

Islam, Conservatism, and Democracy in Turkey: Comparing Turgut Özal and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

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ABSTRACT *In the absence of a politically influential aristocracy and the entrepreneurial middle class, the political and economic transformations in Republican Turkey have been the handiwork of the political elites. Thus, late Dankwart A. Rustow talked of the cultural revolution of Atatürk, the democratic revolution of İsmet İnönü, and the economic revolution of Turgut Özal. The first two transformations were top-down revolutions and have not had a considerable impact on the social and economic stratification in the country. In contrast, with the Özal revolution a new entrepreneurial middle class began to flourish. Furthermore, during the current Recep Tayyip Erdoğan period, the peripheral social groups led by the entrepreneurial middle class have become influential players in Turkish polity.*

Turkey has inherited from its Ottoman times a cultural center-periphery divide. The Westernization reforms undertaken in the early Republican decades were aimed at the modernization of the center, while the periphery was left to its own devices. Even after the transition to multi-party politics in the 1940s, in the eyes of the Republican establishment, the periphery for the most remained “backward” in cultural terms. Under these circumstances, the periphery could not play a significant role for several decades, except in the ballot box beginning in 1950. Despite the fact that several road blocks were laid in their path, Turgut Özal in 1983-1993 and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from 2002 to the present (2013) have managed to bring the periphery into the center, thus, eventually enabling it to begin to play a major role in the Turkish economy and polity. The present essay is an introduction to that saga.¹

Turgut Özal’s Story

Turgut Özal (1927-1993) was Turkey’s eighth President of the Republic. After having attended secularly oriented primary and secondary schools, Özal grad-

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uated from Istanbul Technical University, and then studied economics in the United States. He headed twice the State Planning Organization (SPO), worked at the World Bank and at the Sabancı Holding Company. In 1983, Özal formed the Motherland Party, served as Prime Minister until 1989, and was the President of the Republic for another four years.

Özal had a deep attachment to Islam. His father, Mehmet Sıddık, was a devout Muslim, having played a significant role in Özal's religious beliefs and practices. At different periods in his life, Özal regularly attended the Naksibandi Brotherhood's İskenderpaşa Dergahı (Seminary) in Istanbul. Özal had connections with Mehmet Zahit Kotku (1897-

1980), who was the Shaykh of the İskenderpaşa Dergahı. Kotku had an extraordinary sensitivity to modernity. He had played a significant role in the forming of the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi-MNP) in 1969; the MNP was the first of the five religiously oriented political parties established in Republican Turkey.²

For Özal, Islam had remained a significant personal reference. He publicly expressed his Muslim identity. This particular orientation to Islam on the part of Özal, however, did not prevent him from leading a modern life-style. Indeed, Özal occasionally consumed alcoholic drinks in public, so did his wife Semra Hanım. Mrs. Özal had never covered and was even known to smoke cigars. The Özals were often seen showing affection in public by walking hand in hand.

Özal was an idealist with far-fetched dreams, as he set for himself grandiose goals, believing that he had a "calling," a "divinely ordained mission," and Allah would help him to achieve that mission. Despite the fact that he increasingly sought Allah's help and direction, his primary means to realize his goals remained secular. He was a Western oriented engineer with a secular mind-set. When he was faced with an important issue, he used rational thinking rather than turning to religious texts. Also as he was a pragmatic person, Özal took his distance from closed-minded secular ideologies. Neither did he allow Islam or his loyalty to a particular Islamic group to shape his decisions and policies. For instance, while prime minister, he did not tap into the Islam-friendly private sector. He based the allocation of resources solely on objective economic criteria.

Moreover, Özal's particular take on Islam must have played an important role in why he kept a distance not only from secular (closed-minded) ideologies but also from radical Islam, advocated by Arab, Persian, and Pakistani Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb (1906-1979), Ali Shariati (1933-1977), and Mawlana Maw-

dudi (1903-1979). Rather, Özal's views were more inclined towards the Islam of certain Turkish Muslim intellectuals like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) and Nurettin Topçu (1909-1975) as well as Sufi groups such as the followers of Fethullah Gülen. The latter thinkers and groups do not subscribed to radical Islam and thus they have not embraced political Islam. This means they are not a group of thinkers that promote a return of a state based on religion. Prime Minister Özal even lifted the ban on Fethullah Gülen's preaching because he wanted to employ Gülen's views and activities against radical Islamic groups.³

Although Özal opposed certain Republican ideals and policies, his reservations about those ideals and policies were not informed by religious considerations. Particularly in the early Republican period, the Ottoman past had been relegated to the attic of Turkish history, as those centuries were considered a complete failure. In contrast, Özal's held the Ottoman past in high-regard. On a completely different cultural topic, Özal even argued in support of the growing popularity of Arabesk music, a Turkish folk music genre with a mix of Western popular and Egyptian elements, as it was frowned upon by the Republican establishment. Özal held the view that the Republican establishment had no right to pass value judgement on popular pleasures and consumer choices. More significantly, Özal challenged such taboos in Turkey as the long-standing Kurdish problem. He opined that *all* possible solutions to deal with that problem, including federalism, should be freely debated.

More generally, for Özal it was necessary that instead of "people serving the state, the state should serve the people." It is no coincidence that the three significant dimensions of Özal's Turkey project had been the introduction to and consolidation in that country of three crucial freedoms, namely the freedom of expression, the freedom of entrepreneurship, and the freedom of religion and conscience. Özal wished to enable Turkey to compete with advanced countries on the international markets as well as transform the Turkish state so it could be responsive to the needs, preferences, and sentiments of its people. Özal thought he was the only person capable of successfully carrying out this "mission."

Özal also made significant contributions to democracy in Turkey. He enabled Turkish politics to leave behind certain taboos and thus begin to debate such significant issues as the very function of the state vis-à-vis the people, possible solutions to the Kurdish problem, the nature of Republican secularism and laicism, and the civil-military relations in Turkey. In the process, Turks began to have real debates on these quintessential issues without necessarily incurring crises of political legitimacy.

Özal also contributed to the gradual emergence of consensual politics. With the goal in mind to leave behind the polarized and conflict-ridden politics of the 1960s and 1970s, he attempted to bring together and reconcile the cen-



ter-right, the center-left, the ultra-nationalist, and the Islamist views under the roof of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi-ANAP*), which he had formed in 1983. At least for a while, ANAP had become a melting pot of these four parties, which one could argue held four different world views. For the first time, those with different political platforms began to come together in panel discussions and engage in a real debate. It has been suggested that the relatively smoothly functioning ANAP coalition governments of 1991-1993 and of 1999-2002 bringing together diverse parties, such as the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP*), the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi-DYP*), the Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Partisi-DSP*), and the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-MHP*), have been the end results of the politics of harmony begun by Özal's vision of how the Turkish political system should work.

Yet, not unexpectedly, fully liberal yet less than democrat Özal came to have a penchant for a highly personal leadership. Not unexpectedly he longed for a presidential system of government. Seeing his presidency as the centerpiece to this system, Özal preferred to make all the important decisions by himself, expecting others only to provide the information he needed. In the 1987 general elections, ANAP was not successful as it had been in the 1983 general elections. Thereupon, a number of faculty members, including the present author, were asked by Mesut Yılmaz, who was Minister of Culture and Tourism in the Özal government, to brief Özal on what might have been the possible reasons behind this relative electoral failure of ANAP. However, during their meeting with Özal, the faculty members could hardly get a word in edgewise,

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as Özal dominated the conversation and rattled on about how successful ANAP have been over the years. Özal had been an entrepreneurial politician who managed to get things done as soon as possible. Thus, he was referred to in Turkish as *'işbitirici polikacı.'* He tried to get things done at all costs. Consequently, Özal had a great deal of impatience for the procedural rules of democracy, so much so that on one oc-

casional, he stated "it would not be the end of the world if one acts contrary to the [1982 Turkish] Constitution only once!"

When Özal was Prime Minister (1983-1991), he made key political decisions all by himself or by consulting only a few ministers and/or high-level bureaucrats. Again this pattern repeated itself when he became president in 1991. He made his decisions concerning the economy and Turkish foreign policy by consulting only a few high-level bureaucrats, sometimes even bypassing not only the relevant ministers but also the prime minister.

Özal's authoritarian style did not conflict with Yıldırım Akbulut, who had become Prime Minister after Özal had become the President of the Republic, but it did create tensions with the following prime minister, Mesut Yılmaz. Consequently, Yılmaz even asked high-level bureaucrats not to give briefings to the President without obtaining the prime minister's permission. Özal's mindset was that ANAP had been his brain child, as he had been at the inception of ANAP's philosophy. Thus, he considered that his views on the economy and foreign policy would not be any different from the views of the ANAP prime ministers, who succeeded him.

However, the situation became tense, as Özal's highly personalized and authoritarian presidential style was not compatible with the political reality. Since he could no longer control certain developments, Özal's earlier conciliatory and non-antagonistic presidency began to show signs of turning into a hostile as well as a partisan one. From 1991 to 1993, the date he passed away, Özal spent his last years in office as a rather frustrated President.

The basic goal behind Özal's desire to bring to Turkey freedom of enterprise was that of liberalizing the Turkish economy. He wanted to do away with the state-controlled import-substitution economic model and replace it by an export-oriented market economy. Thus, he opened the door to ending the prevailing protectionist and paternalistic economic policies, and integrating the Turkish economy into the world economy. By doing so, the state-run indus-

tries were privatized and the traditional entitlements and protections in the economy were dismantled.

These far-reaching economic reforms were complemented by important improvements in telecommunications and information technology sectors. These two long-needed reform packages enabled Turkey to “jump an era” (*çağ atlamak* in Turkish), as Özal put it. The Turkish economy considerably increased its competitiveness in international markets that led to substantial economic growth in the country.

Özal helped the periphery to move to the center and start to successfully compete in economic terms with the earlier members of the center

Özal had no sympathy for the left. He held solid centre-right views mixed with a personal piety. Özal wished to upgrade the economic and social status of the urban working and middle classes, which he referred to as *Orta Direk*. He particularly wished that “the silent Muslim majority” would benefit from the political, economic, and social transformations he had started. Particularly critical in this context was his introduction in 1983 of Islamic banking, as an alternative model of banking in Turkey. Islamic

banks contributed to the establishment of an influential network of Islamist businessmen. These businessmen played an important role in the flourishing of the so-called “Anatolian tigers,” the Anatolian-based business companies that contributed a great deal to the Turkish economy’s successfully competing on the international markets.⁴

The significant development for these business companies was that they raised their own capital via the Islamic banks mentioned above. Thus, they had not been dependent on the entitlements and protections traditionally provided by the state. Consequently, they initially faced the seemingly insurmountable challenge of competing with the business companies that had not benefited from those entitlements and protections. The “Anatolian tigers” have nevertheless managed to overcome that challenge. In fact, they played a key role in Turkey’s accession to successfully competing on the international markets.

Much of the increase in religious freedom and conscience began with Özal defending a passive laicism.⁵ Özal was against the traditional Republican assertive secularism where the state’s policies limited Islam to the realm of the citizen’s private beliefs and not allowing it to be expressed in the public forum.

Özal himself began to act in “violation” of the Turkish Republic’s assertive secularism. During his tenure as prime minister, Özal often had himself and his ministers photographed attending mosque in Ankara. Similarly, he went to Mecca to perform the *hajj*. Some of his pilgrimage was carried live on state

television. In another public expression of Özal showing he was a practicing Muslim, he turned “iftar” (fast-breaking) during the month of Ramadan into a political tradition, which was openly attended by politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen.

The ANAP governments under Özal had a sympathetic attitude toward public religious expression. Consequently, the state support for religious institutions was increased. Özal was seeking a synthesis between developing the market economy on the one hand, and Islamic values on the other. One came across the same orientation among members of the Muslim businessmen and intellectuals. ANAP was defined as a conservative-progressive political party, with emphasis on both Muslim cultural values and a Western pattern of development.

A cross-influence developed between “Muslim cultural values” and a liberal and market oriented Western pattern of development in Turkey. Not unlike the sixteenth-century Christian Protestant Calvinists who defined happiness in terms of profit, struggle to get ahead, and personal enjoyment in the newly created physical spaces, Islamic entrepreneurs and intellectuals in Turkey began to seek happiness not only in the after life but in the here and now. These entrepreneurs and intellectuals expected Islam to play a greater role in the definition of the common good than the economic and political processes. Islam did offer a common foundation, generating trust among the entrepreneurs and facilitating the working of market institutions.

Yet, the market oriented Western pattern of development was not swept under the rug. As would be expected, the new conservative-Islamic entrepreneurial middle classes became an ardent supporter of not only non-radical Islam, but also of a viable democracy and thus of political stability, similar to the financially non-state dependent bourgeoisies. Özal had been instrumental in the emergence and flourishing of the new Islamic entrepreneurial middle class. In turn, this class has become ardent supporters of Özal’s Turkey project.

The conservative-Islamic middle classes in question provided financial means to disseminate their message to Özal’s “silent Muslim majority” by financing Islamic-oriented newspapers, television, and radio stations. They have been instrumental in Turkey in the development of a parallel modernity with their own distinct world views and their own life-styles when it comes to dress, taste, music, food, residential areas, vacation hotels, and the like.

Özal helped the periphery to move to the center and start to successfully compete in economic terms with the earlier members of the center. Erdoğan in turn has enabled the new members of the center to play a dominant role in the polity.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Story

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (1954-) founded the Justice and Development Party in 2001 and has been Prime Minister of Turkey from 2003 to the present. He graduated from the Department of Economics and Trade at Istanbul University (1980). Erdoğan worked as an executive manager in various companies in the wholesale food sector. He then became involved in politics by joining the National View Association (Milli Görüş Teşkilatı) that functioned as a think-tank of the first two religiously oriented political parties in Republican Turkey – the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*-MNP, 1970-1971) and the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*-MSP, 1972-1980). He then joined the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*-RP, 1993-1998). From 1994 until 1998, Erdoğan was mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. He had been

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a rather successful mayor, drawing the attention of many. However, he was imprisoned for 10 months for a political speech he made in December 12, 1997. Then he supported from outside the so-called Innovators (*Yenilikçiler*) in the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*-FP, 1998-2000), which was set up upon the closure

of the WF. When the VP was closed, Erdoğan joined the successor party to the VP - the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*-SP, 1999 to the present). But before long he resigned from the SP and founded the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*-AKP, 1999 to the present). The Justice and Development Party (AKP) went on to win the November 2002 general elections. It obtained the majority of the seats in Parliament with Erdoğan at its helm. On March 15th 2003, Erdoğan became Prime Minister. Since then, the AKP under Erdoğan increased its votes at every election, having garnered 49.8 per cent of the votes in the last (2011) general elections.

Erdoğan was born in Kasımpaşa, a lower middle class neighborhood in Istanbul. There, Erdoğan must have internalized a bravado culture, involving defiance and outspokenness. In Kasımpaşa, he contributed to the family income by selling food items on the streets. He must have grown up aware of the sentiments and aspirations of the common people. The Kasımpaşa neighborhood has been known for its strong conservative ethos with a deep sense of solidarity among its lower income classes; a cultural pattern that Erdoğan has displayed in his life.

Erdoğan attended a Prayer Leader and Preacher School before studying at Marmara University. He once observed, "I owe everything to the Prayer Leader and Preacher School that I attended." What Erdoğan acquired at that school

was a mixture of religious *and* secular virtues, attitudes, and/or knowledge – “patriotism, love for fellow human beings, service for the country, worship of Allah, environmental sciences, spirit of solidarity, and wishing for others what one wishes for himself.”

Not unlike Özal, for a while Erdoğan had attended the İskenderpaşa Dergahı. Erdoğan pointed out that there had been four major influences on his personality, one of them being the İskenderpaşa Dergahı.⁶ That seminary has had a pantheistic (Sufi) inclination to Islam. In Sufism there is the belief that by trying to internalize the virtues that Allah radiates, a believer would upgrade his/her moral standing.⁷ For Sufis assume that Allah has rendered them capable of doing this feat by filling a space in their hearts with Himself. When Erdoğan stated that one of the four major influences on his personality was İskenderpaşa Dergahı he must have particularly referred to the Sufi teachings he had become aware of at that seminary. Erdoğan once stated, “If an eye looks at man and does not see Allah, that eye is not a good eye.” Fine poetry has an important place in high Sufi culture. It is resorted to for eloquently expressing oneself. Erdoğan has often recited poems with the same purpose, even at the expense of being imprisoned.

Sufism leads one to pietism (*dindarlık* in Turkish), not to Islamism (*dincilik* in Turkish). Sufis are preoccupied by uplifting themselves in moral terms. They would not be interested in whether or not others live their religions as they do. They do not think of asking/obliging/forcing others to believe and practice their religion in a certain manner. Having had sympathy towards Sufism, Erdoğan has been a pious Muslim, not an Islamist person, and politician.

When he was Mayor of Istanbul, Erdoğan initially did not allow the serving of the alcoholic drinks at the restaurants owned and run by the municipality as well as at the restaurants owned by the municipality but rented out and run by others. His reasoning was that a good Muslim should “save people from the temptation to ignore the ‘right’ Allah radiates,” i.e., not encourage others to commit a sin. When he faced criticisms concerning the regulation forbidding the serving of alcoholic drinks in the restaurants owned by the municipality but run by others he lifted the ban. He had not, of course, thought of attempting to impose such a ban at restaurants owned and run by others.

Erdoğan’s keeping his distance from Islamism was evident in his breaking the widely perceived dichotomy of the traditionalist/Islamist versus the modern/secular life styles in Turkey. Since he is more interested in moral development rather than a state based Islam, Erdoğan had no problems with modernity and laicism, provided that the secular state would not discriminate against believers. When he was mayor in Istanbul, he regularly attended Republic day ceremonies in that city, carrying an Atatürk pin on his lapel.

More generally, Erdoğan has a basic respect for democracy. When he was convicted in 1998 for a speech he had made, he criticized the court decision, not the political regime itself. He urged his followers to try to come to power only “via the ballot box.” He has been against election barriers. For a while he urged politicians to get used to the principle of coalition governments. When he was elected chairperson of the AKP, in his acceptance speech, he quoted French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire, “I may not agree with you, but I would do everything I can so that you can freely express your views.” Not unlike Özal, Erdoğan has always argued that the state exists to serve the people, removing all obstacles to the realization of individual potential.

Along the same lines, Erdoğan has had a non-ethnic approach to nationalism. According to him, all ethnic groups, including the Kurds and Turks, should be able to freely express their secondary ethnic identities, and, at the same time, take the citizenship of the Republic of Turkey as the primary identity of all ethnic groups. His approach to non-Muslims in Turkey has also been non-discriminatory. When he was the Mayor of Istanbul, unlike the (secularly oriented) mayors who preceded him, Erdoğan set aside funds for the renovation of churches and synagogues in that city. Also, as Prime Minister, he visited a car-bombed synagogue and delivered his condolences. However, he has not been equally accommodating to the Alawites in Turkey, who have requested that their temples (*cemevleri*) should be given the same legal status as that of the mosques and similarly granted state funds. On this issue, Erdoğan has stated that Alawiism is not a religion separate from Islam.

Erdoğan’s most significant contribution to democracy in Turkey was to put an end to the undue influence of the military and the judiciary in politics. The Constitutional Court had banned several political parties in Turkey on the grounds that “they had subscribed to political Islam” and had declared null and void some laws and governmental decrees with the force of law on the same grounds. The military intervened directly and indirectly in politics from 1960 until recently. It closely monitored politics via the National Security Council and made some policy recommendations to governments. In recent years, Erdoğan governments rendered both the judiciary and the military subservient to civilian government.

While Erdoğan has been a proponent of furthering democracy on the national level in Turkey, intra-party democracy within the AKP has diminished over the years. As compared to the earlier periods, Erdoğan hardly sought the opinions of those who were not AKP members. Within the AKP and the government the numbers of those close to Erdoğan regularly decreased. It appears, that Erdoğan does not tolerate criticism well. It should be underlined that in recent years certain media owners have had to pay enormous amounts of taxes; some argue that these taxes represented a penalty for outspoken critics of Erdoğan in

the media. This indirect censure of the media has even led to certain journalists losing their jobs. There might have been several reasons behind this attitudinal change in Erdoğan, including the following: (1) the condescending attitude of the Republican establishment toward Erdoğan and the lack of respect for him as a legitimate politician; (2) his prison experience; (3) the attempt to ban his party based on its religious undertones; (4) his own personality traits of self-confidence and authoritarianism, and (5) his bravado culture.

It has often been pointed out that the AKP is led by pious leaders who nevertheless prefer secular politics. One such leader of the AKP has been, Erdoğan himself. For him, Islam has always been a very important reference, so much so that early in his political career he often resorted to religious terminology when, in fact, he referred to or had mind, secular phenomena. For instance, when he was talking about his family's move from Rize, a city on the eastern Black Sea coast, to Istanbul, Erdoğan, referred to that move as '*hicret*' ("*Hegira*," generally connoting "migration," specifically the Prophet Mohamed's moving from Mecca to Medina). Similarly, as the very first meeting of the General Council of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality got under way (1994), Erdoğan as chair, had the first Chapter of the Qur'an, "The Opening" (*Al-Fatiha*), recited. Not only his terminology, but some of his views also seemed to have been inspired by Islam. For instance, at least for a while, Erdoğan's conception of democracy drew upon the Islamic institution of '*sura*' (here, council). He stated, "Democracy is consultation in its widest sense," and for some years, he acted accordingly. Even more significantly, Erdoğan has taken the goal of democracy, as a continuing search for Allah's consent (*rıza*) regarding what is "just" and what is not "just." In his opinion, the goal of democracy was not solely the aggregation of interests with perhaps some regard to the common good. In the AKP's party program, the particular goal the party attributed to democracy was elaborated as follows: "Reflection in politics of one's personal views and feelings based on religion is only to be expected." In the program's following sentence, however, that statement was qualified, "However, they [the views and feeling in question] should not clash with *laicism*"



It should not come as a surprise that the AKP under Erdoğan has opted for a middle of the road approach to secularism, state-religion relationship, and democracy

How can one have respect for democracy, and, at the same time, take Islam as one's major reference? Has Erdoğan all along subscribed to political Islam as his detractors have always claimed? Has Erdoğan thus been long engaged in *takiyye*, hiding one's real intentions until the time is ripe to disclose them? Or, had Erdoğan been sincere when he said (in response to criticisms of his detrac-

tors concerning his employing Islamic terminology), “You always read something else into what I am trying to say, because you load different meanings to the terms I use?” Was he not in fact making an important distinction between non-political Islam and political Islam when he stated, “My reference to Islam is at the personal level. Politically speaking, my reference is the constitution and democratic principles?”⁸

The very raising of the above two sets of questions assumes that a reconciliation between Islam and democracy is out of the question. This is a false assumption, for in the Qur’an itself, there is not one conception, but there are two conceptions of the manner in which that holy Book regulates the life of its believers. According to one, all aspects of life in society and polity must conform strictly and exclusively to Islamic principles. According to the other, the members of the polity should conform only to the *general norms and principles* of Islam. One may suggest that having taken Islam as his fundamental source of reference, in his personal life Erdoğan seems to have always diligently conformed to the Islamic principles. When it came to his political life, having been open to change thanks to his years at a Prayer Leader and Preacher School and having been exposed to Sufi teaching, Erdoğan, seems to have been acting in accordance with the *general norms and principles* of Islam, at least since his years at the Virtue Party.

For Erdoğan, religion has implications beyond individual conscience. He takes Islam as the principle source of morality and other virtues. Justice in particular is a very important moral principle in Islam. On certain occasions, in total disregard of the relevant diplomatic best practices, Erdoğan sharply criticizes countries when he thinks that they have acted in an unjust manner to his fellow citizens and/or to the citizens of other countries.

It should therefore not come as a surprise that the AKP under Erdoğan has opted for a middle of the road approach to secularism, state-religion relationship, and democracy. Being against political Islam, yet taking Islam as the principle source of morality and other virtues, Erdoğan has longed for an unhindered moral development in Turkey, not unlike Mehmet Zahit Kotku, who had been his spiritual mentor for a period of time. When on one occasion he was heavily criticized of not being ‘*laik*,’ Erdoğan responded by saying, “Only the state may be ‘*laik*’ (to be read as, “one may talk about the separation of politics from religion only when one is talking about political regimes”), a person cannot be ‘*laik*’ (to be read as, “a person may be either pious or non-pious”). He also said, “One cannot be both ‘*laik*’ and Muslim.” Erdoğan was, of course, also heavily criticized for having made that second remark. Those criticizing him have come to the conclusion that because he “subscribed to political Islam,” he must be against laicism. In all probability, what Erdoğan had in mind was that those who consider themselves ‘*laik*’ do not take Islam as a source of morality,

Despite their different stories, they had one common story: both were successful in reconciling tradition with modernity

whereas pious people perceive Islam in that light. Consequently, according to Erdoğan one could not be both '*laik*' and Muslim.

Erdoğan's balanced approach to state-religion relations has been reflected in the AKP's party program, "Freedom of conscience is of utmost importance. This freedom also involves the freedom of one's living one's religion in accordance with one's beliefs.... The state should be equidistant to all religions and thoughts, making possible their peaceful co-existence.... [On the other hand] forming a political party in the name of religion is the greatest harm one can render to religion. Religion is a common belief system; nobody has the right to use it for partisan purposes and thus give rise to divisions in society and politics. Also, nobody has the right to force others to become more pious.

The leaders of the AKP have been both pious and conservative democrats in an interrelated manner. The AKP under Erdoğan has sought to maintain traditional values and authority structures in Turkey. In this context, particular significance has been attributed to family, Ottomanism, and piety. Being a family man has been given great significance, so much so that it is now a major political capital in the AKP circles. The family has also been considered crucial for the perpetuation of religious values. The emphasis has been on patriarchal values and male domination. In 2004, The AKP made an abortive effort to re-criminalize adultery. According to Erdoğan, that measure would have protected "human honor, family, and the deceived woman." Erdoğan and other leading members of the AKP are of the opinion that the Ottoman past holds the key to the future of Turkey. Islam is looked upon as an alternative source of identity, as it had been in Ottoman times. The third dimension of the AKP conservatism is communalized piety. Although individualized religious claims are held at high esteem, there is also an emphasis on Islam as a community-building ethos. The public display of religion through, for instance, communal prayers, are expected to build a social capital of trust and thus facilitate smooth personal relations and exchanges both in society in general and among economic actors.

All in all, it is thought that time honored ideas, practices and institutions, socially tested and refined for a considerable length of time, make possible dealing successfully with the world's myriad of challenges. Rationalist utopias, Jacobinism, and social engineering are rejected. There is opposition to both liberalism and socialism because it is thought that the former would promote

ideological rationalism, and the latter would lead to radical change. Conservative democracy is defined in terms of common sense, prudence, and gradual change. Not unexpectedly, in September 2002, on the controversial headscarf ban, Erdoğan made the following point, “We should solve it through reconciliation. Let us not make it a source of political tension.” In later years, he acted accordingly.

In the last analysis, Erdoğan’s view on conservatism is the protection of important values and principles while pursuing progress. In the AKP’s program similar views are expressed, “It is necessary to avoid ... revolutionary change. Commonsense should substitute both the rationalism and the revolutionary change. Ideals are important; yet they should be balanced with other equally important considerations.... It is necessary to avoid being against any kind of change. Everything that existed today cannot be inappropriate, for they have developed through long centuries of trial and error. Tradition is significant not because it is related to the past, but because it is a carrier of past experience and wisdom. However, a nostalgic approach to tradition should be avoided.”⁹

There is a close affinity between the world views of Erdoğan/AKP and the pious economic actors who had started to emerge during the Özal period, as they both were not proponents of radical Islam but were favorable toward political stability. Both tendencies would, of course, contribute to the consolidation of democracy. However, both Erdoğan’s belief that the goal of democracy is that of finding Allah’s consent (*rıza*) regarding what is “just” and “unjust” and his related ideal of communalized piety may not bode well for democracy. As he has managed in other matters, if Erdoğan reaches a middle point between personal piety and morality on the one hand, and communalized piety and morality on the other, democracy in Turkey will not drift towards the rule of the moral majority, i.e., to a version of J. J. Rousseau’s national will.

Two Men, One Story

Both Özal and Erdoğan contributed to the periphery’s march toward the center and to that periphery’s gradually beginning to play a major role at that center. Özal questioned some of the long-held Republican values and policies. He started a major transformation in the economy with its important after effects. It was Özal who contributed to the flourishing of non-state dependent pious business actors. While engaged in a life and death struggle against the Republican establishment, Erdoğan was victorious in three consecutive elections, stayed in power as the representative of the pious periphery, contributed to the periphery’s walk to the center, facilitated the periphery’s turning into a successful social, economic, and political rival to the center, and put an end to the hegemony of the Republican establishment in Turkey.

The education that Özal had received was superior to that of Erdoğan. Özal had an adequate grasp of English while Erdoğan does not. The political party Özal led (ANAP) was not perceived by the Republican establishment as a religiously oriented party while that of Erdoğan (AKP) has been considered so. Özal had a semi-religious life-style while Erdoğan has had a fully religious life-style. The same may be said about most of their respective colleagues in politics. As a consequence, Erdoğan has posed a greater threat to the Republican establishment than Özal. Thus, compared to Özal, that establishment has made life much more difficult for Erdoğan.

In the eyes of the Republican establishment, Erdoğan has had no legitimacy, while Özal had enjoyed substantial legitimacy. It must have been for this reason that the Republican establishment's reservations about Özal had been about relatively less critical issues as compared with the reservations that that establishment has had for Erdoğan. In the case of Özal, the Republican establishment had not approved some of Özal's "provocative" statements and some of his dress choices on certain occasions. In the case of Erdoğan, the same establishment has continued to think that Erdoğan has been engaged in *takiyye* and that sooner or later he would try to return Turkey to a state based on Islam. It should also be noted that as years passed by the balance of power between the Republican establishment and these two politicians turned against the former.

Although life in politics has been more difficult for Erdoğan than it had been for Özal, Erdoğan has handled the difficulties he has faced much more successfully than Özal did. Erdoğan has been a calm and patient person, and he has drawn lessons from past experiences. Özal had often displayed exactly the opposite characteristics. Özal passed away as a dejected person; Erdoğan has never displayed such a mental condition.

Özal was the realist, Erdoğan has his sentimental moments. Özal had focused on the economy, Erdoğan on the people. Özal had been the pragmatist in its Western sense while Erdoğan remained the philosopher, although the latter has always remained on top of the issues that the country has faced. Despite their different stories, they had one common story: both were successful in reconciling tradition with modernity. This has been their most remarkable contribution to democracy in Turkey. ■

Endnotes

1. On Özal and Erdoğan, I primarily draw upon Feride Acar, "Turgut Özal: Pious Agent of Liberal Transformation," Metin Heper and Sabri Sayarı (eds.), *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey* (New York: Lexington Books, 2002), pp. 163-80; Üstün Ergüder, "The Motherland Party, 1983-1989," Metin Heper and Jacob Landau (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 152-69; Graham E. Fuller. "The Erdoğan Experiment in Turkey is the Future," M. A. Muqtedar Khan (ed.), *Debating*

Moderate Islam: Geopolitics of Islam and the West (Salt Lake City: the University of Utah Press, 2007), p. 74-82; Aylin Ş. Görener and Meltem Ş. Ucal, "The Personality and Leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 2011), pp. 357-81; Metin Hepar and Şule Toktaş, "Islam, Modernity and Democracy in Turkey: The Case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Muslim World*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (April 2003), pp. 157-84; Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "The Motherland Party: The Challenge of Institutionalization in a Charismatic Leader Party," Barry Rubin and Metin Hepar (eds.), *Political Parties in Turkey* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 41-61.

2. As the Shaykh Kotku of the İskenderpaşa Dergahı, Kotku's aim in encouraging the forming of the MNP was as follows: a revitalized Islam would render the believers hard working persons; this would energize the economy; that development decrease political conflict and augment political stability; stability would be in the interest of everybody, including the pious. Kotku was trying to attain what was in the benefit of the pious via secular means. What was significant here was that Kotku was trying to achieve through secular means what was in the best interest of the pious.

3. On Sufism, I draw upon Mark J. Sedgwick, *Sufism: The Essentials* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000).

4. M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 52-6; Cihan Tuğal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 132.

5. As it is well known, "secularism" connotes the separation of politics from religion; it also implies the absence of state intervention in religion. The state-religion relationship and the ongoing debate on this issue in Turkey can be better comprehended if the word "secularism" is taken as one's making a decision by using his/her own reasoning faculties, thus not taking Islam as a reference. If the word 'laicism' (derived from French word *laïcité*) is employed to refer to the *separation between religion and politics*, and, furthermore, if the phrase 'assertive laicism' is used to depict *separation of politics from religion and the intervention of the state in religion*, and the phrase 'passive laicism' is employed for *separation of politics from religion and the non-intervention of the state in religion*. These conceptual distinctions are necessary, because in Turkey, with the foundation of the Republic (1923), religion was separated from politics (laicism). However, the state intervened in religion (assertive laicism) in order to enable people to make their decisions by using their reasoning faculties without taking religion as reference (secularism). Ahmet Kuru has made a distinction between "passive secularism" and "assertive secularism." ["Passive and Assertive Secularism: Religion and Politics Worldwide," *World Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (July 2007), pp. 568-94.] My conceptualization above helps to distinguish the laicism on the part of the state from the laicism on the part of the individual; I refer to the latter as secularism.

6. Those others were Erdoğan's father, Kasımpaşa, and Erdoğan's teacher at the primary school he had attended. On one occasion, Erdoğan had let it be known that this teacher at the primary school had encouraged him to attend the Prayer Leader and Preacher School.

7. Here, the word "believer" rather than "Muslim" is preferred, because the monotheistic religions other than Islam, also have followers who have a mystic approach to their religions.

8. A similar "miscommunication" between Erdoğan and his detractors took place when Erdoğan once said that for him democracy was "a means, not an end." Not unexpectedly, this statement was conceived to mean "one man, one vote, once," i.e., once he attains power, he would leave democracy behind and would try to bring to Turkey a state based on Islam. Erdoğan once more had to explain what was on his mind, when he had made that statement, "In every act or activity, one should provide for people's happiness, welfare, and security. A system that is instrumental concerning this particular goal is a means to the end in question. Religion, too, is a means, not an end; one may use religion for his/her benefit or one may benefit from religion in the pursuance of higher ends."

9. On the conservative inclinations of the JDP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, see Yalçın Akdoğan, "The Meaning of Conservative Democratic Political Identity," M. Hakan Yavuz (ed.), *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006), pp. 49-65; M. Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, pp. 93-9; Metin Hepar, "A Democratic-Conservative Government by Pious People: The Justice and Development Party in Turkey," Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 345-61.