



Ümit Cizre, *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*

Didem Buhari-Gulmez



Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4350>

DOI : 10.4000/ejts.4350

ISSN : 1773-0546

Éditeur

EJTS

Référence électronique

Didem Buhari-Gulmez, « Ümit Cizre, *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party* », *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [En ligne], Recensions, mis en ligne le 25 janvier 2011, consulté le 21 mai 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4350> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4350>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 21 mai 2022.

© Some rights reserved / Creative Commons license

Ümit Cizre, *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*

Didem Buhari-Gulmez

Ümit Cizre, *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party* (Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics), (London and New York: Routledge, 2008, 238 pp.) ISBN-13: 978-0415396455.

- 1 This edited book is a promising attempt to provide guidance for assessing the place of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) within Turkish political system. The exponential rise of the Islam-friendly AKP in Turkey since the elections of November 2002 has added fuel to the intense debates about the place of political Islam in global affairs. Turkey is known for its Kemalist establishment whose allegiance to secularism is often greater than to democratic values. Accordingly, the Constitution bans the questioning of secularism by any political group. Kramer (2000, 7-8) argues that without the spread of secular values based on the ideas of human individuality and self-determination, a top-down imposition of secularism on society has not been able to guarantee individual freedoms and democracy; instead, it has alienated practicing Turkish Muslims by excluding not only political but also social expressions of Islam. It is often said that the AKP has successfully mobilized the alienated societal segments that protest the rigid policies of the state vis-à-vis social expressions of Islam, in particular the headscarf ban and the discrimination of graduates of religious schools (*Imam Hatip Okulları*).
- 2 Although the AKP was founded by former leading members of the Islamist movement led by Necmettin Erbakan, its discourse is significantly different. The AKP de-emphasizes Islam in order to embrace democracy, human rights and rule of law, values which originated in the West but are increasingly perceived as universal. The AKP's responsiveness to the contemporary global order has been interpreted as the essential source of its success (Rumford 2008). Presented as a pro-European Union (EU) reformist movement within Turkish Islamism, the AKP has even been proposed as an antidote to the rise of religious fundamentalism and as a role model for the Islamic world (Fuller

2008). However, since 2005 the EU reform process has slowed down in Turkey. The secularists' suspicions toward the AKP's reformist discourse and policies have reached such a level that the Turkish Constitutional Court recently found certain party members guilty of violating the fundamental principles of secular Republic. Although Turkish Islamists are united in their negative reaction to the decision of the Constitutional Court, their internal conflicts about the future of Turkish society and Turkey's EU membership have become more pronounced (Ergül 2007).

- 3 As regards religiosity in contemporary Turkish society, it is observed that although the majority of the Turkish population is Sunni Muslim, Islamic fundamentalism is negligible compared to other Muslim states, as is public support for Islamist terrorism (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2006). According to the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (*Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*, TESEV) surveys, only 21 percent of the respondents reported endorsing *sharia* in 1999 and this marginal support decreased to 9 percent in 2006 (TESEV 2006). Rose and Özcan (2007) argue that the controversies over political Islam in Turkey do not revolve around the supremacy of civil law or the legitimacy of violence in the name of religion, but around the public visibility of Islam as seen in issues such as the headscarf ban.
- 4 According to the First European Quality of Life Survey in Turkey (Rose and Özcan 2007), nearly two-fifths of the respondents reported attending religious services at least weekly, while the other two-fifths never or hardly ever attend mosques. As regards wearing religious symbols, TESEV (2006) finds that in 2006, approximately three out of eight Turkish women reported that they did not wear any head covering. Only 12 percent of Turkish women said they wear the traditional Islamic headscarf, and only 1 percent of Turkish women cover themselves entirely in public with a full-length chador (Kalaycıoğlu 2005).
- 5 However, the picture is not bright with respect to individual freedoms. Recent research led by Binnaz Toprak (2008) demonstrates that the secular segments of the Anatolian public feel threatened by the alliance between conservatism and religiosity. Both non-practicing Muslims and Alevites feel obliged to follow Sunni practices such as fasting during Ramadan. The intolerance towards youth is alarming. The report concluded that the activities of AKP municipalities have reinforced the conservative segments of Turkish society and increased societal pressure based on Muslim mores. The reaction of AKP-friendly media was to accuse Toprak of politicizing research. In addition, some Islamist thinkers tried to justify societal pressures on non-practicing Muslims in religious terms, arguing that one is responsible for making one's neighbours eligible for paradise. Finally, public opinion in Turkey generally favours the Army as the most trustworthy state institution and does not see the its 'guarantorship' as incompatible with secularism.
- 6 Against this complex picture, Çizre's volume offers four chapters, devoted respectively to the historical evolution of the AKP, the secular veto players against AKP reformism, the role of the EU in both legitimating and demotivating the AKP, and the social bases of the AKP movement. Part one, which is much longer than the remaining chapters, is devoted to locating the AKP movement within political Islam in Turkey, and is the book's most significant contribution.
- 7 In their illuminating article, Çınar and Duran explain that Turkish Islamism is unique for at least six reasons. First, unlike other Islamic states in the world, the religious scholars, or *ulema*, are weak in Turkey. In Ottoman times, this was due to a complex

bureaucratic structure that divided *ulema* powers among different bureaucracies. In contemporary Turkey, there are substantial limitations to *ulema* practices. For instance, considering Islam in political activities and law-making is constitutionally banned. Second, the Islamist intelligentsia in Turkey is predominantly influenced by a Sufi tradition that rejects radicalism and anti-state violence. Third, Turkish Islam is local and nationalist in the sense that it does not resonate well with internationalist Islamist movements. Fourth, as it did not arise out of a previous colonization experience, it does not embrace anticolonialist discourses that reinforce a negative image of the West. Fifth, there is significant diversity among Turkish Islamists; the National Outlook, Nurcu, and Gülen movements are just a few examples. Sixth, it is moderate and diffuse because significant segments of its elite and other followers have been secularized through education. The harsh political competition among rightist parties also plays a role in fracturing its ideological coherence. In sum, Turkish Islamists generally participate in Turkish politics and attempt to distance themselves from fundamentalist violence, and do not reject the idea of the state.

- 8 In this framework, both Çınar and Duran (Chapter 1) and Yıldız (Chapter 2) support the argument that there have been two major tendencies within contemporary Turkish political Islam. The first is represented by the National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş, MG) led by Erbakan. The MG has faced accusations that it intends to impose the sharia a top-down transformation of Turkey into sharia, similar to the Islamic revolution witnessed in Iran in 1979. These accusations led to the so-called “28th of February” process in 1997, when Erbakan’s Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) and Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi), were banned. The current political party of the MG is the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi), which is largely marginalized within Turkish public opinion. The MG is known as anti-Western. It accuses modernism and the West of being the sources of poverty, degeneration, and social illnesses in the Islamic world.
- 9 The second major type of contemporary Turkish Islamism is the reformist movement led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of the AKP. Contrary to the MG, AKP reformists frequently refer to originally Western values such as human rights, civil society, and democracy. They claim to reconcile Islamic civilization both with modernity and with Western ways of living, including capitalism. The AKP has announced that it is ‘conservative democratic’ rather than Islamist and that it embraces secularism. Unlike the MG, the AKP also gives explicit support to Turkey’s EU membership candidacy. It has enacted significant reform packages which expanded cultural rights, including broadcasting and education in Kurdish, and has tried to revise the established state policy on Cyprus question. However, the AKP makes it clear that its understanding of secularism is different from that of the Kemalist establishment in that it entails greater freedoms for Muslims. There is still a need to provide a fuller analysis of AKP policies, in particular in the areas of economic and foreign policy.
- 10 Çayır’s paper is a welcome contribution to the analysis of the two different philosophies within Turkish Islamism. Studying not only the political discourse but also the literary works of Turkish Islamists, Çayır concludes that the ‘collective Islamism’ that sought to expand an anti-Western interpretation of Islam in 1970s and 1980s has been replaced by a ‘self-critical Islamism’ that encourages Islamic actors to embrace modern lives and see themselves as pious ‘individuals’ rather than committed ‘soldiers’ of Islamic community.

- 11 Çınar criticizes the depiction of the AKP as a consistent and liberal Islamic movement. He emphasizes the inconsistencies within the discourse and policies of the AKP government and claims that the AKP government lacks a practical democratization agenda independent from the EU membership requirements. In other words, the AKP has used the EU project as a means to ease secularist restrictions on public expression of Islamic belief. For instance, it has instrumentalized EU conditionality in order to restrict the political authority of the military, which claims to be the guardian of secularism in Turkey. On the other hand, the European Court of Human Rights's decisions to legitimize the headscarf ban in Turkey and the EU's greater sensitivity to the religious liberties of Alevites and non-Muslim minorities has led the AKP to distance itself from the EU membership ideal. The AKP's initially liberal discourse is thus susceptible to becoming statist-nationalist, in particular regarding the Kurdish issue. Çınar argues that both the new anti-terror law, which is found stricter than the previous legislation in dealing with separatism, and the AKP leadership's uneasy reaction to public criticism, including their explicit hostility against journalists critical of government policies, violate liberal democratic principles. Moreover, the systematic recruitment of AKP-friendly practicing Muslims into state bureaucracies and the emergence of a private sector falling under the AKP orbit paves the way for further fragmentation and polarization of Turkish society. It is to be noted that Çınar also accuses the secular establishment of reinforcing the already existing divisions within Turkish society and of violating liberal democratic principles.
- 12 Cizre concentrates on the relationship between the Turkish army and the AKP government in order to discuss whether the army has been an important factor in slowing down the AKP reforms. The Turkish army embraced the role of the 'guardian' of the Republican principles, including secularism, and has explicitly specified two internal enemies: Kurdish separatism and religious reactionaryism (*irtica*). Following the 1960 coup, the army-dominated National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*, MGK) was established as an advisory body to the government. In line with European democratic standards for the control of civilians over the military, the AKP government enacted several reforms to curtail the military's supremacy over Turkish politics and to civilianize the NSC. According to Cizre, the Turkish army is still too significant within Turkish political system and undermines the AKP government's self-confidence in continuing the EU reform process. The General Staff's electronic memorandum warning against the election of an Islamist President on 27 April 2007 is offered as an example demonstrating the army's intimidating activities against the AKP government. However, recent developments seem to run against Cizre's assumptions. One of the AKP's leading members became the president of the Republic in 2007, and the rivalry between the army and the AKP government seems to be toned down, especially after the outbreak of the *Ergenekon* case, which accuses among others top members of the military elite of attempting a coup.
- 13 Usul investigates the relationship between the AKP government and the EU and argues that the AKP initially expected the EU process to lead to a substantial advance with regard to individual freedoms. The author calls this phase 'euro-enthusiasm.' However, 'euro-enthusiasm' was eventually replaced by 'euro-fatigue' due to an increasing opposition to Turkey's membership from among Europeans and the EU's emphasis on the enhancement of the status of Kurdish people, non-Muslim minorities and Alevites instead of pious Muslims' rights. It would be useful to the reader if the author

elaborates the concepts used in the paper, in particular euro-skepticism, euro-enthusiasm, and euro-fatigue in the context of Turkey-EU relations.

- 14 Finally, Dalmiş and Aydın discuss the voter profile and the social bases for the AKP electorate, and provide interesting results. They claim that the social bases of the AKP derive not only from the MG but also from another rightist party, the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) founded by Turgut Özal in 1983. They also claim that the voter profile of the AKP is best described as “religious, rightist, and conservative.” Their findings are compatible with the existant literature, in particular with Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2007) who suggest that AKP voters rather than religiosity by itself, the voters of the JDP are distinguished more by their critical stance on religious freedoms than by religiosity itself. Indeed, the majority of AKP voters complain about state-led restrictions on the headscarf and on *imam hatip* graduates, as well as about the general political inertia (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2007: 216-220).
- 15 Overall, the book as a whole is well-edited, and manages to maintain a consistent approach across its eight papers. However, in line with the promising title of the book, it would be useful to provide background information about the normative bases and the historical evolution of Turkish secularism for the readers that are not familiar with Turkish politics. In particular, depicting the Turkish secular elite as a unified front that resists democratization and Europeanization is misleading.
- 16 Turkish secularism is parallel to French ‘laicism’ in that the secularization process has been used to consolidate both the national identity and the authority of the secular elite against monarchist and authoritarian religious establishments (Kramer 2000, Sheikh and Wæver 2005). However, Turkey’s practises of secularism have been more exclusionary toward religion than France due to political systemic reasons. In France secularism coexisted with multi-party democracy whereas in Turkey secularization was initially promoted as a top-down process (Kuru 2007). Toprak (1981: 47) argues that Turkey is only a ‘semi-secular’ state because it embraced state supervision of religious organization and activity, a stance which is not compatible with the traditional Western understanding of secularism. Religion and religious institutions were generally represented as obstacles to innovation and national progress. Thus, rationalism rather than religion has been embraced as the basis of law, education and politics. Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution highlights that individuals not only possess the right of religious freedom, but also a right to be free from religion (Rose and Özcan 2007). The Turkish Constitutional Court states that religious freedoms can be restricted in order to defend democracy, equality and liberty, which secularism guarantees by protecting the individual “not only against arbitrary interference by the State but also from external pressure by extremist movements” (*Leyla şahin v. Turkey* no. 44774/98).
- 17 Moreover, secularism touches directly on the rights of women. Against Muslim norms that segregate men and women in the mosque and stipulate that women should not work with strangers, the founders of the secular Turkish Republic stressed gender equality and Turkish women gained the right to vote before women in France and Switzerland (Rose and Özcan 2007). Finally, the book should have explained that the Turkish army’s relationship with Islam has not always been antagonistic. After the military coup in 1980, the army introduced the ‘Turkish-Islamic Synthesis’ (*Türk-islam Sentezi*), through which it aimed to prevent the spread of Communism by ‘Sunnifying’ Alevites as well as ‘Turkifying’ Kurdish citizens through compulsory religious education

and a pro-active Presidency of Religion Affairs (*Diyanet*), thereby paving the way for further Islamization of Turkish society (Karakas 2007). In sum, Turkey's secularism is a highly controversial issue and should be discussed further. Overall, this book provides an insightful introduction to the contemporary AKP movement within Turkish political Islam, and therefore it is recommendable to students of comparative politics, democracy and religion, as well as scholars of Turkish politics.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

- Çarkoğlu, Ali and Kalaycıoğlu, Ersin (2007) *Turkish Democracy Today: Elections, Protest and Stability in an Islamic Society*, London and New York, I. B. Tauris.
- Ergül, Hakan (2007) 'Destination Europe: The Representation(s) of Turkey's EU Journey in Islamic Newspapers', *Caligrama: Online Journal of Studies and Researches on Communication, Language and Media*, vol. 3, no. 2.
- Fuller, Graham E. (2008) *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, Washington, DC, United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Kalaycıoğlu, Ersin (2005) 'The Mystery of the Türban: Participation or revolt?', Çarkoğlu, A. and Rubin, B.(eds.), *Religion and politics in Turkey*, London, Routledge, pp. 91–109.
- Karakas, Cemal (2007) 'Turkey: Islam and Laicism Between the Interests of State, Politics, and Society', Peace Research Institute Frankfurt Reports No. 78.
- Kramer, Heinz (2000), *A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press.
- Kuru, Ahmet (2007) 'Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles, and State Policies toward Religion', *World Politics*, vol. 59, pp. 568–94.
- Rose, Richard and Özcan, Yusuf (2007) 'First European Quality of Life Survey: Quality of life in Turkey', Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, URL: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/19/en/1/ef0719en.pdf>
- Rumford, Chris (2008) *Cosmopolitan Spaces: Europe, Globalization, Theory*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Sheikh, Mona and Wæver, Ole (2005) 'Comparative Secularism across Europe and the Middle East', paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Toprak, Binnaz (1981) *Islam and Political Development in Turkey*, Leiden, E. J. Brill.
- Toprak, Binnaz (2008) 'Being Different in Turkey: Alienation on the Axis of Religion and Conservatism', Istanbul, Open Society Institute.
- Leylaşahin v. Turkey* (application no. 44774/98)
- URL:<http://www.echr.coe.int/Eng/Press/2005/Nov/GrandChamberJudgmentLeylaSahinvTurkey101105.htm>

Pew Global Attitudes Project (2006)

URL: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=253>

TESEV (2006) *Religion, society and politics in a changing Turkey*, Istanbul, Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı.

AUTEUR

DIDEM BUHARI-GULMEZ

PhD candidate in Royal Holloway, University of London