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THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY:
TURKEY'S EXPERIENCE WITH ISLAM,
DEMOCRACY, LIBERALISM, AND SECULARISM

WILLIAM HALE and ERGUN ÖZBUDUN, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP* (New York: Routledge, 2010)

BANU ELİĞÜR, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

M. HAKAN YAVUZ, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

YILDIZ ATASOY, *Islam's Marriage with Neoliberalism: State Transformation in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

ARDA CAN KUMBARACIBAŞI, *Turkish Politics and the Rise of the AKP: Dilemmas of Institutionalization and Leadership Strategy* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

It would probably be quite curious, if not confusing, for uninformed readers of Turkish politics who are interested in learning more about Turkey's ruling party, the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Justice and Development Party), to pick up these five books, all written by scholars of Turkish politics, all dealing with the ideology of the AKP and the social and political conditions that gave rise to it, all published by prestigious publishers, and realize that they make almost completely opposite claims. For example, while Banu Eligür in *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* claims that the AKP is an Islamist party that is "opposed to democracy" (p. 11), William Hale and Ergun Özbudun in *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP* see the AKP as a secular, conservative-democratic party that clearly rejects Islamism as a political ideology and is perhaps making the most significant contribution to the expansion of democracy in Turkey.

It is no surprise that Turkey's first experiment with an Islam-based ruling party, which came to power in 2002 with an overwhelming electoral majority, has elicited a great deal of interest, controversy, and scrutiny both within and outside of Turkey. In the post 9/11 world, as we all watched Islam being demonized in toto, there was great need to offset this bias by showing how Islam has as much diversity and range of use

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and application, as many inner inconsistencies, controversies, and divergences, and as many democrats, radicals, and fundamentalists as the next religion. Moreover, the AKP experience promised to be the first time that the world could witness what an Islam-based political party would do when it had full governmental control in a democratic and secular system. Would it attempt to use its power to Islamize the state and society, or would it attempt to align Islam with the principles of democracy, secularism, and liberalism? And if it chose the latter, could it succeed and continue to stay in power?

The books reviewed here are part of the first wave of studies exploring the AKP's rise to power, the reasons for its unprecedented success in the elections of 2002 and 2007, and the use of Islam in its ideological makeup, program, and policy choices. They constitute a representative sample of the larger debate over the AKP, which mostly revolves around: 1) whether or not it is an Islamist party¹; 2) whether or not it is against secularism; 3) whether or not it is democratic; and 4) whether or not it is akin to European Christian Democratic parties.

There is not even one among these four questions that all five of the works reviewed here agree upon. While Hale and Özbudun claim that the AKP is not an Islamist party by any definition of the term, Eligür uses the terms "Islamist" and "political Islam" abundantly to refer to the politics and ideology of the AKP, to the social movement that gave rise to it, and to its electorate. Hakan Yavuz's stance in *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* is more confusing because he uses the terms "Islamist" and "Islamic" interchangeably to refer to the AKP and the social movement behind it (e.g., p. xi), and then goes on to argue that the AKP cannot be considered Islamic (pp. 115–16). On the question of secularism, Hale and Özbudun clearly categorize the AKP as a secular party that seeks to establish the neutrality of the state toward religion. Although Yıldız Atasoy, in *Islam's Marriage with Neoliberalism: State Transformation in Turkey*, does not define the AKP as secular, she states that it is certainly not an *antiseccular* party (p. 9). But according to Eligür, for whom Islamism and secularism contradict each other, the AKP targets the "civil state" and wants to put an end to the secular, democratic system (p. 11). Eligür thus refrains from marking the AKP as democratic, whereas the authors of the other books all agree that it is a democratic party that has been genuinely committed to democratization—perhaps more than any other political party in Turkey—as part of the European Union (EU) accession process. On the question of whether or not the AKP falls into the same category as European Christian Democratic parties, Hale and Özbudun, along with Arda C. Kumbaracıbaşı in *Turkish Politics and the Rise of the AKP: Dilemmas of Institutionalization and Leadership Strategy*, claim that it does. Atasoy, meanwhile, argues that the AKP is ideologically closer to the "Third Way" of the Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition.

The existence of such sharp disagreements among scholars who all study the same subject probably relates to the significance of the consequences that these assessments have on the fate not only of Turkey but also of the rest of the world, which makes it difficult for analysts and scholars to stay critically neutral. Whether Islam is compatible with democracy, liberalism, modernity, secularism, and/or capitalism has serious consequences for developments in the Middle East; this is even truer after the sudden turn of events throughout the region in early 2011. In addition, because Islam and secularism are issues that are deeply ingrained in the public and private lives of citizens in Turkey,² the debate over the status of Islam has become a highly personalized matter, resulting

in a lot of bias and unjustified assertions even among scholars who study the issue. Many scholars of Turkish studies tend to use academic research and writing to promote and justify their own ideological stance on the matter rather than look at their subject matter from an academic perspective and retain an open mind with a genuine interest in understanding social and political events. Among the books reviewed here, this biased approach at the expense of critical neutrality³ is particularly evident in the work of Eligür, who favors a Kemalist/secularist perspective, and in that of Yavuz, who tends to speak on behalf of Islam when he attempts to determine who is Islamic and who is not (p. 115).

THE AKP AS A CONSERVATIVE-DEMOCRATIC PARTY

In *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, an exploration of the ideology of the AKP, Hale and Özbudun ask why there are such profound differences between the AKP and its predecessor Islamist parties (p. 27). Their main argument is that the AKP is *not* an Islamist, or even an Islam-based, party that relies on Islam for any aspect of its ideology, identity, or program. The authors assert that the AKP rejects an “Islamist worldview which aims at Islamicizing the society by using the coercive power of the state” (p. 22). Examining the policies and activities of the AKP government since it came to power in 2002, the authors provide a thoughtful and informative discussion to show that the AKP is the “Muslim equivalent of conservative parties in western democracies” (p. 148). They consider the AKP not only a “conservative-democratic” party but also a secular one, in the sense that it advocates the neutrality of the state toward religion. This kind of “passive secularism . . . opposes any established doctrine that defines the ‘good’ for its citizens, either religious or nonreligious” (p. 22) as opposed to the “active secularism” of Kemalism, which was defined and institutionalized as direct control of religion by the secular state.⁴

The authors make a case that the AKP is a continuation of the conservative line of Turkish politics, which started with the Democrat Party in 1950 and continued through the Adalet (Justice) Party, the Anavatan (Motherland) Party, the Doğru Yol (True Path) Party, and now the AKP, rather than of the Islamist lineage going back to the Milli Selamet (National Salvation) Party and the Refah (Welfare) Party (RP) of the 1990s. They explain that this conservative lineage is “characterised by a combination of Turkish nationalism, sensitivity to traditional and Islamic values, [and] a commitment to technological modernisation (developmentalism) while preserving conservative social values” (p. 25). Thus, for the authors, the AKP is not a continuation of its official predecessor, the RP, either in terms of the latter’s Islamist ideology, called the “National Outlook” (Milli Görüş), or in terms of its economic policy, which was based on the notion of the “Just Order” (Adil Düzen).

Hale and Özbudun present four main factors that account for the transformation of the Islamist movement and the emergence of the AKP as a conservative-democratic party. The first factor, the 28 February (1997) National Security Council decree—which defined political Islam as the single most important threat to the Turkish state and resulted in the closure of the RP a year later—was a crucial turning point for the Islamist movement, eliciting a period of intense introspection and self-scrutiny. The decision of the RP’s leaders that challenging the secular system in Turkey was a dead end deepened

the rift between the moderate (“modernist”) wing led by Tayyip Erdoğan and those the authors term “so-called traditionalists” led by the RP’s main leader, Necmettin Erbakan. The moderate wing criticized the pre-1980 Islamist “National Outlook” ideology for being a “religious and radical discourse” that had harmed the movement. The authors also mark this split as a “pro-Western and pro-EU turn of Turkish Islamists” (p. 27).

The second factor is the rise of the “Anatolian Islamic bourgeoisie” (p. 28), a new capitalist class that emerged in Anatolian cities with the turn to a neoliberal economic policy in the 1980s.⁵ According to the authors, this class “combined attachment to traditional moral values with a commitment to neo-liberal economic policies” (p. 152). The AKP’s electoral success was largely due to its “ability to forge a cross-class coalition” between this new Islamic bourgeoisie and the urban poor (p. 28). The third factor is the emergence of a large “ex-rural working class” in the major cities whose members were disillusioned with the Turkish state and its modernization project and which became the main support base for the AKP. Finally, “important changes in the attitudes of Islamist intellectuals” (p. 152) such as Ali Bulaç, who supported democracy, developed new perspectives on merging Islam with democracy and liberalism, and favored EU membership for Turkey, constituted the intellectual foundations of the AKP’s new ideological outlook, which set it apart from its Islamist predecessors.

The authors conclude by asserting that the AKP (as of 2010) is at a crossroads. It might return to what the authors call “the reformist path” (i.e., pursuing rigorous reforms toward further democratization and fulfilling all criteria for full EU membership), which runs the risk of further antagonizing the state elite and the military, or it might veer toward a more compromising stance with the state elite and become a conventional center-right party aiming to maintain the status quo (p. 158).

However, since the authors made this observation a year ago, the AKP seems to have taken neither of these paths but rather one that they did not foresee: it has increasingly drifted toward authoritarian tendencies, especially in the way it has been handling the Ergenekon investigation into the plotting of a coup attempt against the AKP government, which involved numerous arrests of military officers, bureaucrats, and civil servants, with unusually lengthy custody periods (sometimes two or three years), some of which were not sufficiently justified. But Prime Minister Erdoğan’s “authoritarian temptations” were foreseen by another author reviewed here, Yavuz, who notes in his book that these may turn out to be among the main impediments to any pursuit of further democratization by the AKP (p. 13).

In any case, the Ergenekon case seems to have not only effectively eliminated the possibility of a coup attempt against the AKP but also put an end, once and for all, to the habitual ambitions of the military to intervene in and control political life in Turkey. Perhaps the AKP, rather than antagonizing or compromising with the state elite as Hale and Özbudun predicted, has replaced the previous state elite to assume the position itself.

IS ISLAMISM AGAINST DEMOCRACY AND SECULARISM?

In *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey*, Eligür explores the causes of the rise of “political Islam” in Turkey during the 1990s by using social movement theory and the “political process model,” which asserts that a movement does not emerge in a vacuum and calls for an investigation of the political context in terms of political

opportunity structures and the movement's organizational dynamics. Eligür concludes that the rise of political Islam in Turkey was due to: 1) the 1980 military intervention, which created the necessary environment for the Islamic movement by leading to the adoption of the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" as official state policy by the military regime and its successors; 2) the presence of Islamic "movement entrepreneurs with significant organizational, financial, and human resources"; and 3) the success of these entrepreneurs in making Islamism appealing to voters who are secular but "aggrieved" due to the malfunctioning of the state (p. xvii).

Eligür observes that the rise of political Islam went through two phases. The first phase (1980–91) consisted of the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis by the military and then by the Anavatan/Motherland Party (ANAP) government after 1983, which created the first political opportunity structure. The author focuses especially on the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis—as it was produced by the Turkish Hearth, an association of bureaucrats and intellectuals who came together to redefine Turkish nationalism on the basis of religion—which later became the ideological foundation of the Islamist ideology of the RP. This new Turkish-Islamic identity was fully endorsed by the military regime as part of its commitment to anticommunism and was adopted into the 1982 constitution as well as in government policy on education, religion, and culture (p. 101). According to Eligür, the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis as official policy during the 1980s, when all other political movements and ideologies were suppressed, constituted the "political opportunity structure" that paved the way for the emergence of political Islam.

The second phase started in 1991 with the end of the ANAP government, as the Islamist elite seized this opportunity by utilizing the "organizational networks" they had created during the first phase and taking advantage of the grievances caused by the "malfunctioning state" (pp. 136–37). According to Eligür, the Turkish state has been "malfunctioning" since the 1970s and deteriorated further under the ANAP government despite economic reforms toward liberalization, as indicated by increasing corruption, unequal distribution, unemployment, and a decay in social values. The author argues that the Islamist leaders of the RP used the opportunity structures created in the 1980s to mobilize disgruntled masses by propagating an alternative program that they called the "Just Order," an Islamist ideology that criticized capitalism, liberalism, the United States, and the EU (pp. 148–49). It was in this period, the author argues, that the Islamists built a collective Islamist identity by working to "Islamize the society from below—by changing individual habits and social relations" (pp. 3–4). At the same time, they made use of the existing political system—the "secular-democratic polity"—and worked their way into it by forming a political party, building and mobilizing networks among civil society associations, and participating in elections.

Eligür's claim that the Islamists used the idea of a "Just Order" to appeal to the disgruntled masses is highly questionable. In the 1990s, after Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the mayor of Istanbul (1994), the RP's rhetoric in relation to city administration had already moved far beyond the "Just Order"; it was expressing full support of liberal economic policy and democracy and was on highly amiable terms with the United States and Europe. Today the AKP is arguably the party that is most favorable toward the United States and the EU. Perhaps because Eligür's study was conducted in the 1990s, it leaves out the important rift between the older traditionalist generation of Islamist leaders

around Erbakan and the younger, more moderate generation that formed around Tayyip Erdoğan's mayoralty in Istanbul starting in the mid-1990s, a rift that culminated in 2001 with the final split into two separate parties: Erbakan's Saadet (Felicity) Party and Erdoğan's AKP. Most of Eligür's observations concerning the Islamist movement seem to apply only to the traditional wing within the RP that later became the Saadet Party, which won only 2.5 percent of the vote during the 2002 elections, in contrast to the overwhelming 34 percent won by the AKP. Since the "Just Order" was the ideological tenet of the traditionalist group and was explicitly rejected by the AKP, the claim that the Islamist elite won over the masses with this alternative is simply not correct.

Another serious problem in Eligür's study is the way she takes for granted that "Turkish Islamists [are] . . . a noncivil, peripheral, and resource-poor movement opposed to democracy" who have taken advantage of the existing democratic system to "mobilize the population in support of redefining a secular-democratic structure in accordance with a politicized form of Islam. Since the Turkish state has a secular-democratic character that is contradictory to the Islamist state model, the Islamist movement targets the civil state itself" (p. 11). The claim that the Islamist movement is "noncivil" is no more than a statement of personal opinion, since the author does not clarify or justify it or even explain what is meant by the term. Eligür suggests that a religious movement is by definition not civil (p. 8) but does not explain why. Nor does she elaborate on what makes this movement a religious one in the first place, though this assumption is easily contestable, and indeed often contested by the other authors reviewed here. The claim that the movement is "peripheral" is also debatable; most of the former leaders of the movement, such as the RP's long-time leader Necmettin Erbakan, occupy central positions of authority in state institutions and the bureaucracy. Furthermore, given its backing by the "Anatolian Islamic bourgeoisie," which the other authors reviewed here examine, the movement behind the AKP is certainly not a "resource-poor movement." Finally, as Hale and Özbudun demonstrate clearly, the AKP has never pursued or even considered the idea of an "Islamist state model."

These unfounded assumptions about the AKP, which are the foundation of Eligür's main argument, undermine the credibility of her whole study, leaving the reader skeptical of her findings and observations, some of which provide important information on the organizational structure of the RP during the 1990s.

THE AKP: ISLAMIC BUT NOT REALLY

In *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, Yavuz asks the same questions posed by the other authors under review here: whether or not the AKP is an Islamic party and what caused the transformation that gave rise to it. In answering the first question, he argues that even though the AKP has been averse to labels such as "political Islam" or even "Muslim Democratic" to define its stance (p. 2), it is nevertheless an Islamic political party in the sense that "Islam affects the core identity of the ruling AKP and its conceptions of politics and identity" (p. xi). He states that the Islam of the AKP is actually "repressed" rather than simply excluded from its identity and ideology, because "the identity of the AKP is shaped both by what it wants to *forget* (Islamism) and what it wants to *become* publicly (conservative democracy)" (p. 3).

Yavuz sees the AKP not only as an Islamic party but also as part of an unprecedented movement (both in Turkey and around the world) that he terms “liberal Islamism” (p. 78), which is characterized by a unique combination of Islam with political and economic liberalism (p. 113). Making the same argument as Hale and Özbudun, he states that the AKP is not a continuation of the National Outlook but rather a break from it. Also like Hale and Özbudun, he locates the reasons for this break, and for the rise of “liberal Islamism,” in the emergence of “the new Anatolian bourgeoisie, the expansion of the public sphere and the new Muslim intellectuals, the [EU’s] Copenhagen criteria, and the February 28 soft coup” (p. 78).

For Yavuz, however, unlike the other authors, the fact that the AKP is an Islamic party is not something that should be taken and examined as an anomaly or exception, because the existence of an Islamist party is a natural consequence of being part of a Muslim society. According to Yavuz, “since religion and politics are closely engaged in the same issues of normative order, collective identity and legitimate authority, they cannot be separated” (p. xi). He argues that Islam in Turkey is such an ingrained part of life that it is not possible to extract it from any aspect of society or politics. Along these lines, he refers to the transformation of Turkey’s Islamic movement (in which he includes not only the AKP but also other Islamic groups) as a “conservative revolution because it seeks to maintain Turkey’s generally conservative traditions and bring local-level norms and identities to the national level” (p. 13). While it is not clearly stated, the author seems to be suggesting that the anomaly or exception is not the emergence of political Islam but rather the establishment of a secular system that forcefully excluded Islam from politics in a Muslim society. This resulted in a disconnect between the state (“the national level”) and society (“local-level norms”), which are now being brought together through a “conservative revolution” that includes the AKP. In contrast to Eligür, who claims that the Islamist movement became what it is through the effective use of political opportunities by the Islamist elite, Yavuz argues that this transformation “is a bottom-up imagining of those who feel excluded and dissatisfied with the prevailing socio-political conditions of Turkey” (p. 13), thus suggesting that Islamism grew spontaneously at the grassroots level within disgruntled sections of the population.

Yavuz develops an interesting argument that invites the reader to see the relationship between politics and Islam in a new light, but his account suffers from unfounded assumptions and sweeping generalizations. First and foremost, his main argument that the Islamic movement, or what he calls the “conservative revolution,” is the outcome of the mobilization of “local-level norms and identities” is based on the assumption that these norms and identities are all rooted in Islam. This view overlooks the diversity of norms and identities that exist at the “local level” in Turkey, including those associated with Alevism, a religion-based identity that has more elements of shamanism than of Islam, and with “secular Muslims,”⁶ who identify with Kemalism and its official view of Islam. The claim that only Islam represents what is truly local in Turkey not only discounts such diverse groups and identities as somehow nonlocal but also creates the misconception that there is a homogenous Islamic movement that is based on a uniform understanding of Islam. Needless to say, this view privileges a particular view of Islam, one that the author apparently shares, at the expense of identities that are not Islam based or that uphold a different understanding of Islam, such as those of secular Muslims.

The claim that the “conservative revolution” is a “bottom-up” Islamic movement is another misleading generalization. Although the movement is based in grassroots associations and groups, the Islamic identity that defines it was forged by an elite group of political leaders, intellectuals, and bureaucrats, namely, the Turkish Hearth and other Islamic intellectuals, as established by the other studies reviewed here. In fact, one of Eligür’s main arguments, which is thoroughly documented in her study, is that the Islamist movement became what it is under the leadership of an elite group of Islamic intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and political leaders organized in the RP. Yavuz actually acknowledges the same point and thus contradicts his own claim when he states that “Islamic identity . . . has been used as a lubricant vis-à-vis the workings of market forces and an instrument with which [the] new [Anatolian] elite has been able to carve out its share of the market” (p. 54), thus admitting that the Islamic movement is also “top-down.” Framing the Islamic movement as a “bottom-up” movement and obscuring the fact that its Islamic identity was forged by an elite group of actors not only serves to legitimize the movement by making it appear more autonomous and authentic than it is but also delegitimizes other movements that may have started with the initiative of political actors, including Kemalism.

The basic problem in Yavuz’s account seems to be the tendency to make sweeping generalizations about both Islam and secularism, which are treated as if they are two homogeneous camps fighting one another. He notes, for example, that “the conflict is between those who want a society based upon a Jacobin secular vision of social and political order . . . and those who embrace an Islamic conception of society and moral order” (p. xi). However, the situation in Turkey is not that black and white. Yes, there is a disagreement over Islam and secularism that marks the current political climate in Turkey, but this disagreement is not only between Islamists and secularists but also within the secularist camp, as well as among Islamic circles, and it sometimes becomes more antagonistic in these contexts than it does in the clash between secularists and Islamists.

Another problem rests in Yavuz’s claim that the case of the AKP cannot be used as a model of Islamic democracy for other Muslim countries because the AKP is not really Islamic to begin with, which seems to contradict his earlier claim that the AKP is an Islamic party. In making the new argument, Yavuz asserts that a party is Islamic only “if it is making political claims on the basis of Islam” and defines itself as the representative of the larger Muslim community (the *umma*) (pp. 115–16). According to Yavuz, the AKP does neither, and so Turkey, under the AKP’s rule, cannot be a good model for Islamic democracy. This is a problematic claim, because it is based on the author’s own definition of what is and is not Islamic, which may or may not be in conformity with the way others define Islam. By making such a claim, the author inadvertently takes an active part in the politics of Islam, or the struggle over who has the authority to define what Islam is and who is its true representative.

Like Eligür’s work, Yavuz’s study seems to be clouded by the author’s own ideological preferences. The main difference is that while Eligür writes from a strictly secularist/Kemalist perspective, Yavuz writes from an Islamic one. Both authors frequently fail to provide justifications or explanations of the basic assumptions on which their analysis is based. Yavuz’s ideological stance is especially evident in questionable and sweeping claims such as when he states that “the Kemalist modernization project

left much of everyday life untouched until the 1980s” and that Kemalism is “senile, if not in decline” (p. 43).

IS THE AKP CLOSER TO THE NEW RIGHT OR THE THIRD WAY?

As the title of her work suggests, Atasoy’s main goal in *Islam’s Marriage with Neoliberalism* is to show how the AKP government is a unique experiment in merging Islamic values and norms with “liberal democracy, personal freedom, and cultural expression” (p. 10). Based on her study of the party’s ideology, program, and policy, Atasoy concludes that “the AKP has never presented an anti-Kemalist, anti-*laik* position” and that its “policies aim to reorganize the Kemalist state and its privileged political alliance structure by adopting a more liberal-democratic political stance and a neoliberal market-oriented economic model that might be achieved through Turkey’s EU membership” (p. 9).

Similar to Hale and Özbudun, Atasoy stresses that the AKP does not seek to Islamize the political system or the public sphere. However, she argues that the AKP is still a “pro-Islamic” political party, because even if Islam does not directly dictate its policy choices or its ideological stance, it is still an important part of the AKP’s “ideological outlook [which] is based on blending a Muslim cultural orientation with Euro-American values” (p. 9). As Atasoy demonstrates, Islam for the AKP is, in Erdoğan’s words, “our own authentic value system,” which is the “basis of our deeply rooted ideational tradition” and is currently being merged with, or reconstituted on the basis of, “universal standards” (p. 10). According to Atasoy, these universal standards include “principles of liberal democracy, individual freedoms, and human rights” (p. 11). Erdoğan’s words lay out the basis of Atasoy’s main argument: that the AKP has merged, or “married,” Islam—understood as Turkey’s “own authentic value system”—with the universal principles of liberalism, democracy, and the neoliberal market economy.

Among Atasoy’s important contributions to the debate on the AKP is her highly informative account of various intellectual traditions and ideological strands that constituted the AKP’s unique synthesis. Similar to Eligür and to Hale and Özbudun, Atasoy considers the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” as developed by the Aydınlar Ocağı (Turkish Hearth) in the 1980s an important pillar in the making of the AKP’s ideology. However, she introduces other strands of political thought, such as the *ülkücü* (idealist) nationalism of the Nationalist Action Party, and especially the “Turkish-Islamic nationalism” of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, both of which have been crucially influential in shaping the AKP’s ideology (pp. 97–100). Atasoy notes that the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, as one of the foundational elements of the AKP’s Islamism, sought to “redefine Islam such that it would constitute an ethical foundation for Kemalist nationalism” (p. 94), in contrast to Eligür’s claim that the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was essentially opposed to Kemalism.

In another interesting contribution to the debate, Atasoy draws a parallel between the AKP and both the New Democrats of the United States and the New Labour of the United Kingdom rather than the neoliberalism of the New Right or the Christian Democratic parties of Western Europe. Atasoy notes that “in building a cross-cultural coalition the AKP has reframed an Islamic moral stance to fit a ‘Third Way’ party image that partly emulates the former political approaches of Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, and Gerhard Shroeder” (p. 109). Atasoy’s alignment of the AKP with the Third Way stems

from the emphasis she places on the AKP's commitment to democratization and "citizen-empowerment politics," which have more in common with the Third Way parties than with New Right conservatism.

So is the AKP a New Right conservative party or a Third Way liberal party? The answer depends on which of the AKP's tendencies one deems important. In its devotion to cultural and social conservatism and its adherence to traditional/religious norms and values as the defining elements of national community, the AKP is certainly on the conservative side of the political spectrum. But in its commitment to democratization, political liberalism, and the empowerment of civil society, along with its neoliberal economic policy, the AKP can easily be grouped with Third Way parties.

Another reason for the difference of views on the political stance of the AKP might relate to the evolution that the AKP has undergone. It is possible to argue that the AKP was much closer to the Third Way liberal parties during its first term in government between 2002 and 2007, when issues important to conservatives, such as the Islamic headscarf controversy and an emphasis on Muslim values and lifestyle, were shelved in favor of democratic reforms geared toward EU accession and building cross-class coalitions. After winning the 2007 elections with a percentage increase of more than 10 percent (from 34% in 2002 to 47% in 2007), however, the AKP seems to have shifted toward a more conservative line, tainted with elements of authoritarianism and a more antagonistic stance toward the opposition.

Atasoy offers an outlook on the AKP that is unique, thoughtfully argued, and thoroughly substantiated. However, the study suffers from an overambitious approach and tends to spread itself too thin. In 252 pages and eight consecutive chapters, the author not only explores the AKP's ideological stance and policy choices on key issues but also attempts to provide a historical review of the "tensions between Kemalist and Islamic ideational stances from the late Ottoman Empire onward" (p. 29); the evolution of "Turkish Islam" as an intellectual tradition and its branching out into different groups, parties, and associations, including the vast Gülen movement; the official stance toward Islamic attire in the late Ottoman and early republican periods; and the headscarf-ban controversy starting in the late 1980s, followed by an ethnographic account of women who wear the Islamic headscarf in the 1990s. Not only do some of these chapters try to tackle comprehensive issues that could—and perhaps should—have been dealt with in separate book-length projects, but also their contribution to the main theme of the book is questionable, since the author does not always explain how they tie in with the AKP's version of neoliberalism and Islam.

"SYSTEMNESS" VERSUS "AUTONOMY" AND THE SUCCESS OF NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

In *Turkish Politics and the Rise of the AKP*, Kumbaracıbaşı seeks to explore the reasons for the unprecedented electoral success of the AKP in 2002 in spite of the fact that it was a very new party with a leadership that had no experience in government. He looks for explanations in the AKP's internal organization, its ability to maneuver within the confines of Turkey's legal system, and its skill in balancing the benefits of autonomy enjoyed by a new (and not yet rigidly institutionalized) party with the need to sufficiently institutionalize the party—or its "systemness," as the author calls "the

degree of interdependence of its different internal sectors” (p. 3)—so as to avoid being swayed toward radical or inconsistent ideological and policy positions. Kumbaracıbaşı concludes that while the polls have demonstrated that the AKP has succeeded in striking this balance, its continuing success will largely depend on its ability to complete its institutionalization.

What sets this work apart from the others reviewed here—and also from the larger literature on the AKP—is that while most studies have focused on the novelty of the AKP’s ideological stance, especially in order to explore its relation to Islam, Kemalism, and secularism, Kumbaracıbaşı seeks to explain the AKP’s electoral success almost exclusively in terms of its institutionalization and leadership strategies. This approach brings a new perspective to the matter and is refreshingly neutral, in contrast to the highly opinionated approaches that tend to dominate the field. At the same time, the use of an abstract formal model to study something that is as culturally unique and context dependent as the AKP’s Islamism yields an ultimately limited and superficial analysis that is not very helpful in assessing the AKP’s current position. In a country like Turkey, where politics revolve almost completely around ideological premises, factors such as party institutionalization and leadership tend to play less significant roles than in other countries. While Kumbaracıbaşı does devote a chapter to the AKP’s ideology, it does not go beyond a review of secondary literature and is mostly made up of long quotations from other scholars. Kumbaracıbaşı does not make any contributions of his own to the debate on the ideological stance of the AKP but rather reaches the same conclusion as that of Hale and Özbudun, namely, that the AKP’s ideological strategy “strongly resembles the approach taken by many Christian democratic parties in Western Europe” (p. 187).

CONCLUSION

The debate on the AKP’s version of Islam and politics has become even more significant in light of the ongoing collapse of governments in the Middle East in 2011. Despite Yavuz’s claim that the AKP cannot be a model for other Muslim countries, it is evident—especially with the rising demands for democratization in Egypt—that the example of the AKP government, with its unique combination of Islam and democracy, and even with its flaws and shortcomings, promises to become an alternative for various groups seeking democracy across the Middle East. Whether or not the AKP can actually live up to this role remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that making Turkey a model for other Muslim countries is one of the highest aspirations of the AKP’s leaders. This aspiration is particularly evident in Prime Minister Erdoğan’s speech at the 11th Jeddah Economic Forum on 20 March 2011, which invoked several quotations from the Qu’ran in order to criticize certain leaders—especially Mu’ammar al-Qadhafi—for holding on to power at the expense of their own citizens and invited all leaders of Muslim communities to listen to the demands of their people instead of fighting them.

One issue that none of the authors reviewed here takes into account when making a case for or against labeling the AKP as an Islamic party is its national ideology. As I have argued elsewhere, the AKP’s Islamism is most evident in its national ideology and the new national identity that it has forged for Turkey since the 1990s.⁷ This identity, which redefined Turkey as an essentially Ottoman-Islamic civilization, has continued to

dictate the AKP's policy choices and to guide its actions since it came to power in 2002. What is most at stake for the AKP is neither Turkey's economic policy nor its democratic political institutions but rather its national identity, which the party's leaders perceive as essentially Muslim and Ottoman. They see themselves as the true representatives of the Turkish nation because they constitute the only political party that can restore "our own authentic value system," which is the "basis of our deeply rooted ideational tradition," in Erdoğan's words.

What Erdoğan means by "our own" is neither the *umma* (the larger transnational Muslim community) nor the smaller community of pious Muslims in Turkey but rather the Turkish nation. Erdoğan is not speaking on behalf of Islam; he is speaking on behalf of the Turkish nation, and for him the "authentic value system" of the Turkish nation is Islam. What makes the AKP Islamist is not a commitment to transform the Turkish state into an Islamic one, or to replace the secular foundations of the political and legal system with Islamic ones, or even to Islamicize society and public life; it is to reestablish Turkey's national identity as authentically Islamic, where Islam becomes the "glue" that defines and holds together the national community, replacing previous norms such as ethnic Turkism. In this sense, the AKP is very much against secularism, especially as understood by some nationalist-secularists (the *Ulusalıcı*) who consider it the core essential characteristic of the Turkish nation. The AKP is not against—and in fact fully supports—secularism as a political principle that seeks to separate religious affairs from the affairs of the state, but it is adamantly against secularism as an essential part of Turkey's national identity and a norm of public (and private) life.

The AKP's version of Islamism is not so much the "Turkish Islam" of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, which maintains that Islam is a natural part of ethnic Turkish identity, but instead what I would call an "Islamic nationalism" that completely replaces an ethnic definition of Turkishness with an Islamic one. It is in this sense that I choose to define the AKP as an Islamist party, albeit an Islamism that is merged with democracy and neoliberalism, as Atasoy argues. I maintain that the AKP's Islamism is found neither in its economic policy nor in the legal and political reforms it has been undertaking but rather in its national ideology, as evident first and foremost in its foreign policy and second in its sociocultural policies, which reflect and constitute a vision of the standard Turkish citizen as a Muslim democrat.

Yavuz is the only author under review here to draw attention to the shift that took place among the AKP's ranks after it came to power with an overwhelming majority in 2007, followed by Abdullah Gül's election to the presidency; perhaps the other authors did not do so because the AKP's second term in government had barely started when their books were being prepared for publication. Yavuz refers to the shift as "the end of dual sovereignty," meaning that, until then, there were two administrative centers in Turkey, the elected government and the military, but that after 2007 the military lost its status. This is an accurate observation and would become even truer with the start of the ongoing Ergenekon case in 2008.

While the Ergenekon case was intended to eventually expand democracy in Turkey by curbing the military's power over the state, it seems to have increasingly become a means for the AKP to bring down its opponents in the bureaucracy and the military, thereby casting a shadow of doubt over the AKP's intentions to expand democracy. This turn toward a more authoritarian stance became particularly evident in February 2011

after the arrests of several journalists during the Ergenekon investigation, which led even AKP supporters to criticize the party as undemocratic. Such authoritarian tendencies were also apparent in the judicial reforms undertaken by the AKP in 2010, which were initially claimed to expand the autonomy of the judiciary but ended up giving even more control to the government.

NOTES

¹In their discussions of the ideology of the AKP, the authors reviewed here use “Islamism,” “Islamic,” “Muslim,” and “political Islam,” sometimes interchangeably, suggesting that there are no significant differences among these terms when used in relation to the ideology of a political party. I will use “Islamism” to refer to the use of Islam as part of the ideological makeup of the AKP.

²For different perspectives on the significance of Islam and secularism in Turkey, see Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press., 1996); Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis, Minn., and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

³Robert L. Simon, *Neutrality and the Academic Ethic* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 23.

⁴Passive and active secularism are terms borrowed from Ahmet Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵“Anatolian cities” refers to those apart from the three largest Turkish cities—Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir—which were the main centers of capital accumulation and economic growth until the 1990s.

⁶Ayse Öncü, “Becoming ‘Secular Muslims’: Yasar Nuri Öztürk as a Super-subject on Turkish Television,” in *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), 227–50.

⁷Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey*.