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# Secular and Religious Environmentalism in Contemporary Turkey

**T**urkish environmentalism is gaining ground but has not yet become significantly influential in society. The environmental movements have long been held to belong to left wing politics and to be less identified with religious ideas, but today environmental awareness is also reaching the religious establishment. This article presents some of the current secular and religious environmental trends in contemporary Turkey, based on fieldwork mainly conducted in 2012.

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present some of the secular and religious environmental trends in contemporary Turkey. The main research questions are: who are the central environmental actors in Turkey and are there differences regarding ideology and ways of working between the secular and religious fields? When discussing these questions I will also shed light on Turkish environmental history, but the main emphasis is on the present time, focusing on the level of environmental engagement in Turkey. The article is based on my fieldwork, conducted during September–December 2012, mainly in Istanbul, but also in other cities such as Ankara, Izmir and Konya. A second, complementary research visit to Istanbul took place in June 2014.

Turkey is officially a secular state but the traditionally strict division between religion and the state has changed, particularly during the term of office of the AKP – the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, (The Justice and Development Party), as have relations between the state, society and religion (Turam 2012: 2). Therefore my approach in mapping the environmental field is threefold and will examine Turkey's political, societal and religious aspects, represented by the AKP, environmental NGOs, and ÇEKÜD and

the Gülen Movement respectively. When discussing the key actors in Turkish society, the theory of symbolic actors, as used by Yıldız Atasoy (2009) is useful. Atasoy suggests that it is not only dominant states and multilateral organizations that are the agents which exert pressure on policy, but also members of 'symbolic classes', such as religious groups, academics, scholars, and journalists, who play a significant role. In the Turkish context this includes Sufi orders and religious communities such as the Gülen Movement, Islamic intellectuals, writers, poets, and journalists (Atasoy 2009: 13).

The empirical material in this article consists of seven interviews, all but one referenced with the archival code 'IF mgt'.<sup>1</sup> As David Wilkinson and Peter Birmingham state, '[i]nterviews are not an easy option' (2003: 43) but are used when detailed information about a topic where an up-to-date literary survey is limited, such as in contemporary Turkish environmentalism, needs to be obtained. Both Wilkinson and Birmingham and Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann (2009) describe an interview as a conversation between two or more persons. According to Kvale

1 Interviews marked with an archive code 'IF mgt' refer to interviews that have been recorded (with the permission of the informant) and later transcribed into text documents. The recordings and transcribed text documents are stored at the Folkloristic Archive at Åbo Akademi University. Two of the interviews were conducted in English and five were conducted in Turkish with the help of a translator. In most cases my translator was a Finnish researcher on Turkish Islam who had lived in Istanbul for twelve years. This was of enormous help for me, not only regarding the language but to deepen my understanding of the Turkish context concerning culture, religiosity, ways of expression, how to address issues and so on from a Finnish perspective.

and Brinkmann there is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee in which knowledge is constructed and the cornerstone, in their view, of interviews is a dual aspect where 'the personal interrelation and the inter-view knowledge that it leads to' always takes place (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 2).<sup>2</sup>

I begin this article with a brief look into the history of environmentalism in Turkey, as well as at how the key state institutions related to environmental questions have emerged, followed by Turkish Islam at the state level, with focus on the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). Thereafter the AKP and its engagement with environmental issues, and environmental NGOs and religious environmentalist groups are presented. The section dealing with the AKP includes a discussion of how the revival of Islam developed in Turkish politics, followed by a brief history of the party itself. The section on environmental NGOs includes a consideration of what values an environmentalist group is constituted of and presents some categorizations of what kinds of environmental groups Turkish civil society consists of. The section on religious environmentalism focuses on the Islamic environmental NGOs; ÇEKÜD and the ÇEVKOR Foundation. In the end I will make some concluding remarks.

### The history of environmentalism in Turkey

Turkey is one of the twenty most populous countries in the world and has the fastest population growth rate of all the OECD countries. Unregulated industrialization, unplanned urbanization, heavy use of chemicals and pesticides in the agricultural sector, and energy and mega-irrigation projects which pay no regard to environmental vulnerability are all implicated in some of the major environmental problems currently pertaining in Turkey. Concerning the urban environment, issues concerning air quality, the water supply and the disposal of wastewater, ground and underground water pollution, solid waste man-

2 An additional guide that has shaped my understanding of my position as an interviewer is *Metodkompassen. Kulturvetarens metodbok* (Marander-Eklund et al. 2004), especially the chapter 'Att skapa och analysa ett muntligt forskningsmaterial' (pp. 93–115) by Lena Marander-Eklund. These guidelines laid the ground for me to comprehend the central aspects that influence the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, including among other things age, gender and ethnicity.

agement, and noise pollution, all add to the challenges (Adamat and Arsel 2005: 3; Özdemir 2005: 17–18).

Various studies, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report, predict that Turkey will face early and severe adverse effects of climate change. This information has triggered concerns about economic consequences, but more importantly, it has brought an awareness of ecological vulnerability into Turkey's conception of justice and national interests. Climate change has recently gained a high profile on Turkey's foreign policy agenda (Cerit Mazlum 2009: 72, 77).

Environmental consciousness in the modern sense is a new phenomenon in Turkey, just as it is for other countries as well. The beginnings of modern global environmental history are to be traced to the period after the Second World War both in North America and in Europe, spreading not long after to other countries such as Turkey. However, environmental awareness in a broader sense and in the context of Turkish history could be traced back to the customs of its nomadic tribes. The ancient Turks regarded mountains, rivers, brooks, springs, trees and lakes as sacred. But as Islam gained ground in the country a shift occurred in how nature was regarded: it became a realm in which the names of God were manifested. This shift could be seen in Turkish folk poetry, including in the dervish tradition and in the Sufi Yunus Emre's work, among others (Özdemir 2005: 19–20).

In the early 1970s awareness of local environmental problems expanded into the international dimension and became a global issue. One factor contributing to this development was the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm. Environmental protection was to be added to the legal corpus and as a result environmental law was incorporated into the national canon in 1983. The major environmental law institutions in Turkey are still based on constitutional principles dating from this time, mainly based on the Environmental Act of 1983, which was followed by numerous pieces of legislation (Özdemir 2005: 21–2). The Ministry of the Environment was established in 1991 and later (in 2004) merged with the Ministry of Forestry. This was mainly a response to the European Union's demand for a better coordination of environmental policies. There is still a need for improvements in coordination since a number of other ministries also have responsibility for environmental issues. Furthermore, the municipalities and the central government's administrative bodies, together with the units

of the Ministry of Forestry, are given the responsibility of implementing policies on environmental issues at the local level (Adamat and Arsel 2005: 4).

The role of the Ministry of the Environment has, however, been limited and one of the major reasons for this is a lack of funding. This may result from the fact that it is a new institution without a traditional bureaucracy of its own; it has been sidelined during important economic policy decision-making and has been unable to implement the necessary legislations (Adamat and Arsel 2005: 2; Özdemir 2005: 22). Many environmentalists believe that the Turkish state still does not consider protection of the environment to be a high priority and therefore politicians and policy makers are not interested in developing long-term policies (Özdemir 2005: 22–3). The gap in environmental regulation has slowly been filled by civil society initiatives, ranging from environmental social movements to the establishment of formal NGOs (Adamat and Arsel 2005: 2).

### Turkish Islam at the state level

Turkish Islam functions on two levels. On the one hand it is the formal, legal and authoritative state religion which characterizes the educational establishment and the social hierarchy, and on the other hand it exists within the popular, mystical and intuitive faith of the people, of which the great dervish orders are one form of devotional expression (Lewis 2002: 404–5). In Turkey 99 per cent of the population are registered as Muslims and most Muslims identify themselves as Sunni. The highest Sunni authority in Turkey is the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Türkiye Cumhuriyet Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, hereafter called Diyanet). Diyanet was created in the Republican period and was given the mandate to carry out religious affairs regarding faith, worship, and moral principles, to inform society on religion and to administer places of worship. The role of Diyanet, according to its former President (2003–10), Ali Bardakoğlu, is not to follow extreme ideas but to

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The Bosphorus strait divides Istanbul into two parts: the European and Anatolian side. According to the latest count in 2007, the official population of Istanbul is 12.5 million, but the real number today is estimated to be between 14–17 million. The Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge (Fatih Sultan Mehmet Köprüsü), on the picture, is also referred to as the Second Bridge.



ensure a stable Islam (Bardakoğlu 2009: 10, 16).

All mosques are placed under the control of Diyanet, and all religious personnel such as *imams* (prayer leaders) and *hatip* (preacher) are employees of the state (Atasoy 2009: 62). There are close to 65,000 state employees serving as *imams* under the auspices of Diyanet. Apart from the *imams* there are additional religious personnel, such as *müezzin* (the official who proclaims the call to prayer), *vaiz* (preacher), *müftü* (here a regional religious leader) and teachers of the Qur'an schools, also serving under Diyanet (Vitikainen 2014). One of the duties of Diyanet is to coordinate the themes for the Friday prayer sermons, called *hütbe/hutbe*. *Hutbe* suggestions are sent to Diyanet from all over Turkey and around 5 per cent of them are later distributed to the approximately 80 provinces. The *müftü* of every province has a commission that decides what is going to be preached and themes related to the environment come up a couple of times per year (IF mgt 2012/038).

According to Bardakoğlu, there has been a serious development within Islam over the past two hundred years, which has seen Islam being faced, unprepared, with the emergence of modernity. Even though faith in Allah and belief in Judgment Day have always existed within Islam, the forms of faith have changed, resulting in attitudes that are not, Bardakoğlu states, necessarily beneficial for people. Since there is such a strong focus on the life hereafter, people do not sufficiently care about this world. A consequence of this is that education in the ways of Islam has become a matter of mere custom so that wearing a scarf, or having a beard and observing the *namaz* (prayer) is considered to be sufficient for a Muslim. Bardakoğlu, however, emphasizes that there are further demands on the faithful. High moral and ethical standards, such as looking after your neighbour's rights, are what make a true Muslim. Religiosity needs to start from the individual; justice, honesty and respect for nature are all aspects that need to come from within; it does not help that everybody is looking for justice from other people (IF mgt 2012/038).

During his term of presidency, Bardakoğlu paid special attention to questions concerning women, nature and disabled people. As with the work of improving the social status of women, working to change awareness of environmental issues takes time. The most important aspect of this is persisting in the work so that with time people will start to be aware of its positive effects. Bardakoğlu states, however, that what is most difficult is putting the theory

into action. There are clear *hadith* regarding behaviour in relation to nature and the environment and their content could be concluded to be saying that a Muslim does not harm nature, including refraining from contaminating the environment. Attitudes in this area are not, according to Bardakoğlu, changed by means of the publication of books, but by means of continuous work on the attitudes themselves. A concrete example how Diyanet has worked on this issue is the announcement of a competition between the mosques where the purpose was to raise the most relevant questions regarding the environment. From every district the *imam* who had most effectively taken the environmental questions into consideration was chosen (IF mgt 2012/038). Through this the awareness of environmental questions was raised among *imams* and its purpose was also to disseminate knowledge and awareness of the involvement of the *imams* to the people.

### The AKP and its environmental engagement

The AKP has its political roots in the revival of Islam in modern Turkey. According to Barbara Pusch and Ibrahim Özdemir, the transition from a single party system to a multi-party system and a change in attitude towards religion in the public sphere from the middle of the 1980s were the two major political developments that facilitated the rise of a political Islam. Two facts contributed to this development. The first was that it was in the interest of the military to establish a depoliticized version of Islam to mediate between left and right wing political groups and the second was a political intent to weaken the paradigms of Kemalism. In the 1980s these developments led to a boom in the numbers of Islamic groups and also enhanced the public voices of various other social, political, religious and ethnic groups. In this climate of change representatives of political Islam were able to found their own political parties (Pusch 2005: 132; Özdemir 2005: 21).

Erik J. Zürcher (2004) describes the period 1964–80 as the 'second' Turkish Republic. This time is characterized by the liberal constitution of 1961 which allowed parties and movements to distance themselves from the political centre (Zürcher 2004: 5). The first Islamic party, MNP (the *Millî Nizam Partisi*, National Order Party), was founded in 1970, only to be closed a year later after the *coup d'état* and reconstructed into the MSP (*Millî Selâmet Partisi*, National Salvation Party) in 1972. After the *coup d'état* of 1980 the MSP, like all other parties, was locked out of

politics. Following the banning from politics of the MNP and MSP leader Erbakan, the RP (*Refah Partisi*, Welfare Party) was founded in 1983 under the leadership of Ali Türkmen (Pusch 2005: 132). This party was closed down by the Constitutional Court on 16 January 1998 for its non-compliance with the principle of laicism, which has always been a keystone in the constitution of the Republic. During the process of the closure of the RP, the successor party, the FP (*Fazilet Partisi*, Virtue Party) was founded in December 1997 by RP deputies. Not long after this however, the FP was also disbanded for similar reasons as the RP and by contrast with previous developments, the deputies of the FP did not unify themselves into one group, but split into two groups; the SP (*Saadet Partisi*, Felicity Party) and the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party). The SP emphasized their political traditions while the AKP described themselves as Muslim democrats pursuing a number of liberal goals (Pusch 2005: 133; Zürcher 2004: 301–4).

Since the term 'Islamist' is used quite broadly in Turkey, encompassing all political groups that promote any understanding of Islam, the AKP is better described as a 'value-conservative' and 'liberal-economic' party (Pusch 2005: 133). According to the AKP member and head of the Environmental Committee of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Erol Kaya, the party's environmental vision can be summarized as intensive actions towards the environment. The goal is to create a structure where a permanent quality of life is brought to the highest level with a global environment management system of international standards and where the environment is not sacrificed for economic development. The basic permanent wealth is based on the goal of sustainable development together with historical and cultural values. According to Kaya, these values rest on Islam in the form of the Qur'an and the *hadith* of Prophet Muhammad, and on the national culture of Turkey, which is a mixture of various civilizations, but is mainly the product of its Ottoman history. The Ottoman State was the first country to adopt a consumer rights protection act, food materials regulation, standards law and environmental regulation (Kaya 2012).

Within the AKP, environmental issues are evaluated under the headings of morality and implementation. The responsibility and concern of environmental protection is divided between the government and the environmental commission, local administrations and NGOs. Each citizen has environmental

responsibility by law, which is regulated by article 56 of the Constitution. Additionally, according to the party, everyone also has individual responsibility for the environment, as required by religious, cultural and moral values. There is, however, a gap between moral and religious principles and how citizens act in their everyday lives (Kaya 2012). When asked who the key environmental actors are and who has the most power, the answer, according to Bardakoğlu, is the politicians. It is not enough only to teach about ethics since morality needs to be supported by the law. Bardakoğlu illustrates this by stating that those who produce the most waste are particularly university graduates, which indicates that education alone does not guarantee impeccable behaviour (IF mgt 2012/038).

Turkey's foreign policy on the environment is mostly state-centred and leaves little room for manoeuvre, even for the parliament. Thus, the role of the parliament in environmental policies has often been limited to ratifying the agreements and amendments to decisions which have already been made at bureaucratic levels. The country tends to engage in environmental cooperation if participation is seen as being in its national interest. The national interest in environmental cooperation is defined mostly in terms of economic development, sovereignty over natural resources and security (Cerit Mazlum 2009: 68, 78–80). Although the official policy both for the AKP and the government is sustainable development that strives to minimize the costs of the environment, the priority of economic development in juxtaposition with environmental concerns could clearly be seen in 1998 when even the Minister of the Environment stated that Turkey cannot sign a convention which would hinder the country's economic development (Cerit Mazlum 2009: 73, footnote 3).

### **Environmental NGOs**

As a result of the growing importance of civil society in the world, traditional Turkish political life has been changing in recent decades, leaving more space for public participation. This is the main reason for the rapid growth of NGOs in Turkey since the 1980s (Özdemir 2005: 24). Andrzej Furman and Oğuz Erdur (1999) claim that Turkish environmentalism has never transformed from an ecological grassroots movement into an integrated political movement. This might be the result of a long history of state control over the social sphere, the centralized governments' emphasis on growth, and the state policies



The Şişli 100 % Ecological Public Market, arranged in Istanbul every Saturday, was started by the environmental organisation Buğday Association in 2006. It is the first of its kind in Turkey.

that followed the military intervention in 1980, which intentionally resulted in the depoliticization of its citizens (Furman and Erdur 1999: 187). Environmental consciousness among the Turks emerged at roughly the same time as global environmental movements did (Özdemir 2005: 24). The lack of a strong political dimension in the Turkish perception of environmentalism is likely to be related to the fact that environmentalism in Turkey exists almost exclusively in the form of a social movement, as distinct from interest groups and political parties (Furman and Erdur 1999: 187). Furthermore, environmental protection in Turkey has been and is partly still considered to be an elitist hobby. It is thought that after a certain level of development has been reached then the environment will automatically be protected (IF mgt 2014/019: 1–2). Environmental initiatives have therefore tended to be self-protective and reactionary. The popular movement in Bergama against the use of cyanide in gold mining was a special case. In 1989, villagers and local communities, who a decade earlier had demonstrated in favour of new industrial developments in the hope of increased jobs and economic growth, uniquely launched an ongoing campaign against activities harmful to the environment (Özdemir 2005: 25–6).

This social movement in Bergama is an example of findings in Oğuz Erdur's pilot study, carried out among university students in Turkey (Erdur 1996). The aim of the study was to stipulate the correlation between the characteristics of an environmentalist and those of a good citizen. Findings showed that there are environmental values in Turkey and that environmentalism is not only restricted to the richer parts of the world. In fact, environmentalism had

already appeared by the mid-1990s to be a global phenomenon. Erdur also found out that the groups with most environmental concerns were not the youngest and most educated segments of the society. Erdur's findings do not easily answer the question as to who, or which group, is the most environmentally concerned. However, at that time the practical significance of environmentalism was still dubious and a widespread social cooperation with pro-environmental activities did not exist in Turkey. Being an environmentalist was disclosed to be a socially desirable quality and environmentalism was the highest priority among the characteristics of a good citizen. Social and political characteristics came only second (Erdur 1996: 72–3).

These findings were further analysed by Furman and Erdur (1999). Someone who is both a good citizen and an environmentalist should keep up to date with what is happening in the world and be informed about environmental concerns such as ozone depletion. They should also behave in an environmentally responsible way by recycling, being frugal, using 'green' products, and taking care of their immediate environment. They should give support to environmental organizations and participate in environmentally beneficial activities. However, only 57 per cent of the respondents associated support for family planning with environmentalism, which according to Furman and Erdur indicates that the respondents did not associate environmental problems with population growth. Interestingly, respondents perceived support for family planning as being an important attribute of good citizenship (76.2 per cent), which indicates that this question may be associated with quality of life and social consequences (Furman and Erdur 1999: 183–6). Erdur remarks that further research is needed at the institutional level for a better understanding of why pro-environmental attitudes do not translate into environmentally responsible courses of action (Erdur 1996: 73).

Today, according to Özdemir, the Turkish environmental movement could be described as consisting of a broad but generally ineffective official sector and a civil environmental movement (made up of foundations, associations and cooperatives formed by the private sector) that sometimes shows a technocratic tendency. Özdemir also points to another way of categorizing Turkish environmentalist movements, constructed by Arnd-Michael Nohl. It consists of four dimensions; Greens, radical environmentalists, campaigners for the conservation of nature and the environment, and protectors of industry and

the environment (Özdemir 2005: 26). According to a representative from TEMA, the biggest environmental NGO in Turkey, the Turkish environmental NGOs are characterized by a focus on a single issue and are often, due to competition, not interested in cooperating with one another (IF mgt 2012/030).

According to the theologian and professor Muhit Mert, Turkey's ideological leaders have the strongest influence on changing attitudes to create a more environment-friendly society. Politicians can enact laws, but if people do not consider them important they will not be observed. In academic circles there have been symposia and conferences about environmental themes and they seem to bear fruit. Similarly *imams* can give Friday sermons and teach on environmental topics. The environmental NGOs, however, have, according to Mert, a strong impact in reaching people and disseminating knowledge of environmental issues (IF mgt 2012/033).

The Turkish Green Party was founded in 1988 and was influenced by the Green movements of Europe and the United States. The founding members came from marginal groups, including feminists, atheists, anti-militants and queer activists, which caused the majority of the Turkish population to be suspicious about their real aims. Many believed that these groups were using environmentalism as a way of legitimizing themselves. The Greens were disbanded in 1994 (Özdemir 2005: 26–7).

According to radical environmentalists, environmental problems emerge when the public is left out of the decision-making process and are, therefore, democratic problems. Conservationists are characterized by their non-political discourse. Among the most well known conservationist organizations in Turkey are the Environment Foundation of Turkey (EFT) and the Turkish Foundation for Combatting Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural habitats (TEMA). The EFT was established in 1978, emphasizing that its work was in accordance with the principles of the Civil Code of Turkey. The organization often underlines its good relations with the UN, EU, OSCE and the World Bank (Özdemir 2005: 27–8).

TEMA was founded in 1992 and is the largest environmental NGO in Turkey, with over 450,000 supporters. It is non-political and states that its mission is to raise public awareness of environmental problems, specifically in areas such as soil erosion, desertification, climate change, deforestation, habitat destruction and biodiversity loss. TEMA has a strong educational policy within the formal education sys-

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TEMA works to raise public awareness of environmental problems such as soil erosion, climate change and biodiversity loss. TEMA's office is located in Levent, Istanbul.

tem, but the organization also organizes seminars, panels and conferences in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education (for the training of teachers in environmental issues), the Ministry of the Interior, Diyanet (for the training of *müftü* and *imams*), the General Directorate of Security (the police force responsible for law enforcement) and in universities. The organization also publishes a series of books on a wide range of environmental issues (IF mgt 2012/030). The first training of *müftü* and *imams* took place between the years 1998–2009 in form of one or two week long camps in natural settings. During this period approximately 800 religious leaders took part in the training. In 2010 the concept of the training was changed into seminar and education oriented events. Between 2010 and 2013, 3,059 religious leaders have taken part in TEMA's training programme (IF mgt 2014/023).

The impact of the EU is also evidenced by the presence of EU funding. Some of these funds are available not only to accession countries, but also to neighbouring states (İzci 2005: 95). Turkish environmental NGOs benefit from this and receive funding from the EU for their work. A journalist from *Agos* magazine, Ferda Balancar, sees this as one of the reasons that the work done by the environmental organizations in Turkey remains insufficient. During the last ten years the label that environmentalists faced of being a marginalized group is gradually vanishing. Balancar sees two major reasons for this: firstly, that the level of knowledge concerning environmental issues has increased and secondly that the environmental organizations have not been seen to make serious progress in their work over the past twenty years and are therefore considered to be harm-



less, non-political players. Environmental protection is often understood in Turkey to solely consist of tree planting, with the exception of campaigns against nuclear and hydro-electric power plants. Balancar is critical of the fundraising activities of certain environmental organizations and gives as examples the campaign against a third bridge and third airport in Istanbul. The building of the third airport has already commenced, but the opposing environmental organizations are still receiving funding from the EU. Balancar, however, states that there is a group of people with a genuine concern and interest for the environment, but this group does not possess the political power necessary to make a difference. Balancar points out that this group should not automatically be confused with the general wave of protest against the AKP that has formed lately in Turkey. Many of the revolts that have given the impression of being environmental protests have been manipulated by political opponents to the AKP, even though the cause in itself has originally been apolitical (IF mgt 2014/019: 1–2).

At moments when Erdoğan has been criticized for being too authoritarian and for not taking environmental concerns in consideration, his defence has often been to point out how much he did to ‘green’ Istanbul during his term of office as mayor. Trees were planted and parks constructed, and when he gave priority to environmental issues, many secularist political circles accused him of hiding his real agenda beneath a cover of environmentalism. Balancar reminds us that one reason for Erdoğan’s success is that the AKP has worked in areas that have not directly benefited the economy but have improved the quality of life of many citizens. Even though the AKP has planted trees and constructed parks one needs to remember that the name of the party is, after all, ‘justice and development’ and that these are of a higher priority than questions concerning issues such as nature and environment (IF mgt 2014/019: 1–2).

### Religious environmentalism

According to Bardakoğlu it was the left wing that brought environmentalism, or environmental thinking in the modern sense, to Turkey, and since conservative Muslims for most part have been right wing, they have regarded the liberal left wing, including environmentalism, with suspicion; they have not been able to accept it and have referred to environmentalism as being foreign to their values or goals (IF mgt 2012/038). The polarization of the right and left

wings not only affects environmentalism but is a part of the history of – for example – feminism as well. Barbara Pusch (2005) states, that with the growth of an environmental movement in the late 1980s, some Islamic groups have also turned their attention to ecological concerns. Unlike the secular movement, the Islamic response has not included an active social movement involving protests, demonstrations, meetings or platforms. Rather, the Islamic contribution to the ecological debate has been to publish criticisms of modernity and its effects on the environment (Pusch 2005: 134). The Islamic response has for a long time remained on an abstract and theoretical level and according to Balancar the Islamic sources of environmentalism in Turkey are often found in Said Nursi and his writings, even though this has not yet been seen in practice. There are some movements, especially among young Muslims, such as the organization *Ekmet ve Adalet* (Bread and Justice), that have criticized the lack of environmental justice (IF mgt 2014/019: 1–2). Pusch has categorized the critical writings according to theological, popular and intellectual approaches to environmental protection.

Theological works tend to argue that environmental protection is in line with Islam and quotes the Qur’an and the *hadith* to support this view (Pusch 2005: 134). Up until recent decades Muslim environmentalists have mainly confined their attention to the publication and dissemination of scholarly works on environmental awareness and have organized both national and international conferences, panels, workshops and symposia. One example of this is a conference with the title ‘International Symposium on Environment and Religion’, organized in 2008 by the theological faculty at Istanbul University (Conference publication 2008). The more popular Islamic publications have treated the issue of the environment as well. In these articles the discourse of the ‘bad West’ can be blamed for the ecological problems, while ‘good Islam’ is held up as an antidote. The vast majority of the Islamic debate concerning environmental questions has taken place at the intellectual level. The Islamic newspaper *Zaman* was the first publication in Turkey to introduce a regular section on the environment. Since the end of the 1990s, however, Islamic interest in the environment has declined. As with other issues of public concern, Islamic interest in environmental questions has followed broader national trends. When society became aware of ecological issues and problems at the end of the 1980s, environmental pollution became an important topic in Islamic circles. Similarly, as secu-

lar ecological protests declined in the 1990s, so did the interest of Muslims (Pusch 2005: 134–5).

Muslim intellectuals have generally undergone a modern education in addition to an Islamic one. Most of them are university graduates and possess foreign language skills. They usually come from rural provinces, which makes them experts on the traditional and modern ways of life. When referring to the eco-discussion, Pusch describes Muslim intellectuals as having an Islamic understanding of the cosmos and consequently of nature as well. All knowledge is derived from the Holy Qur'an and the *hadith*. According to this view, Allah created the universe as a sensitive balance (*mizan*) and the creation is seen as a cooperation between all creatures (Pusch 1999: 202–3). The Islamic ideal can be summarized in two principles: balance and compassion. Therefore the human being is encouraged to constantly seek knowledge, to use the mental faculties and to contemplate. The human being is considered to be Allah's most valuable creation; but this does not endow people with

superiority so much as responsibility (Pusch 1999: 202–3; Sakaranaho 1999: 37). These principles have often remained at an abstract level, both concerning the literature produced by Turkish intellectuals and the eco-literature by Muslims in other countries. There are, however, strong indications that this is about to change. A. M. Schwencke (2012) indicates that the early decades of Muslim environmentalism (1970–2000) were characterized by a formulation of specifically Islamic environmental theories. The following decades – our era – can be characterized in terms of practical action. The next two sections of this article will present two religiously inspired environmental NGOs in the Turkish context.

### ÇEKÜD

ÇEKÜD stands for *Çevre Kuruluşları Dayanışma Derneği*, the Association for Solidarity of Environmental Organizations, and was established 1999 in Istanbul. ÇEKÜD consists of practising Muslims

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A view from the Second Bridge. There are two bridges, the recently opened undersea rail tunnel Marmaray and several ferry lines connecting the two continents. The Third Bridge is under consideration. It has received fierce opposition from the environmental organisations.

and the only source in ÇEKÜD is Islam based on the Qur'an and Sunna – an act performed by the Prophet Muhammad. Its vision is to be an internationally active environmental association that aims to re-establish the harmony and balance between nature and humans which has deteriorated. Therefore the mission is to contribute to the formation of a society that possesses high moral and environmental awareness in the form of critical and analytical thinking skills. According to ÇEKÜD's website, the target is to reach eight billion humans, which theoretically means the entire population of the world (ÇEKÜD 2014). With the exception of information taken from the website the section concerning ÇEKÜD in this article is entirely based on an interview with female volunteers of the organization.

There are some differences between ÇEKÜD's Turkish and English speaking websites. On the entry page of the Turkish website is a citation from the sura 2:156 'Who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return";<sup>3</sup> which does not appear in English. The Turkish website is clearly more religious than the English version. This might be explained by the fact that ÇEKÜD mainly targets Turkish Muslims and therefore the English website is less informative.

Officially ÇEKÜD stands alone politically, but it may receive help from the government or the ministries. One of the main activities of the organization is planting trees. The government has made this activity possible by allowing the trees to be planted on their land. Volunteers pay for a tree which they then plant, or ÇEKÜD can plant trees on behalf of other people who cannot plant the trees themselves. The tree planting is made possible by sponsors. Among the sponsors listed on ÇEKÜD's website are companies such as the radio station Akra FM (who has the same quotation from sura 2:156 appearing on their website), the educational institution ASFA, and Olgun Lpg, a company engaged in automotive parts.

ÇEKÜD works in different cities together with other organizations, for example, local governments or municipalities. These organizations can be either Islamic or secular, depending on whether the other party wants to cooperate with ÇEKÜD. In Istanbul there are approximately ten full-time staff working

for ÇEKÜD. Otherwise the organization consists of volunteers and their ÇEKÜD activities are a hobby for many of them. The volunteers often work on some specific projects and tend therefore to come and go. Currently ÇEKÜD is working with teachers interested in environmental issues, using books, seminars etc. The idea is that teachers who volunteer for ÇEKÜD will pass on their knowledge. Students plant trees in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of the Environment and Forestry. The organization has run various campaigns and one of the most successful has been the national 'no wasted food' campaign, which paid attention on not wasting food. The request not to waste, whether it is water or food, is one of the key summons.

The ÇEKÜD's sole ideological source is Islam. ÇEKÜD cares about modern society and its problems and tries to find answers to these in Islamic sources, applying them to the modern context. The sources are based on the Qur'an and Sunna. Over time the extent to which people follow Sunna has changed and therefore ÇEKÜD tries to follow it as exactly as possible. The tree planting is an example of how Sunna is put into practice. The sayings of the Prophet Muhammad are used as environmental guidelines in the teaching, for example, 'do not throw stones at a tree; eat what is already on the ground', 'if you cut down one tree you should plant two' and 'plant a tree before you die.'

According to one of the representatives of ÇEKÜD, the level of environmental knowledge in Turkey is dependent on which *tarikât* an individual belongs to and what kind of *tasavvuf* the person possesses. According to Kari Vitikainen (2013) both *tasavvuf* and *tarikât* are complicated terms that are difficult to translate. One way to gloss them is to perceive *tasavvuf* as a way of thinking, a system and a teaching, while *tarikât* is a spiritual school, movement or cult, where *tasavvuf* as a way of thinking exists (Vitikainen 2013). According to a general principle of (Sufi) *tasavvuf* the environment is alive and both the environment and humans have been created by Allah. People have rights with respect to the environment, but also responsibilities and therefore nature should not be damaged. Animals, nature and humans are all a part of Allah's creation and this is one of ÇEKÜD's keystones. According to ÇEKÜD previous generations did not change a single stone in the ecosystem and ÇEKÜD tries to teach this to other people: take, but give as well; do not destroy or damage. Even if you are hungry you should not damage the environment but take only from the trees that offer food. Since most people have little knowledge

3 The English translation of the Qur'an used in this article is by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, new modern English edition (Birmingham, Islamic Dawah Centre International, 2004, 2007, 2010).



concerning environmental problems and, the organization argues, Turkey is still a developing country and people want to use the resources. Furthermore, since people are ignorant of Islam they are polluters, and one of the central teachings is therefore that being clean also means not to pollute the environment.

As stated above, the basic sources of knowledge in the organization comes from the Sunna and *ictihad* is used in tackling problems of the modern world. For example, when mosques are built today they tend to be located close to houses with easy access and roads are built to avoid traffic jams especially during Friday prayers.

When interviewees were asked how they found ÇEKÜD and how they became volunteers the answer given was that 'they find people, people don't find ÇEKÜD'. The impression given was that at least some of the volunteers were handpicked for a specific job. They were already known to those who made the request and this could be one reason why ÇEKÜD as an organization is unknown among the general public. Therefore the statement on their web page about aiming to reach eight billion humans does not correlate with the impression received as to how the organization reaches new members and volunteers.

### The Gülen movement and ÇEVKOR

There seems to be one other exception to the rejection of religious environmentalism, and that is the environmental section of the Gülen movement. The Gülen movement is characterized as the largest Muslim civil movement in the world. The Turkish preacher, Muhammad Fethullah Gülen, born in 1941, is considered as one of the most significant Islamic theologians in the contemporary world. He has millions of Muslim followers around the world and also has a remarkable number of institutions connected to him. These include, among others, the Asya Bank, Samanyolu television station, the *Zaman* newspaper, The Journalists and Writers Foundation, Fatih University, hospitals, an insurance company, Gülen inspired schools in 140 countries and Kimse Yok Mu Relief Organization (Ebaugh 2010; Kömeçoğlu 2008). These institutions are independent but are 'Gülen inspired'.

The Gülen movement has its religious roots in the revivalist Nurcu movement (often referred to as the Nur movement in English), which was inspired by Said Nursi (1876–1960) (Kömeçoğlu 2008: 64–5). Nursi is one of the most influential Islamic scholars

in modern Turkish history and his masterwork *Risale-i Nur* (Treaties of Light) paves the way for focusing on a revival of personal faith through study, self-reform and service to others (Turner and Horkuc 2009). One of the keystones in Nursi's writings is the idea that there is no conflict between religion and science, and Nursi's teachings have had a great influence on Gülen's thinking. Gülen reinterprets the Qur'an to demonstrate that it contains knowledge regarding the laws of order and harmony found in nature. The basis of belief within the Gülen movement is that an Islamic modernity can be deployed through a reflexive grounding of social-economic restructuring according to Islamic values of social justice and ideas of science and progress (Atasoy 2009: 127). Gülen himself was raised in a clerical family, received training in Sufism and attended both the informal religious seminary and the Sufi order. This could be seen as a collaboration of reason and emotion (Kömeçoğlu 2008: 65–6).

The Gülen community commits itself to the dissemination of the Islamic faith, *da'wa*. Solidarity is valued by its devotees. Many of them plan their futures in the form of missionary projects and their Islamic values are based on a puritan understanding of gender relations (Kömeçoğlu 2008: 70). The devotees themselves often describe their activities as *hizmet* – voluntary or vocational work. The success of the movement can be explained through its simple, direct, and personal appeal. Individuals engage in religious education and devotional activities within small, community-based groups. The devotees form strong interpersonal relationships and meet regularly to discuss and read the Qur'an, *Risale-i Nur* and the Gülen's books. The movement does not emphasize overtly religious behaviour in the public realm (Atasoy 2009: 127, 129) and since there is a constant flow of influences from outside the devotees have created their own inner circles in order to insulate themselves from the effects of the Western forms of public life or lifestyles. This safekeeping of Islamic morality is provided by the application of gender distinctions. Even the dissemination of the Islamic faith is based on a segregation of the sexes and this gender mobilization is also the way the movement spreads into the public sphere. In other words, gender operates as a constitutive element of social interaction and relationships (Kömeçoğlu 2008: 71).

The ÇEVKOR Foundation (*Çevre Koruma ve Araştırma Vakfı*) is a Gülen inspired, environmental NGO established in 1991 by scholars from the Ege and Dokuz Eylül Universities in Izmir. Its aim is to



stimulate public awareness of environmental issues at national and international levels. The first act of the Board of Founders was to hold an international symposium on environmental pollution and control, followed by a series of publications; *Ekoloji* was the first Turkish scientific journal in the environmental field, followed by *Ekoloji Magazin*, a popular journal on nature, environment and culture, and *Ekoloji Teknik*, a magazine for the environment and clean energy sector. The core values and beliefs of ÇEVKOR include the principle that environmental education plays a major role in the attempt to protect the natural environment, that private organizations are important in the process of creating and developing environmental awareness and that NGOs in developing and Islamic countries can actively participate to solve the environmental problems (IF mgt 2012/035; Ayvaz 2012a).

Professor Zafer Ayvaz, one of the founding scholars of ÇEVKOR and an old friend of Fethullah Gülen, has been writing books, lecturing and giving seminars for decades, enhancing the environmental awareness of volunteers in the Gülen movement, both in Turkey and abroad (IF mgt 2012/035). According to a lecture entitled 'Islam and the environment', given by Ayvaz, Islam teaches a way of living which is founded on peace, safety, and order. People ought to live a peaceful life with respect to four dimensions: peace with oneself, peace with other people, allegiance with Allah's wishes, and in concordance with all creatures and the environment. Since people are morally obliged to live in concordance with the environment, people are also responsible for their behaviour and this covers all living and non-living creatures. In order to maintain harmony, people should recognize environmental facts and factors and be acquainted with the way the environment functions (Ayvaz 2012b). The theological foundations of ÇEVKOR are entirely based on Ayvaz's lecture. As I understand it Ayvaz represents the environmental and theological standpoint of ÇEVKOR. The purpose of the detailed theological derivation is to point out how ÇEVKOR derives its Islamic roots; in other words, the organization does not avow particularly strong theological bonds in its everyday rhetoric.

ÇEVKOR's Islamic perspective on the environment is based on the idea that purity comes from faith. Waste and prodigality are forbidden and there are three principles regulating the individual's relationship to the non-human world. These are; respect for all creatures, compliance with animal rights, and protecting and preserving plants. Planting a tree is

Sunnah. Therefore the facts and findings of modern ecology and environmental sciences are understood to be in total accordance with Islamic principles, since behaviour towards the environment has been taught by the Prophet Muhammad himself. İbn-i Kayyim (Turkish spelling; Ibn al-Qayyim in Arabic, 1292–1350 CE) writes in his book *et-Tibbu'n Nebevi*: 'Allah is pure and neat; he likes purity and order. Allah is generous and gracious; he likes generosity and grace. Then keep your yards, fields and surroundings clean' (Ayvaz 2012b).

Suras from the Qur'an that have been used to support an environmentally friendly approach concerning waste include, among others, Al-A'raf (7), 31: 'eat and drink; but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not those who waste' and Bani Isra'il (17), 27: 'Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the evil ones; and the evil one is to his Lord (Himself) ungrateful'. *Hadith* that recommend respect for food include, among others, Üsd'l-Gabe: 'Show respect to bread. For as much, Allah the supreme glory, tied earth's and skies' blessing to it' and Keşfu'l-Hafa: 'The one who picks up breadcrumbs will have Allah's mercy. The one who does not respect this and considers it unimportant, will be left to starve by Allah' (Ayvaz 2012b).

There are several *hadith* which regulate behaviour in relation to water. One of them is a *hadith* by Müslim where the Prophet Muhammad damns those who satisfy their need for the toilet on a spot where another may rest. Ebu Davut (Taharet 14), İbn-i Mace (Taharet 21) and Mecma-uz Zevaid (1, 204) all prohibit relieving oneself by the riverside, watercourses and so on. Müslim (Taharet 94, 95, 96) and Buhari (Vudu 71) prohibit urination in proximity to any kind of utilizable water sources. Another *hadith* by Müsned and İbn-i Mace tells how the Prophet Muhammad intervened in one of his companion's usages of plentiful water for ablution (Ayvaz 2012b).

As stated above, planting trees is Sunnah. Muslims are therefore encouraged to plant trees and one of the most famous *hadith* is the saying of the Prophet Muhammad that it is right to plant a tree even in the face of the apocalypse. Another *hadith* by Müslim and Buhari is 'When a Muslim plants a tree and that tree yields fruits, they are all counted as alms; including those fruits eaten by a human being, wild or tamed animals and birds, till the Judgment Day'. Planting and caring for plants and trees are considered to be good deeds (*mitzvah*): 'Allah will take into account all benefits gained from each and every fruit of a tree as a Mitzvah, which has been planted and cared for by a person, and reward him' (Müsned). According



A fishmonger in Kadıköy, Istanbul. The Bosphorus is a mixture of sweet surface waters and salty undercurrent waters. Today the quality of the water is better and cleaner compared to the earlier condition of the Bosphorus. The rich stock of fish is a good proof of this.

to Münavi, a person (even in his grave) will always receive the benefits from the wisdom taught, the water channelled for people's usage, the drawing well that is placed at people's disposal, planted trees, constructed mosques, donated Qur'ans, and the children that will pray for one. The Prophet Muhammad once planted some trees over two people's graves and said: 'The alleviation of their pain is hoped, as long as those trees are kept wet' (Buhari, Müslim). According to a *hadith* by Mecma-uz Zevaid, chopping down trees of economic value, such as date palms and cherry, is considered such an evil act that it will lead to damnation: 'Those that chop down cherries will be thrown upon the fire, facedown'. The same fate will befall people that chop down a tree but will not plant a new one in its stead (Kenzu'l Ummal, Üsdü'l Gabe) (Ayvaz 2012b).

Fethullah Gülen sees the protection of nature as a religious duty. According to Gülen, it is difficult to awaken Muslims to a similar form of environmental awareness as may be seen in the West, mainly due to the fact that environmental questions are not taken seriously in schools and by the state (Ergil 2012;

Ebaugh 2010). In the West and in Turkey a remarkable number of studies have been produced on Gülen and his movement, often focusing on topics such as tolerance, dialogue and education – three topics that the movement also actively promotes (Kim 2012: 2). Joshua D. Hendrick points out that much of the literature on the Gülen movement is often either unnecessarily alarmist or uncritically hagiographic. The Gülen movement could rather, according to Hendrick, be characterized as an Islamic variant of global neo-liberalism through its fluid and self-replicating social and economic networks. These networks market its brand of what Hendrick calls civil-cosmopolitan Islam (Hendrick 2011: 62–3, 80).

In 2010 a conference on eco-justice and ecology in relation to Gülen's rationale was held in Pennsylvania. The overall theme was the injustices in the world and how Gülen or any religiously inspired society can best address these problems (Kim and Raines 2012). A dichotomy between the secular society and a society based on traditional values is often seen in texts written by Gülen inspired scholars. In the contrast between Islam and modernity the issue which most often inspires disharmony and which is a part of the rhetoric of the movement is that of Western 'publicness' (Kömeçoğlu 2008: 71). Such is the case with Ali Bulaç (2007) (who is not officially part of the movement but who sympathises with it), who states that modern civil society groups or associations, which operate within the secular framework and aim to be influential over decision-making mechanisms, are alienated from society because they are based upon a different historical and social legacy. Leaders of these modern civil institutions are seen to distance themselves from the public and as a result there is a serious problem of 'civil representation' in Turkey. By contrast, Fethullah Gülen is seen as a true civil leader and the movement which has gathered around his ideas is seen as carrying forward a profound historical legacy with a modern approach (Bulaç 2007).

### Concluding remarks

Beyond the environmental NGOs ÇEKÜD and the ÇEVKOR Foundation, religious discourse on environmentalism in Turkey has not yet taken the form of any genuine environmental institutions or groups. This can partly be explained by its characteristically strict state–society polarization, inherited from the Ottoman Empire, which does not expect the citizen to get involved in state affairs. Another reason is the earlier, strictly secular structure of the Turk-

ish state which did not allow any space for organized civil activities for religious groups. This, however, has changed under the current AKP government. Muslim environmentalists have for most part mainly focused on publications on environmental awareness and have organized both national and international conferences. The religious establishment has traditionally in Turkey tended to be right wing, while environmental movements have been categorized as left wing, which has led to a situation in which the religious and environmental fields have not found an ideological meeting place.

Among Muslim intellectuals environmental issues and their possible solutions are often linked to questions of modernity. The rhetoric according to which modernity is always being blamed for all problems of the modern world can be understood as a global phenomenon in some Islamic discourses. This discursive form of expression creates contrasts, or even antagonism and paves the way in some cases for a distinctive Muslim identity. Common to all the environmental organizations is the fact that they want to raise environmental awareness, but awareness of which specific issues varies between them. The Islamic environmental NGOs derive their roots from the Qur'an and Sunna and speak for a holistic worldview, while the secular environmental NGOs often focus on more specific issues. Since there is a constant struggle between state and religion on the one hand and Islam and modernity on the other, this creates a very complex situation in Turkey. In this context secular environmental NGOs can be seen to be implementing the modernity which Islamic rhetoric is criticizing. The dividing line between the secular and religious NGOs is not that clear regarding ways of working and whether, for example, the NGOs are cooperating with the government. Secular NGOs, such as TEMA and EFT, and the Islamic ÇEKÜD maintain good relations with the government, while the Gülen-inspired ÇEVKOR takes a distance. After the breach in relations between the AKP and the Gülen movement it is not unlikely that the two parties will employ environmental arguments to attack one another. Ideological polarization has led to the fact that neither of the two parties can, as a matter of principle, accept the other's views. This includes views on issues such as the environment.

As Schwencke states, the Islamic world started to move from an environmental theoretical formation to environmental practice only about one and a half decades ago. However, the theoretical frameworks of eco-Islam, or Islamic eco-theology, have

remained indiscernible for most religious Muslims. This can partly be explained by a low level of environmental awareness, but also by a less clearly defined theological basis. Most *suras* in the Qur'an emphasize primarily how good and useful Allah's creation is for the human being, but the earth also presents a strong temptation for the pious, which humans need to be careful of and warned about. Those who abuse and destroy the natural world should be avoided, which easily leads to a focus on the life hereafter. As Bardakoğlu noted, religion became institutionalized and for many Muslims the observance of customs is considered to be enough to be a good Muslim. However, in Sunni Islam, which dominates in Turkey, the emphasis on rationality is strong and humans are encouraged to use their minds and to contemplate creation. This could open up into a jurisdictional basis concerning environmentalism, but at the same time it is problematic, since one of the major reasons for environmental problems is precisely the rationality that has destroyed the natural environment.

Depending who is asked about who the key environmental actors in Turkey are, answers vary. Based on my encounters and discussions with central environmental actors in Turkey, in combination with the literary survey, a general summary can be made. According to the politicians, politicians are the ones who have the greatest influence regarding environmental development. According to the NGOs, NGOs are the ones who can assert most influence, since there is a serious lack of confidence in politics. According to religious representatives, it is only through religious morality and values that real change can occur. My conclusion is therefore similar to Bardakoğlu's answer concerning the Turkish context; where consumption and economic growth are still valued far more highly than the environment, a value-based motivation, whether religious or secular, is essential to be able to keep going against the economic development current – but the morality needs to be supported by the law. In this context the environment possesses mainly an instrumental value, since it does not seem to have an intrinsic value in general in Turkey. Here all representatives for the three aspects of society dealt with in this article have their roles to fulfill. The NGOs are crucial by virtue of their work to promote environmental education and to reach out to the public with environmental awareness; the religious and ideological leaders and representatives are required to assert the moral dimension, whilst the politicians have the power to institute and pass laws that support it. ■



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