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The "Ends" of Islamism: Rethinking the Meaning of Islam and the Political

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ABSTRACT *There have been almost regular attempts to declare the "end of Islamism" or "the end of political Islam." Since the late 1980s, many observers have been quick to pronounce the end of Islamism with every new political development concerning the Muslim world. In countries where authoritarian regimes repressed the Islamists with massive bloody operations, it was claimed that Islamism was ending. However, it was rather the Islamists' defeat by oppressive means as opposed to an end. In a way, proponents of the "end" discourses welcomed the dictators' supremacy over the Islamists. Thus the celebration of the "end of Islamism" represented an acknowledgement of authoritarian, anti-democratic regimes in the Islamic world.*

Olivier Roy frequently employs the typical discourse of the end of Islamism. His famous book, *The Failure of Political Islam*, declared "the end of political Islam" for the first time in the 1990s. He pronounced the "end" again following 9/11, and later against the background of the Arab Spring where he, along with many other political analysts, found no concrete sign of Islamism in Tahrir Square's revolutionary discourse. For them, the revolutionaries' chants mentioned bread, freedom and dignity—values and things some analysts associated with socialism, liberalism and nationalism. None of these values necessarily symbolized an Islamist discourse, and therefore allegedly signified the absence of Islamism in these revolutions. This approach significantly oversimplified the "ends" or the "goal" and content of any Islamic discourse, and exemplified a stereotypical set of expectations from an Islamic political movement. As a matter of fact, Islamism's meaning seems to have been reduced to a cliché that represents either an AK-47-carrying militant or a political movement entangled in an obsolete campaign to forcibly institute *sharia* in their society, usually in a supposed form of an Islamic state.

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One of the peculiar things within this reasoning is the alleged monopoly of some modern ideologies over certain values: one is assumed to be a socialist if you seek bread, a nationalist if you seek dignity, and a liberal if you seek freedom. What is the reason for these values to be exclusive to socialism, liberalism and nationalism? Or what is to stop an Islamist from seeking bread, dignity and freedom without giving up his or her Islamist identity? Why does an Islamist have to adhere to one or more of these ideologies in order to be entitled to defend these values? Bread, dignity and freedom have always been part of the human experience and cannot be reserved to and appropriated by modern ideologies to exclude any Islamist reference to them. This appropriation serves to maintain the tacit claim that revolutions are characteristic of Western culture and therefore cannot take place in the Islamic world. Moreover, the objective is to underplay—if not to completely ignore—Islamism's role in the Arab revolutions. However, this ignorant act also relies on and reproduces a certain definition of Islamism and the "political", errors that account for the failure to account for developments around Islamic social movements. To be clear, the failure of the "endist" discourse stems from the failure to understand the end points, goals and intentions of Islamism. Their definition relies on a specific and historical articulation that accurately accounts for some Islamists at certain periods, yet it ignores the fact that Islamism is not a constant metaphysical discourse exempt from human interpretation. As a matter of fact, Islamism is inherently related to the political, and therefore cannot be reduced to one articulation of its discourse.

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Restoring the Meaning of the Political

The common perception of Islamism equates it with other utopian projects that seek a forcible and radical transformation of society and the world. The Taliban and other so-called jihadist movements exemplify the concrete model for this kind of Islamism. The categorization of such movements under the term "political Islam" lies at the heart of the problem since there is nothing "political" in such movements. The concept of the "political" above all requires discussion and negotiation with the other. And such movements, essentially militant, emerges where the possibilities of the political i.e., discussion and negotiation have been exhausted. Therefore, there is ambiguity in conceptualizing "political Islam," "Islamism" or "radical Islam", as well as in the general relationship between Islam and politics. In this conceptualization of the term the genuine dimension of the "political" is missing, and so analyses fail to identify

the multitude of Islamism's manifestations due to their failure to see Islamism except in its imagined forms that are not representative of the Muslim community's actual experience.

Indeed, post-colonial Islamist discourses had a vision of an "Islamic state" or an "Islamic government" that was a mirror image of the socialist revolutionary utopias and served as the basis for their imagined forms of Islamism. Some early Islamists articulated their discourse through a call for a revolution that would radically change the social and political system and transform it into an alternative modern system. However, even then, this was not the only articulation of Islamism and the actual variety of projects in the name of an Islamic state could be considered the historical manifestations of Islamism rather than Islamism as such. In the end these kinds of revolutionary Islamic movements managed to bring about an Islamic revolution in Iran, a long-standing resistance movement in Afghanistan against the USSR, and radical opposition movements in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria and others against occupiers or post-colonial dictators. The Iranian practice of an Islamic state constituted a very rich experience in considering the possibility of an ideal Islamic political model in modern times.

The experience of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was no less valuable to the Islamists than the strong bureaucratic presence of the Soviet interpretation of Marxist theory that called for the abolishment of the state and bureaucracy. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that many Islamists realized the modernist origins of their Islamic state/revolution utopia by reflecting on the Iranian revolution. New interpretations and practices of Islamic politics have continuously revised this utopia. Thus, the popularity of Islamic movements in general has fluctuated without disappearing completely. Furthermore, these movements have had to change their visions and strategies even with some reflections on their theoretical notions about the idea of an Islamic state, revolution, politics, and democracy among others. This has led to multiple manifestations of Islamic politics that have proliferated over time, making it impossible to reduce Islamism to one cliché. Of course there should be something common in all these political manifestations to underline their Islamist character. It means that to distinguish what is really Islamism and what is not, some criteria in defining Islamism is required. Indeed the lack of such criteria serves as the main reason behind the repeated declarations of Islamism's end, declarations that have been shown to be inaccurate.

Islamism in Power and Opposition

Islamism, like many sociological processes, requires a proper definition for identification. This definition needs to encompass the whole reality of Isla-

A Palestinian woman waves a Hamas flag during a rally celebrating what they claim to be Hamas' victory over Israel in the Gaza conflict, in Ramallah

REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman

mism. Mümtazer Türköne, a Turkish political scientists and columnist in the *Zaman* newspaper, defined Islamism as follows: "It is an effort to render Islam sovereign to all domains of life from faith and thought to politics, administration and law, and the quest for arriving a solution to the problem of underdevelopment of the Muslim countries against the West by establishing among Muslims unity and solidarity."[1]

Proceeding with this definition of Islamism, Türköne concluded that we are at the end of Islamism since the Islamists came to power through the Justice and Development Party in Turkey and they have failed to achieve Islamism's goals as formulated in this definition. For Türköne, that end is the natural result of the nature of Islamism, which by its very essence is an oppositional movement, incompatible with the position of power.

Actually there are several problems with this approach to Islamism. First, one ought to be wary of the attempt to couple Islamism with opposition. Although an idealization of opposition and this aesthetic position have contributed to a positive evaluation of Islamism, this identification remains problematic due to its distortion of the nature of Islam itself as the ultimate reference of Islamism. Furthermore, it is unclear how Türköne manages to base his reductionist account of Islamism on the nature of opposition. Deducing such a radical negation of positions of power from the Islamist discourse is rather difficult. Quite the contrary, Islamism's oppositional discourse aims at coming to power as its ultimate goal. Similarly, Islam, the Islamist movement's obvious refer-

ence, stands out as perhaps the only religion that achieved its worldly goals in a short period of time. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) himself, though after a period of pressure, torture and exile, established his ideal state in his lifetime. In this sense, his experience simultaneously contained periods of opposition and power. Therefore, one cannot reduce all Islamic ideals to a discourse of opposition: Islam cannot be reduced to a cynical position that never takes responsibility for good governance. Actually, Islamism's few modern references may be traced back to its 19th century origins when it emerged as a conservative movement intent on maintaining the Ottoman state's political status.

What is to stop an Islamist from seeking bread, dignity and freedom without giving up his or her Islamist identity?

Moreover, Türköne claims that the Justice and Development Party represents the Islamists' transformation into either a party following liberal ideology and practices or as state actors. To support this view, he maintains that the Kemalist state's recognition of the AK Party entailed an urgent need to find a new source of legitimization. He argues that the Islamists were proper actors seeking to restore the state's legitimacy since they were deriving their momentum from their being in the bedouin stages of their historical course. Islamists as bedouins were to conquer the Hadhari cities of the Kemalist state. Once successful, the Islamists would start to follow the lifestyle and manners of the conquered, to follow the example of Ibn Khaldun's bedouins.[2] At the end of this adapted story from Ibn Khaldun, Türköne wrote that the state emerged as the surprise winner in the tripartite set of relations between the Islamists, the Kemalists and the state.

For Türköne, the state has recruited the Islamists to serve its own agenda—a relationship that eventually required a break with Islamist ideology and ends.[3] At the end of the story it is understood that the Islamists' relationship with the state is indeed a one-way employment of them by the state. Accordingly, the Islamists have failed to notice this relationship as it has occurred at a level uncontrollable to fallible men. But what is this thing called the state? What kind of will and reason drives it? Or is there an actor that works generation after generation to unilaterally decide to recruit the Islamists (or other groups) without their consent and awareness? Türköne seems to imagine the state as follows: Despite the Turkish Islamists' accomplishments in reforming the state and replacing the former state elite that exercised a near-dictatorial tutelage over the people, their coming to power must be accounted for with reference to a metaphysical state. Indeed, such a conception of the state seems problematic since it equips the state with a metaphysical position where it supposedly operates independently of citizens' influence and the agency, or *dasein*, of its functionaries.

A Muslim student smiles after she cast her vote at a mock election at a mall in Quezon City Metro Manila.

REUTERS/Cheryl Ravelo

It seems that the Islamists' call for democracy, human rights, good governance, justice and development, or "bread, freedom and dignity" as in Tahrir Square, were confusing in the sense that these demands were regarded as deviations from Islamism. But whose definition of Islamism excludes such terms? Is this narrow definition of Islamism not the main source of the problem? Therefore the Islamists' reference to these concepts or values is considered as a victory of the exclusive existence of the ideologies that supposedly own them. Needless to say, the Islamists' interest in all these concepts takes place with reference to their own relevant and coherent contexts and concerns. From these contexts and concerns everything looks completely different. Thus it is in this sense that "the political", the common and substantial element of Islamism, can be seen.

The Political: The Missing Point in Analyses of Islamism[4]

The essence of the political manifests itself through the diversity of the interpretations of the text and its applications, since it contains a dialogic, or communicative, action which has resulted in several articulations of the concept depending on the Muslim community's political situation. For example, the political manifestation of Islamism in a coherent democratic setting cannot be the same as in the authoritarian *mukhabarat* regimes of post-colonial Muslim countries. The Muslim community's difficult circumstances must entitle them to some more respect in the sense that their discourses should be evaluated using more interpretative approaches. As Nouh Feldman has correctly stated, when Islamist cry for *sharia*, that should not be understood in a straightforward way since in many cases such demands are just demands for the rule of law.[5] Of course, in any case, the "rule of law" as an ultimate value is supposed to be realized under the umbrella of Islam. As Bobby Sayyid argues, for the majority of Muslims Islam is the master signifier which represents what is "good."[6] The political manifestation of Islam cannot be the same in a country with a Muslim majority and in another where they constitute a minority. Muslims cannot be expected to behave as if they are in an ideal state when they are suffering from heavy discrimination and repression from the regimes. This list can be multiplied and proliferated, of course. Historically, Muslims have occupied various political positions at different times and in different geographies. In all these experiences the common element, the political, actually

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can be distinguished. The political is one of the most important elements connecting the threads of Islamic history and in creating an entity called Islamic civilization.

Thus it is possible to claim that analyses of political Islam to date have ignored one of the most prominent links in this chain of description. This is the "political" itself. Most important, one should note that the meaning of the political has recently experienced a radical transformation. In this new sense, Islamism has emerged as the best instrument to achieve the political. In fact, I will try to show that the processes that have been used to show the end, death or "withdrawal" of Islamism are in fact simply the manifestations of Islamism's politicization.

However, one must bear in mind that while talking about the political we should distance ourselves from the meanings that have been attributed to the concept of politicization. Although it is an affirmative concept evoking the human will of self-determination and participation in political processes, correlating this with many issues is not so easy. In order to clarify this point, connotations such as "the politicization of religion" or "Islam", "the politicization of the Kurdish issue", or "the politicization of the Alevi issue" must be taken into consideration. In each of these three cases, the term "politicization" is used to discredit the legitimacy of these movements, while in fact their politicization is nothing more than the expression of social demands in a peaceful manner. Contrary to popular assumptions, the alternative to politicization is radicalization and even militarization. Breaking with society and taking up guns, however, serve as shortcuts in expressing one's lack of any interest in the political. The political begins when others are also taken into consideration. Therefore, one must say that the public domain represents not an area of opportunities where a group or an individual has no limits. In this sense, the political (or politics) emerges on the basis of available opportunities, as opposed to being able to do the impossible. Thus, groups that maintain their political means should not be worried about, and only those that imagine society on the basis of an absolute superiority of one social group over other, or of some groups' rejection and repression, should be considered worrisome.

Although different practices are put into action within this meaning of the political, it is nonetheless true that there is a tendency toward broadening the

meaning and content of the political at a global level. Actually, the political represents an approach that inherently strives to manipulate foreseeable and nominal outcomes toward the realization of a "good" in a given society, and to form alliances and to meet challenges as part of this agenda.

We can establish such a conceptualization of the political by distinguishing it from the belief that the state is the sole political actor and the actual goal of political struggle. In the era of nation-states, the state apparatus constituted the only end point of political action and the only determinative actor in politics. Since any activity that fails to be represented or conducted at the state level does not have any political meaning, all facilities or activities that do not have this goal would be considered as outside the political. Therefore, the aim of all political movements is to take over the state, either in a democratic way or through revolutionary acts. The success of these movements is measured through their proximity to this end.

However, this definition of politics proves even more exclusive than its earliest ancestor, the Ancient Greek polis. Moreover, the world enjoys an increase in social and political participation that the state alone cannot encompass. New developments in communication and interaction resulting from globalization have challenged the state's position as the sole actor in international relations. Besides the economic structure's reach beyond national borders, civil society's increasing prominence and improvements in information technology have deprived the state of its role as the only end point and as the space wherein politics operates. Of course, this does not mean that political action has no interest in forming governments. Quite the contrary, the state's replacement as the ultimate end point of the political has also changed the nature of the state as such. Thus, this has significantly changed the quality of political existence and behavior. While the state continues to be a prominent actor, it no longer enjoys a monopoly in this area and it no longer has the super-determinative role that allowed it to undermine competing political models. Not only Islamism but also a series of other movements collectively called "new social movements" have the potential to provide countless examples of the political's novel manifestations at various sub-levels. This era, according to Ulrich Beck, is not a period of restriction that forces a decision between two options ("either this or the other") and does not acknowledge the ability of not opting for either choice. Instead, it is a time when everything can be articulated in terms of any other thing. In a more general sense, it is an era of the re-invention of the political.[7]

Islamism's disappearance may be the symptom of the ultimate realization of its ends: If Islamism has been realized in practice, the movement would not require a direct pronouncement

In order to establish a framework that accounts for Islamism's rising impact despite its current discursive absence (which leads some to think that the end or death of Islamism is here) the nature of these forms of the political and Islamism's participation in these political avenues must be taken into consideration. Indeed, Islamism's disappearance may be the symptom of the ultimate realization of its ends: If Islamism has been realized in practice, the movement would not require a direct pronouncement. Islamism is the political grammar of Islam. Therefore it is more likely to operate, like with a language, without encountering any notice. The problem of grammar becomes discernible only when the fluency of the language breaks down—the rest of the time, it is forgotten. Thus announcements of Islamism's end or death above all seem to stem from the commentator's lack of adequate literacy to identify its existence within any Islamic context.

The Political between Identity and Ethics

In addition to the definition of the political given above, it is important to mention two more prominent aspects of the political in order to understand the process of Islam's politicization. The first of these is "identity claims", which creates sufficient ground for a people's sense of belonging and political existence. Moreover, identity claims in many cases may not be something that people affiliated with the group immediately put forward. As in many cases, Islamism has consolidated itself through it being treated as "the other" by its opponents. Practical or spontaneous belonging ("in itself") to an identity component becomes some kind of "identity for itself" under the influence of this treatment. Identities are determined by these perceptions and definitions of different groups and the antagonisms to which these perceptions correspond. Philosophically Islamism begins with a sense of belonging through being Muslim and perceives this tie as a form of brotherhood. As this feeling in a way might seem to represent a kind of "Islamic nationalism",[8] it also has a dimension that does not consider Islam as an identity-like property but as something that requires continuous "appropriate and good actions" in order to deserve and maintain it. This situation is considered, at least theoretically, to protect Islam from being converted into a nationalist ideology competing against others. One of the most prominent stages in constituting political positions consists of alliances that people establish based on given characteristics and in line with the demands that the people defend and uphold. This reflects Carl Schmitt's[9] definition of the political as a "friend and enemy relation" and shows that it is a fundamental stage in human existence. Although this approach gives an incisive illustration of the state in the nature of human socialization, it is still not an approach that encompasses the entire scope of the political. Even if the political requires at the very least a discrimination between "us" and "them", this emphasis may transform identities into an exaggeration that renders the

political impossible, as there is no room for the political in a setting where antagonism turns into war, rejection and denial.

The second dimension of the political consists of ethical claims. In the definition of "goodness" that the bearers of an identity create for themselves and their community, the struggle to attain such a world has a determining role. The degree to which the definition of "goodness" that any given social movement develops reflects the truth for their movement, humanity as a whole, or only for a small community depends on the limits of the "identity" of that particular movement and the broader social structure wherein it operates. A social movement's claims over "goodness" also have an impact on the construction of the identity. Of course, this is even more correct when one considers Islamism.

Islamism has always had a claim regarding what is "better" for a given situation or for a community. But the Islamists' perception of "goodness" is not a fundamentalist recommendation only made for each given situation once and predetermines all future cases. Conversely, with an emphasis on a dynamic judicial opinion it operates with the assumption that there can be a "good" option among all the possible solutions for a situation. This is, in my opinion, the best way to account for the fact that Islamism is a movement that can easily be articulated. It would be difficult for Islamism to explain why it should find theoretically unique and sophisticated ways while there are easy and possible ways in many situations. A good solution is always preferred to an original solution. In an Islamic sense the ways to be qualified as "good" are always possible. Islamism, with its idea of *fiqh*, is a political position that attributes greater priority to presenting applicable and easy ways for people of all levels within their daily lives. The association of "goodness" in Islamic *fiqh*, with its strong emphasis on the concept of "utility" (purpose) to fundamental principles, such as "the rules may change over time," "expelling badness is better than attracting goodness," "the essence of existence is neutral", and others, allows it to be "practical and solution oriented" and to be more critical and free even towards its own taboos. Consequently, one of the dimensions of the political is to show that the *fiqh* can find middle-ground solutions among all possibilities and through negotiations with others.

Therefore, there is a strand of Islamism that discovered the political in connection with the opportunities that were maintained by its epistemological sources. At the horizon of the political there is an awareness that there is no absolute power. The existence of human beings always reaches and leans on others' boundaries. Thus a Muslim has to redefine herself along these boundaries, and through this act exposes herself to the influence of others. Existence is a state of interaction and Muslims are no exception to it. If one is not alone in this world, and also has no chance to create a world full of people like herself, then she would have to live with an eye on others. The legal order that members of a

religious community adhere to would naturally differ from their relations with outsiders. Islamist politics operates with the claim of granting the freedom that it demands for itself to others, instead of imposing its lifestyle and communal legal order onto others. It demands the freedom of communicating its ethical claims to others, but only within the framework of freedom of speech, and without resorting to any form of imposition. In return, an outsider's failure to respond to these claims in the affirmative would not pose a problem as long as she does not engage in any hostile action against them. Even if Muslims have certain suggestions for the reordering of the public they do not claim to be the only ones to determine it. Of course it is accepted that in determining the frame of the public domain Muslims have political superiority and possess authority under certain circumstances. Even in this case, historical and social conditions will also be important in defining the social and political model that will be designed for a given society.

Without a doubt, all of these points signify a deep sphere of Islamist habitus that does not correspond to all Islamist movements. Habitus means a political reason and structured structures that contains all of the behaviors that inform the daily life of most Islamists. As a matter of fact the discussions on the "Testimonial of Medina" that Ali Bulaç[10] initiated in the early 1990s carried significant clues concerning the broadness of Islamism's political horizon: to establish a public domain based on the principle of negotiation -an attempt which stemmed from the same sphere of habitus. It is not important whether a project inspired by such a historical testimonial is applicable or not. The relevant thing is to acknowledge that Islamists are open to the idea of creating an order based on negotiation with the other elements in society under any given historical condition. Is this not the point where politics begins? Moreover, it remains a fact that Islam or Muslims have exhibited these characteristics throughout history. It is well known that Muslims never tried to homogenize the communities they built in the Middle East and the Balkans. Furthermore, in Orientalist literature this Muslim characteristic has been described as a "weakness" of Islam in creating a common culture.[11] However, "the common culture" that the West was quite successful in creating required intense social violence and religious and ethnic cleansing. It is a positive aspect of Muslim society that it attached considerable importance to standing against impositions to the extent that it chose to not interfere with individual cultural communities—a practice that maintained Islamic civilization as a "mosaic society". This is the virtue of tolerance that made possible the survival of minorities together with the majority. It is the virtue of opting to not utilize its superiority to "destruct" and repress. Here is an Islamist politics that does not demonstrate

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any intention of transforming others despite enjoying a position with immense decision-making power. However, this does not mean that Islamism has no ethical claims or callings under any given condition and it unconditionally follows the existing conditions. The point that I want to make here is that the political function of Islam decreased particularly in the post-Caliphate era not because it was removed from the political sphere but rather it was the Muslims' failure to emerge as a negotiating party that alienated them from politics. This alienation process manifested itself through a kind of radicalism accompanied by the Islamists' cynical attitude that led them to give up their political claims and demands. Therefore, political reasoning came to be replaced by a disorganized and desperate struggle to articulate itself as a prominent negotiating party. Under the influence of colonial and post-colonial circumstances, the Islamist discourse was shaped by a rhetoric of war as opposed to politics.

Hijra versus Zionism

It is immensely inadequate to conceptualize this movement as "political Islam" as its functioning has nothing to do with the political as it emerged at a moment when Islamic politics was no longer possible. Actually, the radical rejection of any political negotiation or participation apparently may have been a political response. These kinds of political movements are, in fact, quite removed from the political due to their unattainable and obsolete goals. Mixed with revanchist emotions, Islamism's demands and discourses moved it away from the political mainstream. Without question, these kinds of discourses may emerge in an Islamic community as a natural human response to certain historical and social conditions. However, since these responses did not emerge on fertile ground for political action, they cannot be considered part of Islamist politics. At least theoretically, Islamic political theology requires that the past is gone and that the present generation cannot be charged with the transgressions of ancestors. In other world, new ideas can always be found for new situations. That positive approach makes new social contracts possible on the basis of the understanding that the responsibility of one's deed belongs to his or herself and each person may be held responsible for their actions alone. Spending a lifetime in a culture of resentment and revenge looking to restore a given golden age may only serve as the pathological state of Islamic politics. Indeed, this resembles the definition of Zionism in some ways in that Zionism calls for going back to and restoring a historical situation. The restoration of a past experience is quite painful not only for those who want to go back but for the people who are repressed under such a despotic belief. All utopias or radical movements have to follow such an approach to reality that also denies the political. To underline a unique feature of Islamism, one should note that Islam is a religion of *hijra* (migration or journey)[12] rather than a religion of Zion or diaspora. That feature makes Islam more open to the political be-

cause its *hijra* is toward the future and about adapting to new circumstances. Therefore, Islam maintains open channels for *ijtihad*, reasoning and renewal, even though it is supposed to be closed to some approaches. It is also important to note that the Prophet Mohammad did not go back to Mecca even after he conquered it, but he stayed in Medina, which was his base for future conquests.

As mentioned above, Islamism's response to the post-Caliphate trauma can be traced back to the literature of permanent victimization and the discourse of temporary conditions.[13] The literature of "being destitute in one's homeland, pariah in his motherland" to which Islamists have frequently appealed and perpetuated as a prominent theme led Muslims to create an eminently unique diaspora mindset. Suffering from diaspora conditions in their homeland, Muslims turned either to nostalgia centered on the prophetic era or a utopian future. The Muslims' lack of an adequate level of socialization to ensure their survival and political activity served as the main reason behind their creation of a nostalgic or utopian Islam out of a religion of emigration (*hijra*). While nostalgia and utopia equipped the Muslim diaspora with the sense that they believed in a radical Islamic Zionism, which is a cynical rejection of politics that had been represented as the only channel for the Islamist to express themselves in. Of course all the elements of the political that are viewed as ways of participating in the establishment may be rejected on theological grounds. As a matter of fact, the Islamists' apathy and cynicism towards the political did not reflect their own preferences. Deprived of all channels of political participation while maintaining their identity, it took mental and political talent to discover new and more functional alternatives to a total rejection of politics. It is an undeniable fact that the Islamists have not exhibited this talent for a long time.

Islam continues to motivate, determine and shape the social and political reality of Muslim communities. To understand this one needs to grasp the political ends (goals) of Islam

The Islamist Movement at the End of Islamism

It is clear that the highly political element embedded in Islam's most basic sense of religiosity, coupled with the rise of globalization, has created an identity, consciousness and will. If we were to imagine the approximately one and a half billion Muslims all over the world bringing together their innumerable political experiences, we would not expect all these experiences to resemble one another. Furthermore, the world's

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rising level of integration has allowed us to see that Muslims globally have been caught in a *telos* that makes them gradually grow closer to each other. It is not only because they travel more for religious purposes like pilgrimage, but also because of some global actors' anti-Muslim attitudes. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the international community's indifference toward Muslims' issues in general have increasingly created the need and tendency for Muslims' bonding with each other and build a new Islamic world.

Furthermore, the communal will within Islam, its emphasis on brotherhood and its unique nature has created a unique identity unlike race-, class- and sect-based identities. Even if this does not necessarily produce some specific political/economical projects and models, it can be expected to lead to a politics of identity and goodness. Through the fundamental daily practices of Islamic worship (its habitus)—prayers, fasting, alms—the most prominent of these channels are produced and reproduced. Therefore, one may conclude that the stories about political Islam's failure arise out of the simplifications of theoretical arguments concerning their expectations about Islamism or Islamic politics.

While the political's role has increased within Islamist practice, although this is not visible to all, there is still a relative scarcity of unique projects in Islamism. However, the only reason for this scarcity of projects—often viewed as the failure of Islamism—is that a very narrow and shallow meaning of "the political" has been adopted. Clearly, being able to easily articulate ideas on liberal democracy, parliamentarian regimes or other political choices under given condition is not due to its exhaustion or death, but instead it is due to the high political element it bears. According to the hereby-proposed definition, the political also refers to searching for the best in any given condition while the political comes to an end when the "impossible best" is required. Containing highly political elements, Islamism maintains itself by seeking the best possible ends.

Conclusion

The proclamations of Islamism's death, or political Islam's failures, resemble Nietzsche's declaration of God's death in the late 19th century. Whatever Nietzsche meant by this statement, it was seen as declaring the withdrawal of religion from a modern world that was to be characterized by secularism. All modernist and secularist analyses have employed Nietzsche's claim and have supposed that religion would disappear over time. But the predictions about Islam's demise have failed and now we witness the revitalization of religion all

over the world. The ironic aspect of this development is best depicted in graffiti that says "God is dead: Nietzsche", followed by another slogan that reads "Nietzsche is dead: God." As a matter of fact, religion, which was supposed to disappear with modernity, has come back to play a much more crucial role in postmodern times. This goes against the modernists' declarations on the death of God. It is correct that the Islamist political discourse of the 1970s and the 1980s is no longer prominent. In this sense, the theme of Islamism's end may refer to the disappearance of some specific kinds of Islamism. However, Islam continues to motivate, determine and shape the social and political reality of Muslim communities. To understand this one needs to grasp the political ends (goals) of Islam, and pay more attention to the term "political." Finally, this is not to try to prove that Islamism is not yet at its end, but that Islamism is an indistinguishable element of Islam and its survival depends on it. In other words, Islamism represents the political grammar of Islam, and this explains why many Islamists do not need to employ the term.

Endnotes

1. Mümtazer Türköne, "İslamcılık," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 23 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2001), pp. 60-62.

2. Mümtazer Türköne, "İslamcılar Şehri Düşürdükten Sonra," *Zaman Gazetesi*, July 24, 2012. For Ibn Khaldun's oscillation theory see İbn Kaldun, *Mukaddime*, Süleyman Uludağ (trans.) (İstanbul: Dergah, 1986).

3. Mümtazer Türköne, "İslamcılığa ne Oldu?", *Zaman Gazetesi,* July 24, 2012.

4. These parts of the article are the revised, selected and translated parts of my article "Post-Halife Şartlarından Vatandaşlık Siyasetine: İslamcı Politik Teolojinin Seyir notları" ("From Post-Caliphate Conditions To a Politics of Citizenship: The Diary of Political Theology of Islamism"), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, Vol. 9 (2010).

5. Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

6. Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: The End of Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 1987).

7. Ulrich Beck, *Siyasallığın İcadı,* Nihat Ülner (translator) (*İstanbul: İletişim*, 1999).

8. Fort the proliferation and the conceptualization of Islamism as a kind of nationalism see, Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993).

9. Carl Schmitt, *Siyasal Kavramı* (*The Concept of the Political*), Ece Göztepe (trans, 2) (İstanbul: Metis, 2006).

10. Ali Bulaç, 2004, "Medine Vesikası ve Yeni bir toplum Projesi", Yasin Aktay (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık,* 6. Cilt (*İstanbul: İletişim*: 2004).

11. For the discussions of the Witfogelean conceptualization of Muslim societies as "mocais societies" see Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1987).

12. Hijra is the historical migration of the Islamic Prophet and his friends from Makka to Madina. This migration constituted the beginning of the Muslim calender.

13. For the analysis of the impact of the abolishment of the caliphate over the Islamist discourse see Yasin Aktay, "Body, Text, Identity: Islamist Discourse of Authenticity in Modern Turkey," unpublished PhD thesis, ODTÜ, Ankara, 1997; and Yasin Aktay, "Halife-Sonrası Şartlarda İslamcılığın Öz-Diyar algısı", Yasin Aktay (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık,* 6. Cilt (*İstanbul: İletişim*, 2004).