

'TURKEY'S OWN SEPTEMBER 11'  
A POLITICAL SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE NOVEMBER 2003  
ISTANBUL BOMBINGS AS REFLECTED BY THE TURKISH PRESS

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ELİF SABAHAAT UYAR

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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Prof. Dr. Sencer Ayata  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

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Prof. Dr. Raşit Kaya  
Head of Department

That is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

---

Prof. Dr. Feride Acar  
Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Prof. Dr. Feride Acar (METU, ADM) \_\_\_\_\_

Prof. Dr. Ayşe Ayata (METU, ADM) \_\_\_\_\_

Assist. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Şen (METU, SOC) \_\_\_\_\_

**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

Name, Last name: Elif Sabahat Uyar

Signature :

## **ABSTRACT**

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Uyar, Elif Sabahat

M. S., Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Feride Acar

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This thesis analyzes the Turkish press coverage of the bombings in Istanbul on November 15 and 20, 2003. The general tendencies of the Turkish press in presenting the events are analyzed and comparisons between the coverage by a number of selected Turkish dailies that are known to be affiliated with different political views are made. The specific presentations of the Istanbul bombings by different dailies is analyzed in the context of the political debates in Turkey as these are reflected by papers of varying political views. Moreover, the analysis of the press was used to interpret Turkish politics on such issues as anti-Americanism, attitudes towards the AKP government and Islamism with reference to the specific positioning of the different political camps in Turkey, on the issue of the November 2003 Istanbul bombings.

Keywords: Istanbul Bombings, Terrorism in Turkey, Islamism in Turkey, Anti-Americanism in Turkey, Islam and Democracy

## ÖZ

‘TÜRKİYE’NİN 11 EYLÜL’Ü’  
KASIM 2003 İSTANBUL SALDIRILARININ  
TÜRK BASININDAKİ YANSIMALARI  
SİYASET SOSYOLOJİSİ AÇISINDAN BİR İNCELEME

Uyar, Elif Sabahat

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

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Bu tez çalışması 15 ve 20 Kasım 2003 tarihlerinde İstanbul’da gerçekleşen saldırıları, basına yansımaları açısından incelemektedir. Ulusal basının olayları yansıtmadaki genel eğilimleri incelenmiş ve farklı siyasal görüşlere bağlı olduğu bilinen gazetelerin olayları yorumlama biçimleri karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz edilmiştir. Farklı gazetelerin İstanbul saldırılarını konuşturma şekilleri Türkiye’deki güncel siyasal tartışmalar bağlamında incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, farklı siyasal kampların saldırılar bağlamında özgül konumlanışları incelenerek, Türkiye siyaseti üzerine, anti-Amerikancılık, hükümete karşı tavırlar ve İslamcılık gibi konularda saptamalarda bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İstanbul Saldırıları, Türkiye’de Terörizm, Türkiye’de İslamcılık, Türkiye’de Amerikan Karşıtlığı, İslam ve Demokrasi

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Question

In this study, the aim is to offer a critical analysis of the Turkish press coverage of November 2003 Istanbul bombings. First, the general tendencies of the Turkish press in presenting the events will be analyzed; then an attempt will be made to draw a comparison between the coverage of these events by a number of selected Turkish dailies that are known to be affiliated with different political worldviews.

The Istanbul bombings were four truck bomb attacks carried out over two days, on November 15 and November 20, 2003. Their targets were two synagogues, the HSBC Bank and the British Consulate in Istanbul. The bombs killed 57 people including the top British official in Istanbul (Consul General Roger Short) and injured more than 700 others. The attacks were suicide bombings. The four suicide bombers and the other suspects so far connected to the bombings were Turkish citizens. Abu Hafz al-Masri Brigades, a group identified with Al-Qaida internationally, and a local group called IBDA-C claimed responsibility for both of the attacks. However, popular press and TV channels had immediately announced that IBDA-C's claim has been dismissed by government officials and foreign experts who claimed that this is a minor group, which does not have the means to carry out such a sophisticated act of terrorism (www.aljazeera.net, November 15, 2003; Milliyet, November 16, 2003; Turkish Daily News, November 28, 2003)

The Istanbul bombings can be regarded as a 'trailer' event of the September 11 attacks in New York City. Such occurrences were very frequent in 2002 and

2003. In these years, al-Qaida and its sub-groups claimed responsibility for a considerable number of assaults in many countries all of which targeted Western and/or Jewish symbols such as synagogues, embassies and tourist hotels. Among such 'trailer' events of September 11, one can count the following:

On March 20, 2002, in Lima, Peru an attack was launched on the U.S. embassy in which nine people died; on April 11, 2002, in Tunisia the attack on a synagogue killed twenty people; on May 8, 2002 a hotel in Pakistan was bombed, killing fourteen people; on June 14, 2002, in Karachi, Pakistan the US embassy was assaulted and eleven died; on October 12, 2002 in Bali, Indonesia in the well known night club attack two hundred and two people died and on November 28, 2002 in Mombassa, Kenya attack on a hotel where Israelis were staying killed fifteen people.

On the following year (2003) more bombs went off in several Muslim countries, killing scores of people in each case. On May 12, 2003 in the bomb attack on foreigners residence in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia fifty three people died; on May 16, 2003, Casablanca, Morocco was the scene of five bombings where forty five people died; the attack on a hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia in August 5, 2003 killed ten, October 27, 2003 witnessed the attack on the American Red Cross in Baghdad, Iraq where thirty five people died and on November 9, 2003 in another Riyadh, Saudi Arabia explosion eighteen people died<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, Istanbul bombings on November 15-20 were also followed by many other similar attacks in different parts of the world, including in Madrid (March 11, 2004) where one hundred and ninety one people died and in London (July 4, 2005) where fifty-six people died.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the attacks, see November, 21, 2003 *Radikal*, and November 18, 2003 *Turkish Daily News*.

A quick glance at the national political scene and developments, in the months preceding the Istanbul bombings would reveal an eventful period of Turkish recent history. It is known that early into 2003 Turkish government, i.e. Justice and Development Party Government (AKP), plainly approved the U.S. request to allow American troops in to set up for a possible invasion of Iraq. However, on March 1, 2003 Turkish Grand National Assembly voted against American deployment. This decision was generally perceived as the response of the parliament to the overwhelming reaction by the Turkish public against the war in Iraq. Nevertheless, the decision was criticized publicly by many experts because of its possible negative effects on Turkish-U.S. relations. Then, in October 2004, the Turkish parliament voted to give the government power to send troops to Iraq in support of the U.S. forces, but restricted them to a humanitarian presence. In November, however, Washington informed Ankara that it did not want the presence of Turkish troops in Iraq after all. It is said that the American position came after strong protest from Iraqi Kurdish groups ([www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), November 27, 2003).

Therefore, after the Istanbul bombings, many intellectuals in Turkey expressed their criticism about the willingness of the government to get involve in Iraq War and/or the U.S. project of 'Greater Middle East'. Views such as that expressed by Prof. Baskın Oran, a well-known critic of US policies in the region, insisted, "Turkey has to become far away from all the Iraq War. It is not our war; we must stay away. Thank God we are not sending any troops there", and expressed concern regarding the relation between the events and Ankara's ties with the main occupying powers in Iraq ([www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), November 27, 2003). Likewise, Ruşen Çakır, an expert on the Turkish Islamist groups, blamed AKP government for making Turkey an easy target by not taking the threat of attacks seriously enough. He said "the people I spoke from the AKP did not care about al-Qaida before all this" and continues to the point that "It is strange that on the one hand they were trying so hard to send troops to Iraq, while on the other hand, they were surprised by the bombings" ([www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net),

November 27, 2003). Çakır also mentioned the importance of local contractors in these events. He argued that blame can not be placed entirely on foreign shoulders because these actions necessitated local contacts which should also be critically examined (www.aljazeera.net, November 27, 2003).

After similar assaults were launched in Madrid, on March 11, 2004, I noticed some differences between the Turkish and Spanish cases mainly in terms of the responses to both events and was oriented to think further on their consequences.

In the Spanish case, after the assaults in 2004, the government immediately tried to put the blame on a national group (ETA)<sup>2</sup>. When it was revealed that the attacks had been carried out by al-Qaida, the government became the centre of criticisms and reactions. There the government was largely criticized for its pro-American foreign policy, specifically its decision to send troops to Iraq and thus for attracting the rancor of terrorists. The public response to the governments handling of the matter resulted in a change of the government in the ensuing elections.

The Turkish case, on the other hand, was considerably different. After the Istanbul bombings, Turkish government immediately put the blame on al-Qaida, while the opposition party tried to direct the attention of the public to local Islamist groups. Moreover, the Istanbul bombings did not trigger public debates on national political issues in Turkey, such as internal problem of Islamist terrorism or the foreign policy decisions of the time. Furthermore, government's popularity and support appeared untouched after the bombing events.

Keeping such differences in mind, one wonders about the reactions of the Turkish public after the Istanbul bombings. Questions such as, "What did

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<sup>2</sup> The Basque separatist movement in Spain, founded in 1959, waging a terrorist campaign for an independent Basque state.

people in Turkey debate after the bombings?”, “How did they interpret the bombing events?”, “To what or whom did they attribute the blame and where did they direct their reactions?” could not but engaged one’s in the text. I, thus, wanted to grasp the public opinion.

In this study, an attempt has been made to question the ways in which the Istanbul bombings were presented in the Turkish press as an indicator of the public response to these events. A search for the general tendencies and specific points of emphasis in the national press coverage of Istanbul bombings was made based on the assumption that analyzing the responses of Turkish dailies to the events will provide a perspective on how the people responded to the events and their consequences. This assumption obviously rests on the conviction that the media (the press) does not only shape but also reflects public opinion.

In fact, a second point that attracted my attention in the Istanbul bombings was the striking differences in the presentation and/or interpretation of the Istanbul bombings by various segments of the Turkish press, thereby lending further force to my assumption of taking press coverage as an indicator of the public’s views on the events.

After the bombings, Turkish press engaged in debates on some important issues of perennial tension in Turkish political life that are intrinsic to worldwide debates on the relation between Islam and democracy and terrorism moved to the forefront of the popular press as well as intellectual debates.

Since Islam- and issues related to Islam- has always been a basic divider between major political camps in Turkey, Istanbul bombings provided a natural platform of debate for different sections of the Turkish press, to vehemently express their specific political positions.

On this context, Turkish dailies were not only different from each other in terms of their divergent interpretations of the events, but also in terms of being involved in substantially different discussions, after the events. For instance, after the explosions in the synagogues, there was considerable emphasis on the problems of minorities with particular references to the Jewish population and anti-Semitism in the daily left-liberal *Radikal*; while other dailies of secular/republican or Islamist leanings such as *Cumhuriyet*, *Zaman* and *Anadolu'da Vakit* did not engage in such a discussion at all.

Observation of this nature made me believe that dailies' handling of the Istanbul bombings would provide a rich frame of reference for a researcher to come to terms with the representations of political polarizations in contemporary Turkey.

The analysis in this work is centered on two questions:

“What were the general tendencies observed in the Turkish press with respect to the coverage of the Istanbul bombings?”

“What were the differences in the coverage and handling of the events and their consequences by the ideologically different segments of the Turkish press?”

For the purposes of general analysis, three newspapers from the popular-mainstream press (*Sabah*, *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet*) and three from the ‘Islamist’ press (*Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Yeni Mesaj*) were chosen. A thorough search of the coverage of the events of bombings in Istanbul by these six newspapers, during the one-month period following the events was undertaken (November 15-December 15, 2003).

For the second question, i.e. comparative content analysis, the four considerably popular national newspapers in Turkey- *Cumhuriyet*, *Anadolu'da Vakit*, *Zaman* and *Radikal*- were selected on account of their divergent

ideological positions. All the news and commentaries from those four newspapers were analyzed during the one-month period following the events (November 15- December 15, 2003).

Obviously, the analysis of viewpoints and attitudes of the press, as a way of looking into the agenda and discourse of public opinion has its intrinsic methodological limitations. It is, therefore, a foregone matter that the present research aims to point to clues and possible indicators to interpret public opinion and does not claim to provide hard data or concrete results as those that would be available from a public opinion survey.

## **1.2 Relevant Literature**

It should be cited that unlike the September 11 attacks in New York, bombings in Istanbul did not attract considerable academic attention although they are largely accepted as ‘Turkey’s own September 11.’ Moreover, it is hard to find a comprehensive analysis of this issue among those various interpretations of columnists and the numerous interviews with some experts in TV and other popular media sources.

In 2004, a Turkish journalist, Önder Şuşoğlu (2004) wrote a book on the Istanbul bombings, entitled ‘Yellow Smoke’ (Sarı Duman). He was more interested in the rather sensational side of the events and mainly interviewed the families of victims for his book. Nonetheless, because he described the events in detail, his work has been of much use in this study, providing an introductory material (Şuşoğlu, 2004).

There are, also, two academic studies specifically focusing on the Istanbul bombings.

One is a master's thesis, focusing on the Istanbul bombings in terms of their representation in the media. It nonetheless, has truly different concerns than the present work (Gökulu, 2005). The aim of the said study is to clarify the relationship between the mass communication instruments and terrorism, with the possibility of making propaganda in the press while presenting terrorism in mind. Consequently, this study tries to underline the importance of a perspective sensitive to the public interest in mass communication instruments while touching on terrorist actions. With these concerns in mind, the study aims to open to debate several propositions on how media should approach the publication of terrorist attacks.

The second is a book of articles, called 'Representations of Terror, Terror of Representations' (Terörün Görüntüleri, Görüntülerin Terörü), which deals with the representations of terrorist events in media, and includes the representation of the Istanbul bombings in Turkish press (Gökçe and Demiray eds., 2004). The primary aim of the study is to clarify the relationship between media and terrorism by especially focusing on the image of terror created by media and the use of media by terrorists as an instrument. Within the book, I have specifically derived insights from the article on the Turkish press coverage of the Istanbul bombings, which includes content analysis of five national dailies such as *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Zaman* and *Yeni Şafak* (Gökçe et al., 2004, pp. 245-300). The focus of that article is on the characteristics of press (as means of communication) and its approach with regard to the terrorist events.

To the extent that my primary concern in this work is on the politics, i.e. the political debates that took place after the bombings and the political consequences of these actions as reflected in the press, it is conceptually and methodologically different from both of the above-mentioned works.



### **1.3 Analysis and Argumentation**

In this study, it is assumed that analyzing the responses of Turkish dailies in the context of bombings in Istanbul provides a frame in which we can interpret people's responses to events and their consequences. Therefore, it is argued that through the two-fold analysis- the analysis on general tendencies and the comparative analysis on the specific interpretations by different political camps in the press- both the field of debates after the bombings and the positioning of political camps in those debates can be grasped.

On the one hand, the general analysis on Turkish press shows that there are deep differences between mainstream-popular dailies and the Islamist ones with regard to the presentation of the events.

Popular dailies show al-Qaida as the perpetrator of the events. However, there is no concrete reference or linkage in the popular press to the earlier claimed attacks of al-Qaida elsewhere in the world, which were frequent in 2003. It seems that the main reference point of the popular press in presenting the bombings is the September 11 events. Consequently, the bombings in Istanbul are largely presented as 'Turkey's own September 11'. In this way, the assaults are taken as an international issue with the majority of foreign news in the pages of the dailies.

On the other hand, the Islamist dailies generally claim that the U.S.-Britain-Israel cooperation is responsible for the bombings. Their presentation reflects a conspirational reasoning.

However, all dailies studied, perceived and presented the bombings as an international event rather than a national occurrence although the four suicide bombers and most of the suspects connected to the bombings were Turkish citizens. Concomitant to this tendency, they all presented the events through the

accepted West *versus* Islam dichotomy. Briefly, it can be stated that, the popular dailies considered the bombings as a result of the ‘war against terrorism’ declared by U.S., and therefore as an assault of the terrorists targeting the free world; and Islamist dailies considered the bombings a reaction to the U.S. and evil plans to enlarge the occupation in the Middle East and/or their plans to make Turkey closer to the Western alliance. Accordingly, Islamist dailies react directly to the U.S. policies in the Middle East in the context of bombings, but not to the AKP government, which is an adherent of these policies. This point seems to make so-called anti-American outlook of Islamists in Turkey open to questioning. Consequently, current national political decisions, e.g. government’s attitude towards Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, or the national problems, e.g. Turkey’s internal problem of Islamist terrorism, were hardly debated in the general frame of Turkish press in the context of bombings. On the contrary, on the national level, agenda was dominated by more speculative issues and debates, that could be regarded as variations of the “Islam and democracy” or “Islam and terrorism” debates.

At this point, special mention has to be made about another important tendency of the mainstream-popular press (as well as the Islamist *Zaman*) in presenting the events. These dailies consistently related the Istanbul events to the uniqueness of Turkey. In other words, there was a consensus on the fact that Turkey was targeted by al-Qaida because of the so-called ‘Turkish model’, which implies Turkey’s uniqueness as a secular and democratic country different from other Muslim countries. It is claimed that Turkey, because it illustrates the viability of a secular democratic system governing a Muslim population, has been the target of religious fanaticism.

In consequence, the praises for the so-called ‘Turkish model’ is over-stated in these dailies as they discuss the Istanbul bombings<sup>3</sup>. This tendency bears a

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, being a secular, democratic country and being a part of the Western alliance are political orientations of modern Turkey. However, they are accepted as

distinct similarity to the interpretations (especially by the George W. Bush government and the U.S. media after September 11 events) that insisted that the target of al-Qaida was 'American democracy and the American way of life'; thereby restricting the reactions to resentment and fanaticism.

On the other hand, this emphasis on the 'Turkish model' partly illustrates the popularity of the debates questioning the compatibility of Islam with democracy. In fact, the essentialist assumptions on the incompatibility of Islam with democracy, as an indispensable part of those debates, have a central role in the popularity of 'Turkish model' ideas. In other words, secular democratic Turkey is something extraordinary or exceptional if one accepted an essential incompatibility between Islam and democracy and/or secularism because Turkey illustrates the possibility of a democratic system governing a Muslim population. In this way of thinking, the point of emphasis is on the fact that Turkey is a democratic country in spite of its Muslim population. Therefore, the presumption here is that very special conditions are necessary to have Muslim people and democracy together.

My criticism is on the debate itself because of the cultural relativist outlook in the motivation behind the formulation of the questions on compatibility of Islam with democracy, with secularism, with progress and so on. Within the formulation of the question on the compatibility of Islam and democracy, the importance of Islam is overstated as the main social dynamic of the societies. Moreover, explaining the emergence of democracy by cultural rather than structural reasons implies the determinacy of cultural components over history, which inevitably restricts democracy to one of the cultural proponents of Western culture and this gives way to Eurocentric suppositions.

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indispensable qualifications, and as part of national identity and lifestyle as well as the sources of prestige, in the context of bombings.

In relation with this reasoning, these ‘Turkish model’ arguments as the reason of the events can also be related to the widely accepted ‘exceptionalist perception of the Turkish Republic.’ This exceptionalist discourse of distinguishing Turkish history from comparable ones is nurtured by Orientalism and plays a significant role in the formation of viewpoints from Turkey to its East and Islam. Within this discourse, West is homogenized as the owner of prosperity and developed technologies. However, this idealized West perception not only causes the misperception of Middle East but also hinders the social conditions of the idealized Western countries. In this framework, on the one hand, Turkey and Turkish citizens are accepted as underdeveloped when compared to the West. On the other hand, Turkish republic is distinguished from the other undeveloped Muslim countries by its qualifications of modern, secular democracy like Western ones, and gains its value in the eyes of the West through these qualifications. In this sense, with the help of the belief that Turkey is the most westernized, most secular among all the Muslim countries, the ‘Turkish model’ is sanctified. Therefore, in the course of Turkish exceptionalism the principle of secularism plays an important role since it has a big part in making the history of Turkish Republic as something exceptional (Lindisfarne, 2002). Consequently, in the Turkish case, the exceptionalist perception is fed by another widely accepted presumption of the Turkish Republic: “the strict laïcité perception” which has resulted in the undervaluing of religion’s role in the construction of the new nation and its identity (Bora, 2003; Lindisfarne, 2002).

In the light of what has been said up to now, I argue in this thesis that the general presentation of the bombings in the Turkish press (as an international event and the presentation of the target as the ‘Turkish Model’) reflected a well-established tendency of the Turkish political realm.

Furthermore, it became clearly benefited the AKP government. The government itself pointed to al-Qaida immediately and interpreted the events as international

happenings. The declarations of Prime Minister Erdoğan after the bombings, were parallel with those of G. W. Bush after the September 11 events in terms of their emphasis on the dangers of global terrorism, war between good and evil, and the necessity of international cooperation against global terrorism.

In addition, after the bombings, the national political decisions or the national problem of Islamist terrorism were hardly debated in the Turkish press. Thus, virtually no criticism was oriented to the policies of AKP government in the national press. Moreover, the parallelism between government's interpretations of the events and the interpretations of the majority of the Turkish press is indeed striking. In fact, support of the AKP government (despite some minor criticisms) emerged as a general tendency of the Turkish press in covering the Istanbul events. Even *Cumhuriyet* and *Milli Gazete*, the two dailies which plainly oppose the government albeit from widely differing perspectives, did not direct their criticisms to the policies of AKP in relation with the events.

Apart from general support for the AKP, presentation of Erdoğan as a 'strong and resolute' leader should be mentioned as another important tendency after the events. The presentation of Erdoğan, after the bombings, is similar to the presentation of Bush who also presented as a strong and resolute leader in the American media after the September 11 attacks (Gökçe et al., 2004, p. 276).

These are all observed in the general news coverage of daily press to answer the first question of the study on the general tendencies in the Turkish press with respect to the coverage of the Istanbul bombings. Up to now, in relation with the first question of this study, I have been discussing the findings of the general analysis of news coverage of Chapter 5. However, the second question on the differences between the ideologically different segments of the Turkish press is about interpretation and necessitates a deeper analysis, which is undertaken in Chapter 6.

On a deeper and specific level, comparative analysis of the responses of the different dailies to the bombings in Istanbul provides a more complex and differentiated picture. Henceforth, for the purposes of second question I will refer to findings of the content analysis, which includes all news, editorials, articles, interpretations in the selected dailies. Such analysis shows a framework in which one can see the political spectrum in all its colors and observe the breaking points between various political camps in Turkey.

In this context, the debate on the usage of the phrases 'Islamist', 'Islamic', and 'religious' terrorism in the press after the bombings, is crucial in illustrating the positions of different political camps and the prominent debates on the relation between Islam and terrorism and Islam and democracy.

Dailies interpreted the issue of Istanbul bombings differently. Republican/secularist daily *Cumhuriyet* interpreted the subject of Istanbul bombings as a national problem, in contrast with liberal Islamist *Zaman*, left-liberal *Radikal*, and radical Islamist *Anadolu'da Vakit*. The bombings were not perceived, interpreted and presented as a separate event by *Cumhuriyet*, but as a chain of Islamist violence, which had been a reality of Turkey for a long time. In addition, since Turkey's internal problem of fundamentalism is seen as more important than al-Qaida threat, local sub-contractors of al-Qaida in organizing the bombings and the early examples of 'Islamist' violence in Turkey are considerably emphasized in *Cumhuriyet* in contrast to other press. The previous experiences of Turkey with Islamist violence was hardly mentioned in *Zaman*, and *Anadolu'da Vakit* and rarely in *Radikal*. While *Cumhuriyet's* agenda after the bombings was dominated by the criticism of the AKP government in general and Erdoğan in particular due to a number of reasons all of which are related to 'Islamism', the other dailies seem to support the AKP government and Erdoğan. On the other hand, radical Islamist *Anadolu'da Vakit* interpreted the bombing events with a defensive position and presented the bombings as terrorist activities by the intelligence agencies of U.S. and Israel while rejecting the

possibility of any Islamist group being involved in them. While *Anadolu'da Vakit* backed both Islam and all Muslims even al-Qaida and Taliban, Islamist *Zaman* expressed uneasiness with people trying to produce a totalitarian ideology from the Muslim religion by arguing on the importance of carrying out an intellectual struggle with them.

Therefore, a distinction between various interpretations of Islam was emphasized by drawing a line between Muslims and Islam and among different Muslims not only in the Islamist daily *Zaman* but also partly in the liberal *Radikal*, while *Cumhuriyet* and *Anadolu'da Vakit* despite their opposing perspectives both expressed a monolithic understanding of Islamism.

#### **1.4 Plan of the Study:**

Following the introduction, the Chapter 2 will introduce some of the main concepts employed in this research as terrorism, Islamism, secularism, laicite, Islamist, and secularist. In doing so, specific attention will be paid to the peculiar usages of those concepts in Turkey and the reflections of those comprehensive debates in Turkish political and academic milieus, which are crucial in the case of the age long confrontation between different political stances.

The specific development of Turkish democracy and Turkish Islamism will be discussed in Chapter 3 in the light of historical facts to clarify the power and positions of the opposing political camps and to identify the political context in which Istanbul assaults were carried out. Then, to better illustrate the perspectives of such selected political camps in Turkey as Republican-secularist, Islamist, and left liberal, their peculiar interpretations of the Republican history of Turkey will be analyzed.

As it is well known, after September 11 events one of the most debated issues in the world has been the so-called relation between Islam and terror. The broader and more effective version of this debate has been on the relation between Islam and democracy, which has been crucial in Turkish political life. Therefore, an aim of Chapter 3 is to reflect the comprehensive debate on the compatibility of Islam with democracy, with regard to its significance in terms of the political confrontation in both local and global sense. It is assumed that the ideas and beliefs on the relation between Islam and democracy have a central role in the shaping of contemporary political debates in Turkey. In this context, on the one hand, the Orientalist and essentialist perspectives, which are embedded in the very question of the compatibility of Islam with democracy, will be criticized, and specific attention will be paid to the projection of those debates to the Turkish political and academic platforms.

Chapter 4 will portray the events of November 15-20, 2003 Istanbul bombings in detail, explain the court case and present a summary of the international and national public responses to the events.

Chapter 5 will analyze the news coverage of events by the selected Turkish dailies and present a general picture of the Turkish press' coverage of the Istanbul bombings. In this analysis question of how the events were presented will be examined in general i.e. how they were presented, issued and interpreted, by pursuing general tendencies in the press will be drawn. Within this analysis, a dual table is constructed because of the striking differences between (what one might call) the popular-mainstream and Islamic press' interpretations on bombings. The research in Chapter 5 based on the analysis of six newspapers: three from popular-mainstream press (Sabah, Milliyet, and Hürriyet) and three from the 'Islamist' side (Milli Gazete, Yeni Şafak, Yeni Mesaj).



Chapter 6 intends to carry out an in-depth analysis of news and commentaries on the bombings in the selected Turkish dailies to compare the reflections of different political camps. This comparative content analysis deals with four national newspapers, which are all considerably popular in Turkish society- *Cumhuriyet, Anadolu'da Vakit, Zaman and Radikal*- by taking into account their divergent ideological positions. These four dailies were chosen primarily with regard to their relatively consistent discourses and ideological homogeneity. It is assumed that the picture will be sharpened by the analysis of these four newspapers because each one represents a pole in Turkish society.

Concluding remarks will be included in the last chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### KEY CONCEPTS: THEIR USAGE IN THE TURKISH CONTEXT

This chapter will introduce some of the main concepts employed in this research such as terrorism, Islamism, secularism, laïcité, Islamist, and secularist. In doing so, specific attention will be paid to the peculiar usages of those concepts in Turkey and the projection of those broad debates in Turkish political and academic milieus, which are crucial in the case of long-term confrontation between different political stances.

#### 2.1 Terrorism

The concept ‘terrorism’ has yet no single universally accepted definition. Large numbers of definitions of the word ‘terrorism’ have been used in different societies. There are also differences between the definitions of terrorism by various institutions and agencies. Even the United Nations has not yet accepted a definition of terrorism although in 2001 Security Council has unanimously adopted a wide-ranging anti-terrorism resolution calling for international cooperation to struggle against terrorism<sup>4</sup>.

The Oxford English Dictionary (Second Edition) defines the word ‘terrorism’ as “the use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims.”

There are variations- in fact, relativity- in definitions of ‘terrorism.’ Hardly any person who is accused of being a ‘terrorist’ identifies himself or herself as a ‘terrorist’. These people rather prefer terms like separatist, freedom fighter, liberator, militant, insurgent, paramilitary, guerrilla, rebel, jihadi, mujaheddin

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<sup>4</sup>Resolution 1373 (2001)  
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2001/sc7158.doc.htm>

(struggler), or fedayeen (prepared for martyrdom). This lack of agreement on the definition of the term occurs because one's 'freedom fighter' can be perceived as 'terrorist' by any other. The disagreement on what to call the Palestinian activists has been a popular example of such confusion. Suicide bombings of Palestinian activists have been largely debated under the notion of the right to self-determination in Middle East, while they are called as 'terrorism' by Western authorities and Israel (Altunşik, 2002, p. 43). How this dispute has been reflected in the Turkish media is the subject of another discussion but, in short, the position of the Turkish media could be characterized as an in-between one. Although there are serious points of analogy between Western and Turkish media (especially mainstream ones) on this issue- for example labeling the Palestinian Hamas and El Fetih as terrorist organizations-, a distinction can be made. In the Turkish media, the term 'militant' rather than 'terrorist' has usually been used for Palestinian activists. Moreover, the phrase 'suicide attack' has been in use in daily language and media rather than 'suicide terrorism.' In fact, there is no equivalent of the phrase 'suicide terrorism' in Turkish language.

Another problem regarding the definitions of 'terrorism' is that the official definitions include only the actions of non-governmental organizations, but not similar acts of states. As one of the proponents of this criticism, Ahmad (1986) talks about U.S.' and Israel's involvement in terrorist activities in Middle East region (p. 3). Consequently, he argues that people generally perceive terrorism selectively 'through the lenses of power,' which cause the ignorance of powerful political authorities' involvement in such actions and the invisibility of the victims belonging to the weaker community (Ahmad, 1986, p. 3).

Finally, apart from those problems in definition, the term 'terrorism' has also been rendered imprecise by popular usage, which complicates the work of social scientists who try to apply it with systematic precision.

This wide debate on the actual meaning of terrorism is bound to extend the scope of this study. This study also rests on the presumption that ‘terrorism’ is an ambiguous concept.

On a more specific level, it could be argued that the Turkish press- even the ones expressing their sympathy to the al-Qaida ideology- has unanimously adopted the concept ‘terrorism’ to refer to the Istanbul bombings. At this juncture, the focus will be on this wide acceptance of the concept among different political stances, ideologies, and discourses.

This wide acceptance cannot be analyzed without reference to the global atmosphere after September 11 attacks and the al-Qaida phenomenon. Between the September 11, 2001 attacks in U.S. and the November 15-20, 2003 Istanbul bombings, many similar assaults were carried out by terrorists in Peru, Tunisia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia and Morocco. Similarly, other assaults continued to occur after the Istanbul bombings, two of which took place in the heart of Europe: in Madrid and London. They were all labeled as instances of ‘global terrorism’ and were linked with al-Qaida whose assaults had targeted the declared enemy U.S. and her allies since 1996, when the leader Osama Bin Laden declared war against the U.S.

The phrase ‘global terrorism’ implies a paradigmatic shift in the definitions of terrorism. The debates on this shift fashioned after the September 11 attacks. In this sense, the new phase ‘global terrorism’ mainly refers to the assaults of terrorist groups whose actions and organization are transcending the borders of nation states.

After September 11, U.S. administration attempted to fix the definition of ‘terrorism’ worldwide and guide the ‘War on Terrorism’. ‘Fighting with terrorism’ was announced as one of the main motives behind the Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) interventions. President George W. Bush declared that

global terrorism is bred in non-democratic states, which necessitated the spread of democracy to these areas. Therefore, he regarded spreading democracy as an important element in the long-run fight against terrorism even if this was to be done by military intervention.

It has also been repeatedly declared that the key to fighting with terrorism effectively is international cooperation among democratic states. Consequently, the phrases “international cooperation in the fight against terrorism”, “global action against terrorism”, “international campaign against terrorism”, “joint battle against terrorism” became diplomatic mottos. The declarations of Prime Minister Erdoğan, after the Istanbul bombings when he repeatedly emphasized the necessity of international cooperation in the fight against terrorism reflected this assumption.

The discourse employed in the global struggle against terrorism included both the international cooperation of states in the fight against terrorism and the necessity to spread democracy to non-democratic countries. In this sense, UN undertook the responsibility of delivering legal, technical assistance in the international cooperation against terrorism by helping countries become parties to the universal legal instruments against terrorism, and by helping expand counter-terrorism knowledge of criminal justice officials<sup>5</sup>. Terrorism here had a loose meaning; an (undefined) organized crime (probably caused by mental illness or fanaticism), and a security threat to nation states.

At this point, on the one hand it can be argued that the discourse on fighting against terrorism detaches the concept ‘terrorism’ from all social, political,

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard, UN perceived terrorism along with other organized crimes as one of the security threats to nation states. For the UN emphasis on the dangerous ‘connection’ between global terrorism and other forms of crime see the working paper "International cooperation against terrorism and links between terrorism and other criminal activities" prepared for the Eleventh Congress (<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/terrorism.html>) (<http://www.unodc.org/newsletter/en/200502/page006.html>).

economic dynamics. In other words, this broad and loose conception regards terrorism as a problem of humankind which is impossible to prevent, but must be fought against<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, within the same discourse if one considers the U.S.-led 'War on Terrorism', and its friend-enemy margin, the term has references to some particularities such as Middle East, Islam, and fundamentalism. Especially terrorists are personalized and popularized with their Islamic fundamentalist identity. Accordingly, academic and journalistic responses on the attacks of al-Qaida generally provide explanations on the relation between Islam and terrorism. As a result, the so-called 'Islamophobia' comes to dominate the agenda with a collective imagination of the 'Middle Eastern Other' as almost identical with terrorism and/or terrorist attacks.

In fact, the terrorist imagination of the 'Middle Eastern Other,' especially in the Western media, was older than the September 11 events (Said, 2000, p. 19). The transformation of the Western perception of 'Middle Eastern Other' to terrorist shaped by Orientalist point of view could be traced back to the historical conditions at the end of the Cold War era, which also coincide with the Iranian revolution and the rise of the Palestinian conflict (Said, 2000, pp. 157-187). September 11 events, therefore, can be regarded as having a triggering effect, which re-popularized the assumptions on the relation between terrorism and Islam, a well-established essentialist argument in the West resting also on views that claim rancor of Muslims against the U.S. and the connection between the Muslim religion and terrorism<sup>7</sup>.

In Turkey too, the term 'terrorism' has been occupying an important place in the mainstream discourse since 1980's (İnal, 1996, p. 123). Consequently, its usage

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<sup>6</sup> This broad and loose conception of terrorism as the irresolvable problem of all humankind can also be observed in the declarations of Prime Minister Erdoğan after the Istanbul bombings.

<sup>7</sup> In his work, 'The Crisis of Islam', B. Lewis (2003) provides an analysis on the reasons of Muslim's hate of U.S.

has been on the rise in the Turkish media. Since the media is where terms are diffused into society and transformed to everyday language, the variety of ways in which the Turkish press uses the concept of terror becomes crucial in understanding people's perception of terrorism (İnal, 1996, p. 122). In this context, it is interesting to note the use of the concept 'terrorism' by the Turkish press.

In the case of Istanbul bombings, the concept of terrorism was generally used with different connotations in various political discourses in the Turkish press. As an example, we can explore the ways in which two politically distinct newspapers- *Cumhuriyet* and *Anadolu'da Vakit*- adopt the same concept with different meanings and reproduce their antagonism by this way. In using the same concept both papers select different historical references. For instance, while *Cumhuriyet* refers to Hizbullah organization and the assassinations of Turkish intellectuals- Muammer Aksoy, Bahriye Üçok, Turan Dursun, Uğur Mumcu, Konca Kuriş and Gaffar Okkan- most of which are linked to Islamist radicalism as historical examples of terrorism in Turkey, (*Cumhuriyet*, November 11, 2003); *Anadolu'da Vakit*, on the other hand, refers to February 28 decisions<sup>8</sup> as an example of terrorism, linking these to historical hostility of the secularist elite to Islamists (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, December 2, 2003).

## 2.2 Islamism

Considering al-Qaida or even its ideology as the final form of revolutionary Islamism seems unrealistic despite its increasing popularity among Muslim masses. In spite of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's call for an international Islamist front, the general trend among the powerful Islamist movements is apparently

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<sup>8</sup> February 28, 1997 decisions were taken in the National Security Council, upon the demand of the military against the Welfare Party (RP)-led coalition government. The event came to be known as "quasi-coup." Among these decisions were security measures to combat Islamist radicalism as well as structural reforms such as education reform (increased compulsory education from 5 to 8 years) that resulted in the closure of the junior high sections of imam-hatip schools.

the reverse (İsmail, 2001). In fact, many Islamist movements' in North Africa and Middle East do not support al-Qaida activism. Various fractions of Islamists are continuously choosing the way of legalization by renouncing violence as a strategy. Among these one can identify such groups as al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt, al-Islah wa al-Tajdid in Morocco. Moreover, powerful moderate groups such as Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are continuing to pursue accommodation policies (İsmail, 2001, p. 36). These developments raise an important question: "Do these developments mean that Islamism failed as an international revolutionary movement?"

Nowadays, there is an ongoing debate on the future of Islamism, which caught the attention of the world by 1980's as an international revolutionary movement. While some scholars argue on the failure of political Islam and its project, some others, *inter alia* İsmail (2001), insist on their adaptability and resiliency.

Roy's arguments are the most prominent ones on the failure of Islamism as a politically transformative movement. According to Roy (1994), we are witnessing the advent of post-Islamism, because Islamism has lost its revolutionary force. He claims that Islamist project failed in three counts: Islamist movements shifted from internationalism to a sort of nationalism; the movements lost their revolutionary character on the domestic front; on the level of the individual Islamism had been swallowed up by the consumer culture (Roy, 1994).

İsmail (2001) questions these arguments on the advent of post Islamism. He argues that Islamists' impact upon society remains significant especially in local politics. In this regard, he attributes Roy's conclusions to his limited conception of the political as equal with government and the state (İsmail, 2001, p. 36). Second, he analyses the tactical, ideological and doctrinal shifts of Islamist movements by questioning the assumption that Islamism was ever



coherent and homogenous. According to İsmail, in the course of activism many Islamist movements repositioned themselves to take advantage of political opportunities, which does not mean that they have given up their political project (İsmail, 2001). Therefore, he concludes that Islamist fact is cumulative; therefore, Islamism as a process remains a dynamic force in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the definition, characteristics and objectives of Islamism (apart from particular Islamism's) as a coherent ideology are still questions in dispute. Islamism is mostly considered as a reaction to modernity, associated with traditional society. Most popularly held accounts attribute the worldwide rise of Islamism to insufficient modernization or innate cultural differences. As Çınar (2005) points out, in such anti-modernist definitions of Islamism, a retrospective view of history (in relating the secularism and modernity to the internal dynamics of West and Christianity) plays an important role (p. 24). This reasoning of relating the superiority of the West to its cultural dynamics goes parallel with the essentialist perception of Islam as a religion against development or any social change, symbolizing rigidity as the cause of all problems in Muslim countries (Çınar, 2005, p. 24).

According to Kramer in the case of Islamism, we are talking about a reformulation of Islam as a modern ideology (The Middle East Quarterly-MEQ, 1999). Islamism, thus, is a response to modern ideologies although Islam was traditionally conceived as being in a class with Judaism and Christianity. Likewise Esposito defines Islamism as an ideology to support political and social activism (MEQ, 1999).

Çınar (2005) points out that in most of the contemporary Islamism analyses we are faced with a Muslim community whose political attitudes are determined by Islamic norms and values against modernity and the repression of this community by a modernizer state for the sake of modernization, secularization and rationalization. In this regard, Islam is perceived as a political force waiting

for resurgence in the cases of the decline in force of modernizing state (Çınar, 2005, pp. 29-31). That is to say, Islam becomes an independent variable resulting in Islamism and determining the political aspects of Islamism when it is not controlled (Çınar, 2005, pp. 29-31). Çınar (2005) summarized the problem as:

This mainstream reading of Islamism as the resurgence of Islam directly links the movements to the dynamics of Islamic religion at the expense of ignoring the contexts they emerged, the roles played and the specific aims introduced by different Islamism's (p. 31).

Therefore, understanding Islamism solely as a reaction to modernity, whose characteristics are directly determined by religion, means to reduce it to religiosity of people. However, it is hard to prove a direct relation between the increase of religiosity and Islamist politics (Çınar, 2005, p.18; Gülalp, 2003, p. 24). Moreover, such culturalist explanations lack the class component of the actors of the movement, such as university graduates without jobs, provincial businesspersons not supported by the state or rural-to-urban migrants without secure employment, which gave input and creativity to Islamist movements in many parts of the Middle East since 1980's (Tuğal, 2003, p.3).

These criticisms, would regard Islamism as a modern ideology looking for solutions for contemporary problems and see contemporary Islamist movements as appearing in different political forms in different contexts. For those who see Islamism as a modern ideology, tradition is nothing more than a form of interpreting on life, settled in society (Çınar, 2005, p. 173). However, Islamism carries a new interpretation, which is different from settled beliefs and form of lives. Therefore, Islamism denotes a clear rupture from tradition or traditional religion rather than being its prolongation (Çınar, 2005, p. 173). Likewise, White (2002) claims "Islamists are Muslims who rather than accept an inherited tradition, have developed their own self-conscious vision of Islam"

(p. 6). Islamism, thus, constitutes a state of inventing a new tradition rather than being a representative of existing tradition. As Çınar (2005) points out it is obvious that this invented tradition is far from being monolithic (p. 173). It is heavily bound on the choices of its inventor (Çınar, 2005, p. 173). Thus, Islamist movements are far from being monolithic and they have contrasting attitudes towards modernization, westernization, and democracy. They take on very different meanings throughout the history and vary according to contexts. As an instance, the differences between new generation of Islamists and 19<sup>th</sup> century modernist Islamists in reconstruction and definition of Western modernity can be cited (Göle, 1996, p. 6).

Similarly, White (2002) interprets the phenomena of Islamist movements as a general mobilization of people around cultural, political and social issues that are presented and interpreted through an Islamic idiom (p. 6). For her, Islamist movements are by no means coherent in organization, ideological interpretation, goal or method. Regarding the issue of Islamism in Turkey, she additionally points out that the Islamist movement in Turkey, encompasses a variety of people with contradictory motivations and goals and sometimes radically different interpretations of fundamental religious principles and political platforms (White, 2002, p. 6). She suggests that a distinctive aspect of the Islamist movement in Turkey is the variety of characteristics and motivations of its followers. (White, 2002, p. 29)

Finally, the major debate within Islamists should be mentioned on the use of violence especially in terms of suicide bombings. While many of the Muslim ulema give fatwas endorsing suicide bombings, there are many rejecting and banning this method. Consequently, while there are many Islamist groups supporting the suicide bombings in the cases of al-Qaida and the Palestinian question and rejected the label of 'terror'; there are also many groups, especially the ones that associate themselves with democratic ideals, labeling and criticizing them as terrorism. The projection is similar in Turkey in the

sense that approach to suicide terrorism is still a breaking point among Islamists.

### **1.3 Laïcité, Secularism, Secularist *versus* Islamist**

It is expected that while societies modernize, they will be continuously disassociated from religious references as sources of knowledge and sources of legitimization of political authority. This assumption is known as 'secularization thesis' and is supported by *inter alia* Max Weber and Emile Durkheim (Giddens, 2006, pp. 553-4). This comes to mean that there is a zero-sum game between modernity and religion in the sense that religion does not have a place in the modern society. However, such an assumption would be questionable due to the unclear position of religion in modern society. As Giddens (2006) puts the present position of religion in Britain and other Western countries is much more complex than the suggestion of secularization thesis (p. 569). Moreover, the enduring popularity of new religious movements presents a challenge to the secularization thesis (Giddens, 2006, p. 554).

In fact, the relation between modernity and religion is a complex and controversial issue, which inspired new secularization studies on the durability of religion's authority in modern societies. Today, it is obvious that the practice of modernity has not excluded the usage or instrumentalization of religion for various purposes. In this sense, both classical sociological stance of viewing religion as a primitive worldview of traditional society, which loses its meaning with modernization, and the traditionalist perspective of viewing traditional society as an ideal society based on religious principles and modernity as degeneration are too simplistic to reflect the reality. In fact, religion and modernity appear to interact in complex ways, interwoven in daily life and transforming each other in modern societies.

With these concerns in mind, secularism can be defined as the process signifying the decrease in the social role of religion, privatization of religious beliefs (Giddens, 2006, p. 553). Secularization has been frequently confused with the concept 'laïcité' since both relate to the decline of religion's role in the organization of modern society. Historically, various religious traditions have faced different secularization experiences. In some societies, secularism was experienced in the framework of a laic political organization while in some others, religious institutions adopt themselves to modern social conditions in a more indirect way. The difference between laic political organization of Catholic France and the secularization experiences of Protestant countries of the West can be interpreted in this framework.

In the case of Turkey, the issue is far more complex. As known, one of the objectives of the Turkish Republic was to institute laïcité as an important step for the modernization of the country in accordance with the French (laic) model<sup>9</sup>. In this model, modernization has been identified with laïcité, with the presumption that religion is the greatest obstacle to the modernization process. With these concerns, the state was made the arbiter of religious affairs and the main office overseeing the religious activities in Turkey, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, was placed under government authority and functioned at its direction (Karpat, 1991, p. 53).

In this sense, 'secularist' elites of Turkish Republic who are thoroughly committed to the concept of a Republic founded on the enlightenment ideas of reason and progress played an important role in the institution of laïcité (Toprak, 2005, p. 170). One should distinguish the process of secularism from the doctrine of laïcité as former signifies a sociological process regardless of the initiative of individuals while the latter rests on political decisions, individual

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, the politics of secularization was not started with Republican reforms. Secularization in the military, education, administration and judiciary dates back to the Tanzimat period of reforms in the Ottoman state (Tapper, 1994, p. 4).

attitudes, beliefs and interests. Therefore, laïcité is not a power free and neutral concept in Turkey since it underlines certain attempts, attitudes and the political and cultural power of secularist elites (Göle, 1996, p. 20). Consequently, the term ‘secularist’ in contemporary Turkey, carries a different connotation from the original meaning of secular and secularism since it refers to the supporters, followers, and carriers of the laic political organization of the modern Turkish Republic. It is conceptualized in contrast to ‘Islamist’, which is generally referring to those marginalized by the republic and pushed out of the centers of political power social status and intellectual prestige because of either their opposition to Republican reforms or their provincial and religious backgrounds (Toprak, 2005, p. 171).

The label ‘Islamist’ refers to the supporters/followers/carriers of the Islamist politics whose loyalty to the laic principle of state is questionable. With regard to this negative connotation of the term ‘Islamism’, another important point is on the assumed difference between the terms ‘Islamic’ (Islami) and ‘Islamist’ (Islamcı). In this sense, the term ‘Islamic’ has a considerably positive meaning compared to ‘Islamist’ since the former refers to piety and devotion, i.e. an individualistic attitude while the latter implies a politicized form of Islam.

In the context of Turkey, while the term ‘Islamic’ has a limited compatibility with laïcité, ‘Islamist’ entails an opposition to the laic foundations of the Republic.

It is nonetheless also a fact that difference between the terms ‘Islamic’ and ‘Islamist’ seems to stay mainly as a debate in the laic circles in Turkey, because those identified as ‘Islamic’ are always reluctant to use either ‘Islamic’ or ‘Islamist’ terms to define themselves, as we see in the Islamist dailies in Turkey.

The conceptual confusion in Turkey (secularism or laïcité) can also be observed in the Islamist criticisms of laicism. Most of the Islamist comments

on laïcité focus on the form rather than substance by emphasizing the strictness of the application of laïcité in Turkey. One famous example is Bülent Arınç's- The President of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (2002-2007)- declaration in which he stressed his sympathy for laïcité of the U.S. while it is well-known that the secularization experience of U.S. had not ended in the form of laic state model (Radikal, May 28, 2005)

This confused remark in fact can be interpreted in various ways. It can be argued that the former Prime Minister does not only confuse the terms but also expresses his uneasiness with laïcité as it is institutionalized in Turkey rather than secularism being the historical process at hand. It could be argued that the historical antagonism between secularists and Islamists is the main motive behind this criticism.

In fact, confrontation between the secularists and Islamists has been one of the centerpieces of Turkish electoral politics. This confrontation has been dominating the political arena especially after 1980's as more and more urban poor joined the ranks of the Islamists. According to research by Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2006), on the changes in the attitudes and preferences of the Turkish public concerning secularism, Islam and politics to follow-up an earlier study in 1999, it was discovered that despite some positive changes, there were already the signs of an increasing polarization between the 'secularist' versus the 'Islamists' camps in Turkey (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p.11). Consequently, they argued that there is a significant tension on the issue of secularism and laïcité in Turkey (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 11). This polarization, it was claimed coincides with class as well as the degree of urbanization and the level of education. Those who are relatively well off, better-educated and live in urban areas tend to be in the 'secularist' camp (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 11). On the other side, there are religiously devout people of lower education and socio-economic status who feel closer to the 'Islamist' camp (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 13). However, assuming or

expecting a one to one correspondence between this social division and electoral choices and party politics is misleading.

Another finding of the study is that religiosity has been on the rise in Turkey (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 11). The percentage of people who approved of religious parties had increased from 1999 (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 11). However, it was argued that these finding can not simply lead the conclusion that the support for a secular system is on the decline in Turkey. There is no finding in the study that indicates a rising support for a religious state (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 11). On the contrary, support for a religious state has declined from 21% in 1999 to 9% in 2006. Moreover, both (1999 and 2006) surveys demonstrate that the Turkish people do not perceive laïcité to be under threat and do not think that there is a real possibility of a Shari'a-based religious regime in Turkey (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 11).

In Turkey, the frontline of secularist and Islamist confrontation revolves around the controversy on the ban on headscarves<sup>10</sup> in universities. This ban had long been a source of political conflict leading to protests at university entrances. In the 1990's the headscarf dispute came to be regarded as the most controversial issue of Turkish politics by both sides (Toprak, 2005, p. 174). While secularists argue that 'turban' is a political symbol of anti-regime, Islamist movements, is fostered by Islamist politics and symbolizes a desire for the Sharia rule. Islamists today insist on the fact that it signifies an individual choice based on religious beliefs and argue that the ban in the universities is a violation of women's human rights<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The term 'turban' is mostly used instead of headscarves by non-Islamists. 'Turban' is an essentially incorrect description if the head cover used by women, has gained wide popular usage in the country. It denotes an Islamic identity marker as opposed to the traditional female head covering.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, this is a simplification because there are more than two parts in this debate. For example, there are also many liberals, feminists and left-liberals (who can be regarded in the secularist camp in many other issues) are against the ban on 'turban'.



The research of Çarkoğlu and Toprak shows that the percentage of veiled women has in fact been on the decline in Turkey in the last several years (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 12). Moreover, full veiling of women, in Turkey is marginalized (those who veil are only 1% of the population) and does not seem to exist among the younger generation.

In the light of these facts, the centrality of and deadlock over the headscarf dispute in 1990's can be attributed to the continuing dominance of Islamist-secularist confrontation in the political arena. Consequently, the public debate on the 'headscarf' has heavily focused on the laïcité principle and modernization paradigm at the expense of ignoring many other scopes of the issue such as class and gender (Lindisfarne, 2002, p. 90). Lindisfarne (2002) claims that as headscarf has been regarded as one of the cultural symbols of lower class and peasantry in Turkey, these women struggling for university admission can be seen as challenging the inequality in applications and the discrimination politics (p. 91). Yet, in doing so, they are supporting inequalities between men and women that are put forth by Islamists (Lindisfarne, 2002, p. 91). Some have also argued that the Islamist movements advocating for the headscarf have primarily aimed to support this dress code as an anti-system symbol rather than the rights of women (Çakır, 2000). In brief, the issue stems from the fact that the headscarf symbolizes not only equality and non-discrimination demands of women but also the Islamic patriarchy (Lindisfarne, 2002, p. 91).

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The issue has been carried to both the national and international legal arenas with cases in domestic courts and European Court of Human Rights (*Zeynep Tekin vs. Turkey*, 1998, application no 41556/98; *Leyla Şahin vs. Turkey*, 2004, application no 44774/98) all ending in favor of the state.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DEMOCRACY AND ISLAMISM IN TURKEY**

This chapter initially aims to analyze the broad debate on the compatibility of Islam with democracy, with regard to its significance in terms of the political confrontation both in a local and global sense. It is assumed that the ideas or beliefs on the relation between Islam and democracy specifically have a central role in the shaping of contemporary political debates in Turkey.

First, the development of democracy and Islamism in Turkey will be introduced in the light of historical facts. The aim is twofold; to clarify the power and positions of the political camps and to clarify the political context of Turkey, in which the Istanbul assaults were carried out.

Then, to better illustrate the outlooks of the selected significant political camps in Turkey (Republican-secularist, Islamist, left liberal), their peculiar interpretations of the Republican history of Turkey will be summarized.

Finally, in the course of the general debate, on the one hand, the Orientalist-essentialist perspectives, which are embedded in the very question of the compatibility of Islam with democracy, will be criticized. On the other hand, specific attention will be paid to the projection of those debates in Turkish political and academic platforms, which are crucial in the case of the confrontation between political camps in Turkey

### **3.1 Democracy and Islamism in Turkey**

#### **3.1.1 Democracy in Turkey**

From the foundation of the Republic (1923) until 1945, Turkey was governed by a single party government. The Republican People's Party (CHP) was the dominant, ruling political organization of Turkey in this era.

It could be stated that this single party rule lasting for twenty-seven years created a unity between the CHP and the state leading to the absence of a separation between the party and the government (Ahmad, 1977, p. 1). In this sense, CHP was not only a political party; it became a 'state party'.

The political thinking of CHP heavily shaped by the major aim of establishing a nation state with the six principles of Kemalism: laïcité, reformism, republicanism, nationalism, etatism, and populism. The social composition of CHP could be described as an alliance between the central military-bureaucratic-intellectual elites and the local notables (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 122). The party carried out a series of reforms in political, constitutional, and cultural realms, aiming at modernizing and westernizing the basis of the Turkish state and the society. As a modern party organization, it aimed to create Western mode of political and civic organizations.

Karpat (1991) claims that under CHP, secularism was invoked in defense of the regime whenever a threat arose (p. 53). The party claimed itself to be the guardian of the regime and the reforms to justify its hold on power. Consequently, defending secularism and the state became the justification for restrictions that CHP imposed upon the opposition, which it generally defined as religious in origin or intent (Karpat, 1991, p. 53).

So far as the place of opposition goes, in the early years of Republic, 1920's witnessed a violent contestation between the Kemalist ruling bloc and

opposition forces. However, it is plain that the early Republican years pointed to the absolute control of Kemalist cadres and CHP over the political sphere except for two periods lasting only few months in 1924-25 and in 1930, when attempts were made to set up a multiparty system (Eroğul, 1987, p. 102).

After the passing away of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in 1938, CHP came under the leadership of İsmet İnönü, the close lieutenant and long-time associate of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Heper (2002) mentions that İsmet İnönü had a skeptical attitude toward particularistic interests. He argues that İnönü had inherited from 1920's a basic distrust toward opposition and therefore an inclination to take measures against it (Heper, 2002, p. 39). Nevertheless, he also states that, President İsmet İnönü was the leader who allowed the formation of opposition parties in 1940s and supported the transformation of the single party regime to a multiparty one in 1950s (Heper, 2002, p. 39).

It has been claimed that, in the spring of 1945, the reasons that pushed İnönü and the CHP to allow the formation of opposition parties had to do with the changing international conditions and growing domestic pressures. On the one hand, with the end of the Second World War the change in international environment could be cited as a persuasive factor. In addition, Turkey's long tradition of Westernization also implied democratization (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 119). On the other hand, during the war years, the masses in Turkey had been economically deprived and social unrest due to economic difficulties, especially wartime shortages was an important factor diminishing the legitimacy of single party rule (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 120). Moreover, Eroğul cites that the propertied classes in Turkey<sup>12</sup>, who had strengthened in the high inflation of war years, also pressured CHP's single party regime and demanded a direct say in government (Eroğul, 1987, p. 102).

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<sup>12</sup> Those propertied classes were mainly composed of landowners, local notables, and big city merchants.

After the decision of allowing the formation of opposition parties, fifteen new parties were founded in 1945 and 1946. It was the Democratic Party (DP), which eventually emerged as the major opposition party. It should also be noted that this opening up of the regime also had quite narrow boundaries. The leftist stance was totally excluded from the newly formed multiparty system. According to Eroğul, “this was to be a ‘democracy’ confined solely to the right wing of the political spectrum” (Eroğul, 1987, p. 103). Moreover, among the rightwing opposition, reactionaries wishing a return to Ottoman times, religious fundamentalists opposed to secularism, and fascists inspired by Nazism would be excluded from the legality conferred upon political opposition (Eroğul, 1987, pp. 103-4). Therefore, Eroğul claims that the opposition, which was granted legitimacy, did not significantly differ from CHP (Eroğul, 1987, p. 104).

The liberal DP was founded on January 7, 1946 by four prominent parliamentarians of the CHP (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 119). It could be argued that, DP was representing the interest of the propertied classes, profiteers, intermediaries, and businessmen in Turkey who were uneasy with some policies of CHP such as capital tax (Varlık Vergisi) and land reform. In fact, land reform, intended to redistribute state-owned land to poor peasants was the most famous proposal in the Assembly that pushed the founders of DP to strong opposition. Consequently, DP came to the defense of landed interests, private enterprise, and the commercial classes (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 125).

In the 1950 elections, it was seen that peasant masses also welcomed the DP. The party won overwhelmingly by receiving 53.3 percent of the total votes and gained 408 seats (out of total 487) in the Parliament (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 121).

Ideologically, it could be said that DP combined democratic discourses with a heavy dose of conservative and traditionalist elements (Kasaba, 1993, p. 66). Its relation with Islam is a complex one. Throughout DP rule, Islam became a

political factor and the official interpretations of secularism became less strict (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 123). Within the years it was in power, DP itself became associated with the resurgence of Islam (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 124). Sarıbay (1991) claims that in 1958, the year of economic deprivation and social unrest, DP leadership began to openly misuse Islam for political purposes (p. 124).

Apart from these, the populist discourse with the theme of empowerment and pro-West outlook of DP was striking (Kasaba, 1993, p. 67). Sending troops to Korean War and relentless efforts to gain membership in NATO are major examples of its pro-West outlook of the Democratic Party. Eroğul (1987) mentions this extreme pro-West outlook: “DP had the distinction of being more pro-West in foreign policy than the West itself” (p. 109).

DP’s early years in power were also a period of rapid growth. In these years DP truly aimed at advancing democracy by curbing government interference and by increasing individual freedoms (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 125). However, with the so-called anti-democratic turn after 1954 elections, DP strictly turned away from political liberalism. It has been argued that the failure of the economy- rising prices, inflation, shortage of goods, black marketeering- pushed the government to abandon democratic policies and take measures against the opposition (Sarıbay, 1991, p. 126). A number of examples can be given in this regard: A province of Turkey was split in two because it had voted for the opposition, electoral law was amended creating further obstacles for the opposition, propaganda through the radio was banned, joint lists by political parties were banned, blocking cooperation among the opposition (Eroğul, 1987, p. 112).

The Turkish army intervened in May 1960. DP was overthrown from government and after a controversial court procedure, its leader, along with two of the cabinet ministers, was given the death penalty and executed. A new constitution was prepared by a special commission of university professors providing broad guarantees against the power of the government, and allowing

for the creation of a liberal environment (Eroğul, 1987, p. 129). The election system was changed from simple majority to proportional representation, thus becoming more democratic (Kasaba, 1993, p. 60).

The military stayed in power for eighteen months and handed power over to an elected government in the fall of 1961. In the 1961 elections the Justice Party (AP), which had identified itself as the continuation of the DP gained the most votes and became the main coalition partner in the government that was subsequently formed. In 1965, the AP came to power by itself.

The political context of the 1960's was shaped by Cold War polarizations. While on the one hand anti-Americanism and the left were on the rise, on the other, anti-communism got stronger. In 1965, for the first time in the Turkish political history, a socialist workers party, Turkish Labour Party (TİP), gained seats (14) in the Parliament (Ahmad, 2007, p. 164). In 1967, Revolutionary Trade Unions Confederation (DİSK) was founded (Ahmad, 2007, p. 164).

As Eroğul (1987) states, the first consequence of the liberal environment created by the 1961 Constitution was the rise of leftist currents, which had been banned and were underground current with marginal influence in the country before (p. 131). In this ground, the left started to become a prominent factor in Turkish politics. CHP did not stay indifferent to these developments and adopted the slogan 'left-of-centre' to describe its position in Turkey's political spectrum.

The 1960's were also marked by the tensions over the Cyprus issue and the fragmentation of the rightwing of the political spectrum.

In some respects, analysts have seen the years 1965-8 as the 'golden age of pluralism' in Turkey, with a real multiparty system functioning for the first time in a truly pluralistic manner (Eroğul, 1987, p. 133). An indicator of broadening of political participation apart from universal suffrage is the nature of the issues

debated on the political platform: “Politics can only be democratized to the extent that it is linked to the livelihood and subsistence of different sectors of society” (Eroğul, 1987, p. 133). In that respect, 1960’s was a turning point in Turkish political life.

1960’s were also the years that the economy began to pick up with the increase in the agricultural productivity, increase in the joint foreign capital and considerable growth of the industrial sector (Ahmad, 1977, p. 279). The connection with foreign capital divided the private sector between those who benefited from the foreign link and the others, who perceived the former as threats to the national economy (Ahmad, 1977, p. 283). The interests of Anatolian traditional capital conflicted with the interests of large cosmopolitan companies in the Marmara region, especially in Istanbul and this confrontation reflected to the political sphere.

Also, in those days, from an industrialist point of view it was clear that the Turkish economy required structural reforms in order to undertake a new phase of development. However, social forces such as trade unions, radical students, workers, workers party demanding redistribution made it difficult to implement those reforms within a competitive party politics.

In March 1971, the military intervened once again in politics. Ahmad (2007) argues that one of the aims of the military intervention was to provide the political climate in which structural changes could be implemented (pp. 162-8).

The elections held in 1973, led to CHP’s surprising success under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit and his left-of-centre discourse. Ecevit’s partner in the new coalition government was Necmettin Erbakan and his National Salvation Party (MSP), representative of the traditional sector. In the following years, Erbakan and his party became an indispensable part of the so-called ‘National Front



Governments' (the rightwing conservative alliance of liberal-right, religious and nationalist parties).

The second half of 1970s could be defined as the period of increasing political violence. The bloody events of Labor Day, on May 1, 1977, political kidnappings, the assaults against Alevi's in many parts of Turkey (Malatya 1978, Sivas 1978, Bingöl 1978, Kahramanmaraş 1978) could be cited as examples (Ahmad, 2007, p. 177).

The third military intervention in Turkey occurred on September 12, 1980 in the form of a full military coup. Its impact on social and political life was unprecedented and irreversible. Civil and political rights were suspended, democratic institutions were abolished the press was silenced; political parties were closed down. A new constitution was drafted which essentially suspended many democratic rights and freedoms guaranteed in the 1961 Constitution.

By looking at the line of politics in the 1980's, it could be stated that the coup had led to the fragmentation of the center-left and the center-right and thus opened the way for a new period of coalition governments in Turkey. In these years the Islamist, National Salvation Party (MSP) and the extreme right wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP) gained power (Ahmad, 2007, pp. 205-6).

In the first elections after the coup held in 1983, claimed to be anti-democratic by many, newly formed political parties were required to receive approval from the military rulers in order to participate. Among the fifteen parties that applied, only three received approval. One of these three was, the Motherland Party (ANAP) which was established in 1983 by Turgut Özal whose worldview could be defined by the catchwords 'free market economy,' 'end to the protectionist and paternalist state,' 'privatization' and 'opening up to the world' (Acar, 2002, p. 172). ANAP as a new political movement stood in the center right of the political spectrum while also claiming to bring together diverse political

tendencies. It had a conservative outlook, which allowed for some expressions of religion and by favoring private capital and enterprise, it introduced free-market reforms and down-sizing of the public sector; transforming the Turkish economy.

It could be claimed that the years of military regime and ANAP rule provided for an economic development that was in line with the requisites of economic globalization. The primary aim was to discipline the trade unions and to reduce the wages for international competition (Ahmad, 2007, p. 195). Those policies for economic liberalization dramatically changed the power structure of the country and disturbed the balance of the income distribution. Export incentives favored the interest of the large companies of the Marmara region at the expense of the interests of Anatolian middle-sized enterprises (Ahmad, 2007, p. 197). In this period, those Anatolian enterprises started to come together to form large companies that come to be known as ‘Anatolian Tigers’. On the political level, these interest groups supported the Islamist stance, which was revealed, by their support for Erbakan’s parties. This division between the interests of Marmara Region companies and the Anatolian enterprises could be cited as the major breaking point between the politics of the Motherland Party and the separate Islamist line.

The politics of 1990’s were shaped by the ‘Kurdish issue’ as a major problem; relations with EU; and a ‘quasi-coup’ (the February 28 decisions of 1997) which identified Islamism as an immediate and clear threat to Turkish state (even more important than Kurdish nationalism) (Ahmad, 2007, p. 200). Nevertheless, the electoral successes of Islamists continued throughout the 1990’s, especially in local elections.

The following part will offer a second look to the period of 1980’s and the following decades by particularly focusing on Islamism as a line of politics in Turkey.

### **3.1.2 Islamism in Turkey**

The debate on the Islamist threat started to dominate the political agenda of Turkey beginning with the early 1950's. The suspicion toward the Democrat Party's popular outlook in the sense that whether it will retreat from the secularist reforms appeared as an early concern (Ayata, 1994, p. 254). Over the following decades, there was a growth in the manifestation of popular religious sentiment, either in the form of building mosques and religious schools or the semi-clandestine activities of mystical groups (Tapper, 1994, p. 2). Those groups were, on the one hand, the old religious orders such as the Nakşibendi and Kadiri, on the other hand, the more recent Nurcu and Süleymancı movements that came into existence in the context of Turkish Republic (Tapper, 1994, p. 2). In terms of religious sentiment, another key development was the establishment of the National Salvation Party and its consolidation as a political force in 1970's (Ayata, 1994, p. 254).

In the Islamic revival of 1980's, which brings the resurgence in religious consciousness and activity was combined with the successful re-introduction of Islam as an alternative ideology (Acar, 1994, p. 281). Islamism of the period was a result of popular reaction and not necessarily organized in political parties (Ayata, 1994, p. 254). The period was shaped by a remarkable proliferation of religious newspapers, periodicals and other literature leading to intellectualization of the Islamist movement much more than even before (Tapper, 1994, p. 3). With the translations of the works by the prominent ideologists of Islamist resurgence into Turkish language, the movement gained an international vision by linking itself to general upsurge of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East and shifted from being a parochial attempt (Çiğdem, 2004, p. 28). The direct attacks on the secular Turkish state as well as the demands for an Islamic state increased also with the influence of Islamic revolution in Iran (Ayata, 1994, p. 254).

Apart from the Iranian effect, it has also been argued that pragmatic policies of the post-1980 military regime, which is seen as tolerant and concessional towards the Islamic groups, helped strengthen political Islamism. According to Toprak (2005), the Turkish Islamic synthesis became the quasi-official ideology of the military regime (p. 179). On the other hand, the rise of Islamism in the 1980's had much to do with the decline of left and as the promising ideology and transformation of urban areas as the urban poor joined to the ranks of Islamists (Toprak, 2005, p. 181). The class composition that created the dynamism of this movement in 1980's was largely urban poor and lower middle classes.

It is, in fact, initially the economic liberalization of the Özal period (premiership and then the presidency of Turgut Özal 1983-1993) in Turkey that had an eminent impact on domestic opportunity structures and therefore, the empowerment of new groups. The economic liberalization of the period facilitated the emergence of a new pro-Islamic bourgeoisie.

In terms of parliamentary politics, the revival in the 1980's caused the emergence and development of Islamist politics as distinct from the conservative right. In this context, Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party (RP) emerged with a distinctive Islamist program and became the first openly Islamist senior partner of a coalition government in Turkish Republican history by 1995 elections. The party's populist 'Just Order' program was successful in mobilizing the poor and providing upward mobility to some of its followers (Toprak, 2005, p. 181). Erbakan's proposal for Just Order called for the elimination of inequalities and corruption, state withdrawal from economic activities, and the promotion of individual small enterprise (White, 2002, p. 133). As a result, RP attracted a much greater variety of supporters than any previous Islam inspired party. Conservative townspeople, poor urban migrants, up-and-coming professionals, intellectuals, and wealthy industrialists are among its supporters.

The RP offered a new legal system derived from the history of Islam- shaped by what is known as 'Medina Agreement'. In Toprak's (2005) words, it adopted an anti-West stand with "a leftist discourse of capitalist exploitation combined with anti-Zionist proclamations that verged on anti-Semitism" (p. 182). In brief, hostility to the West, anti-Semitism, emphasis on cultural alienation, traditionalism (especially in the sense of celebrating the Ottoman past) and a vague nationalism were the characteristic elements of the Welfare party's ideology.

When the party was closed down by the Constitutional Court in 1998, its successor Virtue Party (FP) took the ground with a more moderate programme that differed significantly from that of RP's in terms of supporting Turkey's entry into the European Union and its role within NATO. It also rejected RP's proposal for a new legal system based on the Medina Agreement (Toprak, 2005, p. 183). Under the leadership of Recai Kutan, FP's program called for an expansion of basic rights and liberties and promised to amend the Constitution and other laws that restricted freedoms (Toprak, 2005, p. 183). FP too was soon closed by a decision of Constitutional court in 2001, which gave way to a division in the movement. The movement divided into two parties: Felicity Party (SP) and Justice and Development Party (AKP). The Felicity Party (SP) was placed in the hands of the old leadership still loyal to the archprotagonist of Islamist politics in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan. It gained 2.4 percent of the votes in the elections of 2002 while the more moderate AKP, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, won the national elections on November 3, 2002 with an overwhelming majority and became the first Islamist party to form a government without a coalition partner (Toprak, 2005, pp. 177-183).

It has been argued that the process started on February 28 with quasi-coup against RP had already deepened the disagreement between the elders of the Islamist movement led by Erbakan and the younger generation led by Erdoğan.

The discussion about the EU played an important role and became a fault line between SP and AKP. SP returned to an anti-West (anti-EU, anti-globalization) discourse. They reemphasize political Islamism with an intolerant normative framework (Kuru, 2005, p. 272).

On the other hand, the younger generation, the founders of the AKP, emphasized their pro-democratic ideas. Moreover, they pointed to EU as the only alternative political project for Turkey (Kuru, 2005, p. 272). They started to express openly that they did not intend to found an Islamic state and claimed that AKP is not a religious party. By rejecting political Islamism, they identified their normative framework as “conservative democracy.” Consequently, Erdoğan stresses that the AKP is not a part of the National Outlook Movement (the tradition identified with RP, FP, and SP parties and the personality of Necmettin Erbakan), which is still representing political Islamism (Kuru, 2005, p. 273). However, secularists in Turkey are still suspicious about these claims and the hidden aims of AKP.

Today, in the search for the continuities and ruptures between RP and more moderate AKP, their respective attitudes towards the institutional bureaucratic structure of the Turkish state can be called as the main rupture point. With a strong emphasis on cultural alienation, the Welfare Party adopted a vision of Islamization policy from top to down without criticizing the bureaucratic structure. However, AKP’s criticisms are oriented towards institutions and the bureaucratic structure of the state. It supports re-structuralisation for the sake of democracy in parallel with the neo-liberal outlook. AKP has attempted to reconcile discourse of neo-liberalism and the historical revenge of Islamists from the laic state (Çınar, 2005, p. 13).

Finally, a few significant Islamist movements of contemporary Turkey should be mentioned which fall outside of the parliamentary line.

The most outstanding and powerful one is the Gülen movement as an active movement in a wide geographic area. It has education, media and business networks in more than fifty countries (Kuru, 2005, p. 261). In Turkey, the movement operates a media network, including newspaper *Zaman*, as one of the objects of this study in Chapter 5 (Kuru, 2005, p. 261).

The movement emerged in the late 1960s as a local group around İzmir. (Kuru, 2005, p. 261) In the mid-1980's, it began to open educational institutions and spread to other parts of Turkey and by 1990's it became a transnational movement by opening institutions in many countries and gathering sympathizers from various nationalities (Kuru, 2005, p. 261). The community claims that the primary reason of opening educational institutions abroad is spreading the Turkish culture and values. In this sense, it can be argued that nationalism or more specifically Turk-Islam synthesis plays a big role in the shaping of the outlook of the community.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the movement has had a tolerant framework that has been open to inter-faith dialogue (Kuru, 2005, pp. 257-262). Their outlook is derived from one interpretation of Beziüzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960) as opposed to violence and the politicization of Islam (Kuru, 2005, p. 262). Fethullah Gülen- like Said Nursi- specifically encourages Muslim-Christian cooperation in the struggle against materialism and atheism (Kuru, 2005, p. 263). In this sense, Christians and Jews are not regarded as enemies.

In 1994, the movement founded the Foundation of Journalists and Writers (FJW) to organize public meetings that are claimed to aim promoting tolerance and dialogue (Kuru, 2005, p. 263).

Gülen's emphasis on interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance, particularly his meetings with Pope John Paul II, the Panahrio Greek Patriarch Bartolomeos, and Israeli Sephardic Head Rabbi Eliyahu B. Doron, have been criticized by

many other Islamist groups in Turkey (Kuru, 2005, p. 264). Furthermore, a radical group, IBDA-C reportedly plotted assassination attempts against Gülen (Kuru, 2005, p. 264).

On the other hand, among the terrorist organizations, Hizbullah (Party of God) and IBDA-C (Great Eastern Islamic Raiders Front) are the most prominent ones. These two radical Islamist organizations regard the secular regime in Turkey as “illegitimate,” and wish to destroy the secular state and constitutional system and replace it with Islamic rule and law. They have tried to assert those goals by inflicting terror on especially civilian targets.

First, Hizbullah is the one associated with the tragic murders of intellectuals and statesmen in 1990’s Turkey, such as Muammer Aksoy, Bahriye Üçok, Çetin Emeç, Turan Dursun, Uğur Mumcu, Ahmet Taner Kışlalı and Gaffar Okkan. It has no official ties with Lebanese Hizbullah. According to a U.S. Department of State report, ‘Turkish Hizbullah is a domestic terrorist group of mostly Kurdish Sunni Islamists with no known ties to Lebanese Hizbullah’ (Özören, 2004, p.4).

The history of the organization dates back to late 1970’s; however, its place and importance among the Turkish Islamist movements had stayed uncertain until the 1990’s mainly because of its policy of confidence (Çakır, 2001, pp. 68-74). The organization developed in secrecy, using mosques as gathering places. Through this secrecy principle, they did not publish journals or announcements, and even they did not evidently take responsibility of any actions they involved. Moreover, although they opposed to the state, they mostly struggled with PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and Menzil group (the group who separated from the main violent group of Hizbullah). Their rivalry results from a fight for authority over southeastern Turkey (Özören, 2004, p. 3). The structure and practices of them have become known after the operations of Turkish security organizations (Nugent, 2004, p. 70). The year 2000 can be regarded as a turning point for the



organization since, the leader, Hüseyin Veliöđlu was killed in one of those operations.

Second, the IBDA-C (Great Eastern Islamic Raiders Front) traces its ancestry back to the Akincis, Turkey's large and radical Islamist youth movement of the 1970's. The movement divided then and most members chose the parliamentary road.

The radical IBDA-C can be defined ideologically as the successor of the 'Great East' idea of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. The organization does not have a centralized directorate and each group is free to act by its own when the situation necessities the action through IBDA dialectics (Turan, 1996, p. 55). The books and periodicals that they publish directed the members to build terror-based cells. However, this resulted in a type of uncertainty about their actions. To be precise, it seems that sometimes they claim responsibility for many actions that they were not involved and sometimes they cannot be sure about their actions. A good instance is Istanbul bombings. After the bombings, an IBDA front claimed responsibility for bombings. Then, another front announced in their website that they rejected the responsibility of attacks until it was proved<sup>13</sup>.

Nevertheless, the attacks imply the existence of ties between IBDA-C and al-Qaida, although the nature of their cooperation remains unclear. Those ties may be material in the sense that al-Qaida and IBDA-C acted together in the organization and planning of the bombings. However, many experts and the media assert that IBDA-C was not involved in the actions at all. Those are the questions in dispute. Nevertheless, it should be stated that IBDA-C shares ideological (or started to share) ties with al-Qaida. In this sense, the 'Kaide' magazine IBDA-C published in 2005 is significant in illustrating this spiritual

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<sup>13</sup> Web site of Akademya Journal: <http://www.geocities.com/akademyayadogru/>

ties. 'Kaide' issued two volumes in July 28 and August 4, 2005 and then was suppressed. The magazine openly praises al-Qaida, and included outrageous titles like 'The Taliban killed 600 Johnnies' (Middle East Media Research Institute-MEMRI, August 7, 2005). On the London attacks, their headline read 'al-Qaida is liberating the world' and many pages were dedicated to statements by al-Qaida. In the pages of the magazine, the London attacks were regarded as acts of revenge for Allah (MEMRI, August 7, 2005). Ali Osman Zor- chief editor and a prominent name of IBDA movement- speaks of Osama bin Laden and Zarqawi as 'heroes'. He claims that they only have emotional ties with al-Qaida in his interview with Tempo magazine: "The people in the Kaide magazine are members of the IBDA thought and action movements... Our souls are tied with al-Qaida."<sup>14</sup>

### **3.2 Different Interpretations of Political Camps on Turkish Republican History**

To better illustrate the dynamics behind the polarization of the Turkish political spectrum, one needs to gain a historical perspective within the context of the secular Turkish Republic. The interpretations of these different political standings of Republican history have been crucial in Turkey for the analysis of political confrontation.

In the course of interpreting Turkish Republican history, the major division is between Islamist and secularist viewpoints. However, the historical outlook of those who can be called as left liberal is also distinctive from them.

These three distinct outlooks on Turkish Republican history have been selected intentionally. Those three have been selected because they represent the

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/fc/In.cgi?cat=33&a=918856>

positions of the analyzed newspapers of Chapter 6: Islamists *Anadolu'da Vakit* and *Zaman*; secularist *Cumhuriyet*; and left-liberal *Radikal*.

According to Islamists, if we simplify and generalize, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, devout Muslims of the country resisted and fought against colonial powers. However, thenceforth alienated and westernizer elites took hold of the state and acted as internal colonialists (Çınar, 2005, p. 41). Republican reforms carried out by those elites imposed modernity (which is a product of a foreign culture and religion) on society by force; and therefore, hurt people's religious beliefs. Moreover, westernizer elites began to fight against the history, culture and religion of Muslims and degenerate the moral values of the society. They turned the society into a satellite of the West, which is dependent, deprived of self-confidence and identity (a popular theme from Erbakan's speeches). In this sense, Islamism is nothing but the way for rescuing society from the moral degeneration that was caused by Westernization/modernization policies of the Republican elite.

To be precise, it can be argued that for Islamists the history of secular Turkish Republic is the history of separation of the state from the nation by a handful of privileged elites who are the imitators of the West and has no ties with the society (Çınar, 2005, p. 75). Islamist point of view presupposes that state and society can only be reconciled within the line of Islamist politics since westernizer elites alienated state from society<sup>15</sup>. As a result of such reasoning, Islamists in Turkey primarily aim to deliver the state and society from westernizer elites. Consequently, from the eyes of Islamists the fundamental dispute is between the West, Zionist powers, westernizer elites, comprador laicists and themselves (the society). Within this framework, the society whose

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<sup>15</sup> The emphasis on the reconciliation of state and nation is one of the important continual points between the National Outlook tradition and AKP.

religious beliefs are offended is a homogenous group which is free from conflict of interests, class struggles (Çınar, 2005, p. 41).

Islamists are the ones who strikingly personalize the problems of Turkey by charging secularist elite as the one and only responsible (Çınar, 2005, p. 39). In other words, Islamist interpretation of Republican history reduces the system and order to the executives. As we started to observe within the tradition of National Outlook, this perspective of history led them to personalize the solution too. Therefore, the solution primarily becomes the replacement of those malicious, ill-qualified, alienated, dishonored executives with the virtuous, honest, decent, Muslim ones.

On the other hand, from the secularist point of view (again if we simplify and generalize), in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish people fought against imperialists under the leadership of a neutral force (Savran, 1985, p. 191). The newly founded Turkish Republic turned its face to the West as the center of contemporary civilization, and tried to reduce the legitimizing authority of religion in the society to establish a secular system, therefore; introduce seeds of a modern society. This outlook can also be identified with the official Republican ideology or Kemalist discourse. Within this stance, state, bureaucracy and army as the progressive actors of this transformation are the safeguards of the Republic and they are free from contradictions and class conflicts in society.

In this framework, foundation of Turkish Republic represents a rupture from Ottoman history, i.e. a rupture from the primitiveness and backwardness. The reforms of the early Republican era heavily affected and transformed the society and thus became the significant steps on the way to contemporary civilization.

Finally, left liberals have also a distinctive interpretation of the Republican history in Turkey. If we look from the left liberal perspective, the foundation of

Turkish Republic is not a rupture from Ottoman history. On the contrary, there is continuity between Ottoman and Republican era at least in terms of state/society and state/economy relations (Savran, 1985, p. 176). Therefore, the state of Turkish Republic inherited the despotism and centralism of Ottoman state. Moreover, the transformations of early Republican era are superficial (not able to deeply affect and transform society) especially in the sense that they did not affect the essence of state/society relations.

The fact that left liberals try to explain some contemporary problems of Turkish society with the Ottoman heritage stems from their peculiar interpretation of history in terms of the continuity between Ottoman and Republican era. For example, from this perspective, the military coups (two full 1960-1980 and two half 1971-1997 coupes) in Turkey can be related to Ottoman despotism since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century authorities of Turkish Republic had inherited the despotism/authoritarianism from the Ottoman past. Thereby, this outlook glorifies civil society as the object of pressure and perceives it as something externally related to state and in a sense regardless of fundamental divisions among it<sup>16</sup>.

It can be stated that, this outlook of left liberalism on Republican history developed as a reaction to the dominance of official Republican ideology (Kemalist discourse) in the leftist discourse in Turkey. In other words, left liberal position reacted to the influence of Kemalist discourse on Turkish left.

In sum, if we regard their peculiar perspectives of Republican history, Islamists perceive the bureaucracy and state as captured by westernizer elites and thus

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<sup>16</sup> Following Savran, it can be argued that left liberal analysis of history has many faults. Savran argues that, in being the concrete negative of official republican history version, left liberal analysis stay in the same level with official interpretation in many issues especially because of its perception of state/society as externally related (Savran 1985: 174).

alienated from society; secularists perceive them as progressive powers and the safeguards of regime; and left liberals accept them as the inheritance of Ottoman despotic past and as an unprogressive historical force.

### **3.3 The Debate on the Relation between Islam and Democracy and Its Reflections on the Turkish Political Milieus**

This comprehensive debate about the compatibility of Islam with democracy has attracted the academic and political attention in not only Muslim countries but also Western ones. In some respects, it reminds us the old debates of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the compatibility of modernization theory and Muslim countries. As it is known, modernization theory assumes a positive correlation between modernization and secularization and Muslim countries have been regarded as exceptions to this rule. The widely accepted explanation for this exception argues for the distinctiveness of the Islam since its authority is not inclined to decline (Gülalp, 2003, p.11). Likewise, Mert (1998) claims that the debate on democracy and Islam reminds the ones dominating the agenda of the intellectuals by the end of the Ottoman Empire: ‘Is Islam an obstacle for progress?’ (p. 25)

The commonality between these three debates is the cultural relativist outlook in the motivation behind the formulation of such questions as compatibility of Islam and democracy, Islam and modernity, Islam and progress. Moreover, within all those debates the importance of Islam as a dynamic in society is overstated.

Explaining the emergence of both capitalism and democracy by cultural rather than structural reasons has a long scholarly history, e.g. Max Weber’s analysis on the relation between development of capitalism and the Protestant ethics. This implies the determinacy of cultural components over history, which restricts democracy to one of the cultural proponents of western culture.

However, as Toprak (2005) points out, the perception that there is an incompatibility between democratic values and the belief in Islam has recently been popularized again with the controversial argument of Samuel Huntington on the cultural division between the West and the Muslim world (p. 167).

This reasoning could be traced back to the Euro-centrist view of history and its accomplishment in proving that ‘the miracle of capitalism could only been a European one’ by relating the triumph of Europe to its essence- culture. As it is well-known, Euro-centrism presupposes that West and East as two parts of the world have different essences that require extensively different social, political structures and developmental stories.

The concept ‘Orientalism’ refers to the ideological construction of a mythical Orient whose characteristics are defined by simple oppositions to the characteristics of western world (Said, 1995, p. 32). This exact other or the so-called mythical orient- as an essential element of Euro-centrism- has been especially signifying the region of Near and Middle East<sup>17</sup> including the Arabic world, Iran, Turkey and North Africa as indispensable parts of Arabic Islamization and Ottoman histories (Hentch, 1996, p. 9).

Today, the popular Islam vs. West discourse (widely adopted in both Turkish and Western media) is emphasizing and reproducing the controversy between these divided parts of the world. As Said (2000) points out, in this discourse for the most part, Islam is put forward *vis-à-vis* West rather than Christianity (p. 86). Therefore, the Islam vs. West dichotomy not only gives way to rigid generalizations over the residents of two geographies<sup>18</sup>; but also labels one side with the adjectives of primitive, theological, traditional and the other with modern, scientific and rational (Said, 2000, p. 86). Therefore, as Said (2000)

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<sup>17</sup> In Hentch’s words ‘The Mediterranean East’

<sup>18</sup> In fact, two blurred geographies.

claims West and Christianity labels are at least rigid and ideological as the label Islam in this discourse (p. 85).

Dominance of West vs. Islam discourse, not only reproduces self and other perceptions of ordinary people in terms of binary oppositions, but also creates some problems- actually distortions- within social sciences especially in explaining or understanding the 'East'. With the Orientalist image of immutable religion, most of the analysis on the backwardness of Muslim countries becomes vicious circles rather than being explanatory. For example:

Why is there no change in Islamic countries?

Because Islam is rigid, static.

What proves that Islam is responsible for the lack of social change?

Because there is no change!

Consequently, many analyses on Muslim countries became "theories of absences" by simply pointing to the major differences of those societies from the Western ones as the reasons of backwardness. (Turner, 1994, pp. 20-35)

The absence of Caesar/Jesus differentiation is frequently cited as the reason for the underdevelopment of both secularism and democracy in Muslim countries (Türköne, 1994, pp. 5-19). It is argued that Islam is a religion preventing the development of an autonomous secular area by surrounding all parts of life because of the principle of unity of 'religion and state' (Türköne, 1994, pp. 5-7). In this sense, with these characteristics, Islam is usually defined in terms of its differences with Christianity. Contrary to Caesar/Jesus distinction of the Christian tradition, Muslims have been both religious and political communities to the extent that religion and politics are interwoven. Such arguments on the distinctive nature of Islam generally depend on its holistic interpretations, which is characterized by cultural communitarianism and political authoritarianism requiring hierarchy and obedience (Göle, 1996).



With the need for transcending these essentialist explanations, one should first question this so-called controversy between the two monotheistic religions (Islam and Christianity) by searching historical continuities and teleological similarities between them.

Historically, one can search for the continuity between Christianity and Islamic thought because they are both the productions of the same geography and the Qu'ran makes mention of the prophet of Christianity-Jesus. For instance, Amin (1989) claims that, Christianity and Islam were twin siblings as heirs of Hellenism, although today they are regarded as relentless enemies and rivals (pp. 25-7). He searches the roots of this constructed controversy between two religions in the Eurocentric vision of history. According to him, putting the division between Antiquity and Medieval Era at the end of the Roman Empire implicitly means that Christian era marks a qualitative break in world history. However, the collapse of the Roman Empire was a turning point of European history (Amin, 1989, pp. 25-27). For him, the actual division between Antiquity and Medieval Era was the birth of Alexander's empire because it opened a new era for the entire region and gave way to the development of Hellenism, Christianity, and Islamic thought as one inherited the other (Amin, 1989, p. 27).

Theologically, as celestial religions, both Christianity and Islam, address to all aspects of human life and; therefore, have claims on the regulation of social life directly or indirectly, although Christianity does not have open provisions regarding social and political life (Mert, 1998, p. 29). Moreover, Çaha (2003) points out that Islamic theology also does not contain a comprehensive list of injunctions about politics (p. 107).

Approaching Islam and democracy debate from this anti-Orientalist perspective, makes it possible to comprehend that the whole debate on the compatibility of Islam and democracy actually contains three different

questions: Why can democracy not take root in Muslim countries?; Is the rise of Islamism a threat for democracy?; Can the principles (dogma) of Islam be compatible with those of democracy?

Those three different questions have been frequently debated ambiguously under the same title of the compatibility of Islam with democracy; however, each necessitates looking for different grounds to answer. Consequently, misperceptions or overgeneralizations occur in the sense that one's answer can be misleadingly perceived as the proof of another. For instance, a positive answer to the question on the compatibility of Islamic dogma with democracy can be misinterpreted as a proof against the argument that 'Islamism is a threat for democracy'. However, in the course of Islamist movements, there have been many other dynamics that should be analyzed, such as the movements' own interpretation of dogma, socio-political structure they emerged in, and the class composition of the movement.

First question is on the reasons of lack of democracy in Muslim countries. Muslim societies are generally accepted as the furthest from democracy among the five predominate religious and cultural blocs- namely Christianity, Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam (Çaha, 2003, p. 106). Ordinary explanations to this argument are based on the essential distinctions between religions and Islam's incompatibility with democracy. However, explaining the problem of lack of democracy in Muslim countries by reducing the debate to the compatibility of Islam- as a religion- with democracy will be quite objectionable.

First, it should be stated that the legal systems of all Muslim countries are not based on Sharia- the Islamic law. Moreover, variability is expectable in the few legal systems based on Islamic law because of the differences in the interpretation of dogma. Nevertheless, there are some common problems

against the democratic development of those systems based on Islamic law such as the status of women and non-Muslims (Toprak, 2005, p.168).

In the other Muslim countries, Islam is yet one of the various dynamics of social structure and thus explaining the systemic problems with the characteristics of Islamic dogma would mean to exaggerate the determining power of Islam over history and social processes. Moreover, it is obvious that there are contradictions between the Islamic dogma and its historical experience of Muslim countries. The political institutions, principles and practices which Muslims set up in the past derived mostly from historical conditions rather than from Islamic theology (Çaha, 2003, p. 110). In addition, such an analysis would mean to ignore the relations/interactions between Muslim countries and the Western ones in the name of either colonialism or exploitation, which have been claimed as responsible for many social problems in those countries.

To be precise, a direct relation between the principles of the dominant religion and the development of democracy cannot be established because there are many dynamics that affect the development of democracies, some of them being even more important than the principles of the dominant religion in the society. In fact, as a political system, democracy is in need of some material dynamics such as a certain level of welfare, a relatively egalitarian distribution of wealth and a minimum background of social compromise (Mert, 1998, p. 29).

The Turkish case is relatively more complex. As known, Muslim countries are accepted as the exceptions to modernization theory because of the characteristics of Islam. Within this perspective, Turkey is, as Gellner points out, accepted as an exception to this exception as a secular, modern and democratic Muslim country (as cited in Güllalp, 2003, p. 11). Therefore, the development of democracy in Turkey had to be distinct from its Western

equivalents. In other words, the development of Turkish democracy has by definition, followed a unique path because of the majority of Muslim population. Moreover, it is argued that the development of Turkish democracy was bound to be secured with strict laïcité policies because of its exceptional character. This compulsion comes from the quality of the dominant religion that led Turkish governments to restrict the Islamic identities as a prerequisite for democracy. Therefore, there is accepted a direct link between secularism and democracy in Turkey. Moreover, Turkish experience has generally been seen as a demonstration of the fact that the secularization of law in Islamic societies is an important prerequisite of democracy. (Toprak, 2005, p. 167)

This reasoning creates a tension between secularism and democracy, which is generally called as secularism-democracy dilemma in Turkey<sup>19</sup>. This dilemma stems from the argument that democratization necessitates the restriction of Islam and Islamic identity; however, this restriction is paradoxically anti-democratic (Çınar, 2005, p. 29). Therefore, the vicious circle emerged with the presumption of the inevitability of secularism for democracy even if its precautions are based on anti-democratic grounds. This dilemma can be interpreted as one of the most important aspects of Islam and democracy debates in terms of polarization of the political camps in Turkey. The debates on this dilemma were popularized especially after the 1980's with the rise of Islamism in Turkey.

Second question debated within the title of Islam and democracy is on the possible threats of rising Islamism to the development of democracy. This question on the compatibility of Islamist politics with democracy goes far beyond an academic dispute especially after the rise of Islamist politics acquiring mass support and gaining on electorate grounds in many countries.

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<sup>19</sup> Göle (1996) points out that this tension between secularism and democracy is an embedded characteristic of other modernizing Muslim countries, most of which created relatively secular states through authoritarian political regimes (p. 19).

The question partly signifies an external debate on Islamist politics in which there has been a dispute between two camps. On the one hand, there are scholars perceiving the rise of Islamism as the proof of an awakening of civil society in the Middle East (*inter alia* Sivan 1990; Esposito 2000; Özdalga 2006). On the other hand, there are others perceiving Islamist movements as threats to developing democracies (*inter alia* Kramer 1997; Pipes 1997, 2001). One fundamental dispute between these two camps concerns the definition and characteristics of Islamism.

As Tapper (1994) states, the hidden agenda of Islamism is the age-old Western fear of Islam (p. 1). Today, both secularists in Muslim countries and many Western milieus are usually concerned about a possible hidden agenda of Islamist politics in the sense that Islamists are suspected of using democracy for their own ends to create an Islamic state; and thus, hijack democracy. Islamists are seen as groups whose aim is to overthrow democratic governments in order to bring out systemic changes even if they have declared their adherence to democratic principles.

If we agree on the fact that Islamist policy is anti-democratic in all contexts by its nature, this debate on the threat of Islamism becomes an internal debate of democracy on its vulnerability (Göle, 1996, p. 18). It becomes a question about the tolerance in participatory politics and the survival of democracy while including anti-democratic movements, which reminds the fascist experiences at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, from the point of view of those accepting the rise of Islamist politics as a chance for further democratization, these movements reflect the demands of a larger segment of society and/or they carry the hopes for enlarging the background of social compromise and/or they constitute affirmative identity politics like greens, gay-lesbian movements in Western democracies.

As one of the advocators of the affirmative position in Turkish literature, Özdalga (2006) emphasizes that a political movement based on a religious ideology is not an anomaly in modern democracies and criticizes the perception of political Islam as religious radicalism and illiteracy (p. 51-2). In this sense, the radicalism of religious groups should not be perceived as the signs of extreme political conservativeness- a concern to preserve everything in their old forms against the changing world (Özdalga, 2006, p. 66). In fact, the ideas supported by those groups also change in parallel to the changes of the world (Özdalga, 2006, p. 66). Therefore, their radicalism is also parallel with the ongoing rationalization of their beliefs. They become one of the parts of the modernization process itself (Özdalga, 2006, p. 66). In the light of these remarks, we should not focus on the negative and communitarian aspects of Islamist movements; and we should not close our eyes to their pluralist and dynamic aspects (Özdalga, 2006, p. 87).

In case of Turkey, the question on the threat of Islamist politics has also been one of the disputes dominating political agenda. Moreover, this dispute caused the accommodation of the concept *takıyye* in the political language. It has been frequently asked in secularist circles, first for Erbakan's RP and then for the AKP, whether they would abide by democratic procedures or whether the leadership was engaged in *takıyye*- the right of Muslims to hide their true beliefs in hostile milieus (Toprak, 2005, p. 175).

The question whether Islamic revival posed a political threat to the survival of the modern Turkish state is most often asked in an abstract and speculative manner in Turkey. Consequently, many scholarly criticisms have targeted this abstract threat discourse against Islamist politics. For example, Göle (1996) talks about the suspicion of the ruling 'laicist' elite in Turkey that "sovereignty of people would end up in the sovereignty of Islam" (p. 20). According to her, that is why the principle of democracy was secondary to that of laïcité in

Turkey. Therefore, she suggests that throughout the Turkish republican history, Islamism has been one of the important phobias that constituted the ideological rationale for political authoritarianism (Göle, 1996, p. 20). Likewise, Çınar (2005) mentions that political authoritarianism prevents any questioning of the principle of laïcité or the place and function of religion in society, and excludes these from the legitimate space of political activity (p. 29).

Finally, it would be beneficial to concentrate on the singular issue of the Gülen movement as one of the most powerful and controversial Islamist movements in Turkey in order to grasp the points made by the two sides of the debate. On the one hand, the movement is criticized especially by secularist circles, as a reactionary organization with hidden intentions of systemic change in Turkey. There are plenty of books (*inter alia* Değer 2000; Kındıra 2001; Çetinkaya 2005) written against Fethullah Gülen and his community in this manner. In those books, Gülen organization is generally charged as a threat because of its development in order to seize the state.

On the other hand, an opponent of Islamist threat arguments, Özdalga (2006) interprets Gülen movement in an affirmative manner. She analyses the Gülen movement by claiming on the possibility that a radical religious resurgence movement can be at the same time a carrier of modernity. At first, she announces that questioning the political regime is not on the agenda of Gülen community (Özdalga, 2006, p. 256). Then, she concludes that the way Gülen movement chose is oriented to disenchantment despite the powerful call for religious revivalism (Özdalga, 2006, p. 257)<sup>20</sup>.

Third question is “Can the principles (dogma) of Islam be compatible with those of democracy?” Analyzing Islam in terms of its compatibility with

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<sup>20</sup> She compares the actions of Christian missionaries, especially 19th century Evangelists with the Gülen community in order to show the striking similarities. (Özdalga, 2006, p. 257)

democratic principles has attracted the attention of many scholars who harbor a concern of opening the way for dialogue between cultures and democratization of the Muslim countries. For instance, according to Tibi (2005), an open-minded interpretation of Islam can give way to dialogue between cultures and further democratization. However, such positive answers to this question cannot easily open the way for arguments that democracy will be developed in Muslim countries because of the reasons cited under the first question.

The question will be sounder if we take it as a debate especially within Islamist circle in terms of the way democracy is perceived. As it is widely known, the attitude towards democracy is a breaking point within various Islamisms. The variation among Islamist runs from those rejecting democracy as the political dimension of West to those deriving democratic principles from Islamic theology. Islamists in Turkey also display a picture varied between those two extreme interpretations. This divergence is reflected in the Islamist press. For example, *Zaman* and *Anadolu'da Vakit*, as two selected newspapers for this study, display two distinct positions with regard to their attitudes toward democracy. While *Zaman* claimed to be in favor of democratic values, *Anadolu'da Vakit* is in a position that is rejecting democracy as the political dimension of the West.

On the other hand, the meaning Islamists attribute to 'democracy' (what they understand from the term democracy) is quite a controversial issue in Turkey today. As known, the phenomenon 'democracy' has been subject to a paradigmatic shift recently in the sense that, today, free and democratic elections are not considered enough to call a system democratic without the necessary criteria regarding the issues of human rights, civil society, and minority rights. In other words, free elections are no longer regarded as the sole criteria for the democratization of a political system; rather, new criteria achieved importance to protect citizens from the tyranny of the elected. Now, the question can be formulated to question the Islamist position in terms of this



paradigmatic shift: whether they only abide by the rules of democracy in the old manner in coming to power with free elections or do they absorb the new paradigm of democracy in the sense of being respectful to human rights and minority rights.

The Turkish case demonstrates that most of the Islamist circles have increasingly been using the discourse of the new paradigm such as human rights. This is especially the case in the context of the headscarf issue. However, using these concepts does not mean that they have internalized these ideals (see *Anadolu'da Vakit* as a good example of sectarian and parochial understanding of human rights). Islamists in this sense have tended to define democracy as the rule of majority over the minority (Gülalp, as cited in White, 2002, p. 134).

Both the RP and AKP experiences of government and the non-attitudes of Islamist groups in the context of human right violations (apart from the headscarf issue) demonstrate that they have a pragmatist outlook in using the popular discourses of democracy. They effectively work the theme of electoral power by emphasizing “the sanctity of the ballot.” However, Toprak (2005) claims that what Islamists in Turkey understood from liberal democracy was greater freedom to the Islamists; a sectarian understanding that was solely confined to issues of concern for the party’s following such as the ban on headscarves and they seemed undisturbed by other violations of rights in Turkey (p. 175)<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Erbakan’s RP voted with the majority to remove the political immunity of the representatives of the Democracy Party (DEP, a pro-Kurdish party) in the Grand National Assembly alleging that the DEP supported the terrorist organization PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). This led to the closing of the DEP and the imprisonment of its members of parliament (Toprak, 2005, p. 176). Some other examples can also be given, such as Erbakan’s passivity in the issue of the Susurluk scandal, Erdoğan’s insensitive attitude toward citizens who criticize him, Islamists’ passivist attitude and silence after the assassination of Hrant Dink on January, 2007.

To conclude, in this analysis I have tried to approach the general debate on Islam and democracy from an anti-essentialist perspective since essentialist approaches preclude the chance of any dialogue among different religions and hinder the sociological analysis of Islamic contexts (Tuğal, 2003, p. 2). The basic assumption followed here is that no culture is particular and pure in the world; they are inevitably hybridized, diversified, multilayered and include many contradictions even in themselves (Said, 1995, p. 31). Therefore, rigid generalizations, the validity of religious or culturally essentialist explanations and the possibility of a universally valid answer to the question of compatibility of Islam and democracy should be rejected. Rather than searching for universal answers, a sound analysis on the relation between Islam and democracy should consider the particular contexts and historical experiences, including such social conditions as class and power relations, political system, and social mobility of specific cases.

Approaching the Islam and democracy debate from this anti-Orientalist and anti-essentialist perspective allows us to comprehend the whole debate on the compatibility of Islam and democracy better by looking for case specific and history-based answers to the three questions: ‘why can democracy not take root in Muslim countries’; ‘is the rise of Islamism a threat for democracy’; ‘can the principles (dogma) of Islam be compatible with those of democracy’.

It is in this context that I believe the comprehensive debate on the compatibility of Islam with democracy has been significant in the shaping of existing political debates in Turkey and can be utilized as another tool in understanding the political events in this country.

## CHAPTER 4

### NOVEMBER 2003 ISTANBUL BOMBINGS

#### 4.1 Events and Court Case

##### 4.1.1 Events

The Istanbul bombings were four truck bomb attacks carried out on two days in November 2003.

First, on November 15, 2003 two truck bombs slammed into the two synagogues (Beth Israel and Neve Shalom<sup>22</sup> in Istanbul), and exploded. These bombs killed twenty-seven people, and injured more than three hundred others. Among the dead, six were Jewish Turkish citizens, others were Muslims.

Second, on November 20, 2003 two more truck bombs exploded. This time, the targets were the HSBC Bank and the British Consulate in Istanbul. The first of these destroyed the first two floors of the HSBC building and caused extensive damage to the surrounding area. The second bomb was detonated minutes later in Beyoğlu, destroying at least six buildings. It should be stated that, when these events happened, US President George W. Bush was in the United Kingdom to meet British Prime Minister Tony Blair. These bombs killed thirty people and injured approximately four hundred others. Several British citizens were killed in the attacks, including the top British official in Istanbul, Consul General Roger Short. Most of the victims were again Turkish Muslims.

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<sup>22</sup> The Neve Shalom synagogue was the scene of attack by a Palestinian gunman in 1986. Twenty-two Jewish worshippers were killed. A bomb attack followed in 1992, which is claimed to have done by Lebanese Hizbullah. No one was killed in that attack. (www.aljazeera.net, November 15, 2003)

All four attacks were suicide bombings. Moreover, the four suicide bombers (Gökhan Elaltuntaş, Mesut Çabuk, Feridun Uğurlu, Habip Aktaş) and most of the suspects connected to the bombings were also Turkish citizens.

Al-Qaida and IBDA-C claimed responsibility for both of the attacks. However, both the Turkish government officials and the experts dismisses the validity of IBDA-C's claim by pointing out that IBDA-C as a minor group already weakened by police operations cannot carry out such an expensive and well planned attack: It did not have the means to carry out such a sophisticated act of terrorism. It was also stated that IBDA-C organization had shown no willingness to exercise suicide terrorism prior to November 2003.

Al-Qaida's claim is based on an e-mail, which was sent by Abu Hafz al-Masri Brigades to the London-based Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper after the attacks. Abu Hafz al-Masri Brigades is a group identified as a part of al-Qaida. The first statement after the synagogue bombings to al-Quds al-Arabi, said:

Abu Hafz al-Masri Brigades struck a mortal blow after having kept Jewish intelligence agents under surveillance and determined that five of them were in two synagogues in the centre of Istanbul... We say to the criminal Bush and his valets among the Arabs and foreigners, in particular Britain, Italy, Australia and Japan: you will see the cars of death with your own eyes in the centre of the capital of tyranny... They will not be limited to Baghdad, Riyad, Istanbul, Djerba, al-Nasiriya, Jakarta (www.aljazeera.net, November 16, 2003)

#### **4.1.2 Court Case**

In the aftermath of the bomb explosions seventy-three people were charged with involvement in the events. Nine of those accused were taken under arrest. On February 16, 2007, five were convicted and sentenced to life in prison in solitary confinement with no possibility of parole. These were Loa'i

Mohammad Haj Bakr al-Saqa, Fevzi Yitiz, Baki Yiğit, Harun İlhan and Yusuf Bolat. Two, Osman Eken and Adnan Ersöz, were sentenced to life in prison. Apart from those, Seyit Ertul was sentenced to eighteen years' imprisonment for leading an al-Qaeda cell in Konya, Hamet Obeysi was sentenced to six years and two months, for al-Qaeda membership, forgery and bomb-making. Of the other individuals who were charged, twenty-nine were sentenced to six years and three months for membership in al-Qaeda, ten were sentenced to three years and nine months for aiding and abetting al-Qaeda, and twenty-six were acquitted.

## **4.2 Public Responses**

### **4.2.1 International Responses**

After the bombings in Istanbul, the governments of Israel, Britain and U.S. denounced the bombings and immediately pointed the finger of blame at al-Qaida. U.S. President George W. Bush denounced the bombings “in the strongest possible terms” ([www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), November 16, 2003). Then, after the second series of bombings, at a joint conference in November 20, 2003, Tony Blair and George W. Bush gave solidarity messages to Turkey and stated that they are ready to give all forms of support to Turkey. In the same conference, Bush specifically referred to the news of the Istanbul bombings to justify the US-led “War on Terror.” He claimed that US forces were succeeding in hunting down members of the al-Qaida network and their associates around the world. He said, "We see their utter contempt for innocent life. The terrorists hope to intimidate, hope to demoralize. They are not going to succeed" ([www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), November 21, 2003).

Within the European Union, groups responded to bombings differently. While one group argued that the membership process of Turkey should be accelerated, some others connected this membership process with assaults,

and claimed that accepting Turkey may mean to import terrorism (Sabah, November 23, 2003).

Finally, the bombings have led to at least one diplomatic spat. European football authority 'UEFA' decided to cancel matches scheduled to take place in Turkey and Turkish government strongly reacted to this football match cancellation. This development was reflected in the press with the following headlines.

“UEFA Rewarded Terrorism with a Premium” (Hürriyet, November 26, 2003)

“Aksu: The Decision Encourages Terrorists” (Hürriyet, November 26, 2003)

“Turkish Football Isolated” (Radikal, November 26, 2003)

“Foreign Minister Gül: The Decision of UEFA is the Biggest Concession to Terrorism” (Zaman, November 27, 2003)

“Gül: The Decision of UEFA is the Biggest Concession to Terrorism” (Hürriyet, November 27, 2003)

“Football is Played in the Football Ground” (Milliyet, December 3, 2003)

#### **4.2.2 National Responses**

Toprak and Çarkoğlu's research (2006) shows that there is very little support for terrorist activities in Turkey (p. 12). Even under conditions of resistance to an occupying force, 65.5% of the Turkish people condemned suicide attacks (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 32). Furthermore, according to this survey 81% of the Turkish people thought that such violence is contrary to teachings of Islam (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 32)<sup>23</sup>.

Turkish people also strongly reacted to the November 2003 Istanbul bombings. After the explosions, people organized mass meetings in order to

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<sup>23</sup> According to researchers, this outcome is very striking if we regard the so-called sympathy of the Turkish public to Iraqi and Palestinian resistance (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 12).

denounce them in many parts of Turkey. Similarly, the AKP government immediately reacted against them. After the synagogue explosions, Prime Minister Erdoğan denounce the attacks and declared, “they attacked to the peace and stability in Turkey” (November 16, 2003 Sabah). Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu, immediately pointed the finger of blame at al-Qaida by arguing that Turkish groups were not be able to carry out those actions (Sabah, November 16, 2003) Likewise, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül questioned the foreign sources of the events (Sabah, November 16, 2003). Then, after a cabinet meeting, al-Qaida was declared as the perpetrator by the government (Sabah, December 3, 2003).

Throughout the period following the explosions Prime Minister Erdoğan repeatedly claimed that those attacks could not affect Turkey’s line of policy (Hürriyet, December 2, 2003). Moreover, he challenged the perpetrators with these words: “If there is a message that this terror activity wants to give, we will turn a deaf ear to it” (Turkish Daily News, November 19, 2003). He regularly gave unity and cooperation messages to the people in the following days. He visited the Chief Rabbi in Turkey to give condolences and thus, became the first Prime Minister in Turkey to formally visit with the Chief Rabbi. It was noticed that following the earlier attacks on the Neve Shalom synagogue in 1986 and 1992, Prime Ministers of the time had not visited the Chief Rabbi for condolences. The government’s declaration after the bombings also called for unity and cooperation in the society. Within this declaration, it was specifically stated that Turkey has primarily valued the importance of international cooperation against terrorism (Sabah, November 16, 2003).

One striking characteristic of Erdoğan’s declarations after the bombing events was the dominance of the global terrorism discourse, largely used by George W. Bush. In fact, there was a noticeable resemblance between the messages of Erdoğan after the Istanbul bombings and the ones given by Bush after the

September 11 attacks. For example, Erdoğan calls the bombings in Istanbul as terrorist actions against humanity (Milliyet, November 16, 2003). According to him, terrorism became a global cancer and it can only be prevented with a joint decision of humanity (Sabah, November 25, 2003). Consequently, Erdoğan declares that “our war is between justice and tyranny, good and evil, true and false” just like Bush in declaring “our war with terrorism is between the good and evil” (Milliyet, November 25, 2003).

Another emphasis made by Erdoğan after the events was on the need for further democratization. He declared that the applicable precautions against terrorism would not affect the democratization process (Hürriyet, November 23, 2003). Consequently, in the context of bombings he declares, “Our target of EU membership will not change”; therefore, terrorist actions cannot divert us from the way towards a democratic, secular and social state (Sabah November 24, 2003). Likewise, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül announced that, “we will not change our way” (Hürriyet, November 20, 2003).

One important dispute created by the declarations of Erdoğan is on the definition of terror. It was started by Erdoğan’s expression concerning his uneasiness with the phrases Islamist or Islamic Terrorism. In the “Call to the Nation” speech on November 24, 2003, Erdoğan stated:

(...) There appear, from to time, some who question us about why we do not use adjectives when we denounce terrorism. Some ask for example, why we use the term terrorism but not Islamic terrorism. ... For us, there is only one definition of terrorism. And we equally condemn all movements, all acts, ideas and all intentions falling within the ambit of that definition (Turkish Daily News).

In fact, he declared that the coming together of the two words, Islam and terrorism, offends him (Sabah, November 26, 2003). Then, after about ten days



he defines terrorism with the adjective of 'religious' by saying "I deplore religious, racist and regional terror" in a speech at a AKP parliamentary group meeting (Turkish Daily News, December 4, 2003). Those declarations of Erdoğan have been much debated in media and usually interpreted with references to the debate on *takıyye*.

Finally, Abdullah Gül's interpretation on the reasons of the bombings is another striking point to be made. He argued that the peculiarity of the Turkish model is the reason of the events, attracting the rancour of fanatics: "We are trying to prove that a Muslim country can be a democracy, to prove that human rights can be strengthened and that we can be a modern country. This disturbs some people" (www.aljazeera.net, 27 November 2003).

Contrary to the government's international perception of the events, strikingly, Deniz Baykal- the leader of the opposition party, in Parliament- saw the issue of bombings from a national perspective. He criticized the government for not taking enough precautions to prevent such an event (Sabah, November 17, 2003). He also criticized the government for the dangerous foreign policy pursued (Sabah, November 19, 2003). He again criticized the government for covering up the relation of Turkish groups with the bombings and declared, "The Prime Minister has to admit the fact that Turkish Hizbullah is behind the assaults" (Sabah, November 28, 2003).

In brief, AKP government responded to November 2003 Istanbul bombings by internationalizing the events, by absolving itself from responsibility, by deemphasizing the events connection to Islam, and by using the opportunity to strength its position as a unifying agent within the country. On the other hand, the opposition responded to bombing events by nationalizing the events, by calling for the government's accountability, and by connecting the responsibility with Islamist groups in Turkey.

## CHAPTER 5

### GENERAL ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS COVERAGE OF EVENTS BY SELECTED TURKISH DAILIES

In this chapter, I will try to draw a general picture of the Turkish press coverage of the Istanbul explosions, by looking into the general tendencies in the press regarding how the events were presented and interpreted. In my intention to be all-inclusive and taking into account the striking differences between the interpretations of the popular-mainstream media and the Islamic press. I have found it useful to construct a dual table. General tendencies of the popular-mainstream press and the general tendencies of the Islamist press constitute the two sides of this table in covering the bombing events. I have chosen three newspapers from the popular-mainstream side (*Sabah*, *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet*)<sup>24</sup> and three from among the Islamist's (*Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Yeni Mesaj*). All the news coverage in the one-month period following the events (November 15- December 15, 2003) from these six newspapers has been scanned.

Apart from those published by large and powerful media groups in Turkey, the Islamist newspapers are clearly the most effective ones. It is however, also difficult to categorize a number of different newspapers as 'Islamist press,' particularly in terms of their attitudes regarding the Istanbul events. For example, *Zaman*, a newspaper that would normally be cited under the title 'Islamist press', was more similar to the mainstream-popular press rather than the 'Islamist' ones in presenting the case of the Istanbul bombings. Considered from such an angle, sticking to a general categorization would mean to ignoring

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<sup>24</sup> While two of these (*Milliyet* and *Hürriyet*) are owned by the same publisher, the Doğan group, as they represent two of the highest circulation newspapers, and as they are known to cater to different publics, both were included.

the diversities, strategic differences and peculiar political positions among the Islamist press in this case. For instance, there are striking differences in the attitudes of Islamist press towards the AKP government; i.e. *Milli Gazete's* opposition vs *Yeni Şafak's* support.

Thus, I have chosen three Islamist newspapers for the general analysis presented here, since I regard their commonalities in interpreting Istanbul bombings as distinct from the mainstream ones.

### **5.1 Mainstream Popular Dailies**

A number of common attitudes can be cited for the analysis of the general tendencies of the popular-mainstream newspapers in covering the Istanbul bombings.

To begin with, one tendency has been to immediately point the finger of blame at al-Qaida after the events. Nevertheless, there was no concrete reference or linkage in the popular press to the earlier claimed attacks of al-Qaida, which were frequent in 2003. It seems that the main reference point of the popular press in presenting the bombings is the September 11 events. Consequently, the bombings in Istanbul have largely been presented as 'Turkey's own September 11'.

In this way, the assaults were taken as an international issue due to the high amount of foreign news cited in the pages of the dailies. The foreign news cited are either in the form of diplomatic reactions to the events or media presentations of the events. Another general tendency of these dailies was the abundance of news concerning the possible effects of the bombings on Turkey's admission process to the European Union in covering the events. Many articles speculated on the possible and negative effects of the bombings

on the admission process and give the implication of a strong commitment to further democratization.

Presentation of Prime Minister Erdoğan as a ‘strong and resolute’ leader and thus, support for the AKP government (with only minor criticisms) can be cited as another general tendency of the popular press in covering the events.

On the other hand, among dailies, it seems that there was a consensus on the fact that Turkey was targeted by al-Qaida because of the so-called ‘Turkish model’, which implies Turkey’s uniqueness in the sense that it is a secular and democratic country, contrary to other Muslim countries. Therefore, Turkey is interpreted as the target of fanaticism because it illustrates the possibility of a secular democratic system within a Muslim population.

Finally, it should also be stated that within all these above-mentioned types of news, the issue of the Istanbul bombings has been overtly presented with the West vs. Islam dichotomy.

### **5.1.1 Pointing the finger of blame at al-Qaida**

To begin with, one striking tendency of the popular-mainstream press coverage of the Istanbul bombings is pointing the finger of blame at al-Qaida immediately although a Turkish group IBDA-C also claimed responsibility for the bombings. The following are some headlines immediately announcing that al-Qaida was responsible for bombings:

“Al-Qaida Hit Us, Too” (Sabah, November 16, 2003)

“Al-Qaida Has Claimed Responsibility” (Hürriyet, November 16, 2003)

“Istanbul Was Also Attacked by Laden” (Milliyet, November 17, 2003)

Under those titles, the events are described in detail in terms of the effects, damage, the kind of explosives used, total casualties and so forth. Those claims have been based on an e-mail message sent to Al-Quds al-Arabi newsletter in London.

In two of these headlines, it seems that there is implicit reference to earlier attacks elsewhere in the world. Nevertheless, in the reporting there is no tangible reference or connection to earlier attacks of al-Qaida especially to U.S. allies, which were very frequent in 2003, such as Riyadh (May 12, November 9), Casablanca (May 16), Jakarta (August 5), and Baghdad (October 27). Considered this perspective, it can be argued that the September 11 attacks have been the sole reference used by the Turkish press, which said “Al-Qaida Hit Us, Too”.

IBDA-C’s claim has also been cited in some news coverage. For example, a piece of news in the *Hürriyet* entitled: “Two Key Names,” referred, among the architects of the attacks to Azad Ekinci, declared as a member of the IBDA-C (*Hürriyet*, November 17, 2003). There are also a number of news items speculating on IBDA-C as the local collaborator of Bin Laden. For example: “A Claim Has Been Made That the IBDA Was Used by Laden’s General Staff” (*Hürriyet*, November 17, 2003). However, it could be argued that these rare ambiguous pieces of news have not done more than mentioning the name of al-Qaida once more as the declared perpetrator. In other words, the news items on the local collaborators have not led to any serious treatment of Istanbul bombings as a national issue related to some internal problems. What is more, after the second series of bombings on November 20, even the few speculations on local collaborators of al-Qaida have disappeared from the newspapers and al-Qaida is pointed to as the sole perpetrator without any doubts:

“Al-Qaida Claimed Responsibility for the Assaults” (*Hürriyet*, November 21-22, 2003)

Another remarkable aspect of the news coverage, which point to al-Qaida, was about how the organization itself, its connections and style is presented:

“Al-Qaida’s Terror Does Not Discriminate” (Milliyet, November 17, 2003)

“Al-Qaida’s Tactic” (Sabah, November 17, 2003)

“Al-Qaida is not an Organization, It is a Terror Federation” (Milliyet, November 19, 2003)

“Al-Qaida Reality is Disclosed” (Milliyet, November 18, 2003)

On these news reports, the al-Qaida is analyzed by especially emphasizing the violent means it uses and the extreme aims and professionalism of its organization. For example, the title “Al-Qaida Reality is Disclosed” is based on a declaration made by George W. Bush in which he stated that the al-Qaida knows nothing but killing (Milliyet, November 18, 2003).

Apart from those, dailies gave coverage to a number of news speculating on the reasons of al-Qaida’s hostility to Turkey. For example:

“Al-Qaida Finds Turkey so Unfavourable” (Sabah, November 17, 2003)

In this item, interpretations on the bombings concerning the characteristics of al-Qaida organization and its reasons of choosing Turkey as their target are quoted.

Among those speculations on the al-Qaida’s hostility to Turkey, the most-mentioned reason is the so-called ‘Turkish model’. In this sense, events are interpreted as a consequence of Turkey’s uniqueness, which has become the object of abhorrence of fanatics. This emphasis on the ‘Turkish model’ will be analyzed in the following pages.

In brief, there seem three forms of news that appear in the popular newspapers which point the finger of blame at al-Qaida: first, the headlines and news announcing that al-Qaida is responsible; second, detailed news on the organization, its ideology, and power; and third, news speculating on the reasons of al-Qaida's hostility to Turkey.

### **5.1.2 'Turkey's own September 11': An International Issue**

The label 'Turkey's own September 11' has been the press's favorite way of presenting the Istanbul bombings. In popular dailies, similar to the absence of references to other al-Qaida related terrorist events around the world, earlier attacks of Islamist terrorism in Turkey were hardly mentioned<sup>25</sup>. Instead, the main historical reference was to the September 11 attacks in the U.S.

Along with what has been said, there was a general tendency in the popular Turkish press to exclusively quote foreign news concerning the responses of the U.S., Israel, and Europe. The dailies diligently quoted from foreign sources about their responses to the events either in the form of diplomatic reactions or media representations. Especially, news quoting from the world press (primarily Western and Israeli press) was the rule. These news items generally contained the interpretations of the foreign dailies on the Istanbul events. For instance, the title "The Support Given to Turkey Should be Increased" in *Milliyet* referred to the coverage of events by British dailies (*Milliyet*, November 22, 2003). The following are some examples of news quoted concerning the responses of the world press:

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<sup>25</sup> For instance the piece of news titled as 'This Type of Terror is Unknown to Us' the assaults in Istanbul were analyzed as the first global attacks in Turkey (*Milliyet*, November 22, 2003). In this sense, they were differentiated from the previous religiously motivated attacks that aimed at national figures and thus the two were categorically conceived as two very different things.

“What Has the World Press Told?” (Milliyet, November 16,)  
“The World is Focused on Turkey” (Milliyet, November 16, 2003)  
“Live Broadcast by the CNN on the Synagogue Bombings’ (Sabah, November 16, 2003)  
“The Assaults are on the Agenda of the World Press” (Hürriyet, November 16, 2003)  
“The Assaults are Headlined in the World Press” (Hürriyet, November 17, 2003)  
“The Synagogue Bombings are on the Agenda of the World Press” (Sabah, November 17, 2003)  
“The World is Disrupted by the Attacks” (Hürriyet, November 20, 2003)  
“The Assaults are on the Agenda of the World” (Sabah, November 21, 2003)  
“The Bombings are on the World Press” (Hürriyet, November 21, 2003)  
“The World Condemned the Assaults” (Hürriyet, November 21, 2003)  
“The Assaults Have Been Headlined All Around the World” (Milliyet, November 21, 2003)

Additionally, there was plenty of news concerning diplomatic reactions to the bombing events. For example, within the title “We’ve Become One Heart Against Terror” it is announced that world leaders (actually G.W. Bush and T. Blair) declared that they will cooperate with Turkey in fighting terrorism (Sabah, November 21, 2003). Similarly, the news titled as “Assaults Have Become the Object of the World’s Rage,” informs about the interpretations of international political actors such as the Council of Europe, the EU Parliament, NATO, and so forth (Milliyet, November 21, 2003). Likewise, the news entitled “The World Condemn” and “Hate and Reaction from All Around the World” mention the condolence messages to Turkey by international leaders (Sabah, November 17-November 21, 2003). Moreover, the news titled as “The World is Terrified” informs on the effects of the bombings in different



countries in terms of the increase in security measures (Sabah, November 21, 2003).

While analyzing the press coverage about the Istanbul bombings, Gökçe et al. (2004) interpret this diligence in quoting foreign responses as the press's recognition of the Istanbul bombings as a chance of prestige building (p. 266). Considered from such perspective, there are also a number of news primarily concerned with the prestige of Turkey among those foreign news. For example, the title "They Hit, But Cannot Destroy the Life in Istanbul" is about how the world press commends the fact that people in Istanbul go on with their normal life despite the bombings. Additionally, it is quoted from The Guardian that 'Istanbul is Standing Straight and Challenging'- (Sabah, November 26, 2003). Similarly, in the news entitled "Praises from the World Press" the praise for the Turkish model by the Spanish, French, and Belgian press agencies is repeated (Milliyet, November 18, 2003).

In brief, mainstream-popular dailies interpreted the Istanbul bombings as an international event with almost exclusive references to the September 11 events and the events were rarely connected to national political issues. The popular dailies questioned the events frequently at the international level rather than connecting the problem to national politics, national political polarization and national radical groups. Their reporting of the horrific events in Istanbul also reflected what may be called "a rather twisted expression of pride and prestige" in Turkey taking "its rightful place" in the eyes of the West, on the occasion of this tragedy.

### **5.1.3 The EU process**

Abundance of the news concerning the possible effects of the bombings on Turkey's admission process to the European Union should be cited as another striking tendency of the dailies in covering the events. Those items generally

speculate on the possible and negative effects of the bombings on the admission process. It is obvious that the focus of these news has been the responses by European authorities. For example, the news titled as “We Will Not Import Terror,” refers to the debates between two factions in the EU that disagreed about the membership process of Turkey after the bombings. It is stated that while one group argues that the membership process of Turkey should be accelerated, some others argue for the need to revise Turkey’s membership process in the light of the assaults, i.e. claiming that accepting Turkey may mean importing terrorism. (Sabah, November 23, 2003) This dispute in the EU was frequently presented by allocating large space for the declarations by the endorsing faction.

“EU: The Events Should not Affect the Reform Process” (Hürriyet, November 21, 2003)

“Schilly: Turkey’s EU Membership will be an Answer to the Assaults” (Hürriyet, November 21, 2003)

“Straw: Turkey Must be Made a Member of the EU” (Hürriyet, November 21, 2003)

“For a Powerful Europe and Turkey, Appoint a Date” (Hürriyet, November 26, 2003)

“Schröder: We Should Support the Reforms for Our Sake” (Hürriyet, November 26, 2003)

“Straw: Turkey Should be Immediately Admitted to EU Membership” (Milliyet, November 21, 2003)

“Declaration from Brussels: We Depend on the Existing Schedule” (Milliyet, November 22, 2003)

“The Door of the EU Should be Open to Turkey” (Milliyet, November 30, 2003)

“EU: Our Support will be Continued” (Milliyet, November 30, 2003)

The news entitled “The Path to the EU Should Immediately be Opened to Turkey,” announces that the assaults closed up Turkey and EU by specifically referring to the declarations made by the Turkey-friendly factions in the EU (Sabah, November 22, 2003). By referring to the declarations of Italian Prime Minister S. Berlusconi, British Foreign Minister J. Straw, German Interior Minister O. Schilly, and Commissioner for Enlargement of the EU, G.Verheugen, it is stated that the Istanbul assaults have actually led to an increase in the EU support for Turkey. Particularly, the declarations made by Mr. Verheugen received a privileged treatment in popular dailies.

The following titles reflect news quoted from Verheugen’s speeches with the final one being a quotation from his words against a German conservatist, Bosback, who stated that Turkey will carry terrorism into the EU (Milliyet, November 23, 2003):

“Membership Negotiations Must be Started” (Milliyet, November 22, 2003)

“Terror Should not Affect the Negotiations” (Sabah, November 27, 2003)

“Characterless!” (Milliyet, November 23, 2003)

#### **5.1.4 Erdoğan: A Leader**

To begin with, after the bombings, the three mainstream dailies generally gave the impression that they supported the policies of the AKP government. Considered from such a perspective, their support for Erdoğan’s claim that terrorists had attacked stability and peace in Turkey is significant<sup>26</sup>. For example, *Hürriyet*’s headline “They Attacked Peace and Stability” was directly taken from by Erdoğan’s declaration: (Hürriyet, November 16, 2003). Moreover, a number of news items (especially those published in *Sabah*), signifying the improvements in the Turkish economy, praising AKP’s

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<sup>26</sup> At the time of the bombings, AKP government had just completed its first year in power.

decisiveness and success in the EU membership process, and pointing to Erdoğan's adherence to democratic principles support the AKP. These may be read as implicit support for its handling of the terrorist crises.

*Sabah's* headline after the second bombings emphasizing the need for unity and cooperation was also parallel with the government's declaration: "It is the Day to Unite" (*Sabah*, November 21, 2003). On the first page, a call from the declaration made by Erdoğan after the events was quoted: "Unite Like A Fist" (*Sabah*, November 21, 2003).

Apart from the general support for the AKP, presentation of Erdoğan as a 'strong and resolute' leader was an important tendency in the national press after the events. In fact, the way Erdoğan was presented in the press after the bombings was very similar to how G.W. Bush had been presented after September 11 in some respects. As will be remembered, President Bush had been portrayed as a strong and resolute leader in the American media after the September 11 attacks. With regard to this similarity, the most striking news came from *Milliyet*, which was titled as:

"Erdoğan Has Spoken to the Nation Like Bush" (*Milliyet*, November 25, 2003)

This news referred to the resemblance between the address to the nation made by Erdoğan after the Istanbul bombings and the ones made by Bush after the September 11 attacks. Erdoğan had declared in this speech, that "our war is between justice and tyranny, good and evil, true and false" just as Bush had done.

There are also a number of news pieces that approvingly highlight the close relations between Bush and Erdoğan:

“Condolence and Aid Offer from Bush to Erdoğan” (Hürriyet, November 17, 2003)

“Condolence Call from Bush to Erdoğan” (Milliyet, November 16, 2003)

“Bush to Erdoğan: Terror Has Chosen Turkey as a Front” (Milliyet, November 22, 2003)

“Stay Strong, My Friend” (Hürriyet-Sabah, November 22, 2003)

The last one informs us that Bush had not called President Ahmet Necdet Sezer for condolences but that he called Erdoğan ‘my friend’.

It could easily be argued that the agenda and content of reporting of the press was mainly shaped by Erdoğan’s declarations made after the bombing events (Gökçe et al., 2004, p.286). In fact, by using wording from Erdoğan’s speeches Turkish dailies appeared to speak to the people by Erdoğan’s words.

Some examples of the tendency of drawing headlines by quoting from Erdoğan’s declarations are given below.

“EU Must Support Turkey” (Sabah, November 29, 2003)

“Our Objective of EU Membership Will Never Change” (Sabah, November 24, 2003)

“Terror Cannot Designate any Faith Group” (Sabah, November 25, 2003)

“Terror Has No Religion” (Milliyet, November 19, 2003)

“They Will Pay for What They’ve Done” (Milliyet, November 21, 2003)

“Turkey is Laic and Will Remain Laic” (Milliyet, November 24, 2003)

“They Cannot Change Turkey’s Route” (Hürriyet, December 2, 2003)

Moreover, not only the headlines and news reporting also the agenda of debates in press were to a large extent, shaped and determined by Erdoğan’s declarations. For example, ‘Islamist terror’ debate, which became a distinct subject after the bombings and dominated the agenda of all, was triggered by Erdoğan’s speech in which he expressed his uneasiness with the use of the two

words- *Islam and terror* - together. As Gökçe et al. (2004) cite, the issue of terrorist attacks in Istanbul turned to one of 'Islamist terrorism' in the press, after Erdoğan's speech (p. 289) After this speech, newspapers were involved in a critical discussion on the so-called relation between Islam and terror and on the use of the phrases such as Islamist terror, Islamic terror, and religious terror. Following Gökçe et al. (2004), it is possible to argue that this debate can be regarded as part of the broader debate of *takıyye* about the AKP government (p. 289) because the debate provided ground for dailies to express their positions on AKP, i.e. have they as former Islamists really changed or are they engaging in *takıyye*<sup>27</sup>.

In brief, another general tendency of popular press in covering the events was the presentation of Prime Minister Erdoğan as a 'strong and resolute' leader, supporting the AKP government with minor criticisms and being dominated in its news coverage by the agenda and rhetoric of Erdoğan.

### **5.1.5 The Turkish model**

There was a consensus among the three mainstream dailies in that they will maintained that Turkey became a target for al-Qaida because of the so-called 'Turkish Model'.

Turkey's uniqueness in the sense that it is a secular and democratic country, unlike the rest of the Islamic world was seen and presented as the object of the radical attacks. Turkey was the target of fanaticism because it is illustrated the possibility of a secular democratic system governing a Muslim population. As expressed openly in Sabah (November 21, 2003) "Terror has the Turkish model as its target. Turkey angers them because it harmonizes democracy and Islam and is oriented to the European Union ..."

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<sup>27</sup> This issue is looked at, in depth, in Chapter 6.

In this manner, the praises for the so-called ‘Turkish model’ are expressed in the mainstream dailies in the context of bombings. This tendency could be considered as similar to the interpretations (especially the ones of by Bush government and the U.S media) put forward after September 11 which implied that the target of al-Qaida was ‘American democracy, American way of life’ and reducing the issue to one of resentment and fanaticism. The explicit arguments relating of Istanbul attacks to the Islamists hatred of a Muslim secular democracy and the implicit arguments about the merits of the ‘Turkish model’ were obviously based on the widely accepted ‘exceptionalist’ perception of the Turkish Republic. The positive reactions of the foreign press supporting the ‘Turkish model’ argument were frequently quoted also in line with the mainstream dailies’ above-mentioned seeking of international prestige.

For example, a piece of news titled as ‘Praises for Turkey from Schröder and Verheugen’ announces that the Turkish model is very important for Europe because it reconciles Islamic belief with European democratic values (Milliyet, November 17, 2003). Likewise, the article, titled as “They Hate Free Countries” depends on the declaration by Bush who maintained that terrorists were trying to intimidate free countries. Thus, it is expressed that Turkey is a free country and was attacked because it is free (Milliyet, November 21, 2003).

Other exemplary titles pointing to and praising the Turkish model in relation with the bombing events:

“The Reason of the Assaults is the Fact that Turkey is Westerner” (Hürriyet, November 20, 2003)

“Secular Turkey is a Model Country” (Sabah, November 21, 2003)

“Turkey is Hated Because of Laicite” (Milliyet, November 22, 2003)

“Assaults Aimed at the Turkish Model” (Milliyet, November 22, 2003)

“Turkey Was the Target of the Attacks Because It is a Model Country” (Hürriyet, November 25, 2003)

“Turkey Was the Target of the Attacks Because of Being Pro-Western” (Sabah, November 28, 2003)

“Muslim and a Member of NATO” (Sabah, November 28, 2003)

In brief, there is a consensus among popular dailies based on the argument that Turkey was chosen as the target by al-Qaida because of the so-called ‘Turkish model’. From this outlook, Turkey became a target of fanaticism because it illustrates the possibility of a secular democratic system governing a Muslim population.

## 5.2 Islamist Dailies

A number of common attitudes can also be detected as the general tendencies of Islamist newspapers<sup>28</sup> in covering the Istanbul bombings. Firstly, as a general attitude in the context of bombings, the overwhelming criticism of the policies attributed to cooperation of the U.S., Britain, and Israel cooperation should be cited. One important characteristic of this critical attitude found in the pages of these dailies is the lack of connection to Turkish politics. In other words, they generally voice a stern criticism of U.S. politics also it with the responsibility for Istanbul bombings. However, in their pages it is not possible

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<sup>28</sup> Under this heading three newspapers are reviewed: *Yeni Mesaj*, *Milli Gazete* and *Yeni Şafak*. *Yeni Mesaj* is owned by Haydar Baş, the leader of Haydar Baş a religio-nationalist movement, affiliated with the Kadiri order. It spreads its messages through its media network, business investments and a number of schools (Kuru 2005:266). It owns and operates two nationwide television channels (*Mesaj TV* and *Meltem TV*) and a few magazines apart from the newspaper *Yeni Mesaj*. In 2001, its leader founded a political party, Bağımsız Türkiye Partisi (Independent Turkey Party-BTP). In the recent years, the movement has emerged as a major Islamist opposition to AKP. *Milli Gazete* is affiliated with the elders of the National Outlook movement the Islmaist contingent that staffed all the Islmaist parties that preceded AKP. It is currently affiliated with the worldview of Felicity Party (SP), another opponent of AKP from the Islamist camp. *Yeni Şafak* is a daily known to have pro-European Union and pro-AKP government outlook, often reflecting socially conservative and religiously endorsed position with a political liberal rhetoric.



to find a concomitant criticism of Turkish policies, i.e. Turkey's advocacy of the Western stand and/or her alignment with the U.S.<sup>29</sup>:

“Occupation Mostly Kills Children” (Milli Gazete, November 18, 2003)

“Thousands of Denouncements (to Bush)” (Milli Gazete, November 22, 2003)

“Civilians are Killed in Afghanistan” (Yeni Mesaj, November 18, 2003)

“Stop This Man (Bush)” (Yeni Mesaj, November 20, 2003)

“The Biggest Obstacle on the Way to Peace: Bush” (Yeni Şafak, November 17, 2003)

“American Brutality in Iraq” (Yeni Şafak, December 2, 2003)

As clearly seen, the anti-American outlook of the Islamist dailies is also highlighted by such news in the context of bombings. Moreover, anti-Zionism or even sometimes anti-Semitism can be argued as more or less the common viewpoint within the Islamist press. However, in the presentation of Europe, *Yeni Şafak's* affirmative attitude is different from the others. Therefore, while *Milli Gazete* and *Yeni Mesaj* compliment their anti-American position with an overall anti-Western outlook that includes the Europe; *Yeni Şafak* has a positive attitude towards the EU as a strong supporter of Turkey's candidacy.

On their outlook on Istanbul bombings the Islamist dailies resemble the popular ones in overtly adopting a West v.s Islam discourse. Additionally, like the popular press, Islamists also do not make reference to the other attacks of al-Qaida, within the preceding years.

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<sup>29</sup> *Milli Gazete's* attitude is the exception to this attitude as it states its opposition to the government's foreign politics and its pro-Western politics. For example, a title from *Milli Gazete* relating the bombings to pro-Western policies of government says “The Cost of Supporting Bush”( *Milli Gazete*, November 22, 2003). Nevertheless, *Milli Gazete* also mentions many conflicting statements which prevents generalizing such attitude.

Oddly enough there is more variation among the Islamist dailies reviewed here with regard to their attitudes towards the government and its handling of the Istanbul bombing with *Yeni Şafak* expressing support and endorsing governmental position; *Yeni Mesaj* having a partly critical attitude and *Milli Gazete* expressing very strong opposition.

As different from the popular dailies, the Islamist media took a defensive position after the events. A number of items affirming Islam as a peaceful religion found their way in the pages. For example the a piece of news in *Milli Gazete*, titled as “Islam is the Religion of Peace” was based on a speech by Necmettin Erbakan in which he argued that foreign forces are not only making terror but also putting the blame on Islam (Milli Gazete, November 28, 2003). Likewise, the same newspaper in another instance reported that “Their Target is Islam: Intelligence Agencies Who are the Actual Perpetrators of Terror Put the Blame on Al-Qaida” (Milli Gazete, December 3, 2003).

In the Islamist dailies this defensive position seems to have been supported by conspiracy theories. I consider this conspirational point of view as the most striking characteristic of the Islamist press coverage of the Istanbul bombings. It is well-known that conspiracy scenarios are one of the most popular ideological means of blaming and creating an enemy. They generally point to an enemy with evil plans and justify the possible violence against him (Nefes, 2005, p.2)

In the case of the Istanbul bombings, the Islamist press was blaming external forces as responsible for the bombings. Those external forces were identified as imperialist powers, Zionist regime, evil forces, axes of evil, or the personalities of Bush and Sharon.

As known, the most popular way to talk of conspiracies is to question the benefit of the enemy from an evil action. Thus, the key question is “who

benefited from the action?” In this point of view, who will benefit from the action is the perpetrator of the action/ or responsible for the action.

In the case of the Istanbul assaults, Milli Gazete questioned the benefits of the attacks and blamed the enemy in this way:

“The Key Question is That: Who Benefited from the Assaults?” (Milli Gazete, November 19, 2003)

“Look Carefully at the Scenario! Israel Benefited” (Milli Gazete, November 18, 2003)

“Is it the Reason of Terror? Sharon’s Call for Jews to Come and Live in Israel, Raises Questions in Minds” (Milli Gazete, November 20, 2003)

“Terrorism Served the U.S. (Milli Gazete, November 23, 2003)

In the Islamist press, there are also many articles claiming professional intelligence agencies of the U.S. and Israel as responsible for what happened. For example, the news, titled as “Big Trick” quotes from the declaration of Mete Gündoğan- the vice president of SP- in which he argues that these terrorist events are operations for the new world order. According to him, the new world order is tried to be realized by U.S. through intimidation/and terrorism (Milli Gazete, November 23, 2003).

“Professional Work” (Milli Gazete, November 17, 2003)

“Evil Forces are at Work” (Milli Gazete, November 16, 2003)

“Mahir Kaynak: Work of Intelligence Agencies” (Milli Gazete, November 16, 2003)

“Who Used the Hoods: Evil Forces” (Milli Gazete, December 2, 2003)

“The CIA-MOSSAD’s Involvement in the Events should be Questioned” (Milli Gazete, November 19, 2003)

“The Same Scenario: The Aim is to Intimidate States and Enlarge the Occupation” (Milli Gazete, November 21, 2003)

After the second series of bombings, *Milli Gazete* started to point to al-Qaida as the perpetrator more than before. However, it was engaged in questioning the creators of al-Qaida or the power behind it rather than holding it responsible for the events. Therefore, for *Milli Gazete* the real enemy, i.e. those who were responsible for the assaults, does not change even if it is accepted that this enemy is not directly involved in the events.

“The Source of Terrorism is American Imperialism” (*Milli Gazete*, November 23, 2003)

“Who Fed Osama Bin Laden?” (*Milli Gazete*, November 23, 2003)

“Increasing Opposition to Blair and Sharon in the West: Occupation Feeds Terrorism” (*Milli Gazete*, November 22, 2003)

“Bush is Provoking Terrorism” (*Milli Gazete*, November 22, 2003)

“The Source of Terrorism is the U.S.” (*Milli Gazete*, November 22, 2003)

On the other hand, *Yeni Şafak* raised suspicion about the perpetrators of the bombings through its ambiguous statements. For example, the headline in *Yeni Şafak* after the bombings announced that Turkey is tried to be drawn into the marsh of terrorism in parallel with the developments in Iraq (*Yeni Şafak*, November 16, 2003). According to *Yeni Şafak*, stability and peace in Turkey is not desirable for others; they feel indisposed because of the positive developments in economy; they are trying to disrupt the political stability in Turkey; they want deadlock in EU membership and Cyprus. These are the causes of the events (*Yeni Şafak*, November 16, 2003). Among those statements ‘who’ and ‘why’ questions are strikingly left unanswered. Therefore, it can be argued that these statements mean nothing other than implying that there are enemies of Turkey with evil plans.

Through these ambiguous statements, suspicion, however, is raised about the assumed perpetrators. For example, the news, titled as “Who is the Boss of the

Bombers?” plainly points to some external forces. It is claimed that while the bombers are identified one by one, the codes for the externally controlled structure which directs the actions have not yet been broken (Yeni Şafak, December 1, 2003). Likewise, the piece of news with the title “Collaborator Tekfir” announces that the relation between Turkish perpetrators of the events and Egyptian el Tekfir ve’l Hicre organization- that is declared as subcontractor of CIA and MOSSAD- comes into light (Yeni Şafak, November 19, 2003).

Likewise, Haydar Baş, as the owner of *Yeni Mesaj*, declares that terror is the work of those surrounding Turkey, implying Western forces. Moreover, *Yeni Mesaj* also expresses its suspicions about the al-Qaida organization. For example, with the title “El Pentagon” it is claimed that al-Qaida was created and guided by CIA and MOSSAD (Yeni Mesaj, December 13, 2003).

The general tendency in *Yeni Mesaj* raises suspicion about the declared perpetrators after the bombings by referring to some suspicious details about the events. For example, the headlines in November 17 and November 22 inform us on the quality and characteristics of bombs used in the events: “Bombs are Very Special” (Yeni Mesaj, November 17, 2003). Likewise, the article, with the title “The Police is Puzzled” claims that experts argue on the impossibility of realizing the bombings with materials obtained in the place of action (Yeni Mesaj, November 23, 2003). Another article, entitled “Can Those Bombs be Produced in Such a Shop?” announces that the son of the declared perpetrator İlyas Kuncak states that his father is in Saudi Arabia for the Umra (Yeni Mesaj, December 2, 2003).

In brief, while the Islamist press adopted a defensive position after the events, it increasingly engaged in speaking of conspiracy theories. The blame of the acts were put on the U.S. and Israel as the external, evil forces, or axis of evil.

### 5.3 Overview

In the analysis of the general press coverage of Istanbul bombings, it is seen that there are differences between the reflections of Islamist press and the popular-mainstream ones.

A number of common attitudes have been cited for the analysis of the general tendencies of popular-mainstream newspapers in covering the Istanbul bombings. These are immediately pointing the finger of blame at al-Qaida; no concrete reference or linkage of Istanbul explosion to earlier claimed attacks of al-Qaida elsewhere in the world, which were frequent in 2003 but comparing them exclusively to September 11 events; presenting the bombings as an international issue; discussing bombings' possible effects on Turkey's entrance in the EU; general support for the AKP government's handling of the crises and presentation of Prime Minister Erdoğan as a 'strong and resolute' leader; adopting a West *versus* Islam discourse and emphasizing the secular democratic 'Turkish model' as the reason of the attacks.

A number of common attitudes can also be cited as the general tendencies of Islamist dailies in covering the Istanbul bombings such as the abundance of criticisms against policies of the U.S., Britain, and Israel cooperation; adoption of a West *versus* Islam discourse; no concrete reference or linkage to earlier attacks of al-Qaida elsewhere in the world, which were frequent in 2003; adoption of a defensive position affirming Islam as a peaceful religion; the abundance of conspiracy theories.

The general analysis of the Turkish press shows that there are similarities as well as deep differences between the mainstream popular dailies and the Islamist ones in presenting the bombings. Both have generally refrained from references to earlier attacks of the al-Qaida and tended to put the Istanbul explosions in the same frame with only the September 11 events. Their common

adoption of West vs. Islam dichotomy is striking. They all presented the Istanbul events as an international rather than a national occurrence although the four suicide bombers and most of those suspected by the police were Turkish citizens. The popular dailies considered the bombings a result of the ‘war against terrorism’ declared by U.S., and therefore as an assault of the terrorists targeting the free world; and Islamist dailies considered the bombings a reaction to the U.S. and its evil plans to enlarge the occupation in the Middle East and/or their plans to make Turkey closer to the Western alliance. Therefore, mainstream and Islamist dailies see a conflict between Islam and the West as lying beneath the terrorist assaults. Current national political decisions such as the AKP government’s attitude toward Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, or such national problems as Islamism in the country are hardly debated in the Turkish press in the context of bombings. On the contrary, the press agenda was dominated by more speculations and debates that can be regarded as variations of the general Islam and democracy or Islam and terrorism debates. Such presentation of the bombings, by the press as exclusively an international event with global and international causes, plainly benefited the AKP government.

In fact, the government itself blamed the al-Qaida immediately after the bombing the bombings and interpreted the events as international remarks by Prime Minister Erdoğan that closely paralleled with those of G. W. Bush after September 11 events.

Likewise, after the bombings, national political decisions or the national problem of Islamist terrorism was hardly debated in Turkish press. Criticism was not directed to policies of the AKP government. Moreover, the parallelism between government’s interpretations of the events and the interpretations of the majority of Turkish press is striking. Even the two dailies (*Cumhuriyet* and *Milli Gazete*), which plainly opposed the government, did not directly orient their criticisms to the policies of AKP government.

Apart from general support for AKP, presentation of Erdoğan as a 'strong and resolute' leader should be mentioned as another important tendency after the events. When we compare the presentation of Erdoğan after Istanbul bombings with presentations of Bülent Ecevit (imprudent, incompetent) after September 11 events in the same mainstream popular dailies, the powerful leader image of Erdoğan becomes even more striking (Gökçe et al., 2004, pp. 217-244). It has been pointed out that the press heavily criticized the then-Prime Minister Ecevit for passing up a strategic chance for Turkey in the context of September 11 events because his inability to see this opportunity to bring Turkey closer to the U.S.

Another important tendency of the mainstream dailies' coverage of the Istanbul bombings is 'relating the events to the uniqueness of Turkey.' I regard this presentation significant because it stems from and reinforces a widely accepted notion in Turkey regarding the Turkish Republic.

The dailies consistently related the Istanbul events to the uniqueness of Turkey. In other words, there was a consensus on the fact that Turkey was targeted by al-Qaida because of the so-called 'Turkish model', which implies Turkey's uniqueness as a secular and democratic country different from other Muslim countries. It is claimed that Turkey, because it illustrates the viability of a secular democratic system governing a Muslim population, has been the target of religious fanaticism.

After the bombings, the mainstream popular dailies praised the 'Turkish model' repeatedly and stressed the positive qualifications of the Republic as the reason for the attacks. Moreover, they allocated a large space to the news of the Western media about the events, especially those complimenting and praising the 'Turkish model'. In their treatment the 'Turkish model' was both the target of the events and a source of prestige.



The praises in the international and national media for the 'Turkish model' are over-stated, similar to the U.S. media's attitudes after September 11 event implying that the target of al-Qaida was 'American democracy, American way of life'; thus tying the attacks to resentment and fanaticism.

On the other hand, this emphasis on the 'Turkish model' also illustrates that the prominent debates on the compatibility of Islam with democracy have been dominating and shaping the political perceptions in Turkey. The praises for 'Turkish model', depend on the essentialist point of view and gains significance from the assumptions of the essentialist arguments. In other words, secular democratic Turkey is something extraordinary only if we accepted an essential incompatibility between Islam and democracy and secularism. In this way of thinking, the point of emphasis is on the fact that Turkey is a democratic country in spite of its Muslim population. Therefore, the presumption here is that it necessitates the coming together of very special conditions (a exception) for a Muslim people to develop and maintain democracy, and Turkey is such an 'exception'.

While exceptionalism is a form of claiming uniqueness for a state, and its people, it is, in fact, a common way of explaining the history in many nation states (Lindisfarne, 2002, pp. 32-34). The U.S. is a prime example. The distinction of this discourse stems from the fact that it excludes/ruptures the state and its people from the regional and global transformations and regards them as ineligible to compare with other countries (Lindisfarne, 2002, p. 14). In the legitimization of exceptionalist discourses, ethnocentrism usually has a central place. It leads ordinary citizens to misunderstand and misperceive their societies and the history of their nations by avoiding comparisons (apart from simple ones oriented to striking differences) with other nation states. Within the exceptionalist perspective, understanding the differences of people in other nations from one's own is graceful, however; understanding and accepting one's own similarity with them becomes hard. Thus, it inevitably makes difficult for a

people to apprehend their positions in the national and international issues (Lindisfarne, 2002, p. 32). Furthermore, by disturbing people's apprehension of political events, the exceptionalist discourse is functional as a way for the people and government to get rid of the responsibilities of their actions (Lindisfarne, 2002, p. 34). Moreover, according to Lindisfarne (2002), this discourse is a collaborator of nationalism by helping the people to identify themselves with their administrators, exceptionalist discourse is a way of hindering class and interest conflicts/differences between lower class people and their leaders (Lindisfarne, 2002).

Lindisfarne orients criticisms towards Turkish exceptionalism, specifically the wide acceptance of this rhetoric in Turkey, like in U.S, however, she ignores the bases of this wide acceptance in the West as well as in the Turkish society. Throughout her book, she repeatedly points out that the exceptionalist discourse depends on modernist dichotomies. Nevertheless, she thus can be criticized for missing the point that the West, as the homeland of modernist paradigm, also has a responsibility in the reproduction of the Turkish exceptionalist discourse. It should be remembered that in the context of the Cold War Western powers repeatedly pointed to Turkey as the model for other Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, in the context of the Istanbul bombings, Western press also referred to the uniqueness of the 'Turkish model' as the reason of the assaults. While claiming that Turkish Republican rhetoric rests itself on the modernist paradigm, one should not ignore the fact that Republican rhetoric is also affected by domination of modernist paradigm in the West. The specific presumptions of the modernization paradigm (on the relation between secularism, democracy and Islam) have valued the Turkish model by stressing its exceptionality. Thereby, dominance of modernization paradigm in the West, as well as Turkey, can also be interpreted as reason of the wide acceptance of the Turkish exceptionalist discourse.

Lindisfarne further argues that the Kemalist (or Republican) rhetoric and applications have ruptured the Turkish state and society from history of the regional and global transformations by creating a national identity related to the modernization of state (Lindisfarne, 2002). Therefore, Turkish exceptionalism can be defined as the discourse of expressing the uniqueness of modern, secular, democratic Turkish Republic. In this perspective, Republican history is entirely unique; thus analyzing similar processes in other countries is a meaningless attempt to understand Turkey. Indeed, Republican rhetoric tells us the story of a miracle at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which could not have happened anywhere else and was independent from regional and contextual developments.

The exceptionalist discourses of differentiating the Turkish history from comparable ones is also fed by Orientalism and plays a significant role in the formation of viewpoints from Turkey to its East and Islam. Within this discourse, West is homogenized as the owner of prosperity and developed technologies. However, this idealized West perception not only causes the misperception of the Middle East but also hinders the grasp of the social conditions in the idealized western countries. In this framework, on the one hand Turkey and Turkish citizens are accepted as underdeveloped in comparison to the West and, on the other hand, the Turkish Republic is separated and distinguished from the other undeveloped Muslim countries because of its qualifications of modern, secular and democratic like Western ones. It also gains its value in the eyes of West through these qualifications. In this sense, by believing that Turkey is the most Westernized, most secular among the Muslim countries, the ‘Turkish model’ is sanctified. Therefore, in the course of Turkish exceptionalism the principle of secularism holds an important part. Some have argued that in the Turkish case, the exceptionalist perception is fed by another widely accepted presumption on Turkish Republic: the strict laïcité perception (or undervaluing the religion’s role in the construction of the new nation and new identity in Turkey). In other words, the total exemption of the nation-building project from the influence of Islam and Islamic values has

been complimentary assumption. This assumption has been criticized by some scholars. First of all, Zubaida (1996) points out that one cannot think about Turkish nationalism regardless of the Turkish Islam (p. 10). Similarly, Bora (2003) in questioning the validity of the total exemption assumptions, claims “legitimacy and sanctity transfer from religion to national state” which simply means that we cannot think about nation-building project regardless of the influence of religion in Turkey (p. 124).

The ethnographic study of Lindisfarne (2002) also illustrates that religious and national values are strikingly mixed/or fused in daily life of Turkey (p. 279-297). In this study, she emphasized that Republican and Islamic values are interwoven in the minds of people in a complex way rather than contradicting with each other. In fact she argues that Turkish people generally suppose that the institutions of the Republic are continuations of Islamic institutions of the past (Lindisfarne, 2002, p. 284). Moreover, she points out that there are parallelisms between religious and public rituals in Turkey and even in the idols of Muhammed and Atatürk. Likewise, many analysts, (*inter alia*, Acar 1993; Zubaida 1996; Lewis 1998) emphasized that Turkish people generally do not perceive a contradiction between Islam and their attachment to Kemalist symbols or do not find difficulty in being both citizens of a secular republic and Muslims.

Lindisfarne (2002) also argued that Turkish Republicanism itself depends on a peculiar and autocratic interpretation of Islamic religion (p 71-9). According to Bora (2003), this interpretation is something specifying a nationalized Islam inspired by Protestantism (p. 118). He argues that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the dominant vision among the modernizing elites accepted the religion as one of the things to be modernized in the society (Bora, 2003, p. 118). In this perspective, if religion is purified of superstitions, it will be functional in the society as an institution ordering social morality and conscience (Bora, 2003, p.

118). For that reason, Bora (2003) argues that the modernization of religion is imminent in the modernization project of Turkey (p. 115).

Included in this modernization and nationalization of religion are the cleansing of the religion from Arabic and Farsi impacts and the 'protestantization' (Bora, 2003, p. 121). On the one hand, Islam purified from the Arabic tones is expected to give way to the Turkish nationalist interpretation of Islam with an undertone that Turks are the superior among Muslims. This perspective attributes the survival of Islam to date to the success of Turks (Bora, 2003, p. 115). Bora (2003) claims this belief in being the superior and prevailing nation of the Islamic world, has also made its mark on the international vision of Republican Turkey (p. 122).

The 'protestantization' process of Islam becomes clear when we consider the ongoing institutionalization of religion as an official obligation of national morality. Bora (2003) cites the project of Fethullah Gülen as a recent affirmed example of the protestantization of Islam (p. 120). This is a religious project which can partly be understood as a project of bringing together professional men who are qualified, hardworking and loyal to the state (Bora, 2003, p.120). He argues that Gülen's line of thought is the most popular example of instrumentalization of Islam as a device of firming the order of state, stability, and reconciliation in society (Bora, 2003, p.139).

Additionally, Çınar (2005) also analyzes the Republic's peculiar interpretation of Islam from another perspective. According to him, secularist elite's viewpoint at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is as follows: "If there is no distinction between religion and politics in Islamic tradition, the best way to eliminate religion's role in politics is controlling religion" (p. 27). Moreover, this control inevitably necessitates defining and determining the religion. In this manner, Turkish laïcité includes the attempts to reconstruct or redefine the supposedly real Islam (Çınar, 2005, p. 28). In fact, Çınar (2005) also claims that

Turkish laïcité cannot easily be categorized as laïcité if we regard its attempts to define the good Muslim and attempts for constructing a peculiar form of Islam in the name of Turkish Islam (p. 28).

These debates on the laïcité principle gained importance especially after 1980's when Islamism developed as a separate line and when the role of religion in modern life in Turkey became increasingly more visible. Bora (2003) argues that after 1980s religion has been attached or articulated to official ideology in Turkey more than before because of the ever-increasing domination of nationalist conservatist discourse which perceives religion as the essential element of nationality. He argues that after 1980s being devout became an obligation of official ideology (Bora, 2003, p.127).

In brief, with regard to explaining the mainstream popular dailies' over-emphasis on the uniqueness of the Turkish model, I have tried to demonstrate that there are two presumptions; the exceptionalist and strict laïcité discourses, both of which are nonetheless challengeable.

## CHAPTER 6

### IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS AND COMMENTARIES ON NOVEMBER 2003 BOMBINGS IN SELECTED TURKISH DAILIES: COMPARISON OF THE REFLECTIONS IN DIFFERENT POLITICAL CAMPS

This chapter reports the findings of the content analysis of a selection among national daily newspapers. The guiding concern here is to identify variations among the dailies with respect to the nature and content of the issues, attitudes, and political positions expressed about the Istanbul bombings.

This comparative content analysis will deal with four national newspapers- *Cumhuriyet*, *Anadolu'da Vakit*, *Zaman* and *Radikal*- by taking into account their divergent ideological positions. I have chosen these four dailies primarily with regard to their relatively consistent discourses and ideological homogeneity. It could be assumed that the picture will be sharpened by the analysis of those four because each one represents a pole in Turkish society

All the news and commentaries from those four newspapers are reviewed in the one-month period following the events (November 15- December 15, 2003).

The aim here is to grasp their diverse positions in order to come to terms with the characteristics of polarizations in society in interpreting the Istanbul bombings. Implicit in this is also the assumption that, to some extent this would reflect their reader groups' views, too. I will try to interpret different reflections on the bombing events found in these papers by taking into consideration that views in these newspapers parallel those of their readers although clearly not every word in the newspapers can be assumed to reflect the opinions of their reader groups.

In the Turkish socio-political context, it is possible to associate these four newspapers with different standings and political positions. As a general outlook, *Cumhuriyet* gives primacy to the principles of secularism and the unitary state and importance of armed forces in protecting the foundations of the Turkish Republic. Briefly, it can be said that *Cumhuriyet* whose readers locate it on the left wing of the political spectrum, represents the views of the Kemalist left. Secondly, *Zaman* and *Anadolu'da Vakit* can be described as two newspapers of Islamist nature; however, they represent virtually two margins (liberal-radical) of the Islamist point of view in Turkey. *Zaman*, claims that it is the newspaper of the people whose political stance is closer to 'liberal' ideas including mainly a form of rapprochement between liberal democratic principles and Islam. In this sense, *Zaman's* points of emphasis are, on the one hand, the threats to democracy in the name of reactionary and retrogressive (*irticaî*) activities and on the other, the criticism of the position of armed forces in the Turkish political system, both in the name of protecting and furthering democratic principles. *Anadolu'da Vakit* is closer to a radical Islamist point of view which includes sympathy for a totalitarian state order designed according to the Shari'a as the law of the land. Finally, *Radikal* can be specified as liberal with leftist tendencies or left liberal. It also gives primacy to the issues related to "democratization"- especially the importance of Turkey's EU entrance process and minority rights. Therefore, it can be assumed that these four newspapers represent the bases of existing basic polarizations in Turkish socio-political life.

## **6.1 Cumhuriyet**

Cumhuriyet was founded in 1924 and has been owned by Yunus Nadi Abalıđlu (1879-1945) (Adaklı, 2006, p.133). Since its inception, the newspaper pursued a statist attitude. Its leftist tendency started to become apparent in the 1960's and the paper continued to give voice to the left-leaning, secular, intelligentsia in Turkey throughout the following decades. After the financial crisis faced in



1990's, the ownership structure of the newspaper changed dramatically. Its ownership passed to the hands of a partnership of private business with a small share remaining in the hands of the original owner. The paper nonetheless, continued to maintain its political stance.

As a newspaper presenting itself as respectful to the founding principles of the Turkish Republic, the primary political concern of *Cumhuriyet* can be claimed to be the protection of the 'laic' structure of the unitary state. İlhan Selçuk, its long-time Chief Columnist, defines the political position of *Cumhuriyet* as against three 'isms', i.e. fundamentalism, imperialism and terrorism (Cumhuriyet, November 18, 2003).

After the synagogue bombings on November 15, 2003, *Cumhuriyet's* news and columnists are tended to attribute the events to the international terrorism, namely al-Qaida. However, within their detailed news presentations and interpretations, the internal problem of 'political Islam' in Turkey was often emphasized. Political Islam was perceived as always carrying the threat of radicalism within itself and/or may having ties with radical waves of Islamism and was seen as more significant and urgent than the specific al-Qaida threat. In connection with this issue, many columnists in *Cumhuriyet* tried to draw attention to national realities-problems like Islamist ghettos in Istanbul<sup>30</sup>, and religious orders (tarikats) as the indicators of 'Turkey's own ground of religious terrorism which is continuously growing' (Bursalı, Cumhuriyet, December 2, 2003). Clearly the identity of perpetrators of Istanbul bombings were 'Islamist' in the sense that they were terrorists guided by Islamic beliefs and fighting for Jihad. Likewise, the political aim beyond the attacks was definitely

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<sup>30</sup> One headline in *Cumhuriyet* points at an 'Islamist ghetto' in Istanbul as the source of the Istanbul bombings within under title "Address is the Islamist Ghetto." It is argued that bombings had been planned in a mosque in Kartal (a district of Istanbul) in which Feridun Uğurlu (one of the suicide bombers) used to be the teacher of a Quran course. Additionally, it is stated that the neighborhood, which Uğurlu had lived in, reminds one of an 'Islamist ghetto'. (Cumhuriyet, November 29, 2003)

'establishing the order of the Shari'a by destabilizing, weakening and isolating Turkey' (Cumhuriyet, December 1, 2003).

In the first day after the synagogue bombings, Mustafa Balbay argued for the infeasibility of the success of the any foreign-originated terrorism in Turkey if it were not able to find local support (Cumhuriyet, 16 November, 2003). Likewise, Emre Kongar, categorized Istanbul bombings as parts of the fifth terror wave that Turkey is faced with, which occurred with the connection of local Islamist groups, born, protected and developed in the Cold War period, with global terrorism.<sup>31</sup>

In *Cumhuriyet*, many research articles by Mehmet Faraç, Faik Bulut, İlhan Taşçı, Ecevit Kılıç and Özgür Erbaş on the identity of local subcontractors of al-Qaida organization, discuss the links of the bombers with local organizations. In those articles, mainly three organization's names were stressed as having links with the Istanbul bombings: Turkish Hizbullah, IBDA-C (Great Eastern Islamic Raiders Front), and İmamlar Birliği (Union of Imams). For instance, the headline of *Cumhuriyet* on November 20, declared Hizbullah as the local subcontractor of the synagogue bombings. Similarly, the headline of the November 23 issue was inspired by Mehmet Faraç's article: 'Hizbullah Has Thousands of Guards'. Additionally, columnists such as İlhan Selçuk also tended to talk about the local linkages of events arguing that the Turkish Hizbullah was behind those bombings. Concomitant to this, the declarations of the opposition leader, Deniz Baykal, found place in the pages of *Cumhuriyet* who repeatedly stressed his belief that the Turkish Hizbullah was linked to the bombings in Istanbul.

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<sup>31</sup> In his article, Kongar argues that Turkey had faced four terror waves up to the Istanbul bombings. For him, Armenian terrorism in 1970's, terrorism caused by the left-right struggle between 1970 and 1980, ethnic terrorism since 1980's, and radical Islamist terror of 1990's were the four terror waves that Turkey had faced (Cumhuriyet, November 24, 2003).

In the light of these, it can be said that among the papers studied here, *Cumhuriyet* is at the top the list when it comes to accepting, presenting and restricting the issue to the national level. Undoubtedly, one significant motive of this tendency is *Cumhuriyet*'s discomfort with the AKP government with respect to its 'Islamist' orientations. Erdal Atabek, another columnist of *Cumhuriyet*, states this uneasiness by arguing that the fundamental problem is the governance of a political group (refers to AKP) whose respect for 'laic' principles is not clear (Cumhuriyet, December 1, 2003).

The AKP government is criticized in *Cumhuriyet* in the context of Istanbul bombings for a number of reasons, all of which are related to 'Islamism' in one way or another. It is plain that with all the news and columns, *Cumhuriyet* presents the government as unsuccessful in crisis management after the bombings. Moreover, for most of the columnists of *Cumhuriyet*, the government is to be blamed for its members' radical pasts especially in the sense that they would have links with the ideology of the perpetrators of Istanbul bombings. It is accused of being 'Islamist', criticized for its 'Islamic' reflections after the events which are perceived as signs of weakness in the struggle against 'Islamist terrorism'. At the top of these criticized 'Islamic' reflections is the declaration of the Prime Minister that the remark 'Islamist terror' bothers him. According to *Cumhuriyet* columnists, the government is not equipped to deal with such type of terror because, before all else, it can not even call its name. From this perspective, Ali Sirmen argued that he did not believe the government could resolve these events (Cumhuriyet, November 22, 2003) and Deniz Som also stated his doubts about the success of the government in fighting against this type of terror by referring to Erdoğan's reluctance to admit to the Muslim identities of the terrorists (Cumhuriyet, December 2, 2003). Accordingly, for Cüneyt Arcayürek, by rejecting the remarks 'Islamic, Islamist and religious terrorism' Erdoğan is not aware of the fact that he defends religious terrorist organizations. He adds that Erdoğan is emotionally motivated to the defense of 'Islam', which disrupts his rationality

and that he also tries to also cater to his fundamentalist political base (Cumhuriyet, December 4, 2003). Above all, İlhan Selçuk harshly charged AKP government as suspicious by suggesting its relationships with Hizbullah and questioning whether there were some linkages between AKP government and al-Qaida (Cumhuriyet, November 25, 2003). He pointed to the similarity between Osama Bin Laden and the ideology of Erdoğan three to five years ago and expressed his very serious doubt that the AKP government cannot indeed call this terror with its name.

*Cumhuriyet* columnists continuously stated that they had no qualms about naming this violence. They used the terms Islamic, Islamist, religious, retrogressive (irticai), pro-Shari'a (şeriatçı), and fundamentalist terrorism interchangeably to define the bombings in Istanbul. The basic rationale behind these remarks was described by İlhan Selçuk as "...since their (terrorists) aim is to establish the order of the 'Shari'a, their attacks on Turkey are plainly Islamic, Islamist, and religious terror" (Cumhuriyet, November 17, 2003).

In this context, *Cumhuriyet* writers tied Erdoğan's rejection of the remarks 'Islamist terrorism and Islamic terrorism' to his own Islamist roots. In Mustafa Balbay's words this stems from the 'genetic anxieties' of the government in dealing with 'Islamist terrorists' (Cumhuriyet, November 16, 2003)<sup>32</sup>. Erdoğan was continued to be blamed for his own radical past on the belief that he did not 'change' or 'change enough' to divorce himself from the radical Islamists. According to Orhan Bursalı, the AKP discourse, which excluded phrases such as 'Islamic' or 'Islamist' terrorism was a clear sign of their strategy: *takıyye*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Prime Minister Erdoğan had been punished years before because of reading a poem by Ziya Gökalp which brought struggle for Jihad to mind by likening mosques to barracks, minarets to bayonets, and the faithful Muslims to an army. This led to his conviction on the grounds that he had attempted to incite the population to violence (Toprak, 2005, p. 177).

<sup>33</sup> *Takıyye* refers to lying for a just cause. It can be defined as the right of Muslims to hide their true beliefs in hostile milieus (Toprak, 2005, p. 175). In Turkish political life,

(Cumhuriyet, November 26, 2003). Likewise, Şükran Soner also referred to the Islamic base of the AKP government and invited them to prove that they have really changed in order to put a clear line of demarcation between them and those supporting the Shari'a rule, and calling for Jihad (Cumhuriyet, November 29, 2003).

Another important subject that is emphasized by *Cumhuriyet* with relation to 'Islamist terror' debate is the declaration of the Chief of General Staff, Hilmi Özkök, who tried to provide clarification to the widespread debate on what this terror was to be called. He used the phrase 'religiously motivated' terror and reminded all the value and virtue of a laic state by emphasizing the brutal results of mixing religion and politics, in Istanbul bombings. *Cumhuriyet* cited Özkök's declaration as a headline- with the title "Religion Should Not Interfere in Politics" without being critical about whether the Chief of General Staff should take the initiative to make a public declaration on such a sensitive political issue (Cumhuriyet, December 2, 2003). Moreover, other newspapers were criticized by *Cumhuriyet*, in the following days, for ignoring or not emphasizing enough the declaration of General Özkök. İlhan Selçuk thought this to be due to the preference of other press in staying in line with Erdoğan according to İlhan Selçuk (Cumhuriyet, December 3, 2003).

*Cumhuriyet* columnists also often resembled Erdoğan's rejection of the phrase 'Islamist terror' to a well known expression of defensive rationality by Süleyman Demirel when he was Prime Minister in the late 1970's. By saying "you can not make me admit when faced with criticisms in the make of violent between leftist and nationalist groups in the country, Prime Minister Demirel

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it implies that the appearance of government with the ideology of moderate-liberal Islam and its respect for secular principles is nothing but a strategy to come to power and become stronger for their 'real' aim: a totalitarian religious state.

had manifested his clear stand within the highly polarized politics of those days.

There are many references to early Islamist based violent events in Turkey such as assassinations and massacres, including the earlier attacks on the Neve Shalom synagogue as well as Alevi-Sunni conflicts. *Cumhuriyet's* columnists often alluded to these events. For instance, Türkel Minibaş reminded the readers of the murders of left-leaning secular figures such as Muammer Aksoy, Bahriye Üçok, Turan Dursun, Uğur Mumcu, Metin Göktepe, Gaffar Okkan and non-conformist Islamists such as Konca Kuriş as concrete examples of the work of 'Islamist' terrorist organizations (Cumhuriyet, November 24, 2003). Likewise, Murtaza Demir while debating Erdoğan's rejection of 'Islamist terror', also referred to the past and said "Not calling Hizbullah holes full of corpses; the massacres of Çorum, Maraş and Sivas; the murders of Mumcu, Üçok, Aksoy, Kışlalı 'Islamic terror', is rejecting the truth and misleading the society" (Cumhuriyet, December 6, 2003). In the same way, Hikmet Çetinkaya reminded the government of earlier violent events saying "...those who rule Turkey should remember safe houses, 'domuzbağı'<sup>34</sup>, grave-houses right now... it is apparent that they do not want to remember" (Cumhuriyet, November 26, 2003). Finally, Mustafa Balbay summarized the place to the newspaper *Cumhuriyet vis-à-vis* the bombings: "As a newspaper that has lost Uğur Mumcu and Ahmet Taner Kışlalı as a result of such devilish terrorist attacks, we know very well the pain caused by terror and the meaning of current attacks" (Cumhuriyet, November 27, 2003).

In the light of these commentaries it is clear that Istanbul bombings was neither perceived nor presented by *Cumhuriyet* as a single, unique event, but as a loop in the chain of Islamist violence which had been a reality of Turkey for a long time.

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<sup>34</sup> A torture method which was generally used by Turkish Hezbollah

Apart from this, two other particular subjects are cited in *Cumhuriyet* in presenting the government as responsible for (or at least as having links with) the Istanbul bombings. One of them is the debate on the effects of the ‘Law of Rehabilitation’<sup>35</sup>. It was argued that this law, which is said to be enacted for the sake of a more effective struggle with the ‘PKK’ resulted in the release of many Hizbullah members from prison. Secondly, *Cumhuriyet* argued that AKP’S practice of setting up its own cadres in public offices in a systematic fashion caused weaknesses in the government’s combat with terrorists because of the removal from office of expert personnel experienced in struggle against local Islamist groups. Consequently, it is argued, in AKP times, routine operations of the ‘laic’ state against Islamist organizations lost strength and dedication (Cumhuriyet, December 3, 2003).

With respect to U.S-Britain-Israel’s role and foreign and military policies, *Cumhuriyet* stands at a critical point. Many columnists blamed the alliance for Istanbul bombings by indirectly linking the latter to U.S. intervention in Iraq. Consequently, someone like Ilhan Selçuk, the Chief Columnist of *Cumhuriyet*, who was very hard on the government’s handling of events and expressed no sympathy for the actual perpetrators of the bombings also blamed U.S. and Israel for the events. Another columnist, Oral Çalışlar, tried to take the attention from the ‘ground the feeds terror’ to the ‘terrorist states that water this ground. Cüneyt Arcayürek argued that the U.S. itself exacerbates terrorism; and Işıl Özgentürk cited that if there is war and there is poverty, terrorism is inevitably their result (Cumhuriyet, November 18, 2003). Likewise, on November 19, Güray Öz referred to the ‘other terror’ (U.S. terror) apart from Islamic terror and on November 20 Toktamış Ateş criticized U.S. and Israeli

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<sup>35</sup> This law passed in 2003 aimed at the rehabilitation of those who had been involved in lesser roles in terrorist activities. In essence, it provided partial amnesty to these people in exchange for cooperation with authorities.

policies as the greatest obstacle for any hope of peace. Moreover, it can be argued that *Cumhuriyet* has a critical account about the question of Turkey's cooperation with the U.S. for the struggle against terrorism. As cited in an article signed by *Cumhuriyet*: "It is natural for the Bush government to pursue a policy that counts on using Turkey against the Islamic world; however, Turkey's permission for such use in the name of 'war against terrorism' is something that has many drawbacks which cannot be forecasted today" (*Cumhuriyet*, November 27, 2003).

This declaration stating a point against cooperation with the U.S in the 'war against terrorism' is however, a single and a comparatively thin criticism compared to those related to Islamism in *Cumhuriyet*. Thus, it is hard to read it as the paper's reaction to Turkish foreign policy in general. In the one month period after Istanbul bombings *Cumhuriyet's* criticisms against the government were not oriented to the government's support for the U.S. policies in general and did not dwell on the government's behavior in the course of Afghanistan and Iraq interventions. They were almost exclusively oriented to issues related with 'Islamism.' While the U.S. intervention in Iraq was charged as illegitimate, Turkish government's support of the intervention or the attempts to be involved in were hardly mentioned as the causes of the Istanbul bombings.

Elsewhere, *Cumhuriyet* columnists also emphasized socio-economic bases of terror by referring to 'poverty, deprivation, illiteracy, inequality' and the imbalance between the rich West and the poor Islamic world (*Cumhuriyet*, November 17, 2003).

Finally, in *Cumhuriyet*, European Union's attitude was also much criticized. The EU was said to enhance its exclusionary policy towards Turkey by using the Istanbul bombings as an excuse. In connection with this issue, *Cumhuriyet* reminded the readers about EU's neglect of 'Islamic terrorism' in Turkey in



that they had been reluctant to include the IBDA-C and the Turkish Hizbullah in the EU list of terrorist organizations<sup>36</sup> (Cumhuriyet, November 21, 2003). In *Cumhuriyet's* pages, there are also editorials evaluating the bombings in terms of their possible positive or negative effects on Turkey's admission to EU; however, these are clearly outnumbered by news and commentaries on the criticism of the AKP government and the events linkages with Islamists in Turkey.

To sum up, *Cumhuriyet's* agenda after the Istanbul bombings is dominated by the criticism of the government in general and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in particular due to a number of reasons all of which are related to 'Islamism'. In addition, *Cumhuriyet* sees the internal problem of growing fundamentalism in Turkey as more important than the al-Qaida threat. It, therefore, emphasizes local sub-contractors of al-Qaida in organizing the bombings and the earlier examples of other 'Islamist' violence in Turkey. Apart from these, there are also many criticisms towards U.S-Britain-Israel's military policies in Middle East, socio-economic malaises, inequalities of the world and EU's attitude to Turkey after the bombings. All in all, in contrast to general tendency of Turkish press *Cumhuriyet* interpreted the Istanbul bombings as a national issue and targeted the AKP government for contributing their causes as well as for not effectively dealing their results.

In a final note, the caricatures published in *Cumhuriyet* during this period (see Annex 1, pictures 1-6) also help illustrate *Cumhuriyet's* stance by depicting highly unpleasant men in cloaks and turbans, playing with bombs, and the Prime Minister guarding religious groups (See pictures 1-6).

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<sup>36</sup> In this case, some EU members' attitude are generalized to the EU and even to the 'West' as clear in the titles: 'West is Two-Faced'; 'West's Attitude to Bombings is Exclusion of Turkey'.

## 6.2 Anadolu'da Vakit

This newspaper started to publication on November 12, 1993, under the name of *Beklenen Vakit*. Then, its name changed to *Akit*. However, because of several court cases suing for damages, *Akit* was closed down in 2001. Two days after its closure, *Anadolu'da Vakit* started to publication.

In its Editor-in-Chief Mustafa Karahanoğlu's words "Vakit continues to be the voice of inoffensive and aggrieved people today because these are children of their own country treated as pariahs and live in a society oppressed in the name of laicite" (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 8, 2003). *Anadolu'da Vakit* can be described as an aggressive supporter of the Islamist sections' demands, among which the 'headscarf problem' is at the top in the period of this research. Ali Karahasanoğlu, one day after the synagogue bombings in Istanbul, he chose to write on the headscarf issue and stated justification of his choice, in the following words: It is obvious that the 'headscarf problem' which creates thousands of aggrieved people for years, is definitely more important than the bombings in the synagogues" (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 16, 2003).

Politically *Anadolu'da Vakit* is in line with those who think Turkey should turn its face to the Islamic world rather than the 'West'; the latter is generally illustrated as an enemy in the articles of this newspaper. Consequently, in contrast to general tendency in Turkish press, foreign news' of *Anadolu'da Vakit* is mostly oriented to the Middle East with current news from Palestine and Iraq and plenty of quotations or reprinted articles from Middle Eastern newspapers.

In the course of covering the Istanbul bombings, one of the striking characteristic of *Anadolu'da Vakit* was its indirect condemnation of the events. Condemnations were not stated in editorials and articles signed by the

newspaper as is usual, but were always stated from the mouth of a third source, also not clearly identified as a person, party or organization<sup>37</sup>.

“The World Condemned” (Anadolu’da Vakit, November 21, 2003)

“Terror is Condemned” (Anadolu’da Vakit, November 21, 2003)

“They Condemned by Praying” (Anadolu’da Vakit, November 21, 2003)

“CIA and MOSSAD are Condemned” (Anadolu’da Vakit, November 21, 2003)

This attitude can be interpreted as an indicator of the defensive position that the newspaper took after the events. One other sign of this defensive position is the large number of articles published, which were presenting and affirming Islam as a peaceful religion.<sup>38</sup> Again because of this defensive position the declarations after the Istanbul bombings, which are pointing al-Qaida and other ‘Islamist’ groups, are criticized more than the events themselves. It is presented that while there was still doubt on their identity perpetrators were immediately declared as al-Qaida by other Turkish press. The phrase ‘the events have been placed on a ‘Kaide’ [pedestal, basis]’ is used in order to emphasize that other press and some experts wrongly put the blame on al-Qaida. Moreover, the London-based Arabic newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi which received an e-mail from the Abu Hafz al-Masri Brigades of al-Qaida claiming responsibility on the attacks is announced as an unreliable newspaper, by at least *Anadolu’da Vakit* columnist, Hasan Karakaya. (Anadolu’da Vakit, November 18, 2003)

In contrast to attributing al-Qaida’s responsibility in the Istanbul bombings, headlines and interpretations of *Anadolu’da Vakit* pointed to the intelligence agencies of the U.S. and Israel (CIA and MOSSAD) as the perpetrators of the

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<sup>37</sup> One exception is the columnist, Abdurrahman Dilipak, who definitely and clearly condemned the attacks in his article (Anadolu’da Vakit, November 20, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> The series of articles written by Harun Yahya (pen name of Adnan Oktar, leader of a Turkish religious community) between November 29 and December 4 with the title ‘There is No Terror in Islam’ and also last pages of the newspaper which is reserved for articles on Islam can constitute examples to this tendency.

events. For instance, the first headline of *Anadolu'da Vakit* after the synagogue bombings was 'C-4 Again'. By this headline, they indirectly pointed the finger at intelligence agencies because it is known that C-4 is generally used by states and intelligence agencies.<sup>39</sup> To support such thesis declarations from non-Islamist Intelligence agency members of Leftists such as Mahir Kaynak (November 16, 2003), Doğu Perinçek (November 20, 2003) and M. Bedri Güntekin (November 22, 2003) are reported in the first pages of *Anadolu'da Vakit*.

*Anadolu'da Vakit's* columnists also frequently wrote about the facts that proved to the innocence of al-Qaida and any other Islamist organizations in the Istanbul events. The fact that the targets of the first series of bombings- the synagogues- are places of worship exempted them from assault by Muslims, claimed authors of *Anadolu'da Vakit* as no Muslim would act like this. Second, the fact that most of the casualties in the four bombings were reportedly Muslims is proof for them that the perpetrators could not be Muslims. By referring to these facts, Abdurrahim Karakoç claimed that: "It is impossible for al-Qaida to hit Turkey by reason, in thought, and in shape" (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 17, 2003).

As seen, the newspaper backs both Islam and all Muslims (even al-Qaida and Taliban). One day after the synagogue bombings, in total disregard for the timing, in an article titled as 'Al-Qaida Published a Book'; the book of Yusuf al-Ayyari was presented to readers (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 16, 2003). In this book Ayyari mentions about the resistance in Iraq and the future of both Iraqi and Arab people. One striking aspect of the book is that it includes Ayyari's criticisms against Turkey for many reasons such as politics of

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<sup>39</sup> In the various articles of *Anadolu'da Vakit* it is stated that C-4 was used in the past in Turkey, in murders, where perpetrator(s) remained unknown.

secularism, partnership with U.S. and his declaration that Turkey is one of the targets of al-Qaida.

Within this perspective, rather than EU and U.S. oriented news, in *Anadolu'da Vakit* one can find Hizbullah of Lebanon's voice declaring that the bombings were at first beneficial for Israel; or an Al-Qaida declaration rejecting the responsibility of bombings; or the voice of a Hizbullah member claiming that they are not involved in these events; or the words of Abdülaziz Rantisi from HAMAS arguing the fact that Istanbul bombings are the work of Zionists (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 20, December 4, 2003).

The view that Istanbul bombings will primarily be beneficial for U.S and Israel is probably the most emphasized and repeated interpretation in *Anadolu'da Vakit*. In fact the attacks are interpreted as having a function to repair Turkish-Israeli relations, which they claimed were woesening in the period of the AKP government. In this sense, *Anadolu'da Vakit* columnists stress Israel's discomfort with the AKP government because AKP is a party respectful to Islam (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 20, 2003). Mentioning the interpretation of Hüsnü Mahalli (a Syrian journalist) *Anadolu'da Vakit* also claimed the bombs in Istanbul were meant to end "Turkey's relations with Muslim countries" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 23, 2003).

Various interpretations of identity of the perpetrators exist in *Anadolu'da Vakit*. On the one hand, columnists Asım Yenihaber points at MOSSAD<sup>40</sup>, Abdurrahim Karakoç blames "MOSSAD and CIA", and Mustafa Kaplan holds Israel and laicist groups in Turkey responsible as if the latter's had united to plan the attacks against the AKP government (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 17, 2003). On the other hand, Yavuz Bahadıroğlu declares that the bombings can have links with the PKK or ASALA (the Armenian terrorist group) organizations (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 21, 2003). Beyond all these,

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<sup>40</sup> By using the term al-MOSSAD

November 20 the headline of *Anadolu'da Vakit* strikingly defined the synagogue bombings as 'Migration Bomb' implying that Israel is the force behind these types of attacks in order to motivate the migration of all Jews to Israel.

Apart from those, there was plenty of news against U.S. and Israel politics in *Anadolu'da Vakit*. In the period of bombings in Istanbul, by assigning space to current news from the resistance in Iraq, 'state terror' of the U.S. was emphasized. In addition, Israel was labeled as either 'Zionist state of Israel' or 'terrorist Israel', while suicide bombers of Palestine were presented as 'resisters'. Some examples are provided in the titles below.

"Security Wall Torture to Palestine" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 16, 2003)

"The Biggest Obstacle for Peace: Bush" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 17, 2003)

"Bush and Sharon are Responsible" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 19, 2003)

"Afghanistan: Occupier Brutality" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 19, 2003)

"Hostility Against Jews is Because of Palestine" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 20, 2003)

"Terrorist Number One: Bush" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 20, 2003)

"One and Only Responsible of Attacks: U.S." (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 22, 2003)

"Headline: Condemnation to CIA and MOSSAD" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 23, 2003)

"U.S. Became Like Israel" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 23, 2003)

"U.S. Accelerates Terrorism" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 23, 2003)

"Iraqis were not able to Find Peace and Security even in the Religious Holiday" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 26, 2003)

"Provocateur Sharon" (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 27, 2003)

"Two-faced U.S.: Bush Administration is Trying to Get New Nuclear Weapons" (Anadolu'da Vakit, December 3, 2003)

At the time of this research, there was not reaction or criticism in *Anadolu'da Vakit* against the foreign policy of AKP government, which is more or less in adherence with U.S. policies. Rather than criticizing, *Anadolu'da Vakit* is seen to back AKP government in the aftermath of bombings as understood from affirmative news about the declarations of Erdoğan. In fact, the newspaper's coverage of bombings is pretty much parallel with the government's attitude in many senses. For instance, bombings are presented since the first day, within Erdoğan's discourse that "The Target of the Bombs was Stability" which underlines the success of AKP government. Consequently, the attitude of Erdoğan after the bombings is found proper which is clearly seen from the titles accompanying Erdoğan's declarations. The hesitance of Erdoğan, in the first days after the synagogue bombings in the sense that he rejects declaring al-Qaida as the perpetrator of the events before any investigation results were in, was presented with the title: "Erdoğan is Careful" (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 18, 2003). When he declares that "if there is a message that this terror activity wants to give, we will turn a deaf ear to it" *Anadolu'da Vakit* positively presents his attitude as "Erdoğan Challenges" (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 19, 2003). Reporting Erdoğan's declaration on the remark that 'Islamic terrorism' bothers him, *Anadoluda Vakit's* headline is 'Magnificent Answer', with the subtitle 'Answer from Erdoğan to Vindictive People'. The newspaper generally regards Erdoğan's declaration as an answer to those who are trying to dampen the people's enthusiasm for religion by using the words 'Islam' and 'terror' together (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 26, 2003). Erdoğan government has the support of *Anadolu'da Vakit* not only with regard to its attitude against terror but in general. One indicator of this support is that coming to power of AKP is labeled as 'the triumph of national will on November 3<sup>rd</sup>' by *Anadolu'da Vakit* columnists. The one year of AKP rule, is presented as a period of peace, stability, security, economic development, unity and cooperation in its articles. Within the period of this research, a series of

articles on the evaluation of AKP government's first year in office was published and in those the government is seen as successful in nearly all issues.

The word 'terror' is amply used in *Anadolu'da Vakit* for describing the bombings in Istanbul but there is a strong aversion to any attempt of 'Islamic' or 'Islamist' to it<sup>41</sup>. Hüseyin Öztürk argued that "using the term terror together with Islam is mercilessness, unfairness, and immorality" (*Anadolu'da Vakit*, November 19, 2003). It can be argued that one commonly accepted reason for this vehement rejection of 'Islamist terrorism' is the belief in the fact that those Istanbul bombings are indeed perpetrated by intelligence agencies because Muslims could never act like this<sup>42</sup>. In this sense, for them there is no distinction between various interpretations of Islam or between Islam as a religion and Muslim people or between sects of Muslim people.

In fact, *Anadolu'da Vakit* goes so far as to claim that Turkish Hizbullah, an organization that is associated with horrific terror acts in the collective memory in Turkey, was a violence agent of the Turkish state whose actions had been used to accuse on religious people.

On the other hand, while rejecting the use of the two words Islam and terror together; the general tendency in *Anadolu'da Vakit* is to use the concept of terror rather freely in various contexts. In this way, the paper is actually breaking the concept 'terror' from its context to the extent that the meaning of the word is expanded to cover almost everything. The paper's headlines are particularly striking. Some excerpts from these articles are given below.

"The Biggest Terror" (Headline, *Anadolu'da Vakit* November 27, 2003)

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<sup>41</sup> According to a headline, the remark 'Islamist terror' is created in Pentagon in order to slander Muslims; therefore, it does not have any ties with reality.



(On the one hand there is the Islam which is mentioned along with the term ‘terrorism’ although this is a religion that assumes one who sleeps with a full stomach while his neighbor is hungry does not belong to it. On the other hand, there is the West claimed as civilized but spending 839 billion dollars on arms while 800 million human beings are starving in the world today... It is the real terrorism!)

“As You See Terror is This” (Headline, *Anadolu’da Vakit* December 2, 2003)

(The painted press that is terrorizing society by manipulative news as in the case of the reporting of the recent terrorist events, get slapped on the face again... The answer came from the independent judiciary to the media who blamed Erdoğan and his staff of the Istanbul municipality unjustly, for the AKBIL<sup>43</sup> case... All the suspects of the AKBIL case are acquitted.)

“Mother of Terrorism is Western Civilization” (Headline, *Anadolu’da Vakit*, December 12, 2003)

(Coming together of Islam and terror is done with an aim in mind. Terrorism is the child of Western civilization who excludes religions...)

As seen in these examples, the term ‘terror’ is used so broadly to refer to all ‘evil actions, and badness.’ Apart from those, ‘headscarf terrorism’ and ‘state terrorism’ are concepts used in *Anadolu’da Vakit* especially to indicate oppression in the name of ‘laicism’. Moreover, a columnist in the paper, Abdurrahim Karakoç uses ‘artificial terror’ concept to emphasize the fact that U.S and Israel artificially create terrorism because for him, Bush and Sharon’s

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<sup>43</sup> AKBIL case consisted of corruption and nepotism accusations involving dealings of the Istanbul metropolitan municipality during the time Erdoğan was the mayor. It had no direct connection with terrorism.

power depended on ‘artificial terror’ and they had a stake in its continuity (Anadolu’da Vakit, November 17, 2003).

To sum, *Anadolu’da Vakit* interprets the bombings as terrorist activities of intelligence agencies of U.S. and Israel in a way that is very much remindful of conspiracy theories. It rejects the possibility of any Islamist groups’ involvement in such activities. The bombings are argued to be done in order to force Turkey to become closer to the U.S. and Israel. Other characteristics of *Anadolu’da Vakit*’s coverage of the Istanbul bombings are examples of a defensive position in terms of protecting both Islam and Muslim’s from accusations; aggressive rejection of the use of Islam and terror together; general support for AKP government and the tendency to use ‘terror’ in such a broad manner as to include all evil action.

Finally, I want to mention about caricatures of *Anadolu’da Vakit* (see pictures 7-13) which depict bombs that are made in 1948, the establishment date of the state of Israel, the actions of U.S. and Israel while throwing the blame on al-Qaida, and a Turkish map falling down on the lap of an Israeli man by the bombings.

### **6.3 Zaman**

This newspaper is affiliated with the Gülen Movement in Turkey. This movement operates a media network, including a television channel (*Samanyolu*) with a global satellite outreach; a news magazine (*Aksiyon*); an international magazine in English (*The Foundation*); and about ten other periodicals, which cover the areas ranging from ecology, literature, and theology to popular science in addition to the daily *Zaman* which is published in twelve different countries (Kuru, 2005, p. 261).

‘Dialogue atmosphere’, ‘dialogue between cultures and religions’ and ‘tolerance’ are the key concepts that reflect *Zaman*’s point of view against the idea of ‘the clash of civilizations.’ In fact, Fethullah Gülen, the leader of Gülen community, is well known for his emphases on the importance of dialogue between religions, and cooperation between them against atheism. He supports the idea of compatibility of Islam with democracy and frequently refers to democracy and the West in a positive manner. Moreover, he has a clear attitude against ‘terrorism’ and specifically against the activities of al-Qaida. He strongly condemned the September 11 terrorist attacks against the U.S. In his statement to the Washington Post, on September 21, 2001, Gülen emphasized that, “Islam abhors such acts of terror. A religion that professes, ‘who unjustly kills one man kills the whole humanity’ cannot condone senseless killing of thousands (Kuru, 2005, p. 265).

Therefore, favoring the cooperation between U.S. in the name of “solidarity between devout nations,” Gülen’s strategy for Jihad is different from those of al-Qaida, which perceives U.S. as an enemy<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, Istanbul bombings are plainly and definitely condemned and damned in *Zaman* as terrorist activities and condolences are expressed to the victims.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, just after the synagogue bombings the message of Fethullah Gülen in which he clearly condemns terrorism and announces its illegitimacy was published.

It is clear that, *Zaman* has a political stance that cannot be described as against U.S policies and Turkey’s alignment with the U.S. On the contrary, the importance of cooperation and dialogue between “devout people” is frequently emphasized by focusing on the religious side of U.S government in both news

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<sup>44</sup> Al-Qaida and its ideology are sharply criticized in *Zaman*. In Fikret Ertan’s words al-Qaida ideology is distorted and spoiled (*Zaman*, November 18, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> Ahmet Selim’s article can be taken as an instance of these expressions against terrorism in *Zaman*. He criticized the lack of a proper condemnation of suicide attacks by Islamist circles by saying that emphasizing the reasons that create terrorism such as poverty and deprivation are nonsensical (*Zaman*, November 23, 2003).

and interpretations. Although U.S. is described as the occupier force in Iraq, suicide bombings of the resistance fighters are clearly labeled as ‘terrorism’ in *Zaman*, thus charged as illegitimate (Zaman, November 22, 2003). *Zaman* does not have a clear stance against U.S intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. This is observed in the fact that there is very few news about the interventions although they had just started to appear in the period of this research. Moreover, after the declaration of Pentagon’s list of allied countries that will be given the chance of participation in the awarding of contracts in Iraq, Fikret Ertan in *Zaman*, stated his pleasure and happiness about the fact that the U.S. has added Turkey to the list (Zaman, December 13, 2003). He also stated that this could happen mainly because of the Parliamentary decision of October 9, 2003,<sup>46</sup> which he has been supporting strongly. He openly said his support was linked to awareness of the potential for great economic advantages that this action would bring to Turkey.

Democracy or importance of the democratization process in Turkey- was another significant point emphasized by *Zaman*. The stance that Islam is not in contradiction with democracy and the process of democratization in Turkey are affirmed in many articles<sup>47</sup>. *Zaman*, on the base of such attitudes, could be placed in a frame, which is closer to ‘liberal’ ideas among the various interpretations of political Islam because of its mutual emphasis on Islamic values and libertarian democratic principles. Consequently, the phrases ‘Turkish model’ and ‘uniqueness of Turkey’ are terms pointing to the

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<sup>46</sup> In October 9, the Turkish Parliament voted to give the government power to send troops to Iraq in support of the U.S.-led occupation, but restricted their presence to a ‘humanitarian’ presence. However, in November, Washington told Ankara that they did not want Turkish troops in Iraq after all because of strong protest from Iraqi Kurdish groups and the Iraqi Governing Council (www.aljazeera.net, November 27, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> *Inter alia* ‘Afghanistan President Karzai: Islam and democracy are not mutually contradictory’ (Zaman, November 26, 2003); ‘Muslim people are more supportive of democracy than Europeans’ (Zaman, December 15, 2003).

distinction of the Turkish democratic model from other Muslim countries stressed in the articles of *Zaman*<sup>48</sup>.

Immediately after the synagogue bombings, in an editorial signed by the newspaper, it was emphasized that with its attempts to form a synthesis between the West and the East, Turkey is a country whose prestige is on the rise against the thesis of clashing civilizations and provocation attempts such as the bombings cannot obstruct this (*Zaman*, November 16, 2003). Likewise, Abdülhamit Bilici, a columnist in *Zaman*, described Turkey as the only 'European Muslim' country and emphasized Turkey's great mission in creating a dialogue between cultures. These points are also clearly stressed in the titles of the news after the bombings:

"Dialogue Atmosphere Develops Among the Targets of Bombings" (*Zaman*, November 16, 2003)

"Leader of Hatay's Jewish Community: No One Can Destroy Peace Atmosphere" (*Zaman*, November 16, 2003)

"Rabbi is Near the Muslims in Funeral" (*Zaman*, November 18, 2003)

"Leader of the European Jewish Congress Cobi Benatoff: Istanbul Was Hit Because It is the City of Tolerance" (*Zaman*, November 22, 2003)

"Citizens are United Just to Defy Terror" (*Zaman*, November 22, 2003)

"Messages of Unity are Given in Funerals" (*Zaman*, November 22, 2003)

"Prayers in Synagogue for the Victims of Terror" (*Zaman*, November 22, 2003)

"Message from the Vatican for the Muslim Religious Holiday: In Worship We Are Together With You" (*Zaman*, November 25, 2003)

As seen, after the bombings such kinds of unity and cooperation messages were frequently cited in both news and articles of *Zaman*<sup>49</sup>. Specifically, after the

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<sup>48</sup> The articles of Nevval Sevindi (2.12.2003 *Zaman*) and Hüseyin Gülerce (5.12.2003 *Zaman*) can be taken as examples of this affirmation.

synagogue bombings unity and cooperation between Jews and Muslims is a much emphasized topic. Likewise, after the second bombings the headline of the editorial column was “Today is the Time for Unity.” In this article, it was argued that just to defy terrorism, it is the time for unity: “There are 70 million supporters of our prime minister who has declared, ‘If there is a message that this terror activity wants to give, we will turn a deaf ear to it’ and they are all shouting the same thing. The fear that will fill the hearts of the deadly puppets of terror is the integrity of the nation” (Zaman, November 21, 2003).

As seen, the unity message is associated with the support of government as well as the worry about the possibility of a triggered struggle between ‘laicist and anti-laicist’ after the bombings<sup>50</sup> (Zaman, November 16, 2003). In Ekrem Dumanlı’s words it is compulsory to back Prime Minister Erdoğan nationally in those days rather than struggling with each other (Zaman, November 21, 2003). Moreover, the use of the government’s discourse, i.e. strong parallelism between the news and interpretations of the paper and argument and declarations of the government after the bombs are indicators of *Zaman*’s support for the government. It can be argued that among a number of national newspapers associated with this discourse *Zaman* is the foremost supporter of the government.

In terms of identifying the perpetrators, *Zaman* did not divert from the general tendency of the Turkish press in presenting al-Qaida as responsible for Istanbul bombings. There were, however, a few *Anadolu’da Vakit*-like interpretations in its pages referring to conspiracies and citing that the suicide bombers are only tools and not the actual perpetrators (Zaman, November 16, 2003). For

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<sup>49</sup> Mustafa Ünal (Zaman, November 19, 2003), Ekrem Dumanlı (Zaman, November 20, 2003), Hasan Ünal (Zaman, November 24, 2003) are the columnists stressing the importance of unity and cooperation after the Istanbul bombings in their articles.

<sup>50</sup> Bülent Korucu’s article.

instance, A. Turan Alkan described the denouncing of al-Qaida an hour after the bombings as thoughtlessness by stating that what needed was to recognize that there is a state behind these assaults, not an organization (*Zaman*, November 17, 2003). Moreover, just after the HSBC Bank and British Consulate bombings in Ekrem Dumanlı's article and in an article signed by *Zaman*, perpetrators of the events were described as just tools and pawns. (*Zaman*, November 21, 2003). Nevertheless, it can be argued that in general *Zaman* columnists did not support those types of interpretations and even criticized them harshly in many places. For instance, Nihal B. Karaca's critical article with the title "Esteem of Conspiracy Theories" was an example (*Zaman*, November 25, 2003). Additionally, Eyüp Can stated those conspiracy theories, i.e. thinking that "those attacks will be beneficial for U.S and Israel, so they must have done it" is a product of conformist mentality which causes mental inactiveness: "...approaching the possibility of solving each terrorist activity with the question 'who will benefit from this' with a deductive and oversimplified Aristotelian logic is nothing but limiting our minds" (*Zaman*, November 19, 2003). Likewise, Ahmet Selim charges the tendency of talking, always, about the tricks of U.S. and Israel as it is taking the easy way out (*Zaman*, November 24, 2003). In fact the titles of news in *Zaman* show that the paper's basic frame of mind is not built on conspiracy logic. For instance one can see the title 'Al-Qaida Claimed Responsibility for the Bombings' in *Zaman*, rather than 'It is Claimed that al-Qaida's Assumed Responsibility' as used in other Islamist press institutions.

On the other hand, on the question of how to describe terror, *Zaman* also reacts the use of the 'Islamic' and 'Islamist' terror<sup>51</sup> concepts. According to Ali

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<sup>51</sup> It should be reminded that the pointed distinction between the terms Islamist and Islamic in Chapter 1, is not suitable for understanding *Zaman's* conceptualization. As already mentioned, there is not a considerable distinction between two terms from the Islamist point of view and the two become more difficult to separate in the context of a clearly Islamist-based perspective also containing substantial liberal elements as does the *Zaman*.

Bulaç, it could be called ‘al-Qaida terrorism’, but not ‘Islamic terrorism’ (Zaman, December 2, 2003). Their objection to the use of ‘Islamic’ or ‘Islamist’ terror is however somewhat partially different from that of *Anadolu’da Vakit*. Like the latter, *Zaman* also objects to implied unjust accusation of Muslim masses by this usage. It also stresses that Islam is a religion of peace, happiness and security and associating it with terrorism is wrong. Additionally, many *Zaman* columnists argue that using the phrase ‘Islamic’ or ‘Islamist’ terrorism to refer to the bombings will be giving privileges to terrorists because inadvertently it will help them by increasing their popularity in the eyes of Muslim people. In other words, it would be beneficial for terrorist organizations like al-Qaida if we give them esteem by adding the label ‘Islamic’ or ‘Islamist’ to their activities.

Bülent Korucu’s article with the title “Do We Define al-Qaida as Islamic?” summarizes *Zaman*’s general frame of mind in this broad debate after the Istanbul bombings:

(...) with a very appropriate stance, we call PKK terrorism as ‘separatist’ rather than ‘Kurdish’. If we (Turks and Kurds) can still live in the same city in peace, I believe this sensitiveness has a big role. Again, when funerals of a known terrorist organization’s militants are held in the worship places of Alevi’s, with a correct preference, we do not label them as ‘Alevi terror’. ...we did not aid Alevi-Sunni struggle, which is ready to be provoked. If we say ‘yes, you are’ to the terrorist who thinks ‘I am Islamist’, we will have swallowed the bait. Isn’t it already what he wants? I can not understand the rationality behind the marking of terror- which is nothing but a psychological campaign towards the subconscious of the society- with the remarks that it already desires (Zaman, November 24, 2003).

The author of this commentary emphasizes two undesirable outcomes of using the label ‘Islamist’ or ‘Islamic’ in referring to terrorists: damaging unity and solidarity in society and helping the terrorists inadvertently. He also mentions that using the phrase ‘Islamist’ or ‘Islamic’ terror will add on to the causes of tension between label such as ‘laicists’ and ‘anti-laicists’. Moreover, he claims if we label terrorists as ‘Islamist’, we will permit them it to appear attractive to



the ignorant masses. He reminds that the negative advertisement of Western media makes many people admirers of Bin Laden in Muslim countries, as Bin Laden becomes an Islamic hero in the eyes of those people. Ekrem Dumanlı also wrote with a similar perception by referring to ASALA and PKK examples (Zaman, November 27, 2003). He charged the concept of 'Islamist terror' as it means treating unjustly to Muslims and giving privilege to terrorists and he found another name for Istanbul bombings: "perverted religious terror" (Zaman, November 28, 2003). With the same rationality, Ali Bulaç argues that if the religion of Islam is presented as responsible for each terrorist activity, many Muslims can be convinced that their religion condones terrorism; they may even start to feel sympathy to terrorism (Zaman, November 29, 2003). Also for *Zaman* columnists, there is a clear uneasiness with the mentality of 'clashing of civilizations' which they believe supports the development of 'a new kind of racism' against Muslims.

*Zaman* has a critical approach to Middle East politics by frequently emphasizing the fact that the Islamic world is problematic within itself. In its pages, even the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is interpreted somewhat differently from the general Islamist tendency. While chronic problems of Palestinians are seen as the results of Israel's occupation, Palestinian violence, i.e. suicide bombings, are also criticized. For instance, Ahmet Selim states that if Palestinians had chosen to stay silent rather than adopting violent activities, their situation would not be worse than today's (Zaman, November 30, 2003).

Similar to Minister of Justice Cemil Çiçek's declaration following the Istanbul bombings, in which he has said "... the Muslim world should take a stand against terrorism without any excuses. If the Muslim world can criticize itself harshly, this chaotic situation could be ended," *Zaman* columnist Hüseyin Gülerce demanded that "the Muslim world should come face to face with itself" (Zaman, November 28, 2003). Likewise, another columnist Şahin Alpay stated his uneasiness with people trying to produce a totalitarian ideology from

Islam (Zaman, November 28, 2003). He argued about the importance of the struggle with this type of thought. Hasan Ünal also repeated Çiçek's arguments<sup>52</sup> and added that as al-Qaida is doing these in the name of Islam and Muslims should accept this truth and face the reality now (Zaman, November 28, 2003). Similarly, Ali Bulaç cited that some terrorist groups are using Islamic identity or Islam label (Zaman, December 3, 2003). However, he argued that Islam label is not enough to legitimate the attacks. In this sense, he expressed his ideas as: "a group carrying out such attacks by using the 'Islam' label is not enough to make it legitimate, on the contrary, it means the exploitation of that religion." (Zaman, December 1, 2003). Kerem Balcı complained about the absence of a decisive Islamic stand against suicide bombings among the Muslim ulema (religious leaders). He reminded the responsibility of the ulema, in the Istanbul bombings, who tend to be silent in the issue of suicide bombings. (Zaman, December 1, 2003). In fact, some ulema in Turkey withdrew their fatwa's supporting suicide terrorism, after the Istanbul bombings. However, they are also responsible according to Balcı because they choose to be silent in the previous attacks of al-Qaida. In this sense, the distinction between various interpretations of Islam is frequently emphasized by drawing a line between Muslims and Islam and between Muslims. For instance, by referring to Humeyni and his fatwa's Nevval Sevindi criticized the mentality of seeing fanaticism as Islam, becoming an enemy of everyone who does not think or live like one's self, and acceptance of killing those that are different as religiously permissible (Zaman, December 2, 2003). Also Şahin Alpay went so far as to ask how these big differences between interpretations of Islam could be reconciled: "What is the commonality between the Islamic understanding represented by Fethullah Gülen in Turkey and the Wahabism, the official ideology of Saudi Arabia? (Zaman, December

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<sup>52</sup> Çiçek also emphasized the historical mission of Turkey in terms of being a bridge between the West and the East. The similarity between the points of emphases between Çiçek and *Zaman* is significant.

1, 2003) He stated that there is nothing in common between the political understanding that is represented by AKP and those in the dictatorship of mullahs in Iran or terrorist organizations creating carnage in Algeria and Egypt or al-Qaida or its Turkish sub-contractor Hezbollah<sup>53</sup>.

To sum, in the period after the Istanbul bombings *Zaman's* agenda was dominated by emphasis on unity, solidarity, dialogue, the importance of a definite stance against al-Qaida terrorism, the distinctions between Islamists, Islamisms, and the necessity of supporting AKP government which is taken to represent a 'mild' form of Islam.

#### **6.4 Radikal**

This newspaper was founded by Mehmet Yakup Yılmaz in 1996. It is one of the papers owned by the Doğan group, who has the biggest share of press in Turkey. Its target readership is mostly middle and upper middle class, university graduates and students.

At first sight, *Radikal* with its columns and columnists that occasionally contradict each other and its weekly papers such as *Radikal İki* whose writers are mostly constituted by outsiders, academics and other professional columnists, is difficult to identify as having a clear political stance. Despite writers contradicting each other on many issues, it however has a political stance as the mouthpiece of "leftist-liberals." Their political demands and priorities can be stated as 'more democracy', respect for human rights, admission of Turkey into EU. The paper is in general loyal to the formal secular discourse, but opposes interventions of the military in politics.

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<sup>53</sup>As seen, Hezbollah is more or less mentioned in *Zaman* without hesitating as the potential sub-contractor of al-Qaida in Istanbul bombings within interpretations and Baykal's declarations blaming Turkish Hezbollah responsible for Istanbul bombings generally cited in *Zaman* without interpretation as seen in the one of the title: "Baykal is Insisting on Hezbollah" (*Zaman*, December 3, 2003).

'Democracy' can be regarded as the key word for *Radikal's* point of view, which also prepares the way for its more radical demands, especially those related to the cultural issues concerning minority rights. In contrast to this radical tendency in cultural issues, with respect to the economy, *Radikal* generally expresses views that are parallel to the ongoing practices of the centre and are based on economically liberal views materialized by adopted structural reform programs.

After the bombings, *Radikal* had an attitude parallel to the popular tendencies of the Turkish media. It claimed Al-Qaida's responsibility for the bombings from the onset, published abundance of news about reactions from the U.S. and Europe and devoted much commentary to the impact of these events on Turkey's future membership in the EU, and concurred with the target being the Turkish model<sup>54</sup>.

Yet, apart from all these points, what makes *Radikal* special as a subject of this work is the intense argumentation one finds in its issues, on 'minority rights' and 'democracy.'

The issue of 'minority rights and discrimination' were first introduced in the column of Yıldırım Türker (*Radikal*, November 17, 2003) by his critical article on 'anti-Semitism' which is said to have increased around the world<sup>55</sup>. This subject continued to be discussed in an article of Haydar Ergülen (*Radikal*, November 19, 2003). He too, giving references to Türker, claimed that terror

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<sup>54</sup> For instance, Murat Yetkin and İsmet Berkan stated that the target of the bloody Istanbul bombings is the Western type democracy in Turkey (*Radikal*, November 21, 2003). Likewise, Gündüz Aktan (*Radikal*, November 24, 2003) maintained that the target was secular Turkey (*Radikal*, November 24, 2003).

<sup>55</sup> Interestingly all attention about discrimination in *Radikal* was centered on anti-Semitism while in the same days Islamists sections in Turkey were frequently stressing their vulnerability because of an emerging type of racism called as 'anti-Islamism' [for details see *Yeni Şafak* (November 20, 2003), *Zaman* (November 29, 2003) and *Vakit* (November 21, 2003)]

might aim to make people hostile to each other. Likewise, Rifat Bali (Radikal İki, November 23, 2003) wrote critically on anti-Semitism embedded in political Islam and attributed responsibility to everyone (for instance, to the government that avoided to mention the anti-Semitic aspect of the bombings and to the Islamist media for continuing its discourse expressing grudge and hate against Jews) for giving support to the anti-Semitist point of view, in one way another. Consequently, Mehmet Ali Kaçtı (Radikal İki, November 30, 2003) stated that it was a necessity for every section of society, in Turkey, to get rid of prejudices through a self-criticism process, and Adnan Gümüş (Radikal İki, November 30, 2003) based on a research on high school and university students' tendencies on 'Religion, Nationalism and Authoritarianism' in Turkey, critically stressed that 70% of the youth had anti-Semitic attitudes, which coincided with their conservative and religious tendencies.

Secondly, a wider debate on the issues 'democracy, freedoms and human rights' also picked up in *Radikal's* pages<sup>56</sup>. Fear of the possibility of anti-democratic practices, in the name of struggling with terrorism gave birth to this concern. Although such anxiety found its place in a number of other popular newspapers in the Turkish press, *Radikal* was clearly in the lead. The concern about possible anti-democratic measures, in the aftermath of the bombings, constituted a significant diversion of *Radikal's* coverage. Authors such Bülent Aras (Radikal İki, November 23, 2003) doubted about 'steps back from democratization and human rights' in the aftermath of the bombings; Yıldırım Türker (Radikal İki, November 23, 2003) was concerned about 'the bombs being a threat to freedom and democratization package' and asked those who survived the bombings to defend democracy; Mustafa Kemal Coşkun (Radikal

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<sup>56</sup> Naturally, one of the sub-subject of this article is 'Police and Democracy' issue in which Adnan Ekinci (Radikal, November 25, 2003), Yıldırım Türker (Radikal, December 1, 2003), and Murat Belge (Radikal, December 2, 2003) directed their criticisms against anti-democratic behavior of Turkish police forces.

İki, November 30, 2003) said such events were opportunities for dominant classes to establish a terror regime or a police state and called on NGOs to be on the look out for such damage; Murat Belge (Radikal, November 23, 28, 2003) expressed anxieties about those who were screaming for 'fascism' after these type of events especially in a society in which anti-democratic tendencies have deep roots. Murat Yetkin (Radikal, November 21, 2003) wrote about the importance of saving democracy; Erdal Güven (Radikal, November 23 and 26, 2003) argued on the fact that the most powerful answer to terrorism is democracy and stressed the need to fight against terrorism without diminishing democracy; Hasan Bülent Kahraman (Radikal, November 28, December 5, 2003) was obviously very nervous about the possibility of isolation and withdrawal as classic state reflections to terrorism which will create the most dangerous thing: an authoritarian state.

In the pages of *Radikal* too, the phrase of 'Islamist' or 'Islamic' terror was quietly criticized in many articles (especially in *Radikal İki*) but not totally opposed. Many attempted to separate between Islam as a religion, Muslim people and fanaticism. In other words, *Radikal* reflected a frame that was respectful of the devout people by trying to attract the attention of its readers to differences between religion and believers and differences between those believers. With such concerns, Nuray Mert (Radikal, November 20, 2003) stressed the importance of publishing the reactions of Islamist circles to bombings. Similarly, Leyla İpekçi (Radikal İki, November 30, 2003) drew attention to the difference between religion and fundamentalists and criticized presenting the Quran as the key word in terrorist activities at a time when the Middle East is being reshaped as a feeding mechanism for discrimination. She was also critical about the discourse used which is dominated by Western media and states and blames as supporting Bush's policies (Radikal İki, November 30, 2003). Yıldırım Türker perceived the label of 'Islamist terror' as a supporting of politics of the U.S. for separating the world in order to rule it through its military strategy of 'war against terrorism'. In this sense, Türker's

suggestion (Radikal İki, December 14, 2003) was that no matter how they are related to Islam, everyone must be able to see the truth lying beyond the terminology that the powerful imposes.

Nonetheless, there were many writers in *Radikal* who also insist on the necessity of using the 'Islamist' label for defining the Istanbul bombings. For example, Haluk Şahin, Murat Yetkin, and İsmet Berkan insisted on the necessity of the label 'Islamist'. Interestingly, Berkan (Radikal, November 22, 2003) declared that government should label terrorists although he was also stating his uneasiness with the concepts of Islamic terror or Islamist terror since these immediately blamed all Muslims for terrorism. In this sense, the rationality of Berkan (Radikal, November 26, 2003) was "To find a name for terror is essential, in order to effectively struggle against terrorism. Otherwise, the struggle would remain inadequate." He thought the way to secure a democratic regime necessitated identifying those who opposed its fundamental values and Erdoğan's refusal to identify the nature of terrorist attack was, in this sense, wrong. Likewise, Murat Yetkin interpreted Erdoğan's behavior as a weakness in the struggle against terrorism. According to Gündüz Aktan, too (Radikal, November 26, 2003) it is essential that a qualification be there the word terrorism not only to effectively condemn this menace by domestic measures and international cooperation but also to let the society know who the enemy was. However, instead of 'Islamist' or 'Islamic terrorism', he offered the use of 'terrorism in the name of Islam' as a suitable description. Authors such as Mine Kırıkkanat and Ayşe Karabat also insisted on the label of 'Islamic terrorism' (Radikal, November 21-22, 2003).

The criticisms of the columnists in *Radikal* were not identical to and as strong as those by *Cumhuriyet* authors who connected the events to the Islamic roots of AKP, and implied that AKP protected the terrorists<sup>57</sup>. In fact, *Radikal*

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<sup>57</sup> The exceptions were the columnists, Türker Alkan and Mine Kırıkkanat who were both closer to *Cumhuriyet's* frame of mind on the issue of political Islam.

maintained that the rupture of AKP from the 'National Outlook' movement was significant. I. Berkan (*Radikal*, November 18, 2003), for instance, argued that when Erdoğan designated Taliban and al-Qaida as terrorists this attitude became obvious and added that: "I do not suppose that AKP government can have tolerance for those participating in terrorist activities even if this is under the guise of Islam."

Thus, *Radikal's* criticisms were directed towards AKP's stand *vis-à-vis* the Istanbul bombings were around Erdoğan's rejection of using the concept 'Islamic' or 'Islamist' terror rather than the government protecting the terrorists. In fact, some columnists, e.g. Nuray Mert, stated that nothing would be more unfair than to say that the AKP was protecting Islamic terrorism.

In *Radikal*, the declarations of Erdoğan and other members of his cabinet were presented without comment. Criticisms were mostly limited to the individual columns indicating that the editorial policy of the newspaper was supportive of the government's handling of and position *vis-à-vis* the events. Moreover, even I. Berkan's criticism of Erdoğan stopped after the Prime Minister referred to 'religious terror' in an AKP Parliamentary group meeting. He stated his satisfaction with Erdoğan finally deciding on a label and stated agreement with it (*Radikal*, December 3, 2003). Türker Alkan, too found Erdoğan's definition (religious terror) suitable and stated that the Prime Minister had defined the events in the best way. (*Radikal*, December 4, 2003)

In the light of these facts, it can be stated that the dilemma presented by *Radikal* after the bombings was about the relation between democratization process- the main dynamic of which was contingent upon full membership in the EU- and the suspension of human rights and democratization efforts in the name of an effective struggle against terrorism, rather than between political



Islam and secularism<sup>58</sup> (Radikal, November 27, 2003). Thus, *Radikal*'s coverage of bombings was very similar to the tendencies of the mainstream popular Turkish press, i.e. it also saw the target of al-Qaida's attack as the 'Turkish model' and as a part of the global war against the 'free world' (Radikal, November 21, 2003). *Radikal*, too, basically support the AKP government, with few minor criticisms; supported Turkey's partnership with the U.S. in such a context (although U.S. politics were harshly criticized in especially *Radikal İki*); it presented the perpetrators of the bombings as al-Qaida members (not CIA or MOSSAD); and emphasized the threat to democracy as the most salient danger of the terrorist events.

## 6.5 Comparative Overview

In regard to the Istanbul bombings, Turkish press was involved in several debates. These revolved around some long term points of tension in Turkish political life that were related to the global debates on the relation between Islam and democracy and terrorism. Since issues related to Islam have constituted an essential breaking point between political camps in Turkey for ages, the context of the Istanbul bombings also provided a suitable ground for new discussions around this topic and different sections of the Turkish press expressed their various positions on the issue with vigor. Specifically, the debate on the use of the phrase 'Islamist', 'Islamic' or 'religious' terrorism in referring to the bombings, was crucial in illustrating the positions of different political camps.

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<sup>58</sup> Clearly, there were columnists in *Radikal* who also claimed that the steps taken by the AKP government contradicted with the fundamental principles of the Republic and created threats for secularism. (e.g. Mine Kırıkkanat, M.Ali Kışlalı, Türker Alkan) However, in regard to the general frame of analysis and approach, much more emphasis was put on the 'threats to democracy.'

Turkish dailies were not only different from each other in terms of their divergent interpretations of the events, but also in terms of opening substantially different debates after the events. Dailies that are affiliated with diverse political camps interpreted the Istanbul bombings differently.

The republican/secularist *Cumhuriyet* presented the Istanbul bombings as a national problem, in contrast to the liberal Islamist *Zaman*, the left-liberal *Radikal*, and the radical Islamist *Anadolu'da Vakit*. The bombings were perceived as related to Turkey's internal problem of 'political Islam' in *Cumhuriyet*— that is perceived as always carrying the threat of radicalism within itself and/or having ties with radical waves of Islamism. This was presented, by *Cumhuriyet*, as more significant and urgent for Turkey than the al-Qaida threat. In connection with this, many columnists in *Cumhuriyet* drew attention to national realities such as problems like Islamist ghettos in Istanbul and religious orders in Turkey.

The dailies, *Zaman* and *Radikal*, presented the bombing events primarily as assaults carried out by global terrorist actors and as such new phenomenon for Turkey. For *Cumhuriyet*, the bombings were not a new phenomenon, but constituted a part of the chain of Islamist violence which had been a reality of Turkey for a long time. Since Turkey's internal problem of religious fundamentalism was seen as more important than the al-Qaida threat, local collaborators of al-Qaida in organizing the bombings and the earlier instances of 'Islamist' violence in Turkey were considerably more emphasized by *Cumhuriyet* than in other press. Turkey's earlier experience with Islamist violence was hardly mentioned in *Zaman*, and *Anadolu'da Vakit* and it was rarely alluded to in *Radikal*. *Cumhuriyet* stood alone in making many references to earlier Islamic based violent events in Turkey such as assassinations, massacres, and the previous attacks to the Neve Shalom synagogue.

*Cumhuriyet*'s agenda, after the bombings was dominated by the criticism of AKP government in general, and Prime Minister Erdoğan in particular, due to a number of reasons, all of which were related to 'Islamism'. AKP government was blamed for its members' more radical past especially in the sense that they had possible links with the similar ideology of the perpetrators of the Istanbul bombings; it was accused of being 'Islamist', criticized for its 'Islamist' reflections after the events which were perceived as signs of weakness in its struggle against 'Islamic' or 'Islamist' terrorism.

The other dailies seem to support the AKP government and Erdoğan much more in substance and appearance. *Radikal* presented the dilemma as between democratization and suspension of human rights in the name of struggle against terrorism rather than between political Islam and secularism as *Cumhuriyet* had done. Thus, even the criticisms of the government, by *Radikal* columnists, were not similar to and as strong as criticisms in *Cumhuriyet*.

*Anadolu'da Vakit* directed all its criticisms to the U.S. and Israel with a strong anti-Western and anti-Semitic outlook and did not react or criticize AKP government at all. *Zaman* was the first among a number of national newspapers in terms of actively supporting the government in the context of the bombings. It emphasized unity of society and cooperation among all institutions a lot and argued for the need back Prime Minister Erdoğan as a nation.

On the issues of Islam, Islamism and Muslims, the dailies reviewed here had significantly different attitudes. On the one hand, *Anadolu'da Vakit* interpreted the bombing events with a defensive position and presented them as terrorist activities conducted by intelligence agencies of the U.S. and Israel while rejecting the possibility of any Islamist groups' involvement in such activities. *Anadolu'da Vakit* backed both Islam and all Muslims including al-Qaida and Taliban. *Zaman*, on the other hand, reflected a clear uneasiness with people trying to create a totalitarian ideology out of and argued for the importance of

carrying out an ideological struggle with them. Therefore, the distinctions between various interpretations of Islam religion were frequently emphasized in *Zaman*, drawing a line between Muslims and Islam and among Muslims. *Radikal*'s columnists also tried to separate Islam, Muslims and fanaticism. Therefore, in the context of bombings a distinction between various interpretations of Islam was emphasized in this paper. In contrast to *Cumhuriyet* and *Anadolu'da Vakit*'s monolithic understanding of Islamism, both *Zaman* and *Radikal* stressed a varied, complex picture of Islam and Muslims.

The dailies' positions on in the debate on 'Islamist terrorism', 'Islamic terrorism', and 'religious terrorism' were also striking. On the one hand, against Erdoğan's position in the debate, *Cumhuriyet* columnists used such terms as Islamic, Islamist, religious, reactionary (irticai), pro-Shari'a (şariatçı), and fundamentalist terrorism interchangeably to define the bombings in Istanbul. Moreover, in *Cumhuriyet*, Erdoğan's rejection of the remark 'Islamic terrorism' - was strongly criticized and directly attributed to his own 'Islamist' origins. Erdoğan was blamed for his more radical past with the belief that he had not really changed or changed enough to separate himself from those 'radical Islamists'. On the other hand, Islamist dailies *Zaman* and *Anadolu'da Vakit* rejected the labels of 'Islamist' or 'Islamic' terrorism to define the Istanbul bombings but their reluctance to use such characterizations were for different reasons. *Anadolu'da Vakit* showed an aggressive rejection of any Muslims' involvement in such events while *Zaman* said, using the label 'Islamist' to define terrorists would not only damage social unity and solidarity in society but would also, inadvertently, help the terrorists cause. Finally, *Radikal*'s position was in between. The phrase 'Islamist terror' was not rejected totally and it was quietly criticized in many articles especially in *Radikal İki*, while it was also supported by some columnists in the newspaper.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

This study primarily aimed to offer a critical analysis of the Turkish press coverage of November 2003 Istanbul bombings.

By analyzing the attitude of the press, the specific presentation of the Istanbul bombings has been attempted to be linked with political context and debates of Turkey. Moreover, the analysis of the press was used to interpret Turkish politics, by elaborating the specific positioning of the different political camps in Turkey, on this issue.

For this purposes, both the general tendencies of the press coverage of the bombings events and the differences and breaking points between the dailies affiliated with different political camps have been analyzed. Thus for the general analysis the news coverage of six daily papers (*Sabah, Milliyet, Hürriyet, Milli Gazete, Yeni Şafak, Yeni Mesaj*) has been examined in a one-month period following the events (November 15- December 15, 2003). For the comparative content analysis, all the news and commentaries from four ideologically different newspapers (*Cumhuriyet, Anadolu'da Vakit, Zaman, Radikal*) have also been researched in a one-month period following the events. It was hoped that this analysis would be aided by the clarification of some key political concepts, in Chapter 2; by the critical examination of the Islam and democracy debate and a summary of factual historical developments in Turkey in terms of Islamism and democracy, in Chapter 3, and by the detailed explanation of the bombing events and the international and national public responses to these events in Chapter 4 of the present thesis.

The findings of the general analysis in Chapter 5 and in-depth comparative analysis of Chapter 6 together, indicate that, the subject of bombings triggered considerable support and trust for the AKP government in the large part of the Turkish press. There were only two exceptions to this tendency, *Cumhuriyet* and *Milli Gazete*, both of which framed their opposition in predefined ideological terms.

It is seen that on the one hand, *Cumhuriyet* concentrates on a more ideologically based opposition rather than a critique of current policies of government and/or implications of these policies. AKP government is blamed in *Cumhuriyet* for its members' radical pasts and their connections with the similar ideology of the perpetrators of Istanbul bombings are implied. The government is accused of being 'Islamist', criticized for its 'Islamist' reflections after the events which are perceived as signs of weakness in the struggle against 'Islamic' or 'Islamist' terrorism in a rather suspicious and ambiguous manner. On the other hand, the other opposition *Milli Gazete*, mentions many conflicting statements and conspiracies which prevent a direct accusation of government for its policies. In other words, by putting the blame of the events on Western forces, *Milli Gazete* inevitably acquit the government.

Most of the dailies perceived and presented the bombings as an international event rather than a national one although the four suicide bombers and most of the police suspects connected to the bombings were Turkish citizens. Consequently, current national political decisions, e.g. AKP government's attitude toward Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, or the national problems, e.g. Turkey's internal problem of Islamist radicalism, have been hardly debated in the general frame of the Turkish press in the context of bombings. The exception was *Cumhuriyet*, which presented the bombings as a part of chain of Islamist violence in Turkey. In contrast to all other press, Turkey's internal problem of fundamentalism, local collaborators of al-Qaida in organizing the bombings and the early examples of 'Islamist' violence in Turkey were

emphasized in this newspaper. Concomitant to the general tendency of internationalizing the events, most dailies presented the events through the West v.s. Islam dichotomy. The shape of the political debates in the dailies after the events was determined by this approach. Consequently, the agenda was dominated by issues and debates that can be regarded as Turkish variations of the global Islam *versus* democracy and terrorism debates.

The reasons why the Turkish press presented the events as international happenings can be questioned. It can be claimed that they chose this way of presentation because domestic debates are more risky and that they may increase the tension in the society. In other words, as the issue of Istanbul bombings were related to many sensitive points in Turkish socio-political life, the dailies tended to present the events as international happenings for political psychological reasons. Moreover, perennial tendency of the Turkish press to seek prestige, by connecting national events to international causes, may be regarded as another reason for such presentation of the Istanbul bombings. By presenting the events as international happenings within an adopted framework of West vs. Islam dichotomy, the dailies tried to place Turkey not only in the Western camp but also in a more significant place in world politics.

This type of presentation clearly benefited the AKP government, which took the issue from an international perspective itself. After the assaults, Prime Minister Erdoğan emphasized the dangers of global terrorism, the war between good and evil, and the necessity of international cooperation against global terrorism. In this way, he illustrated Turkey as a part of 'free and democratic' world. The term 'democracy', here, has an abstract and loose meaning. Erdoğan emphasized 'democracy' by specifically referring to its international value in the sense of being in the free and good side rather than referring to the free will and participation of the citizens of Turkey. This understanding of 'democracy', as seen, is not directly related to such material bases as good governance and the responsibility and accountability of governments for their actions.

The anti-Americanism that fills the pages of the Islamist dailies reacted directly to the U.S. policies in the Middle East and was the foundation for an abundance of conspiracy theories. Strangely however, this sentiment was not directed to the AKP government which is obviously an adherent of these policies. Thus, the so-called strong anti-American outlook of Islamism is quite questionable in the Turkish context. Moreover, the affirmative attitude of most of the Islamists in Turkey towards the pro-West AKP government can be considered as illustrating attribution of an essential anti-West stance to the Islamism as a mistake. Apart from Islamist press, there were also many other dailies which more or less adopted an anti-American stance in the context of Istanbul bombings, however, this sentiment, again, was not translated into political attitudes in the domestic context, i.e. was not directed to pro-American policies of AKP government.

After the bombings, the agenda was heavily shaped by the sensitive debates related to Islam. Specifically, the debate on the usage of the phrases ‘Islamist,’ ‘Islamic’ or ‘religious’ terrorism were crucial in illustrating the positions of different political camps.

Finally, one other general tendency of the press in presenting the events was overwhelming preoccupation with the uniqueness of Turkey. In almost all papers, Turkey was presented as the target of fanaticism because it illustrated the possibility of a secular democratic system governing a Muslim population. While *Cumhuriyet* and Islamist dailies reflected this attitude less freely than others, even in their pages one could see occasional references to the uniqueness of Turkey. Islamist *Zaman* was indeed very much involved in the ‘Turkish model’ interpretations. Turkish exceptionalism as a widely accepted presumption about the Turkish Republic can be considered as giving power to these arguments. In this thesis, by quoting from critical works, I also tried to show that this exceptionalist perception of the Turkish Republic can be challenged and suggested that a more meaningful question would be ‘were the



'Turkish model' arguments, as explanatory, important in the context of Istanbul bombings, as the dailies assume?' As I think of the similar attacks in Peru Tunisia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia and Morocco around the same times, I find this perspective rather 'self-centered' and 'one-sided'.

In this context, I suggest that conducting comparative studies on the nature and public perceptions of these events would also allow for a more 'realistic' analysis of 'Turkey's own September 11'.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Some Caricatures in the Turkish Press

1- ZAFER TİMOÇİN (Cumhuriyet, November 17, 2003)



(Western outlook) Turkey is attempted to be made a part of the firing line of the Middle East

2- MUSA KART (Cumhuriyet, November 18, 2003)



Man in suit uses a man in cloak and turban for bombing activity.

3- ZAFER TEMOÇİN (Cumhuriyet, November 20, 2003)



Erdoğan is guarding religious organizations.

*Erdoğan: I tremple on the terrorists message.*

*Officer: Sir, you should first raise your foot. The files of officers and governors that have been fighting with Islamist organization are under your foot.*

4- ZAFER TEMOÇİN (Cumhuriyet, November 23, 2003)



Erdoğan pictured as the target of fire from all around.

*Erdoğan: Look, how we increased the prestige of Turkey. Attention of the whole world is on us.*

5- ZAFER TEMOÇİN (Cumhuriyet, November 27, 2003)



Making fun of Erdoğan's rejection of the perpetrators' Islamic identities

*Erdoğan: Unless it has this sign we cannot label any action 'Islamic terrorism'*

*Sign: For the Attention of our Clients, Our Terrorist Actions are Carried Out in Accordance with Islamic Rules.*

6- MUSA KART (Cumhuriyet, November 28, 2003)



Making fun of Erdoğan's religious declarations after bombings

*Erdoğan: We took timely the measures. Thus, it is definite that the terrorists will be punished in the other world.*

7- K.Güler (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 16, 2003)



*“Chief! The production date of the bomb is 1948”.*

8- K. Güler (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 18, 2003)



U.S. and Israel are trying to put the blame on 'kaide', making a word play with the words Qaida/kaide

*Bush: Come on, let's get this placed on the kaide (base)*



9- K.Güler (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 19, 2003)



Turkey falling down to the Jewish man's lap.

10- K.Güler (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 20, 2003)



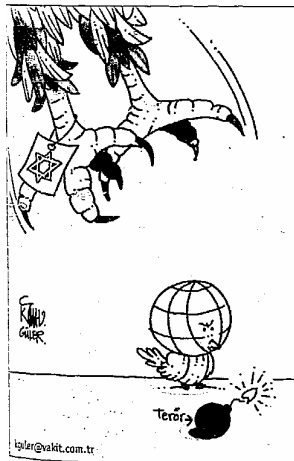
A maze (Israel) through which authorities needs to find their way to explain the terror.

11- K.Güler (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 21, 2003)



A bomb explodes; from behind it emerges Israel.

12- K.Güler (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 23, 2003)



The claws of a Jewish tagged bird threatening the world depicted as a chick with terrorism.

13- K. Güler (Anadolu'da Vakit, November 29, 2003)



A hand obstructs the investigation.

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