does not exist in any other country. For the peace of the society, for the strengthening of the society, this [opportunity] needs to be used. Another issue, for instance today sixteen thousand mosques lack imams. These places need to be filled. Today, in Turkey there are 35,000 vacancies for religion and ethics teachers, these needs need to be met. In Turkey with a population of seventy million, there are nearly twenty-five “Divinity Faculties.” The curriculum of these Divinity Faculties needs to be reevaluated and the number of students accepted into them needs to be increased... The Directorate of Religious Affairs needs to be reorganized. The imam should not just be a person who leads the Friday payer and the five prayers, he also needs to be an opinion leader, he needs to be more active and functional. 355

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354 Interview with Cevat Ayhan on February 22, 2007. Ayhan has been an MP from the NSP, WP, and VP. He is still an active member of the FP.
355 Interview with Seref Malkoc on February 22, 2007
As the quotation shows, the aim of the National Outlook Movement is not to radically transform the institutional structure of the Turkish state as far as the religion-state relationship is concerned. The leaders and activists of the NOM know that the Turkish state already exerts an important authority over religious affairs. For instance, the Directorate of Religious Affairs appoints the imams in every mosque in Turkey and supervises the Friday sermons. In addition the state controls religious education. The vocational Imam Hatip schools are under the authority of the Ministry of Education, while the Quranic courses operate under the purview of the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The aim of this state control of religious affairs is the Kemalist view of keeping religious activity at bay and making sure that religiosity of society confirms the Kemalist tenets of the state. On the other hand, the aim of the NOM is to use these institutions already set in place by the Kemalist state to create a citizenry more in tune with its political ideology. Hence, the aim of the movement is not to free religious activity from the state’s control, but to use these state institutions to impose their own religious ideology over the Turkish citizenry.

A very significant aspect of the National Outlook Movement’s Islamism has been its critique of the Kemalist project of modernization. Similar to Shas’s attempts to recreate the glorious Sephardic civilization from Andalusia, National Outlook aims to create a civilization that would stand up to Western civilization. In this civilizational project, National Outlook attempts to recreate certain practices from the Ottoman period.

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356 Yayla, A. “Turkey’s Leaders-Erbakan’s Goals” Middle East Quarterly (September 1997): 1
The NOM’s civilizational critique starts with the late Ottoman period. According to the ideology of the party, the Ottoman Empire started to crumble when it decided to borrow practices from the West:

We said that the prescriptions the West introduced into Turkey in the past two decades did not develop Turkey, caused Turkey to lose blood, and took Turkey backwards....The Tanzimat edict in 1839 was the importation of certain political projects into Turkey by pressure from the West. Thus, we started to import systems. First we said ‘let’s import knowledge and technology’, then we said that this knowledge and technology are part of a system and started to import systems. After 20 years, in 1856 with the Rescript of Reform we entered a bigger import period. After another 20 years in 1876 we started to import political systems...Certainly Turkey needed to take certain measures within its boundaries. Yet, since these were done with an import mentality and imposition of the West, but not with a mentality based on our own values, our own resources, our own opportunities, the Empire disintegrated. From 1839 to 1938, after 5-6 import packages, we could neither become rich nor do anything. On the contrary, we lost our political power, we lost our military power...In conclusion, it is apparent that the Westernization process caused Turkey to regress, caused Turkey to disintegrate. This is a historical reality. These packages did not – as they [the Westerners] and their extensions in Turkey argue – make Turkey rich or develop Turkey. On the contrary they caused Turkey to regress and shrunk the domain of freedom for our people who are attached to their own values.  

This analysis, which claims Turkey’s underdevelopment is caused by the Westernization practices the country adopted, lies at the core of the National Outlook Movement’s ideological worldview. In most of his speeches Erbakan calls all the other political parties “imitators” in order to emphasize that they are unquestionably accepting the Kemalist project of Westernization, while his party is proposing a civilizational project that foregrounds the Islamic roots of Turkish society. According to the National Outlook Movement’s ideologues, the Turkish education system depicts the West as the ultimate source of progress and human achievement and overlooks the contributions of

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357 Interview with Bahri Zengin on March 7, 2007
Islamic societies to humanity in scientific, legal, and political realms. This admiration of Western culture and attempts to mimic it creates a lack of self-confidence on the part of the Turkish population.\textsuperscript{358}

The activists of the National Outlook Movement also state that just practices were the norm during the Ottoman era, and these just practices were replaced by coercive ways of governing. As one of the old guards of the National Outlook movement claims:

\begin{quote}
We are not going to learn from the West how to govern a society. When we look to history, we see that we are the descendants of a governing cadre, which governed three continents for six centuries, and they have governed these places despite the diversity in ethnicities and religions. Hence, there is no point to look for salvation in the capitalism or socialism of the West. We need to foresee a governing system in which we elevate the right (\textit{hak}) and justice and ensure the establishment of happiness among the entire nation and geography.\textsuperscript{359}
\end{quote}

As Kazan mentions in the above quotation, the activists of the National Outlook Movement emphasize the peaceful coexistence of ethno-religious communities in the Ottoman Empire. This peaceful coexistence of ethno-religious communities was instituted through the implementation of the “\textit{millet system}” in the Ottoman Empire, which granted autonomy to different ethno-religious communities in the Empire for managing their communal matters. This practice according to the National Outlook activists is an indication of the superior democracy during the Ottoman times:

\begin{quote}
During the Ottomans, there was a democratic mechanism, because the Jews who came from Spain were living according to their laws, according to their beliefs, according to their values. So were the Christians, and the Muslims. Hence, everyone was living as they wished. It [the Ottoman state] was only constituting the defense, in a way it was an administrative mechanism. In a way it was enabling the different communities to live
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{358} Bahri Zengin \textit{le On the Record Sistemin Anatomisi Uzerine Soylesiler}, p.37
\textsuperscript{359} Interview with Sevket Kazan on March 2, 2007.
together, it was eliminating all the pressures among the communities. At that time there was a conception of democracy much more developed than today’s. When we started to Westernize, we also started to lose this [conception of democracy], as I said we also lost our freedom. The racist system that they call the nation-state, which also affects the Turkish-Kurdish issue, came to us by the imposition of the West. Now for 100 years we have been trying to sort it out. This is not the product of our values and culture. We lived for 1000 years together, the Turks, Kurds, and even the Armenians and there was no problem. Whenever we brought from the West a racist system in the form of the nation-state, then the problem occurred.360

Taking the millet system of the Ottoman Empire as an example, Bahri Zengin designed a project of “multiple legal orders”, which envisages the existence of plural legal systems for different ethno-religious communities in Turkey. According to this project, which was discussed by the WP on different political occasions, each citizen should have the right to choose the legal system of his choice and be tried according to the rules of this system.361 Some in the movement also grounded the project in the Medina Charter. The Medina Charter was a legal arrangement Prophet Muhammad instituted between the Muslim, Jewish, and pagan Arab tribes in Yathrib (later Medina), in order to establish public order in the city after his hijra. This arrangement, which granted communal autonomy in religious, legislative, judicial, educational, and commercial matters to respective ethno-religious communities,362 is also used as a source to legitimize the proposal of multiple legal orders.

In addition to its civilizational critique, the parties of the National Outlook also expressed their Islamic character by framing political questions with a religious vocabulary. For instance, the word ‘milli’ – which is at the core of the movement’s

360 Interview with Bahri Zengin on March 2, 2007
platform *Milli Gorus* (National Outlook) – does not simply mean national, but is also used by the party cadres as an adjective that refers to a “religiously defined community”.\(^{363}\) Furthermore, the National Outlook activists described their parties as belonging to the category of ‘‘*hak’’ – meaning truth, sacred, godly and a just system of Islam- while depicting all the other parties as belonging to the category of ‘‘*batil’’ – meaning false, spurious, and irreligious.\(^{364}\) The motto of the party’s newspaper *Milli Gazete* reads: “*Hak gelince batil zail olacak,*” meaning that falsehood will vanish with the advent of truth. The reference is clearly to the National Outlook Movement’s rise to political power and the concomitant disappearance of other political parties that promote superstitious materialism.

Necmettin Erbakan, the founder and the leader of the movement, is known as *Hoca* (teacher) among his followers. The term has a double meaning. It does not only refer to Erbakan’s status as a university professor of mechanical engineering, but also depicts him as a religious opinion leader, hence a religious teacher. Erbakan is also known to organize ceremonies after the National Outlook’s public meetings, where people take an oath of allegiance to the movement’s cause. These ceremonies resemble to an oath of obeisance (*biat*) followers take to their religious leaders.\(^{365}\) Erbakan also utilized the concept of *jihad* in his political speeches, and made his own interpretation of the concept. According to him, *jihad* meant “to work with all your abilities and until the end of your endurance for the formation of a godly/just order and to use all your wealth

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\(^{364}\) Ibid., p.223

\(^{365}\) Calmuk, F. “Necmettin Erbakan” In *İslamcilik* ed. Aktay, Y. (İstanbul: İletisim Yayınları, 2004), 566
in this path.”366 In political rallies, the supporters often chanted slogans calling Erbakan a jihadist (mucahit).

The religious vocabulary used by the National Outlook Parties was in tune with the religious character of the movement’s supporters and activists. The supporters of the National Outlook Parties were ideologically different from the rest of the electorate. A post election survey conducted in 1999 showed that religious values were the most important predictor of the Virtue Party’s vote.367 The results of the survey indicated that the voters, who cast their ballot for the Virtue Party, differed from the other voters primarily in their emphasis on religious ideology.

The activists and elites in the Welfare Party also distinguished themselves from others by showing high levels of Islamic ideology. In a survey conducted in 1997-1998, all the 111 questioned party elites and activists in the Welfare Party responded affirmatively to the claim that “Islam is the one ideal that can emancipate individuals from the chains of the current problems in the country.”368

The third aspect of the National Outlook’s religious message can be seen in the movement’s approach in addressing the Kurdish question. The parties of the NOM emerged as the only serious political force in the Southeastern provinces, where the Kurdish citizens form a majority of the population, against the Kurdish nationalist parties. The main reason behind the appeal of the National Outlook parties was their inclusiveness of the Kurds. Erbakan and the National Outlook Parties continually

367 Esmer, Y. “At the Ballot Box: Determinants of Voting Behavior” In Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey ed. by Sayari, Sabri, and Esmer, Yilmaz. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 111
claimed—especially in the 1990s when radical Kurdish nationalism was on the rise and
the activities of the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK) were at the focus of national
politics—that the concept of Islamic brotherhood should foreground the solution for the
“Eastern Question”.369

In its Fourth Party Congress on 10 December 1993, the WP represented the
sources of the Kurdish question as “i) the materialist and racist character of Turkish
nationalism; ii) economic underdevelopment of the region, and iii) the destruction of
Islamic brotherhood by Republican policies of modernization without providing a
substitute.”370 Similarly Nazir Ozsoz, the press adviser of Erbakan at the time, stated that
“the people of the Southeast have always been considered as a threat by the (Republican)
Westernists simply because of their strong commitment to their faith (Islam) and their
traditions and their resistance to the integration with the West.”371

This view clearly attempts to create a bond between the Kurds and the Islamists
by emphasizing their exclusion and persecution at the hand of a common enemy, namely
the Kemalist center. Furthermore, it also suggests that the Islamic character of the
Kurdish population constitutes an important reason for its exclusion by the Republican
elites. Although it is true that Kurdish nationalism had Islamic overtones in the early
Republican period, this close relation between Islam and Kurdish nationalism constitutes
at best a half-truth.

369 For example see Zaman 2 April 1994 or Milli Gazete, 6 December 1995
370 Duran, B. “Approaching the Kurdish Question via Adil Duzen: An Islamist Formula of the Welfare
Party For Ethnic Coexistence” Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 18, no.1 (1998): 113
371 Milli Gazete, 26 July 1994. Quoted in Duran, B. “Approaching the Kurdish Question via Adil Duzen:
An Islamist Formula of the Welfare Party For Ethnic Coexistence” Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 18,
no.1 (1998): 114
According to the NOM, the solution to the Kurdish question needed to be found in the framework of a new national identity that is grounded in the concept of Islamic brotherhood. As Huseyin Tanrikulu explains in the National Outlook’s daily newspaper *Milli Gazete*:

Certainly, Refah (Welfare) will solve the Southeastern Question…by winning the population…not by a racist societal view, not by crushing them [the Kurdish citizens], not by putting pressure on them through the state’s means, not by forcing them to leave their houses and villages, not by leaving them hungry and jobless….by seeing them as Muslim brothers, by winning their hearts and minds.372

This way the National Outlook parties aim to create a more inclusive national identity that has Sunni Islam as a common denominator for different ethnicities. Some within the movement go one step further and suggest that Islam subscribes to communal rights for different ethnic groups. As Yakup Hatipoglu, a Kurdish WP member elected to the parliament from the Kurdish province Diyarbakir in the 1995 election, states:

This problem needs to be solved in a logical, rational way. Military struggle can work up to a point. We need to find ways outside this. The solutions outside the military struggle can be done through mutual agreements. And this is granting certain rights. I see this as a human rights problem. If people’s rights are given, this problem would be solved. What are human rights? Our religion has determined those. These are all necessary for a tribe, a race, and a nation….The solution is in Islam. Whatever Islam says would happen, whatever Allah says would materialize. Rights and freedoms need to be granted.373

As seen in the above quotation, Hatipoglu argues that the Kurds need to be given cultural rights, which is a practice justified by Islam. This rather multiculturalist proposition, which is also embraced by a liberal minority in Turkey, is less homogenizing

373*Nokta*, 11-17 August 1996, p.23
than the other suggestion of the NOM for creating a Turkish national identity intermeshed with Islamic brotherhood.

Yet despite these attempts to solve the Kurdish question within an inclusive Islamic framework, the relationship between the National Outlook parties and their Kurdish constituents has not always been smooth. For instance, when the Welfare Party made an electoral alliance with the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party before the 1991 national election, many Kurdish members either resigned from the WP or criticized severely the decision of the party leadership. Furthermore, the WP could not deliver its promises of inclusion once it became the senior coalition partner and adopted the hardline official military approach to the Kurdish question. The current government of the JDP - which has splintered from the National Outlook Movement and evolved into a Muslim democratic party- took some positive, but still insufficient, steps in solving the Kurdish question by extending certain basic civil rights in the cultural sphere to the Kurds.

The last aspect of the National Outlook’s religiopolitical ideology can be observed in its foreign policy agenda. Unlike the Shas party which mostly focused on domestic political issues, the National Outlook parties proposed a detailed foreign policy agenda that differs significantly from the other mainstream parties in Turkey. At the center of National Outlook’s foreign policy analysis lies the claim that the current international political system “puts might over right”. According to Erbakan, this characteristic of the international political system is shaped by the dominance of Western civilization which promotes power, wealth, privilege, and interest.374 This system that is

flawed at its core produces war, conflict, double standards, arrogance, exploitation, and oppression for mankind.\textsuperscript{375}

This Third Worldist critique of the international system is complemented by a positive argument that proposes the creation of an international system that “puts right over might.” According to Erbakan, the West can not be trusted for the salvation of humanity, and therefore the solution needs to come from the Muslim world. In order to realize this goal, the National Outlook Movement proposes the creation of a “United Nations of Muslim Countries” and “The Defense and Cooperation Organization of Muslim Countries.”\textsuperscript{376} These international organizations can “protect right and justice in the world as the Seljukis and the Ottomans did.”\textsuperscript{377}

In this vision of foreign policy, the NOM attributes to Turkey a leadership role in the Muslim world as the inheritor of the Seljuki and Ottoman civilizations. This vision proposes the creation of a “Great Turkey” that stands on her feet and takes initiatives in the international arena as opposed to being “a satellite of the West which is run by racist and imperialist mentalities.”\textsuperscript{378} Thus, since its inception the National Outlook Movement has been vehemently opposed to Turkey’s joining the European Union.\textsuperscript{379}

The NOM took practical steps to realize this vision for the first time during the Welfare Party-led coalition government by forming a new international body named D-8, which is composed of the 8 largest Muslim countries, namely Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Iran, Indonesia, and Malaysia. As stated by Necmettin

\textsuperscript{375} Ibid. pp.20-23
\textsuperscript{377} Ibid. p.21
\textsuperscript{378} Ibid. p.27
\textsuperscript{379} Saribay, A. Y. \textit{Türkiye'de Modernlesme Din ve Parti Politikasi : Milli Selâmet Partisi Ornek Olayi} (İstanbul: Alan Yayınları, 1985), 127-8
Erbakan the aim of the D-8 is to break the Western domination in the international system, become an alternative to the G-7, and institute “peace over war, dialogue over conflict, justice over double standards, equality over superiority, cooperation over exploitation, and human rights and democracy over force and imposition.” According to Erbakan, the activities of the D-8 should culminate in the Second Yalta Conference, where G-7 and D-8 would come together and agree on the institution of a just international order. Despite these utopian, grandiose goals, the D-8 did not have any substantive achievement and became, in the words of National Outlook activists, a shelved project after the Welfare Party left office.

Another major theme in Erbakan’s speeches and the National Outlook’s foreign policy analysis is Zionism. Echoing anti-Semitic conspiracy theories Erbakan finds Zionism and the aim to create a Greater Israel behind every exploitative structure on the international field. A segment from the Felicity Party’s Election Declaration is typical of this stance:

The great game of the racist imperialism is to institute its world dominance and turn all people into servants and slaves to itself by establishing a Greater Israel… The great game of the racist imperialism is to establish the Greater Israel that would include the entire promised land between the Euphrates and the Nile, to control the government of all 28 countries from Morocco to Indonesia in order to institute its [Greater Israel’s] security, to get rid of any independent state that is the inheritor of the Seljuks and Ottomans and could be a threat to Israel, hence to destroy our Turkey. This

380 Opening Speech of Necmettin Erbakan at the Meeting of the Union of Muslim Communities on May 28, 2006. (Ankara:Esam, 2006)
381 Ibid. Erbakan argued that the first Yalta Conference between the Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and the United States at the end of the WWII constitutes a missed opportunity for the formation of a just international order, because the conference included only the winners of WWII and incorporated dictators like Stalin. Moreover, Erbakan argues that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the West has chosen Islam as its new enemy and preferred to establish enmity and hatred rather than cooperation. Hence, he presents the Second Yalta Conference as a step towards the establishment of a just world order. Yet he does not explain why G-7 would suddenly agree to the institution of a just world order in his proposed second Yalta Conference.
Lastly, the National Outlook Parties were very successful in instrumentalizing conflicts in the international arena, such as the first and second Gulf wars, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the ethno-religious conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Palestinian plight under Israeli occupation, and the ethno-religious conflict in Bosnia, for increasing their popularity among their constituents. The most visible example of this was the huge humanitarian campaign spearheaded by the Welfare Party to help Bosnian Muslims in 1993. The Bosnian war and similar events helped the National Outlook parties to construct a victimized Muslim identity in the international arena in order to bolster the party’s anti-Western, anti EU stance, and call for international justice.

8.4.2 Socioeconomic message

The main pillar of the National Outlook Movement’s economic ideology is Turkey’s need for material development (maddi kalkınma). According to the NOM’s economic vision, Turkey needs to embrace an effort of national industrialization that focuses on heavy industry, especially defense industry. The famous slogan of Erbakan in the 1970s was that under the government of the National Outlook, Turkey “will not be a country that buys, but a country that produces.” Hence, the parties of the National Outlook have been arguing that Turkey can become an independent world power only by becoming a producer and exporter of industrial products rather than raw materials. As

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mentioned in Chapter 6, during its participation in the coalition governments, the NSP laid the foundation of a number of factories in Anatolia, but many of these factories did not start to work at full capacity.

The NOM’s critique of the international economic system is very similar to the criticism raised by the dependency theorists – who emphasized the need for the periphery countries to cut their economic ties with the core countries and to develop infant industries— in the Latin American countries in the 1970s. Yet the economic model that the NOM proposes to get rid of the underdevelopment of Turkey had significant differences from the ISI models proposed by the dependency theorists. The NOM’s economic solution differed both from socialist and capitalist models. According to the ideology of the NOM, both capitalism and socialism are exploitative systems that put “might over right”, one promoting exploitation in the hands of the capital, the other promoting exploitation in the hands of the political power.383

The NOM states that the state should play an active role in the creation of an egalitarian income distribution, provision of credit to the private sector, and the creation of basic infrastructure for heavy industries, while the private sector still constitutes the main engine of growth.384 The NOM’s economic program, which is presented as the “Just Economic Order” (Adil Duzen,)385 also heavily criticized capitalist economic practices, such as interest rate-taking, credit systems, and exchange rate systems.386

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383 21 Soru 21 Cevapta Adil Duzen (1995 Electoral Booklet)
385 Adil Duzen is a social and economic program that is based on a project prepared by university professors living a communal Islamic life in Akevler, Izmir. This project, which was prepared by Professor Arif Ersoy, Assistant Professor Suleyman Akdemir and Suleyman Karagulle, was adapted by Erbakan in 1985 and first used as the political program of the WP in the 1991 national election.
386 21 Soru 21 Cevapta Adil Duzen (1995 Electoral Booklet)
Moreover, the healthy working of this semi-utopian “Just Order” program was very much based on the concomitant moral development of the Turkish citizens and their good-willed intentions in economic transactions.387

Similar to Shas in Israel, the parties of the National Outlook also used the themes of poverty and socioeconomic inequality in their appeal to socioeconomically disadvantaged strata, especially the gecekondu residents. The statement below from the party program of the FP is typical of the NOM’s rhetoric:

In spite of the abundant natural endowments bestowed by Almighty God, the present economic situation is distressing. We can prove this with a few economic indicators: 1) The number of unemployed people is 11 million; 2) The level of hardship is at the highest level and the minimum wages are under 100 US dollars; 3) 13 million people are at the edge of hunger; iv) 22 million people are at the edge of poverty; v) the Gross National Product per capita is less than 2500 US dollars; vi) the imbalance in the distribution of income is twelfth among 190 countries.

Social consequences of our economic situation are: i) An increase in psychological depressions and suicides; ii) An increase in resorting to violence and in the rate of crime; iii) An increase in family problems and in the number of divorces. These indicators demonstrate that our society is at the edge of social explosions.388

The egalitarianism of the movement and its emphasis on the socially adverse consequences of these economic inequalities struck a cord among the rural immigrants, who had a hard time climbing the economic ladder and coping with the difficulties of city life. The National Outlook Movement activists were also successful in explaining the problems of poverty and inequality to the people on the street with a religious vocabulary:

387 Ibid. For similar statements see also article 5 of the program of National Order Party. Available at: http://www.belgenet.com/parti/program/mnp.html Retrieved by 03/05/2009 (Turkish)
388 Party program of the Felicity Party. Available at http://www.sp.org.tr/page.asp?id=139
These people lived in Turkey and were expecting service eventually. Despite the limited opportunities at the time the Welfare Party members were able to find solutions to their problems. Hence, they tried to help those people in the shantytowns, those people who came from the rural areas....And our prophet commands that ‘the one who sleeps with a full stomach while his neighbor sleeps hungry is not one of us’...Thus, a concept developed within the party organization. There were many people who got a religious education in the Imam Hatip schools or in the Quranic courses. They received this religious education, but could not apply it in real life. The Welfare Party became an instrument for them to apply this in their social lives...In our faith, our prophet says ‘the one who sleeps with a full stomach while his neighbor sleeps hungry is not one of us’. This person knew this, but could not apply it. Upon entering the WP, he started to apply it. Henceforth, the interest in the WP grew.389

As the above quotation shows, the Prophet Muhammad’s hadith: “the one who sleeps with a full stomach while his neighbor sleeps hungry is not one of us” was not only used to communicate the National Outlook’s egalitarian message to the people residing in poor communities, but was also utilized as a motivator for the pious activists working for the party. The National Outlook’s egalitarianism did not just stay on the discursive level, but also turned to concrete action thanks to the extensive party organization developed in the 1990s.

The Welfare Party, which was the representative of the NOM in the 1980s and 1990s, developed a very sophisticated party network that was known as the ‘prayer bead model’ (tespih modeli). According to this model, the party appointed activists who would be in charge of each administrative district. Hence every province (il), every borough (ilce), and finally every neighborhood (mahalle) would have one Welfare member responsible for recruiting the voters in the district. Moreover, in each neighborhood, four members, including one president, were appointed for each voting booth. These four voting booth observers (sandik musahiti) attended meetings every week to discuss how to

389 Interview with Ali Turan on 28 February 2007
reach out to citizens in their designated district. In 1995, the number of these booth observers in neighborhoods and villages surpassed 200,000. As a result of this extensive political network, the activists of the Welfare Party made frequent visits to homes in the gecekondu neighborhoods in the big metropolitan cities. Jenny White’s (2002) anthropological study in Umraniye, a big gecekondu neighborhood in Istanbul, reveals some of the dynamics of this Islamist mobilization among the urban poor. White shows in her ethnographic study how Welfare municipalities together with the party committees pinpointed poor households in the neighborhoods and provide material help by distributing clothes or food. This provision of social services in the gecekondu neighborhoods was parallel to Shas’s activities in the impoverished development towns in Israel.

Furthermore, the WP members attended social occasions, such as funerals or weddings in the neighborhoods, to construct a human connection with the residents and show that the party cares for them. As a WP activists stated:

People say that the Republican People’s Party is a social democratic party, but the social democrats do not have any involvement with the social life. They did not consider if these people in the shanties were hungry, thirsty, or if they needed anything. But those in the Welfare Party did not act like this. They went from door to door, they handed out roses during Women’s Day. They brought presents on Mother’s Day... With their limited means, the borough organizations, the district organizations engaged in these endeavors. They prepared talks in the coffeehouses, they held conversations in apartments...With these developments, everyday new people joined the WP. 

As a result of this successful mobilization strategy, the membership of the Welfare Party skyrocketed and surpassed any other party in Turkey. The WP increased its

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391 Interview with Ali Turan on 28 February 2007
membership from 800,000 in 1991 to over 4 million in 1995. The party’s women’s organization also played an important role in political mobilization. Despite their exclusion from party leadership positions, the women of the Welfare party worked in “Ladies Commissions,” which were organized in all of the seventy-nine provinces in Turkey by the end of 1996. These Ladies Commissions, which were organized even at “apartment levels” in metropolitan cities, played a key role in gaining access to households. As the current leader of the NOM suggested:

The women’s committees became an instrument of reaching out to a big audience, especially to households. Very silently, without making much noise, by knocking on doors, [by giving] a daisy, or 50 grams of coffee, [the women working for the WP said] this is our position, we don’t want your vote, we want your heart. Many people were contacted in this way.

Another key socioeconomic message of the National Outlook was the need to restore economic equity (ekonomik dengе) and to get rid of inter-regional inequalities. Since its formation, the National Outlook Movement activists claimed that the economy of the periphery had been neglected by Ankara. The NOM severely criticized the way the Import Substitution Industrialization strategy was implemented in Turkey in the 1970s, because most state subsidies went to big industrialists in the major cities and the small businesses lost ground. Hence, the NSP proposed policy measures, such as the establishment of regional credit banks or building factories near peripheral areas, and these appealed to the small businesses in Anatolia.

394 Ibid. p.45
395 Interview with Numan Kurtulmus on 5 March 2007
The National Outlook Movement also criticized the disregard for the agricultural sector in Turkey’s attempt to industrialize. Hence, the activists tried to create a fine balance between the party’s goal of industrialization and the need to look after the agricultural interests that formed an important part of the periphery’s economic basis. As the ex-minister of public works and settlement claimed:

The inequities between social layers need to be eradicated. This is an important issue. During the government of the NSP for four years, we tried to build meat and fish enterprises in agricultural Anatolian provinces. We built dairy industry enterprises, fodder factories in the boroughs. We did things which the private sector needed to do but hasn’t done. We expanded the factories of Sumerbank, the sugar factories. We don’t say that it is necessarily the state that has to do it, but someone has to do it. If no one does this, people in Kars immigrate to Istanbul, to Izmir, to Ankara and settle in gecekondu neighborhoods. This is the picture in Altindag, this is the picture in Mersin. When you go to Adana, this is the [same] picture, in Istanbul this is the [same] picture. Why is this so? Why do 15 million people live there [in Istanbul]? Because people are hungry there [in the villages]. Certainly, there will be demographic movement, it is unavoidable. Yet the people’s needs should be met at the minimum level so that the villagers can live in their village, the townspeople can subsist in their towns, and the urbanites can live in cities...You have to manage the transition, you can not abandon people to wild capitalism.396

Lastly, the Welfare Party ran on a policy agenda that emphasized the importance of a clean society (temiz toplum). In the post-1980 era, the WP could run on an anti-corruption agenda, because the party did not become part of any government until 1997. The party was perceived as the cleanest party at that time, when all other mainstream parties were involved in corruption scandals while in power.397 The WP repeatedly claimed that it was the only party that fought bribery and corruption and believed in government accountability.

The WP also had the opportunity to prove that these themes were more than election promises when it won the municipalities of four big boroughs in Istanbul,

396 Interview with Cevat Ayhan on 22 February 2007
namely Kagithane, Bahcelievler, Sultanbeyli, and Bagcilar in the interim local elections in 1992. In these four municipalities, the party worked hard to show that it could deliver services to the residents without getting involved in corruption or bribery charges. The work of these four municipalities was extensively used in the election campaign before the 1994 local elections, when the WP made major gains overall in Turkey including capturing the municipalities of Turkey’s biggest cities, Istanbul and Ankara.

Image 8.1 shows how the “clean society” image of the WP was deliberately constructed by its use of municipalities. The picture published in the National Outlook’s newspaper *Milli Gazete* shows the entrance of the Bahcelievler municipality. The banner hung over the door reads: “Bribes can not enter through this door: Just Solution-Immediate Solution.” The text below the picture explains that the residents are satisfied with the work of all WP municipalities because of the mayors’ fight against corruption and the concomitant increase in the budget of the municipalities. Similar statements on anti-corruption efforts of the municipalities and interviews with the mayors on their achievements were continuously represented in the *Milli Gazete* before the elections.

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398 *Milli Gazete*, 11 March, 1994
The WP also increased its popularity by convening “people’s councils” in the districts of its own municipalities. This experiment in participatory democracy brought the mayors and the residents of the district together in a forum in order to open a communication channel between the elected and electorates. This novel concept of “people’s assemblies” was also reported in the mainstream media channel. 

Image 8.1 Photograph of Bahcelievler Municipality Building’s Entrance on *Milli Gazete* 11 March, 1994
outlets and contributed to the WP’s image as a party promoting government accountability.

8.4.3 The National Outlook Movement as an Alliance of the Excluded

Another achievement of the Welfare Party that carried the National Outlook Movement to unprecedented electoral success in the mid-1990s was the party’s ability to present itself as the champion of the cause for “justice” (adalet), and to construct an alliance of various marginalized societal segments around this conception of justice. The NOM leadership put special emphasis on this concept and used it extensively in its political mobilization efforts, since the leadership very well knew that the concept of justice has much more resonance among Muslim constituents than concepts like individual rights or democracy.

A closer look at the party’s electoral campaigns in 1991 and 1995 shows that the National Outlook Movement began to reach out to all segments who felt exclusion from the society by utilizing the concept of justice. For instance, in the text of the 1991 electoral campaign, individuals from various walks of life voiced their concerns on the injustice of the political system. For instance, “farmers, civil servants, small-scale retailers, and workers who complain about rising inflation, low salaries, and high taxes; an industrialist who goes bankrupt and is unable to pay even the interest of the credit he took; the youngster who can not find a job; the retired person who could not find peace; and the student with a headscarf who demands that her human rights would be
respected” were subjects depicted in the 1991 election advertisement. These messages in the campaign clearly aimed to reach the “man on the street” who felt exclusion from the system. The WP concluded these advertisements with the promise of “creating a new world” in which these problems are solved once it comes to power.

This promise of bringing justice also extended to non-observant and non-traditional voter groups. During the mid-1990s, the WP is known to have engaged in extensive political propaganda and canvassing in taverns (meyhanes) and even in brothels in the slums of big cities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these slums supported the WP candidates. My interviewees suggested that these non-traditional, non-observant voters supported their party because their program, “Just Order”, captured their imagination and addressed their sense of exclusion from the society and longing for a better future. This strategy of the WP to reach out to the socially marginalized strata is analogous to Shas’s engagement with the drug addicts in the development towns and the slums of big cities.

Parallel to Shas activists, the modest background of many NOP activists also played a central role in convincing people that the promise of the WP for creating a new just, egalitarian order is genuine. An activist, who joined the National Outlook Movement during the Virtue Party era, defines the WP as a revolutionary force and eloquently sums up the reasons behind the party’s appeal:

Hence in the ‘91 and ‘95 election campaigns this left [rhetoric] was enormous...[They] wanted justice and opposed poverty, wrongfulness, injustice… Indeed the WP is a coalition [composed of] everyone who wants justice. [One says] I want justice, because Islam, our civilization is wronged…the other had to work hard in the past, he wants justice. The other

400 Ibid.
401 For instance see “Beyoglu’nda genelev sokagindan RP cikti” Nokta 9-15 January, 1994, pp.16-8
is homeless, he wants justice. Hence, in the “Just Order,” this is very clear, a coalition... I have an observation. In that period, during the 28 February [process], videotapes of Sevki Yilmaz and Tayyip Erdogan were circulated. [Those in the media] these are supporting sharia...But the people on the street did not listen to what the media said. [They said] these men are crying out, they are crying out for us. He is one of us, someone from Kasimpasa...The more these tapes were shown on TV, the more the WP strengthened. Hence someone similar to us is crying out, [they did not care] if he was religious or not...The prostitute in the brothel, the drug user on the street [thought] [they are] crying out for “me.” In short, something like that helped the Welfare Party catch on then. Hence the WP is a coalition, but primarily it represents the periphery. Hence the periphery was walking towards the center.  

8.5 National Outlook Parties and Democratic Governance

The multi-dimensional relationship between democratic governance and the parties of the National Outlook demonstrates striking similarities to the effect of Shas on democratic governance in Israel. First of all, similar to Shas’s integration of the Sephardi concerns to the Israeli center, the National Outlook parties deepened democracy in Turkey by incorporating economic, political, and cultural concerns of the periphery into the center of Turkish politics. Many groups that experienced socioeconomic and/or cultural exclusion felt empowered thanks to the representation of their concerns in the parliament and municipalities by the Welfare/Virtue Party in the 1990s. For instance, the socioeconomically marginalized gecekondu residents’ economic concerns were voiced by the National Outlook’s agenda. Moreover, the newly emerging Islamic bourgeoisie felt more inclusion, as its cultural symbols were slowly incorporated into the political sphere thanks to the increasing visibility of the Welfare and Virtue politicians. This symbolic

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402 Interview with Mehmet Bekaroglu on March 6 2007
politics represented the construction of a new Islamic identity addressing the periphery’s demands for cultural recognition.

Another important contribution of the National Outlook was its success in incorporating the discussion on rights and freedoms in the religious sphere into the national public discourse. The National Outlook activists’ questioning of the strict Kemalist interpretation of secularism, their proposal of an American type of secularism, their insistence on conceptualizing the wearing of the headscarf in universities as a right to education, and their demands for lifting the restrictions to access to religious education in the Quranic courses and Imam Hatip schools changed the tone of the public debate in Turkey in the 1990s. Despite the fact that the strict secularism in the legal sphere continues—as showcased with the latest court case against the governing Justice and Development Party—issues, such as the limits of state encroachment into religious affairs, the extent of freedom of religious expression in the public sphere, and the collective right to religious education, all became topics discussed publicly by different social and political actors.

In contrast to this positive role played by the National Outlook parties in enhancing the boundaries of the democratic public debate, some of the rhetoric the party leaders utilized against their opponents undermined democratic political culture in

404 For the different conceptions of secularism in public debate see Kuru, A. “Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey: The Case of the Justice and Development Party” in The Emergence of a New Turkey Democracy and the AK Parti ed. by Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006)

405 On March 21, 2007 the public prosecutor opened a case against the JDP, which has been governing Turkey since 2002. The indictment stated that the JDP became the center of anti-secularist activities, primarily because it proposed a constitutional amendment that would allow female students to wear the headscarf in the universities, and demanded its closure. At the end of the trial, the party was not closed down but the Constitutional Court issued a serious warning to the party for undermining Turkey’s secularism and half of the JDP’s public funding was cut.
Turkey. The exclusivist rhetoric Erbakan and party leaders used against their opponents is akin to Rabbi Ovadia’s jabs against Shas’s opponents that undermined norms of democratic debate in Israel. One of the infamous statements of Erbakan was his reference to other party supporters as believers in a “potato religion,” a mocking expression implicating a superstitious belief system: “If you don’t want to serve Refah [Welfare] Party, none of your prayers will be accepted… We, the entire community of believers, shall obey the orders of Refah and join this army. Those who don’t join [are not Muslims, but they] belong to the potato religion…Refah is the army. You will work for the growth of this army. If you don’t, then you belong to the potato religion. It is your religious duty to obey this call for jihad.”

The above quotation showcases the undemocratic and exclusivist tendencies of the National Outlook’s leadership. It shows how Erbakan used his position of religiopolitical authority to dismiss National Outlook’s rivals. It also demonstrates a lack of respect or even toleration for democratic rivals. Furthermore, Erbakan’s attempt to label all non-National Outlook supporters as non-believers demonstrates how he exploited religious beliefs to construct political divisions for his movement’s benefit.

Erbakan continued to use dismissive rhetoric when he became the prime minister and his Welfare Party was the senior coalition partner. One of his dismissive statements came after the infamous Susurluk car crash, which revealed that there had been close connections between the mafia and state officials. Some limited information disclosed by this car crash pointed to the existence of criminal organizations within the state structure. In response to these incidents, the public demanded that the government investigate the

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matter and started to protest, for example by turning their lights on and off every evening at 9. Erbakan, as the prime minister, called these protests trivial (fasa fiso) and said that the protesters are “like children doing the gulu gulu dance.” 407 The Justice Minister, Sevket Kazan, added insult to injury by likening these protests to the alleged game of “mum sondu” (snuff out the candle). 408 These remarks by the Welfare Party leaders while at the helm of the government showed their lack of democratic political culture and their trivialization of democratic grassroots demands.

Another aspect of NOM’s politics that was anathema to democratic governance was the totalistic approach of some party activists with regard to the Turkish state and society. As the general discussion in this chapter suggests, the National Outlook Movement was not a monolithic entity. There were different groups within the party with different political approaches. One of the groups within the movement, which was led by Bahri Zengin, saw the NOM as a civilianization project (sivillesme projesi). According to this view the NOM would create a grassroots movement and create a bottom-up change in the Turkish society. This group usually criticizes the Turkish state for being too powerful and argues that the strong state tradition stymies any attempt at creating a social movement for change. According to this view, the Islamist movement can be most successful if the role of the society is maximized in the government and the role of the

407 Ibid. 49
408 These remarks of Kazan were especially offensive to the Alevis in Turkey, despite the fact that they were not directed at Alevis. The usage of “Mum sondu” implies that there are inappropriate sexual relations between females and males during the Alevi religious practice. This is a public myth that is invented by those who are hostile towards the religious practices of the Alevis, especially the lack of gender segregation in the Djemevi (Cem Evi), their place of worship.
state is curbed. Yet another, and rather more influential group within the movement, finds fault in
the official ideology of the state, rather than state institutions’ extensive power over the
society. Mehmet Bekaroglu, who is one of the fiercest critics of this authoritarian
approach, puts it eloquently:

The modernism of the WP comes from this: they aim to capture the government
and transform the society from top-down. They want [to create] the “Great Turkey.” In this manner they are similar to the Kemalists, hence they want a strong,
developed, industrialized Turkey. There is only one difference: Muslim morality,
spiritual development. They aim to come to government with their spiritually
developed cadres and to rehabilitate Turkey with these cadres. This is the
ideological basis. Hence this is the basis of the conflict. There is an authoritarian
state...and there is an ideology named Kemalism within this state...They [the WP
activists] do not challenge the authoritarian state. They oppose the totalitarian
ideology in this authoritarian state, namely Kemalism. Hence they will take out
Kemalism and put in an ideology that is inspired by Islam.

Parallel to Bekaroglu’s claims many National Outlook activists perceive the state
as a “sacred” institution. Similar to Kemalist elites, they think that a strong state is crucial
for running the affairs of the society. For instance, many of my interviewees claimed
that the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which administers most religious affairs in
Turkish society, should be kept as it is or even be strengthened. Similarly, many argued
that the state should provide religious education, and this authority should not be given to
different religious communities (cemaatler). If different religious communities would

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409 For the civilianization manifesto of this group see Zengin, B. Sivil Anayasa Yeni Bir Toplum Sozlesmesi
Oneri (Ankara: Mart Matbaacilik, 2001)
410 Interview with Mehmet Bekaroglu on March 7 2007
411 For an argument on the similarity of statisms of both the Kemalist and Islamist actors see Navaro-
Yashin, Y. Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
2002)
have a right to give religious education, the argument runs, then false religious beliefs would be disseminated by unqualified people, and Turkish citizens would be manipulated. This argument, which is also frequently used by many Kemalists to thwart legitimate societal demands, assumes that there is one correct interpretation of Islam, and that the state should disseminate this correct interpretation through its institutions. Hence, many National Outlook activists, with the exception of a small group led by Zengin, do not question the “strong state” ethos of the Turkish Republic, but only want to conquer the institutions of the “strong state” to implement their own worldview from top-down. This view, which is shared by many secularists, is a testament to the existence of a poor democratic culture in Turkey.

8.5.1 The 28 February Process and the Breakdown of Democracy in Turkey

The rise of the Welfare Party in the 1990s also impacted democratic stability by leading to the polarization of politics along the secular-religious spectrum. This polarization culminated in the breakdown of the Turkish democratic regime, when the WP-TPP coalition government was ousted from power by pressure from the military in 1997. One year later the WP, as the political party with the largest membership, was closed down by the Constitutional Court. This period that is known as the “28 February Process” – named after the decisions taken in a National Security Council meeting on February 28, 1997 – constituted one of the most tumultuous periods in recent Turkish political history.

The polarization of politics along the religious-secular divide started in the early
1990s when the vote share of the WP started to increase and the secularist social and political actors felt that their way of life would be threatened with a potential WP government. This threat perception was also reflected in the political campaigns of political parties. For instance, in the wake of the 1995 general election all the mainstream parties and the WP positioned themselves along the religious-secular spectrum. Hence, the parties defined themselves implicitly or explicitly as belonging to the “secular” or the “religious” political camp. For example before the 1995 elections, all of the center-left and center-right parties, namely the Democratic Left Party, the Social Democratic Populist Party, the True Path Party, and the Motherland Party declared that they would not participate in any coalition government with the Welfare Party.\(^{412}\) In their election campaigns, each political party also portrayed its platform as the only safeguard against the Islamists.

Erbakan also made a sharp distinction between his party and the others by portraying the WP as the only rightful party and the other parties as imitators of the West. Moreover, he made it clear in the campaign speeches that WP is not in the same league with the other parties. When asked which party will follow WP in its vote share after the elections, he claimed “They are so far below that they are invisible.”\(^{413}\) In addition he refused to participate in TV debates, where other party leaders were present. When asked why he did not participate in the TV debates, Erbakan stated that “the WP is a super


\(^{413}\) *Zaman*, 21 December, 1995
league team, while the other parties are teams from the third league. There can not be a match-up between those.\(^{414}\)

When the WP emerged as the largest party in the 1995 election and acquired 21.4 percent of the national vote and 158 seats in the 550-seat parliament, alarm bells started to ring in the secularist circles. For instance, many in the mainstream media and center political parties immediately made the claim that “in democracies the will of 21 percent of the population can not preside over the will of 79 percent.” This statement meant that the WP did not have any mandate to rule, although it finished the electoral race as the first party. The implicit assumption in this claim was that all the votes cast for other parties were cast in total rejection of the WP.

Despite this heavy opposition from the mainstream media and after a brief center-right coalition government, the WP formed a coalition with the center-right True Path Party in 1996 and Erbakan for the first time became the prime minister of Turkey. During its short-lived government, the WP came constantly under attack by the secularist-mainstream media outlets, military establishment, and members of the judiciary. The excerpts below from articles by Oktay Eksi, the lead journalist in Turkey’s most-read daily, is typical of the secularist attacks against the WP and the political mood of the time:

The military academy, air force academy, and naval academy started the new academic year yesterday. Yet, yesterday they made a start different than other years. The information passed to us by some of our friends was that in all three academies the content of the first class was “secularism”…Moreover Atatürk’s statement “You should understand very well that the Republic of Turkey won’t be a country of sheikhs, dervishes, murids” was hung on the wall of the room in which the ceremony of the air force academy was held. This is not all. Yesterday, some universities had opening ceremonies. In most of them either

\(^{414}\) *Milli Gazete*, 13 December, 1995
the first class was on “secularism” or a speech given in the ceremony emphasized secularism...It is also reported that the chief justice of the Constitutional Court Yekta Gungor Ozden mentioned the danger of sharia in the speech he gave in one of the ceremonies in Ankara and said: ‘before it is not too late, we need to wake up and take steps.’ As Yekta Gungor Ozden says now without losing time we need to take action in order to save the secular republic.415

I can not tell you how many things passed through my mind when prime minister Necmettin Erbakan told the German journalists: “Sharia won’t come to Turkey”...But isn’t his presence-or the presence of his mentality- in the government a sign that Sharia already arrived....Sharia has arrived in fact. Now the question is not how it arrived, but how it will leave.416

In this period, the WP was closely scrutinized for its actions in the government and heavily criticized for certain symbolic events. These included Erbakan’s visit to Qadhafi, who gave an anti-Kemalist tirade in his tent during the visit; the support of the Welfare MPs for lifting the ban on the headscarf in universities and public offices; the discussion over building a mosque in Taksim square in Istanbul; Erbakan’s throwing an iftar dinner for religious order leaders in the prime ministry; the WP’s proposal for allowing the donation of the hides of sheep sacrificed for the Festival of Sacrifices to institutions other than the Turkish Aeronautical Association417; and the “Jerusalem Night” prepared by the WP’s Sincan mayor Bekir Yildiz and attended by the Iranian ambassador. These events challenged the secular imagery and political rituals the secular actors were accustomed to, and increased their belief that the secular regime was under threat.

417 According to law, the skins of sacrifices made during the Festival of Sacrifices have to be donated to the Aeronautical Association. This law basically aims to curb the potential financial gains of religious civil society organizations that might benefit from such donations.
On February 3, 1997, three days after the “Jerusalem Night”, tanks of the Turkish army passed from Sincan, a borough of Ankara, as a warning sign to the government. Finally, this heavy institutional and social opposition leveled against the WP government culminated in the decisions taken by the National Security Council on February 28, 1997. These decisions demanded from the Erbakan government, among other things: i) the enforcement of the dress code initiated during the Turkish revolution, ii) the closing of the religious orders, iii) the transfer of all the dormitories, schools and foundations with a connection to religious orders to the ministry of education, and iv) closing of the middle-school sections of the Imam Hatip schools by passing the 8 year compulsory education law.\(^{418}\) These decisions were clearly a memorandum given to the government by the army and marked the beginning of the “postmodern coup.”\(^{419}\) In the months following these decisions, the government was pressured to implement these decisions. When the government did not fully comply with the pressures, the military pressured the MPs from the True Path Party to resign in the summer of 1997 leading to the breakdown of the government. Following this, on February 22, 1998 the Welfare Party was closed by the Constitutional Court for becoming the center of anti-secular activities. Erbakan and many of the leaders received a political ban for five years.

The secular-religious cleavage was not only intensified in the political arena, but also in the social and cultural spheres. A cursory look at the coverage of the political

\(^{418}\)Before the change of the education law in Turkey, the elementary education, which is compulsory, was five years. Post-elementary education was six years (or seven years if a foreign language is taught). The first three years were known as the middle-school, and the next three years were known as the high school (lise). By making the elementary education eight years, the new law incorporated the middle-school education into elementary education and automatically eliminated the middle-sections of the Imam Hatip schools. Therefore, the education students received in the Imam Hatip schools was restricted.

\(^{419}\) The phrase is coined in the aftermath of the NSC meeting by some social scientists and journalists. It indicates that the intervention occurred behind the scenes and even without the recognition of some parts of Turkish population.
events during the WP government and the 28 February process by secular and religiously oriented media outlets reveals this. The secular and religious media conveyed almost diametrically opposite representations of political events in this period. The secular camp, led by the newspapers *Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, Hurriyet, Yeni Yuzyil* and television channels *ATV* and *Kanal D*, emphasized the threat of the Islamists to the secular regime. Articles and news in these media channels emphasized how the pro-Shariat Islaimists were trying to subvert the secular regime by using democracy as a means. Every comment of the WP activists was held to be suspect. Furthermore, the journalists in these media channels emphasized the backward nature of religious practices and how in modern times, belief in superstition misguided uneducated people. With few exceptions, no journalist in these media outlets criticized the secular state establishment, when the democratically elected WP-True Path Party government was ousted from power by pressure from the military.

On the other hand in the same period, Islamic leaning newspapers *Zaman, Yeni Safak, Akit* and television channels *Samanyolu* and *Kanal 7* portrayed the WP as the representative of the values of Turkish people against the elitist values of the state establishment. They all criticized the breakdown of the WP-TPP coalition as an undemocratic intervention of the military in civilian politics. The representations in these media outlets constructed the image of a society with traditional values oppressed in the hands of an authoritarian military-bureaucratic elite.

A critical discourse analysis conducted in February and March 1997 on 44 texts that had appeared in the secular *Cumhuriyet* and Islamist *Akit* newspapers shows how the identity of the “other” was constructed during the height of the secular-religious
polarization. Both newspapers systematically communicated an ideological stance, in which they represented negatively the outer group and positively the inner group. In the secularist *Cumhuriyet* “pro-Shariat”, “backwards,” “darkness,” or “obstructionist” were the most repeated words to describe the WP and the Islamists. On the other hand, Islamist *Akit* portrayed the secular camp as “oppressive”, “brutal”, “having an interventionist (military) mentality” or “having an aim to eradicate believers from the political scene.” While *Cumhuriyet* and *Akit* can be seen as extreme newspapers with not very extensive readership, the narratives of other newspapers also portrayed a similar picture. While the Islamic-leaning *Zaman* and *Yeni Safak* employed pro-Welfare rhetoric, the secularist newspapers, *Milliyet*, *Hurriyet* and *Yeni Yuzyil*, used news and narratives that would paint a dark picture, that of a rising threat of Islamic rule.

8.5.2 Moderation of the Religiopolitical Actors: From the National Outlook to the Justice and Development Party

When the WP was closed down by the Constitutional Court and the party’s leaders were banned from politics for five years, the party organizations and the MPs reorganized themselves into the Virtue Party (VP). Due to the strong reaction from the state institutions, military and the secularist media during the 28 February Process, the VP adopted a new political discourse that included new concepts, such as human rights, democracy, rule of law, and international law. Yet the party did not have much time to present any policy agenda, since its political life ended very abruptly. The VP was closed

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421 *Ibid.* 171-174

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down by the Constitutional Court in 2001, primarily for one incident, namely the entrance of a female VP deputy into the Grand National Assembly with her headscarf.

A major split occurred within the NOM after the closure of the VP. There was already a power struggle between the old guard and the new generation of politicians within the VP. In the first congress of the party, the new generation of politicians supported Abdullah Gul, who challenged the old guard’s nominee Recai Kutan. Finally, Recai Kutan was reelected as the head of the VP. Yet the new generation received a major success, since Gul received more than forty percent of the delegates’ votes despite Erbakan’s clear support of Kutan.

This leadership conflict within the VP culminated in a split, when the VP was closed down. While the new generation formed the Justice and Development Party (JDP), the old guard was organized around the Felicity Party (FP). The FP kept the ideological premises of the National Outlook Movement in its party program and stayed loyal to Erbakan. On the other hand, the JDP cut its ties with the NOM tradition and wrote a transformed political program. In the three national and local elections that followed the split, the JDP emerged as the largest party in Turkey and formed two governments, while the FP became a marginal political party. Thus, it is worthwhile to mention the contrasts between the JDP and the National Outlook Movement in order to evaluate the new transformed face of religious politics in Turkey.

First, despite the fact that the top leadership of the JDP, namely Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, and Bulent Arinc, came from the National Outlook Movement, these leaders explicitly claimed that their new party is not a party of the National Outlook
and that they were breaking with the political tradition that Erbakan represents. In addition, many center-right politicians were incorporated into different levels of the party organization.

In his various speeches, the leader of the JDP, Erdogan, continuously claimed that ethnic nationalism, regional nationalism, and religious nationalism constituted the three red lines of the party. The party leaders also mentioned on various occasions that their party does not have a religious identity or any religious ideology:

> While attaching importance to religion as a social value, we [the JDP] do not think it right to conduct politics through religion, to attempt to transform government ideologically by using religion, or to resort to organizational activities based on religious symbols. To make religion an instrument of politics and to adopt exclusive approaches to politics in the name of religion harms not only political pluralism but also religion itself. Religion is a sacred and collective value. This is how we should interpret it, how we should understand it. It should not be made the subject of political partisanship causing divisiveness.

The new political philosophy the JDP leadership embraced refuses to see Islam as a political reference point, while perceiving it as a personal and social reference point. As Dagi (2006) argues, the JDP activists observed how the 28 February process not only led to the closure of the Welfare Party as the representative of political Islam, but also turned into an attempt to uproot the Islamic social and economic networks. Hence, the JDP “symbolizes the withdrawal of Islam from the political sphere in return for safeguarding its social network which forms the basis for the party’s conservatism.”

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422 In this context, red lines indicate boundaries. Hence, Erdogan asserts regional, ethnic, and religious nationalist worldviews are outside the boundaries of the JDP’s ideology.

emphasis on the protection of the individual and civil societal actors from the state, the JDP aims to create a civil sphere, in which Islamic life style, social, and economic networks can thrive without state interference.

The JDP activists denounce the claim that their party represents moderate political Islam. Instead, they define the JDP as a “conservative democrat” party. The JDP attempts to reproduce the universal standards of political conservatism within the social and cultural context of Turkey by employing the concept of conservative democracy.425

According to Erdogan:

“A significant part of the Turkish society desires to adopt a concept of modernity that does not reject tradition, a belief in universalism that accepts localism, an understanding of rationalism that does not disregard the spiritual meaning of life, and a choice of change that is not fundamentalist. The concept of conservative democracy is, in fact an answer to the desires of the Turkish people.”426

This synthesis the JDP leadership tries to create between modernity and tradition, universalism and localism, and rationalism and spirituality forms the backbone of the party’s ideology. Based on this premise, the conservative democratic worldview the JDP adopts: i) rejects any revolutionary change or social engineering project, but embraces gradual change; ii) suggests a limited government that emphasizes the protection of individual liberties; iii) acknowledges the importance of civil and social structures that support the individual, such as the family unit; iv) proposes to solve political problems on the basis of compromise rather than conflict; v) accepts the existence of cultural differences in the society and the need for coexistence based on tolerance; vi) claims that

the legitimacy of political authority stems from its popular support and its abidance by the laws, rules, and values of the political institutions.427

These ideological premises clearly show that the JDP has departed from the NOM’s ideology to drastically transform Turkey’s politics and society. Instead, the party emphasizes the need for limited government that would open up a public space for the social and individual manifestations of cultures, including Islam. Furthermore, unlike the NOM parties, the JDP refrains from employing a conflictual political language that would antagonize the secularist institutional and political actors.

In addition to these political differences, the JDP’s economic and foreign policy also differs significantly from the NOM’s proposals in these areas. Although the JDP mentions the importance of social justice in its economic program, it adopted a neoliberal economic stance while in government and worked for Turkey’s full integration into the global economy. Unlike the NOM, the JDP does not assign any significant role to the state in the economic realm. Thus, in the past seven years of JDP government, the party pushed for extensive privatization measures unmatched by any other previous government.

Foreign policy represents another fundamental break of the JDP’s ideology from National Outlook. The JDP rejects the dogmatic anti-Western stance of the NOM and its totalistic analysis of the international system based on a critique of Western civilization. Instead, the JDP severely criticizes any Huntingtonian “clash of civilization” approach and focuses on the importance of civilizational dialogue. Accordingly, Turkey became the co-sponsor of the U.N initiative “Alliance of Civilizations” with Spain, and Erdogan,

as the prime minister, acted as the co-chair of this initiative in 2005-2007 with the Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero.

The JDP’s new foreign policy vision also foresees a multidimensional approach in relations with other states and an increased international influence by participation in international organizations. Unlike the NOM, the JDP does not solely focus on the Muslim world, but sees the relations of Turkey with the Muslim countries as one of the multiple dimensions of its foreign policy agenda.

Lastly, the JDP actively embraced and worked for Turkey’s European Union membership despite a slowing down of efforts in the past few years due to resistance towards Turkey’s membership in European public opinion and increasing Euro-skepticism in Turkey. The pro-EU stance of the JDP was critical for the domestic platform of the party. First of all, it showed the secularist actors that the party is actively embracing the Kemalist aim of “reaching the level of contemporary civilization”. Yet more importantly, the bid for EU accession necessitated reforms in the areas of democratization and human rights that are instrumental for the JDP to weaken the excessive power of the military in Turkish politics and to open a political space for itself that is less susceptible to attacks by extra-political institutions.

Hence, when the JDP came to power in 2002, it prioritized the start of accession talks with the EU and passed several “harmonization packages” in the parliament in order to bring Turkish law in accord with the EU’s political criteria. As a result of these harmonization packages, the EU officially opened accession talks with Turkey in October

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2005 during the JDP government.\textsuperscript{429} These harmonization packages presented by the government and approved by the National Assembly led to the enhancement of safeguards for the rights of prisoners, enhancement of freedom of association, changes in the political party laws that would make more difficult the closure of political parties, provisions allowing the use of languages other than Turkish in political propaganda, removal of the military members from the Higher Education Board, taking away the authority of military courts over civilians, and removal of any reference to the death penalty including military offences.\textsuperscript{430} In addition to these harmonization packages, more constitutional amendments were carried out in May 2004, human rights bodies were created, and the government signed a number of international human rights conventions.

In sum, both ideologically and practically the JDP diverged from the NOM parties significantly. Therefore, it is not surprising that the FP, as the new face of the NOM, became one of the fiercest and most systematic critics of the JDP in the domestic and foreign policy arenas.

Despite the moderation of the JDP, a number of political developments recently brought the party onto a collusion course with the military and other institutional secularist actors. Abdullah Gul’s nomination and election to the presidency, an institution the secularists saw as their last bulwark against creeping Islamism, the JDP’s increased vote share in the 2007 elections (the party received 47 percent of the national vote), and finally the JDP’s constitutional amendment that would allow female students with

\textsuperscript{429} Despite the opening of the talks, the EU was very hesitant and put into the accession talks’ agreement certain special provisions, which were never used for any other candidate country.

headscarves to enter universities rang alarm bells among secularist circles. Hence, first
the military issued a warning on its internet website against Abdullah Gul’s bid for the
presidency, then the Constitutional Court annulled the constitutional change on the
headscarf issue, and later the public prosecutor opened a case against the JDP. Although
the party was not closed down, the Constitutional Court found it guilty of anti-secular
activities, and cut half of the party’s public funding. These recent events show that the
intensification of the religious-secular struggle does not so much depend on the ideology
(moderate/radical) of the religiopolitical actors, but more on their political power and the
threat perception of the secular political actors.

8.6 Conclusion

The NOM was formed in a period when the periphery-center cleavage was
politicized and the frustration of the peripheral groups with the center’s policies became
more apparent. In this sociopolitical climate Erbakan broke away from the traditional
center-right parties and constructed his political program “National Outlook.” This
program blended religious, economic, and social messages and successfully drew support
from different strata within the periphery. The underdeveloped provinces in Eastern and
Southeastern Anatolia, Kurds, urban poor, and the owners of bourgeoning small and
medium-sized firms all found an appealing element in the program of National Outlook.

The political success of the NOM peaked in the mid-1990s, when the Welfare
Party scored electoral successes in the local and general elections. By emphasizing the
concept of justice, the WP was able to create an alliance of the socially, economically,
and culturally excluded segments of the Turkish society, especially in the metropolitan cities. The “prayer beads” model of organization that penetrated into many households, the door-to-door canvassing of the women within the WP, the economic services the party delivered to the urban poor, and the anti-corruption campaigns of the WP municipalities provided credibility to the party’s promise of creating a “just order.”

This unprecedented success story of the WP as a religiopolitical actor had mixed effects on democratic governance in Turkey. First of all, the party succeeded in incorporating the demands of the periphery into the political system. Moreover the NOM’s criticism of Turkey’s strict state-imposed secularism paved the way for popular public debates on important issues, such as the limits of state encroachment into religious affairs, the extent of freedom of religious expression in the public sphere, and the collective right to religious education.

On the flip side, the exclusivist, dismissive rhetoric of the party leadership towards its political opponents, the trivialization of opposition demands, and the party’s embrace of the “strong state ethos” contributed to the poverty of the democratic political culture in Turkey.

The WP’s political success also led to the intensification of the religious-secular cleavage in Turkey. The increasing political power of the NOM disturbed the secularist institutional, political, and social actors and triggered the polarization of the political spectrum along secular-religious lines. This polarization reached its climax, when the military ousted the WP-led coalition government, in what is known as the “postmodern coup.” Soon afterwards, the Constitutional Court closed down the WP and banned its
leadership from politics.

In the aftermath of this heightened religious-secular conflict and the breakdown of Turkish democracy, the JDP was born as the new moderate face of religious politics in Turkey. The party took lessons from the conflictual period during the mid-1990s and created a novel ideology by denouncing any Islamic ideology in its party program, employing a pro-EU foreign policy agenda, and extending human rights during its governments. Despite these developments, and maybe more because of the party’s enormous electoral successes, the relations between secularist institutional actors and the JDP remain one of uneasy coexistence at best.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS

9.1 Summary of the Main Arguments and Findings

At the beginning of this study, I posed three interrelated research questions: (1) Why does the electoral strength of religiopolitical actors increase in democratic settings? (2) What factors contribute to the continuing success of religious parties in democratic politics? (3) What is the effect of increasing power of religiopolitical actors on democratic governance and stability? This dissertation tried to answer these questions by comparatively analyzing the increasing electoral fortunes of two religious movements, namely the Shas movement in Israel and the National Outlook Movement in Turkey, in the 1990s.

The cases of Israel and Turkey were deliberately selected for comparison. These two countries differ in socioeconomic variables (their level of economic development and level of urbanization), in political variables (their relative strength of center parties), in cultural variables (their majority religion), and in institutional variables (in their institutional arrangements to manage the relationship between religion and state and in
their educational institutional arrangements). Despite these differences, in both countries the religiopolitical actors have increased their electoral power. Thus, this most different case research design enabled me to control for alternative explanations in the literature while establishing a link between the independent and dependent variables of the study.

The dissertation has argued that secular states’ attempts to co-opt religion in the form of inclusion of religiopolitical actors into the governing institutions and in the form of increased state funding for religious education unintentionally contributed to the growth of religious political parties. It has also argued that in both contexts, two other variables, namely the existence of a historical sociocultural cleavage in the society and the recent politicization of that cleavage as a result of socioeconomic modernization, provided the initial conditions and emerging context for the religious movements.

As explained in Chapter 3, a sociocultural cleavage was created in both Israel and Turkey during the formation period of the two nation-states. This sociocultural hierarchy between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim in Israel and the center and the periphery in Turkey were politicized by processes of socioeconomic change. In Israel, the increasing literacy rates of the Sephardim and the concomitant attempts to integrate the Sephardi students into the educational systems created a backlash from the Ashkenazi parents and increased the cultural frustrations of the Sephardim. In Turkey, the sociocultural divide between the periphery and center was politicized when rural-urban immigration led to increasing social contact between the periphery and center. Rural immigrants’ problems of integration into the city life did not only lead to increasing socioeconomic frustrations of the second and third-generation gecekondu residents but also led to their stigmatization.
by the oldtimers in the city. Therefore, the social and cultural frustrations of the periphery increased.

In this context, Shas was formed in Israel in 1983, and the National Outlook Movement (NOM) was formed in Turkey in 1970. This dissertation has argued that the ideologies of these two religiopolitical actors reflected the societal demands created by the politicization of the sociocultural cleavage in their respective countries. Thus, Shas and NOM addressed the social, economic, and cultural concerns of the marginalized segments in their respective societies by using religion as a meta-narrative.

A closer look at the ideological statements of these two religious movements revealed striking similarities. First, both movements supported egalitarian economic policies in order to appeal to the socioeconomically disadvantaged strata primarily concentrated in the development towns and gecekondu neighborhoods. Second, they promoted a concept of social justice for those who felt excluded from the mainstream society by blending social, economic, and religious messages in their ideologies.

Last, both parties used identity politics in their ideologies. Shas emerged as the champion of the Sephardi identity in the political arena, while the National Outlook parties emerged as the champion of the Islamic identity in Turkey. In this respect, both movements have shown a similarity to the social movements that represent the oppressed and promote the political recognition of marginalized identity groups (e.g. racial, gender, sexuality-based, or cultural). In the case of Israel, the Shas movement created pride around an ethno-religious Sephardic identity by promising the revitalization of the Sephardi tradition from the glorious past in Andalucia. Similarly, in the case of Turkey,
the National Outlook Movement created pride around an Islamic identity by promoting
the recreation of selective practices from the Ottoman period. Thus, the platforms of
these political movements created a venue for the recognition of identities that had been
marginalized by the mainstream official ideologies, namely secular Zionism in Israel and
Kemalism in Turkey.

The politicization of a historical sociocultural cleavage created the context for the
formation of these movements and also shaped the societal demands that became the
sources of their ideology. Yet, these two variables are not sufficient to explain why and
how the electoral strength of these parties increased in the 1990s, decades after their
formation. This dissertation has argued that the co-optation of religiopolitical actors by
the state elites unintentionally contributed to this political outcome. Contrary to the aims
of the secular actors, who thought that they could preempt the public appeal of the
religious actors or who thought that they could gain the loyalties of the religious
constituents by co-opting religious groups, the religiopolitical actors increased their
electoral strength and emerged as major political players in both countries. Chapters 4, 5,
and 6 discussed the role of state co-optation in the rise of the religious parties by
illustrating how state co-optation enabled the religiopolitical actors to have access to the
cultural and material resources of the state.

In Israel, the Shas party was incorporated into almost every coalition government
after its formation in 1983. Shas was able to enter most of these coalition governments,
because the party pursued a very particularistic agenda focused on the needs of its
constituents, while also acting pragmatically on national issues, such as the peace
process. The party continuously occupied the ministries of interior and religious affairs, and these institutions provided both cultural and material resources for the party. By occupying the interior ministry, Shas was able to affect cultural policies related to the “Jewish character” of the Israeli state, such as having a say on one’s citizenship status. Shas’s control of the Religious Affairs Ministry gave the party the power to appoint half of the members of each local religious council and administer rabbinic courts that handle religious issues concerning personal status, such as conversion, marriage, and divorce. In addition, the party used its ministries to channel funds to its own educational network and to cultural non-profit civil society organizations closely allied to itself.

Through its grip on the Religious Affairs Ministry, Shas also controlled the religious economic sector and provided an enormous amount of jobs, such as kosher food inspectors, ritual bath managers, religious court judges, and yeshiva school administrators, to its own constituents.

In Turkey, state co-optation occurred in three different periods. First, the National Salvation Party (NSP) became part of three coalition governments during the 1970s. During its coalition partnerships in the Ecevit government and in the two Nationalist Front governments, the Islamist NSP was recognized as a legitimate political actor in Turkish politics, and Erbakan’s party used its ministries and governmental agencies to create patronage networks, which survived into the post-1980 politics. The military government (1980-83) used selective elements from Islam in its ideology and created a symbiotic relationship with a conservative think-tank, the Hearth of Intellectuals. During this time, the Hearth’s ideology of Turkish-Islamic synthesis started to shape the cultural
and educational policies of the Turkish state.

The next governments formed by Ozal’s Motherland Party (MP) (1983-1991) also co-opted religion through the inclusion of a conservative faction within the government. Although the MP was composed of different factions, the party succeeded in presenting itself as a conservative party to the religious constituents in various avenues. Similar to Shas in Israel, during this period, the conservative faction within the MP used the cultural resources of the state. State institutions such as the education ministry, national television, family consultation centers, and Ataturk Culture, Language and History Higher Institution emerged as institutional sites where a conservative ideology was constructed and communicated to the larger public. As a consequence of this, religious social actors found a receptive cultural environment to increase their public appeal.

In Turkey, the trajectory of the co-optation policies and their subsequent effects on religious politics differed slightly from those in Israel, because in the post-1980s the co-opted religious actors were more moderate. Thus, the instrumentalization of Islam by the military in 1980-3 and the incorporation of conservatives into the MP governments were criticized by non-moderate social and political actors from outside the government. Conservative and Islamist newspapers, National Outlook activists, and Islamist intellectuals severely criticized the instrumentalization of Islam in these periods. As a consequence of these criticisms, the moderate Islamists within the Motherland Party were discredited, and Erbakan’s Islamist Welfare Party, which was seen as a more authentic Islamist movement, emerged as the focus of the periphery’s political support in the 1990s.
This example illustrates how state-society interaction is not unidirectional. Unlike the “Bringing the State Back In” theorists, the analysis in this dissertation suggests that the state is not a powerful political actor that can unidirectionally affect changes in the society. Nor is the state just a superstructure solely conditioned by class or other societal interests. Rather, my analysis suggests that the state-society interaction was an iterative process which affected actors both within and outside the state apparatus.

The creation of state-funded institutions as sites of political contention is another testament to this dynamic nature of state-society relations. These institutions, which were strengthened by policies of state co-optation, became channels for political entrepreneurs to communicate their ideological messages to larger segments of the society. The comparative discussion of the religious schools in both countries cogently demonstrates this fact.

*Ma’ayan* and *Imam Hatip* schools emerged as institutions that receive state funding, provide social provisions for the poor, and empower the culturally marginalized segments of the population by creating an affirmative religious Sephardi/conservative Muslim identity. These positive identities were constructed through different narratives that depicted these religious schools as victims of a secular state, as safe havens from the corruptive effects of the modern world, as the source of societal transformation, and as the source of cultural pride. These narratives were disseminated through the social networks formed around the religious schools and led to political mobilization.
9.2 Theoretical Contributions and Future Directions

This dissertation can be read in the context of several theoretical debates in political science. One of the main debates this dissertation addresses is the literature on political religion. Heretofore, the rise of religious politics has been explained by social, political, and cultural factors. While social processes and societal actors play an important part in the explanations on the rise of religious politics, there is also a need to analyze the secular state (which plays a key role in embedding religion in politics) as a potential religious actor (Nasr, 2001). This dissertation analyzed the co-optation strategies of secular states as a potential explanation for the electoral strengthening of religiopolitical actors.

As a future research agenda, the causal argument developed throughout this dissertation can be applied to other contexts to assess whether the main thesis of the dissertation works in other countries. There are a number of democratic political systems (e.g. Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan) where secular states also tried to co-opt religious actors before or during democratic politics. For instance, in Indonesia Suharto created The Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) in 1990, eight years before the democratic transition. The Association, which was led by Suharto’s close associate Habibie, was incorporated into the bureaucratic mechanisms. ICMI, which has similarities to the Hearth of the Intellectuals in Turkey, soon became a source of political recruitment for ministerial positions in the next governments. Furthermore, from 1990-97, Suharto instrumentalized Islam by passing pro-Islamic legislation in the areas of education and the legal system (Effendy, 2003). It would be interesting to see if and how these measures adopted by Suharto affected the fortunes of religiopolitical actors during
the democratic era and whether a similar causal argument can be made in that case.

In Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia’s secular-socialist BNP included the Bangladesh Jamaat-i Islami in its government from 1991-3. Moreover, the BNP incorporated Jamaat-i Islami and some other small Islamist parties in the government from 2001-2006. According to one scholar, these alliances made the religiopolitical actors important components of the Bangladeshi political system. In Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s socialist PPP co-opted Islam during its governments from 1971-1977 by introducing many pro-Islamic measures in the cultural arena and by establishing the Ministry of Religious Affairs to strengthen state control over ulama. A more aggressive top-down Islamization in the areas of education, criminal justice, and politics was implemented during the military dictatorship of Zia-ul Haq (1977-88) to legitimize the military regime’s policies. Moreover, Zia-ul Haq incorporated Jamaat-i Islami in its government for a long period of time.

All these examples show that state co-optation of religion has occurred in different settings both before and during democratic regimes. The analysis of the relationship between the religiopolitical actors and the co-optation strategies of secular state elites in these countries might be a fruitful area of inquiry. Co-optation strategies have been explored widely in an attempt at understanding the conflict between labor movement and the state in Latin American and European countries (Stepan, 1978; Collier and Collier, 1991; Wiarda, 1997). I argue that these strategies are also used in managing the conflict between religious groups and the state, and a rigorous analysis of the co-optation in this area can contribute to our understanding of religious politics in different settings.

The causal argument made in this dissertation also addresses the debates around the secularization thesis. Both the proponents and opponents of the secularization thesis argue that there is a relationship between socioeconomic modernization and secularization. While the proponents argue that modernization leads to secularization, the opponents claim that modernization leads to desecularization (religious activism). What both sides of the debate often overlook is the fact that modernization might lead to secularization under specific contexts, and it might lead to religious activism under other contexts.

From the findings of this dissertation, we can infer that the relationship between modernization and secularization is dependent on contextual factors. I argued that in Israel and Turkey, increasing modernization, namely increasing rural-urban migration and increasing literacy rates, politicized a historical sociocultural divide and brought two sides of the divide into closer social contact. As a consequence, both sides felt that their cultural identity was under threat. Hence, processes of modernization led to a heightened embrace of particularistic identities, and religion emerged as a suitable tool to address these ideational needs. Both Shas and the National Outlook Movement were formed in this context, when modernization heightened the salience of particularistic identities, and both movements used religion as a meta-narrative to alleviate the threat directed to certain groups’ collective identities.

Thus, I claim that the politicization of a sociocultural cleavage by processes of socioeconomic modernization creates a context that is amenable for the emergence of religiopolitical actors. By no means do I claim that this is the only conjecture that links
modernization to religious activism. There can be numerous other possible conjectures under which socioeconomic modernization is linked to religious activism. Similarly, there might be numerous conjectures that link modernization to secularization. Hence, for future research it will be more fruitful for the scholars to specify certain contexts under which modernization leads to secularization or religious activism.

Third, the findings of this dissertation also contribute to the theoretical debate in the comparative politics literature about the role of ideas vs. institutions on political outcomes. The institutionalist analyses show how the constraints provided by political institutions affect the behavior of political actors. The ideational analyses, which are rather rare in comparative politics, emphasize the independent role of ideas on politics. A new school of thought, namely discursive institutionalism, attempts to show the interactive effect of ideas and institutions on political phenomena.

Adopting a discursive institutionalist approach, this dissertation showed – specifically in its comparative analysis of religious schools in Chapter 4 – how ideas are created, transformed, and disseminated through institutions and how these ideas affect political mobilization. Thus, I tried to show how ideas and institutions interact and how this interaction affects political change. Discursive institutionalism is usually applied in the field of political economy. By using the insights of this school of thought, this dissertation aimed to expand the boundaries of discursive institutionalism from its narrow analytical focus on economic institutions (e.g. financial markets and property rights) to analysis of cultural and educational institutions. A research agenda that includes rigorous analysis of discursive practices within educational and cultural institutions can be a
productive research venue for comparative political studies.

Last, the comparative analysis of religious politics in this dissertation provides insights regarding various arguments made in the literature on democracy and religion. One of the main debates in this literature revolves around inclusion-moderation thesis. The inclusion-moderation thesis stipulates that religiopolitical actors that are allowed to participate in democratic settings moderate their demands, because they learn how to operate within the rules of the game, while exclusion from the political system leads to religious radicalism.

The findings from a comparative study of Shas and National Outlook Movement do not support the inclusion-moderation thesis. The main moderation of religiopolitical actors occurred in Turkey, when the newly formed JDP broke up with the Islamist ideology of the National Outlook and embraced a “conservative democratic” identity. Yet, contrary to the claims of the inclusion-moderation thesis, this moderation followed the removal of the WP from power by a “postmodern coup” and the closure of the WP and VP respectively by the Constitutional Court. Hence, the moderation of the religiopolitical actors followed a period of exclusion.

Yet, the fact that the JDP’s moderation followed a period of exclusion should not lead us to conclude that exclusion leads to moderation. It is important to understand how the nature of exclusion in Turkey differs from other cases. Unlike in other countries (e.g. Algeria and Egypt), in Turkey exclusion did not mean violent state repression and/or total exclusion from the elections. Despite the fact that the WP and VP were closed down by the Constitutional Court, the religiopolitical actors knew from past experiences and a
history of protracted democratic regime that they would be able to reorganize themselves in the political field. Moreover, they were already adapted to the rules of competitive elections from their thirty-year participation in Turkish democracy. Hence, the JDP leadership decided that it would be in their best long-term interest to continue to participate in the Turkish political system with a more moderate ideology. This moderation would benefit the party both in terms of political survival and in terms of political success.

In Israel, the Shas party underwent a moderation of rhetoric to a far lesser extent in the past decade. This moderation did not follow any change in the political regime’s approach towards Shas. Rather, Shas leadership’s decision to tone down some of its uncompromising rhetoric was based on an assessment of the political events. The vocal secular opposition against the party spearheaded by the secularist Shinui and Shas’s inability to become part of Ariel Sharon’s government in 2001 played an important role in this assessment. Thus, both in Turkey and Israel, moderation occurred when the religiopolitical actors decided that moderation would be in their long-term political interest after an assessment of the immediate political climate and/or institutional context.

The different kinds of moderation between Shas and the newly formed JDP also require some explanation. The discussions in Chapters 7 and 8 show that there is an important qualitative difference between the moderation of the two cases. While the JDP embraced a “Muslim-democrat” identity and parted with the Islamism of the NOM, Shas’s moderation was very minimal.

The difference between these two kinds of moderation can be explained by
looking to the changes that occurred in the social bases of these two parties. There is a significant difference between the level of integration of the constituencies of Shas and National Outlook parties into the mainstream of their respective societies. In Turkey, there has been a movement toward embourgeoisement in the Islamic movement, especially in the post-1980 era. Many of the owners of small and medium economic enterprises (SMEs) in developing Anatolian provinces were fully integrated into the Turkish economy after Turkey embraced a neo-liberal economic policy based on export-oriented industrialization in the post-1980 era. Most of these SMEs were also integrated into the world economy through their engagement in exports and formed a new middle class. Hence, these emerging Islamic middle classes, who are represented by the conservative business association, Independent Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (Mustakil Sanayici ve Isadamlari Dernegi, MUSIAD), emerged as a main factor for the moderation of the Islamists. The ideology of the National Outlook Movement, which was based on a socialist rhetoric and heavy industrialization, was not suitable for these new, emerging middle classes anymore. It is not a coincidence that the JDP supports a neo-liberal economic agenda.

On the other hand, Shas’s strategy towards the integration of its constituencies into the mainstream Israeli society and economy differed significantly. Sephardim affiliated with Shas institutions are both culturally and economically segregated from other segments of the Israeli society. Most of the graduates from Shas’s educational institutions are not prepared to enter into the Israeli workforce. These graduates usually work in the religious sector and become dependent on state resources. This culture of
segregation and state dependence does not form the basis of any ideological moderation, because Shas’s constituencies still see themselves at the margins of the Israeli society. The minimal moderation of the party on religious affairs is only a strategic move that does not affect the party’s constituencies.

The comparison of the National Outlook Movement and the Shas movement also show how religiopolitical actors can deepen democratic practices on some level. Both Shas and the NOM showed striking similarities to social movements that represent oppressed identity groups. The political projects of these movements led to the cultural empowerment of the marginalized groups, namely the Sephardim in Israel and the conservative Muslims in Turkey. This politics of identity paved the way for the recognition of these identities in the public arena and restored the sense of self-respect these groups lacked in the earlier periods.

The Israeli and Turkish cases also reveal how the electoral strengthening of religious parties in countries with strong secular traditions can have a destabilizing effect on democracy. As discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, the rise of the Welfare Party to power in 1996 and the Shas party’s winning of an unprecedented 17 mandates in the Knesset in the 1999 election increased the anxiety of secular segments in both societies. This anxiety instigated the formation of secular blocs against the WP and Shas, and this led to the polarization of politics around the secular-religious divide. Moreover, the continuing secular opposition against the moderate JDP and the ongoing polarization around the secular-religious divide in Turkey shows that the secular reaction is not solely dependent on the ideology of the religious party, but rather on its relative political power.
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