Counter Transformations in the Center and Periphery of Turkish Society and the Rise of the Justice and Development Party

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The election results on November 3, 2002, which brought the Justice and Development Party into power, shocked many, but for varying reasons. Afterwards, some became more hopeful about future of their country, while others became even more doubtful and anxious, since for them the "republican regime" came under threat. These opposing responses, along with the perceptions that fueled them, neatly describe the two very different worlds that currently exist within Turkish society, and so it is important to think through many of the contested issues that have arisen as a result of these shifting political winds.

The winning Justice and Development Party (JDP) was established in 2001 by a group of politicians under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, many of whom split from the religio-political movement of Necmetiin Erbakan, the National Outlook Movement, and the Welfare Party. Interestingly, in less than two years after its establishment, and at the first general election it participated in, the JDP received 34.29 % of the vote when all other established parties fell under the 10 % threshold. The only exception to this was the Republican People's Party (19.38 %). The JDP captured 365 out of 550 seats in the parliament and therefore was given the opportunity of establishing the government alone, which is exactly what happened. Two years later, in the 2004 local elections, the JDP increased its votes to 41.46 %, while the RPP slightly decreased to 18.27 %, and the Nationalist Action Party increased to 10.10 % (from 8.35 % in 2002). Finally, in the most recent general elections in Turkey in 2007, which was marked by intense debate over presidential elections and an online military note, the JDP won nearly half of all votes, 46.58 %, and began its second term in power.

What was noteworthy about all of this was not merely the JDP's surprising rise to power, but its contributions to the consolidation of Turkish democracy and to economic improvements within such a short time period. During the five-year rule of the JDP, Turkey witnessed a "silent revolution," as argued by Abdullah Gul. Turkish Parliament worked harder than ever to reform the political, bureaucratic, and judicial systems, which they hoped would bring Turkey into a compatible line with the European Union, while making the Turkish economy into the sixth most productive economy in Europe.

The interesting point that I want to emphasize here is that a party established by the ex-members of a political party that has been seen as an outsider since its inception, was closed down by the Constitutional Court on accusations of anti-regime activities, and has been treated as an anomaly by many secularists (Dağı, 2006: 88), easily won the support of an important majority of the Anatolian people. This remains a strange and remarkable political fact that begs for further examination. A poll in the Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolia showed that the leader of the same party, Tayyip Erdogan, was seen as the "most favored leader, politician and statesman" by 59.9 % of respondents, followed by Abdullah Gul (13.3%), and Devlet Bahceli (0.9 %), the leader of the Nationalist Action Party (MetroPoll, 2007). These facts foreshadow the apparent dichotomy between the perceptions and preferences of the two worlds in Turkish society. The same political trends represent a great hope for some, but a threat for others; the same political figure can be seen as a savior for many, but a demon to others. The initial question that forced me to take up this subject of Turkish politics and society was therefore: "why is there such division and such differing perceptions along these lines?" That is, why is there a very wide gap between perceptions and preferences in Turkish society? Why is a party supported by the majority of people seen as an anomaly by another group of people? Why is a party proven to be very successful in advancing democratic institutions seen as a threat to the republican regime? Finally, what happens to the sort of regime that comes under such threats along with the consolidation of democracy and with economic improvements?

These, of course, are deep-rooted questions that require a careful examination of political and cultural history. There are many valuable academic studies that have looked for answers to similar questions in the context of Turkey. Relying on those studies for this paper, I will focus mostly on the more recent events of Turkish cultural and political history. Here, I will look at the developments that have taken place after the 1980s, as those remain the definitive event, which I argue gave birth to the Justice and Development Party.

Transformation in Turkish Society

My starting point is Şerif Mardin's classification, which he introduced in 1973 in his *Center and Periphery: A Key to Turkish Politics?* There, he proposed a useful framework for explaining Turkish politics when he argued that Turkish society had a center and a periphery, and that "the confrontation between center and periphery was the most important social cleavage underlying Turkish politics and one that seemed to have survived more than a century of modernization" (1973: 170). This modern dual structure has its roots in the Ottoman society, and so there are two very loosely related worlds at play here. Mardin observed a confrontation "between the Sultan and his officials on the one hand, and the highly segmented structure of Ottoman Anatolia on the other hand" (Mardin, 1973: 171). However, in the Ottoman Empire, the two worlds had interacted essentially through religion, and Islam was the common language that both communicated through. Moreover, it was a means to an alliance and a bargain, or an accommodation, which had been struck up between the center and periphery. That is, the relation created a space "in which the sharp edges of the both had been rounded off and a degree of overlap achieved," and so "this imbricative pattern minimized conflict, allowed coexistence and served to bridge the gap between the two worlds" (Sunar and Toprak, 2004: 156).

The cleavage between the center and periphery continued to exist, and even widened, in Republican Turkey. The central actors of the Turkish society, the Republican elite, for example the "Republican People's Party—the single party through which Republican policies were channeled—was unable to establish contact with the rural masses...[and] the members of the bureaucratic class under the Republic had little notion of identifying themselves with the peasantry" (Mardin, 1973: 183). Rather, in addition to the Republican elite's indifference and its distancing of itself from the peripheral values, the shared constant of religion slowly became removed from many aspects of social and political life. As a result, this major connection with the periphery was weakened, and the tension between them was exacerbated, and the distance between the central elite and the ascriptive, religious groups of the periphery greatly increased (Sunar and Toprak, 2004: 160).

Secularization in the Early Years of the Republic

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the founding elite inaugurated an intense secularization process, with the aim of transforming the religious society into a homogenous, Western-type, modern secular nation-state. The new "Republican elite's passion for modernization," Yilmaz argues, "seen as an escape from backwardness, translated itself into a

total dislike and distrust of all things associated with the ancient regime and the old way of life," and "topping the long list of suspect establishments were religion and religious institutions" (Yılmaz, 2005: 387). Therefore, shortly after the founding of the Republic, a major campaign was launched against the institutional and cultural basis of Islam in society (Turan, 1991: 34). Religion then became the main target of the Kemalist elite's cultural revolution (Mardin, 1971: 202). Such a perception by the secular elite of religion as an inhibitor of modernization resulted in an unimaginable and careless mistreatment of Islam in the early years of the Republic (See Tunçay, 2001: 94). This targeting of religion and the forceful secularization imposed from above widened the gap between the Republican elite and the ordinary people of periphery. As Yavuz argues, such a movement "subordinated religion to the political realm, and alienated society from the state…promoted the polarization of Islam and the struggle between secularists and Muslims for control of the state" (1997a: 64).

A Counter Transformation in the 1980s

The social and political structure of Turkey started to change after 1980s. The Turkish periphery underwent a deep transformation in its economic, social, and political realms that altered the power balance between the center and the periphery, which had been in favor of the center until 1980s. In this transformation process, though the macro structure of society was preserved and the center and the periphery continued to co-exist, the power balance between the two changed. As a result, the periphery recovered, produced its own world with its own market and financial networks, grew its elite, and re-defined its worldview with respect to its central beliefs and traditions. This process re-established the periphery in the social, economic, and political scene of Turkey. Most importantly, with regard to the main subject of this paper, I argue that it is this transformation that created the conditions that would bring about the Justice and Development Party. It is important to note then that these transformations in the periphery towards a more powerful re-assertion of itself have paralleled a regress of power in the center. In other words, while the periphery has become leading force of economic improvement, political liberalization, and democratization, the center, once the revolutionary modernizing actor, has turned into a opposing force at the front of the liberalization of Turkey. Next, I will discuss these transformations in the economic, political, and social realms in more detail.

The 1980 Coup and New Policy toward Islam

With the 1980s came a turning point for the Turkish periphery and its transformation, particularly due to two factors: one was the state's changed approach toward religion after the 1980 military coup, and the other was the very influential, decade-long liberal rule of Turgut Ozal. In the second half of the 1970s, ideological confrontation between left and right reached its peak in Turkey and shattered society with ideological polarization and strife-ridden violence that weakened the administration (Yavuz, 1997a: 67). During the same years, TGNA was even unable to agree on a president, and the government was incapable of providing law and order. Between 1976 and 1980, "political parties, state bureaucracy, labor unions, student organizations, and other interest groups were thoroughly politicized and ideologically factionalized" (Yeşilada, 1988: 351) and violent clashes between leftist and rightist movements were often carried into streets. According to estimated statistics that Yeşilada provides,

> By the September 1980, the country the country faced conditions close to civil war. Rough estimates of deaths from political violence grew as follows: 1975, 35; 1976, 90; 1977, 260; 1978, 800-1; 1979, 1,500; and 1980, 3,500…When the military coup took place, the generals moved quickly to end domestic political violence. Within a year, 150,000-200,000 individuals were arrested and, by 1983, some 39,529 persons were given jail sentences (Cited in Yeşilada, 1988: 351).

After taking control, the military-led National Security Council suspended the Constitution, dissolved the Turkish parliament, disbanded the political parties, detained their leaders, and suspended all professional associations and confederations of trade unions (See Ahmad, 1993). However, the military leadership was unable to find a solution to the violent clashes between politicized groups, even with force; therefore they appealed to Islamic institutions and symbols. They attempted to fuse Islamic ideas with their nationalistic goals of creating a more homogenous and less political Islamic community (Yavuz, 1997: 67). This move represented Kemalism's failure to build a homogenous, modern society. Following the coup, in contrast to the early years of the Republic, the generals made religious courses compulsory in schools and opened new religious schools with the aim of strengthening the role of religion in society.

The leaders of the 1980 military coup had intended to make religious ideas co-exist with Turkish nationalism in order to expand the social base and promote the cohesion of the state (Yavuz, 1996: 99). Religion was not a goal in this sense, but was only a means to an end; therefore, as Yavuz argues, the military government planned to foster a co-opted and less political Islam to confront a much-exaggerated "leftist threat" (2003: 74). This project to of

integrating secularism, Turkish nationalism and Islam was known as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, and was supported by the Heart of Enlightened, which was established by a group of conservative intellectuals who wanted to form an intellectual resistance to what they saw as the corrosive effects of Marxist thought in Turkey.

The Turkish-Islamic synthesis was carried into practice by the new victor of the first democratic elections of the post-1980 coup period, namely Turgut Özal and his Motherland Party (MP), which received the support of 45.14 % of the people in the 1983 general elections. Ozal's coming to power as Prime Minister, and then as President until 1993, was perhaps the most influential force behind the transformation of the periphery of Turkey. The Motherland Party had the electoral appeal of the old Justice, the National Salvation, and Nationalist Action Parties, which had been closed by the military government and their leaders' participation in politics was prohibited. In addition, Ozal had a charismatic personality and was equipped with attractive, pragmatic policies. In this way, he successfully negotiated the perceived pitfalls of secularism and democracy. While campaigning for the elections in 1983, Turgut Özal "did not hesitate to use the traditional networks of authority, such as the Sufi orders, kinship ties, and mosque associations in order to build dynamic bridges with the society at large. His liberalism, anti-bureaucratism, and pro-Islamic attitude made him very popular in the eyes of different segments in Turkish society" (Taşpınar, 2005: 141). He successfully bridged the political divisions in Turkey as well. While he was in power, he included in his leading cadre the leading members of the closed National Salvation Party and also prominent disciples of Nakşibendi leaders, which he mixed together with liberal, pro-Market, and secularist politicians. Therefore, he was able to gain the popular support of a wide range of voting blocks.

Throughout the 1980s, when the military held control, liberalism was not permitted in the areas of politics and culture, but only in the economic sphere (Insel, 2003: 295). However, Ozal's liberal economic policies gave rise to new opportunities for the peripheral actors to assert themselves in other spheres as well. The economic ground was fertile for this, and during Özal's liberal rule throughout the 1980s, small and medium-sized businesses in Anatolia greatly benefited from this opportunity. They utilized the opportunity to establish their own financial networks, organize themselves outside of the control of the state, and challenged the preeminence of state-supported large industrialists (Taşpınar, 2005: 142). During this process, some of the Anatolian companies such as Ihlas and Kombassan Holding, far surpassed the levels of the small and medium size companies and became among Turkey's

largest holding firms. Ozal's liberal economic rule therefore gave birth to a new middle class, as argued by Ahmet Insel:

> The economic policies implemented in the politically repressive environment of the September 12 [1980 military coup] regime dealt a serious blow against the traditional middle classes favored by protectionist policies. This middle class, comprised of urban artisans and midsize traders and farmers in Western Anatolia, wage earners, most of whom worked in the public sector, and large private-firm employees who had been able to raise their purchasing power thanks to the right of collective bargaining, lost its economic standing because of the new policies. The traditional middle class began to be replaced by a new one. The conservative cultural affinity between the traditional class of provincial artisans and traders on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the small- and midrange enterprisers who live mostly in midsize cities and some of whom are employer and employee simultaneously, and the young executives who have received university education, especially in technical fields, caused these groups to become united and to constitute the nucleus of a new middle class. The great distance separating the traditional republican bourgeoisie from this new middle class, which is culturally conservative, politically nationalist and moderately authoritarian, economically liberal, or rather, on the side of free enterprise, became considerably more marked during the last period (2003: 298-99).

This emerging middle class even established its own economic organization as well, (MÜSIAD, or Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği) instead of joining themselves to the previously established Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (TÜSIAD).

Another very important contribution of Özal was his strong support of Turkey's push for EU membership. He intended to pursue a full integration into the EU, in part as a way to undermine the authoritarian position of the powerful Kemalist state-centric institutions (Yavuz, 2003: 75). Furthermore, in addition to market economy, Ozal introduced the privatization of the mass media, contributed to the expansion of civil society and the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (Gole, 1997: 47). These moves marked a departure for liberal politics. The state's accomodationist approach toward Islam, along with Ozal's liberal policies regarding religion, established an opportunity for the religio-political movement of Necmettin Erbakan to re-enter the scene with his Welfare Party. However, the Welfare Party came to its prominence only after the death of Ozal. It received a significant percentage of the votes in the 1994 local and 1995 general elections. In 1995, the WP won the support of 21.38 % of the vote and established a coalition government with True Path Party. Therefore, the periphery began to establish itself in the political sphere as well. The WP was a party of the periphery, and its rise to power was sign of a change in Turkish society. Coming from religious roots, the WP was not welcomed by the secular elite. The WP's success in the elections was reported with the headlines, "The Other Turkey Wins the Elections," or "The Black Turks versus the White Turks," or "Faith Won against Harbiye" in the newspapers

(Yavuz, 2003: 214). The WP afterwards established the coalition government and its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, became prime minister.

The Welfare Party was, in fact, a successor of the National Salvation Party (NSP)— the party that was established by Erbakan in the early 1970s and was dissolved by the military leadership after the 1980 coup on accusations of anti-regime activities—which represented those who were not fully integrated culturally and economically into the "modernist center" (Toprak, 2005). However, the NSP "stressed Islamic mores as a cure to social problems, and its goal was to return to traditional social and cultural life," while the WP, in contrast, attempted to modernize traditional norms and institutions (Yavuz, 1997a: 70). This success in 1995 general elections was the result of the WP mayors' relative success when compared to their predecessors. They worked hard to improve public services and reduced corruption and nepotism in their municipalities. In addition, Hakan Yavuz argues that the WP also acted more professionally than the other parties on the left and right (1997a: 72).

However, despite its considerable success at the elections, the WP's tenure was short-lived, and it "is remembered largely for being ineffectual and compromised by the constraints of governing with a coalition partner and the political boundaries set by the military establishment" (Mecham, 2004: 343). After some years, the military re-emerged in the political scene and forced the popularly elected government to resign in 1997. However, this was not a sudden development, but, as Kramer argues, "has become all too obvious in the developments since the early 1990s when the military leadership with the Kemalist circles in the state bureaucracy, intellectuals and the media tried to roll back the political consequences of softening the strict respect of the Kemalist principles that had occurred during the government of Turgut Özal in the second half of the 1980s" (2000: 9-10). With the WP coming to power, many in the secular establishment perceived Erbakan and his party to be a serious menace to Turkey's secular regime, and would argue that their endorsement of the secular-democratic order in Turkey was no more than *taqiyya*—a dissimulating of one's faith on grounds of expediency (Güney and Heper, 2000: 639).

In addition, there were some other factors that disrupted the military and secular establishment in Turkey, such as the accumulation of large funds by the Islamic holding companies and the growing number of students graduating from the Prayer Leader and Preacher Schools (See Güney and Heper, 2000: 640). Erbakan's choice to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran and Libya also increased the military's doubts. However, the most influential of these activities was the Jerusalem Night organized on February, 5, 1997 by the Sincan Municipality under the control of the Welfare Party. What took place there presented some

radical messages regarding Israel and seculars. This event convinced the military to intervene, and after four days, tanks roamed the streets of Sincan. As Güney and Heper have said, "Everybody received the message; however, unwilling to make an overt intervention in politics, the military insisted that it was part of a preplanned military exercise" (2000: 641)

The commanders first expressed concern about political Islam at the National Security Council meeting on August 17, 1996, and later again on February 28, 1997. In the February meeting,

> the commanders pointed out that if those who govern the country overlooked the threat the secular democratic republic faced and, to add insult to the injury, they themselves used religion for political ends, the republic would tatter at its very foundations. The commanders urged the members of the council to recommend to the government the necessary measures, adding that otherwise a critical threshold would be crossed, the implication being that then the military would be obliged to deal with the threat unilaterally (Güney and Heper, 2000: 646)

The Military's warning targeted the Welfare Party and did not meet with much resistance by the coalition partner, Tansu Ciller. President Demirel "tried to make the recommendations more palatable to [the Welfare Party] so that Erbakan would sign the final document and the matter would not lead to a further escalation of the already tense political situation" (Güney and Heper, 2000: 646). The February meeting of the NSC ended with eighteen recommendations to the government, including the closure of many Imam Hatips (religious schools), the strict control of religious brotherhoods, and restrictions on Islamic dress, especially concerning women. These demands were contrary to Erbakan's policies and his electoral supporters. However, he signed the recommendations, and by June of the same year he was forced to resign, ending the tenure of the coalition government between Welfare Party and True Path Party. Hence, the very famous repeated phrase "February 28 process" was coined to indicate not only the far-reaching implications of the NSC decisions, but it also signaled the suspension of normal politics until the secular correction was completed (Cizre and Çınar, 2003: 310).

"February 28" became a sign of the sensitivity of the secular elite of Turkey, and it vividly demonstrated the constraints put on a party, which identified with religion. Furthermore, this represented a failed attempt by the periphery to operate within the political realm, and became a lesson for its successors. The group that split from the WP was established, the JDP, which was aware of the sensitivity of the secular elite; therefore they would not repeat same mistakes. This event became a significant part of the transformation of the political realm.

After discussing the economic and political dimensions of the transformation in the Turkish periphery, I would like to briefly look at changes in the religious and cultural life of that society. As Yilmaz argues, in enlarging the boundaries of the private, an unforeseen development occurred:

> Private everyday life has increasingly been given new richness and variety; religion has become a central focus of life and acquired a new power. Religion has received a new lift from the privatizing wave; private religious instruction, Islamic fashion in clothes, manufacturing and music, Islamic learned journals, all aspects of private life, have made Islam pervasive in a modern sense in Turkish society, and have worked against religion becoming a private belief (2005: 393).

Nilüfer Göle's study also demonstrates well the transformations in the religious and cultural life of Turkish society. She argues that the changing environment produced opportunities for Islamic groups to attain liberal education, life in the urban centers, and a modern means of expressing themselves, while being able to seek Islamic sources to redefine their worldviews (1997: 52). According to Gole, this rise of Islam in social and economic life was not only a reaction to a given situation, but it would "present a counter-cultural model of modernity, and a new paradigm for self-definition that has led to the formation of Islamist counter-elite" (1997: 53). Göle describes this process as "the move of Islam from the periphery of the system to its center, and yet were themselves a product of that center, of its educational institutions and its urban life" (1997:54).

One other important dimension of transformation in the Turkish periphery, I would argue, occurred at the level of consciousness. This was revealed insofar as the economic and representational struggles within the political sphere and the re-establishment of Islam within the cultural sphere came about in parallel with what I would say was a general transformation in consciousness. With the advent of globalization, and the improvement of communication technologies that promoted contact with people in other parts of world, especially in Europe, the Turkish people were afforded the chance to compare their own condition with others. Therefore, they were given the chance to see any deficiencies, difficulties, and constraints that they may have been living with. Through such communication, they started to question the givens and to look for their past for their identity. Reşat Kasaba demonstrates this important shift and its outcomes brilliantly when he argues,

> During the early decades of twentieth century, the tired and defeated people of Anatolia were in no position to debate or resist Ataturk's radical message. Some were even enthusiastic in supporting the national leader in his determination to remake the Turkish state. By the 1980s, the situation had changed completely. The Turkish people, few of whom now remembered the early years of the republic, had grown extremely suspicious of, and downright cynical about,

the latest incarnations of the promises of 'enlightened and prosperous tomorrows.' Instead of making further sacrifices for a future that kept eluding them, they were starting to inquire about the histories, institutions, beliefs, identities, and cultures from which they had been forcefully separated. This reorientation of the social compass spread to all segments of the society, not only affecting people's political outlook but also influencing the way they dressed, which music they created and listened to, how they built their houses and office buildings, and how they thought about the history of modern Turkey...The nature and contents of these debates and conflicts show that as a monolithic force that tried to mold Turkish society and mentality, Kemalism is losing its grip (1997: 16, 18).

To summarize, the Turkish periphery has undergone an economic, social, and political development, which allowed its members to re-establish themselves in all aspects of life. They established and/or supported political parties that represented them and struggled for their rights and liberties, including religious ones. The Motherland Party of Turgut Ozal and the Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan were among these newly created groups. After Ozal, the MP lost its popular support, and the WP government was forcefully terminated. However, since the source of their power—economic might, and most importantly, conscious desire—had remained alive, the periphery re-established itself in the political sphere again. The popular support of the JDP in 2002 (34%) and in the 2007 (47%) general elections are proofs of this. However, the JDP is just another step in the transformation process of the Turkish periphery, which took its lessons from the earlier WP experience.

The Transformation of the JDP

I have discussed briefly the overall transformation the periphery of the Turkish society underwent during 1980s. I have also proposed that two key motor forces, the state's changed approach towards Islam and Turgut Ozal's liberal rule, opened the way for the periphery to recover and re-assert itself in the economic, social, and political realms. Then I argued that the Justice and Development Party, which was established in 2002 by reformist politicians of the Welfare Party—closed by the Constitutional Court of Turkish Republic on account of anti-secular activities—was a significant corollary outcome of the discussed transformation in the periphery of the Turkish society.

In this section, I will discuss perhaps the most recent complication in the general transformation of Turkish economic, social, and political life, namely the transformation of the JDP. My proposition is that the JDP split from the National Outlook Movement and the Welfare-Virtue Parties both institutionally and ideologically, and so became a liberal democratic party. The WP was the political party of a political-religious movement and promised to remove restrictions on religious liberties. However, the JDP differs from the WP

in certain aspects, which I will discuss in the following section. Then, I will discuss the ideology and practices of the JDP in order to show that it changed and became a liberal democratic political party. Finally, I will provide some important data as to how people began to see the JDP.

Conservative Democracy: The JDP's New Vision

After splitting from the WP, Erdogan and his colleagues emerged with a new party and ideology, what they called "conservative democracy." However, the JDP's conservative democracy was, in fact, merely a new interpretation of liberal democracy according to the needs of Turkish society and state rather than an invention of a new ideology. Yalçın Akdoğan, the author of *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi* (The JDP and Conservative Democracy) and the main contributor of the JDP's new interpretation, has provided the main pillars and tenets of conservative democracy. According to the principles of conservative democracy, Akdogan argues, "the field of politics should be firmly grounded in the culture of reconciliation," since conservative democrats believe that "it is possible to solve social differences and disagreements in the political arena on the basis of reconciliation" (Akdoğan, 2006: 50). For them, a "variety of social and cultural groups should participate in politics in order to add diversity to public debate in the forum of tolerance that is generated by democratic pluralism," and this is expected to improve participatory democracy in Turkey (Akdoğan, 2006: 50). In addition, the conservative democracy of the JDP as expressed by Akdoğan, "favors limited and defined political power," which rejects "authoritarian and totalitarian practices that would lead to a repressive state" (2006: 50). Conservative democrats see the authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies as the greatest enemies of civil society and democracy, and they seek ways to curtail them in order to prevent the following: arbitrariness in the application of laws, any downplaying of genuine political representation, and any disregard for individual and collective freedoms (Akdoğan, 2006: 50).

Another important focus of the conservative democracy of the JDP is the source of political legitimacy: "Conservative democracy considers political legitimacy to be based on popular sovereignty and the rule of law, which in turn, is based on constitutionality and universally accepted norms" (Akdoğan, 2006: 50). These were accepted as the main bases of political power that political leaders must seek if they wish to achieve legitimacy. Along these lines, a like factor that the conservative democracy stresses is rule of law. As Akdoğan puts it,

> By necessity, political power and institutions must remain within a designated legal framework, thereby ensuring rule of law. The state should be functioning, small but dynamic, and effective, and excessiveness and waste in government should be prevented. The state should never insist on specific preferences for its citizens, or retreat to dogmatic and ideological stances. Instead, the state must be defined, shaped, and controlled by its citizens. Democracy becomes acceptable if it is able to mix a wide variety of social and cultural differences, and demand in the political arena. A truly democratic political arena is one in which all of the society's problems are referred and discussed, all social demand are given a voice and social programs can be tested and modified. In the case of Turkey, the heterogeneity of its society will work to enrich pluralist democracy (2006: 50-1).

The conservative democratic ideology put forward by the JDP addresses one of the deep-seated fears of Turkey's skeptical seculars. As observed in modern Turkish history, many of political parties and movements were rejected or dissolved by the secular establishment because of their so-called desire to change the secular regime of Turkish Republic. As a response to such an accusation, Akdoğan argues that "a radical rejection of the existing political structure through the establishment of a totally new order is not viewed as viable or feasible. In order to enable gradual change vis-à-vis the overall structure, it is necessary to maintain some of the values and features of the existing structure" (2006: 51).

Lastly, but certainly not of least importance, conservative democracy stresses the necessity of a balance between idealism and realism. Akdoğan argues that "it is natural that some people possess utopian visions, but conservative democracy does not implement these utopian ideals by forceful means and does not insist on the truth of these ideals over the truth of others," but instead insists on balance and gradual, evolutionary change (2006: 51). The party program touches this issue as well and follows as:

> [O]ur Party is one which aims to offer original and permanent solutions to our country's problems, parallel to the world realities with the accumulation of the past and tradition, making public service its basic purpose, conducting political activities in the platform of the contemporary democratic values, rather than ideological platforms. The JDP is not and shall not be a party forcing ideologies or distributing favors. The most important aspect of this program is that it does not include rhetoric, which cannot be converted to action. Its correctness; realism and applicability are the salient characteristics of our Party's policies.

Looking at the above summary of the conservative democracy of the JDP should convince one to argue that it is, as also expressed by Fuat Keyman (2007), not much different from a Western liberal democracy, though one re-interpreted according to the needs of Turkey. Ideas that conservative democrats stress continuously—such as democratic pluralism, constitutionalism, rule of law—coincide with their Western, liberal and democratic counterparts. As a matter of fact, this is the main reason behind Western support for the Erdogan government. Departing from these discussions of conservative democracy, I would

like to argue also that what has been more fortunate than the JDP's ideological and theoretical proposal has been its practical results in the acting government since 2002.

The JDP, the EU and Democratic Reforms

After coming to power, the Erdogan government promoted an intense reform wave in many fields, including human rights issues, minority rights, the judiciary, and the economy. The JDP government's program, named the "Democracy and Development Program," reflected these priorities of the new conservative democratic movement as well as its theoretical pillars demonstrated above. As Dağı has it, while the "development" part of the program has been the legacy of center-right politics since 1950, the "democracy" is a new-found objective that the JDP leaders regarded as convenient for dispersing the excessive pressures of the secular establishment, namely the judiciary and the military as exemplified by the February 28 process (2005: 30). In addition, it is important to remember that the EU membership constituted the core of the JDP's attempts to realize its program. During their rule, the "Copenhagen Criteria" was used as a blueprint for reforms, and as of March 2005, a record high number of 553 laws were proposed by the JDP government and adopted by the JDP dominated parliament (Tepe, 2006: 107). These reforms initiated and then realized by the JDP government amounted to Turkey's first civilian-initiated reforms, which Abdullah Gül titled "a silent revolution" (Tepe, 2006: 107).

The first wave of reforms, known as the first harmonization package, came in January 2003. They enhanced the freedom of association, and provided deterrences against torture and mistreatment, while safeguarding the rights of prisoners (Dağı, 2006: 99). This package amended laws concerning political parties too. The package made the closure of political parties more difficult, and brought them under constitutional protection. These improvements were important for the JDP colleagues who had had the unfortunate and undemocratic experience of political party closure prior to the establishment of the JDP.

The second harmonization package was passed by the parliament in February 2003, which improved upon the conditions for retrial in light of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (Dağı, 2006: 99). These were followed by the abolishment of the Article 8 of antiterrorism law in July 2003, in addition to the introduction of provisions that allowed political propaganda in languages other than Turkish. August 2003 witnessed another very important step toward consolidation of Turkish democracy as the Turkish Grand National Assembly, under the domination of the JDP,

introduced a significant reform with regard to civil-military relations, limiting the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians, enabling the auditing of military expenditure and property by the court of auditors, repealing executive powers of the NSC, increasing the time period of regular NSC meetings from once a month to once every two months, and opening the way for appointment of civilian secretariat general for the NSC (Dağı, 2006: 99).

In addition, in September 2003, upon the EU's insistent demand for a mechanism for monitoring the effective implementation of these reforms, the JDP government established the Reform Monitoring Group, which included ministers of foreign affairs, interior affairs, justice, and high-ranking bureaucrats. As the initiators of these important developments, the JDP leaders expected to gather the fruits of their labor at the European Council's meeting in December 2003 in Brussels. The Council's response was hopeful, but not satisfactory enough. Accordingly, the Council welcomed the "considerable and determined efforts" of the JDP government and expressed that the reforms "have brought Turkey closer to the Union." However, the European Council underlined the need for "sustained efforts to strengthen the independence and functioning of the judiciary; the exercise of freedom of association, expression, and religion; the alignment of civil-military relations with European practice; and the exercise of cultural rights" (Cited in Dağı, 2006: 100). Determined to bring about the democratic criteria of the EU, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey, declared that his government would complete the requirements and "make the Copenhagen Criteria as Ankara's own criteria."

The incumbent government of Turkey continued its democratic reforms in 2004. In April, a new package passed by the Turkish parliament abolished State Security Courts and all references to the death penalty. With the same reform package, international treaties were accorded precedence over Turkish law, and the military representative on the higher education board was removed. In July 2004, another harmonization package was passed by the parliament. With new adjustments, four deputies of the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party, including Leyla Zana, were released from prison, and the state-owned TV channel TRT started to broadcast in Kurdish (Cited in Dağı, 2006: 100). In addition, the government signed and ratified many international conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Protocol No. 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights. After its second intensive year marked by such reforms, the government expected to be rewarded by the European Union. Finally, in its 2004 progress report, the European Commission noted that Turkey has "sufficiently fulfilled" Copenhagen political

criteria, and it was recommended that the European Council start accession negotiations. On December 17, 2004, in the Brussels meeting, the Council decided to open accession negotiations in October 2005. This was a very important turning point in the history of Turkish Republic, which had continually attempted to enter to the EU, but was rejected repeatedly, mostly because of what the Council saw as breaches of democracy and unacceptable military interventions.

Just as important as the opening of accession negotiations is the JDP's role in this achievement. This was the party whose leadership had a record of active involvement in religio-political movements, and which was ousted from government after having been accused of having a hidden agenda to replace the secular order with religious one, but it became the one that pioneered democratic reforms and brought Turkish democracy to the point where it is compatible with the Copenhagen criteria. As a matter of fact, the JDP's activities and reforms were welcomed by a wide section of society, especially by liberal intellectuals and business circles. However, there have still been some who have remained skeptical about what they see as Erdogan and his colleagues' "hidden agenda" of replacing secular republic with a religious one. Those skeptics accuse the JDP of being insincere and of using the cloak of the EU and its democratic reforms in order to reach their goals. However, these fears seem to be unfounded.

First of all, it should be remembered that the Turkish Republic has more than seventy years of experience with secularism, which was well established and sensitively protected by almost all of the political, bureaucratic, and judicial actors. As Çarkoğlu and Toprak's survey in 2006 shows, 76.2% of society said that they do not want a religious order (while 14% was undecided, and only 8.6% supported Sheriah), and 84.2% argued that the political parties they vote for have to respect the secular values of the Turkish Republic (2006: 74, 81). Even before the 1997 soft-coup, the majority of people rejected the religious state. In 1995, 61.8% (TÜSES, 1995); in 1996, 58.1% (TÜSES, 1996); in 1998, 59.9% (TÜSES, 1999); in 1999, 67.9% (TESEV, 1999); and in 2002, 71.2% responded that they do not want a religious state. On the other hand, as briefly discussed above, the secular establishment transcended and violated the borders of democracy for the sake of their assertive interpretation of secularism (See Kuru, 2006). Furthermore, looking from the EU membership perspective, it was observed that it was lack of democratic institutions that prevented Turkey's membership to the EU, but not for a lack of secularism.

Secondly, the EU membership was not invented by the JDP government, but the Republican elite dreamed of it for decades, as it was seen as a step in the way of reaching the

level of modern civilizations. What the JDP has done is to prioritize this, and so to fulfill the requirements demanded and supported by the EU institutions. However, this is not to deny the benefits of above mentioned reforms for the JDP. In spite of its popular support, the JDP was not trusted by the secular establishment, and even was seen as an anomaly and a threatening outsider. The main point here is noting that the JDP leadership, after the closure of the WP and VP, "realized that they needed the West and modern/western values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in order to build a broader front against the Kemalist center, and to acquire legitimacy through this new discourse in their confrontation with the secularist establishment" (Dağı, 2005: 31). Dağı follows this point by saying,

> In the face of pressures originating from the military's adamant opposition to the Islamists, which influences the attitudes of the judges and the upper tiers of the state bureaucracy, as well as the mainstream secular media, they realized the legitimizing power and the virtue of democracy, which turned out to be a means to highlight "people power" *vis-à-vis* state power. They knew that they could survive only in a country that was democratically oriented, respecting civil and political rights, and moreover integrated further into the western world, particularly the EU (2005: 31).

The JDP leaders' intense support for EU membership is not an elitist project, but was supported by a grassroots effort as well. A public opinion poll conducted in July 2004, shows that 79% of the JDP voters responded in favor of the EU membership, which was above the national average of 73% (Pollmark, July 2004). According to the results of the same public opinion poll, 60% of JDP voters viewed NATO more positively when compared to national average of 48%. Similarly, JDP voters have had a more positive view of "Western civilization" than the national average, which is at 54%, and have favored aligning with the West (53%) instead of the East (Pollmark, July 2004). This should suggest that the much-feared JDP leadership has, in fact, proved their commitment to the path of democracy and EU membership. The JDP government's further attempts at additional reforms has turned the secular elite of the center into the protectors of the status quo.

A Postscript: Turkish Economy during the JDP Government

Erdogan and his colleagues have been under strict scrutiny and pressure throughout the rule, especially by the secular media. Given the experience of the Welfare Party in political and religious issues, the economy, as a softer issue, has become more important and perhaps the only area of free maneuvering. As the numbers below demonstrate, the JDP government has proved successful in economic measures. Unable to act in the way that they promised to in election campaigns—in issues such as the ban on headscarf and obstacles on the Imam Hatip

graduates university entrance exam—the Erdogan government has tried to push their success in soft issues such as economy and healthcare in order to gain popular support. The expected has happened: the government has acted sensitively with respect to "hard issues." Similar to issues coming to the fore after the 1980 coup, the economic success of the JDP has turned into the popular support of the 2007 elections and has strengthened the government's hand to deal with other social issues, especially in the freedom of religion and expression. In nowadays, the government is in preparations to introduce a new and liberal constitution to replace the authoritarian one that was written under the pressure of the military.

Between 1993-2002, Turkey displayed an average economic growth of 2.6%. However, during the GDP government, the Turkish economy for the first time in its history had grown continuously and reached a peak of 7.3%, becoming Europe's sixth biggest economy. In addition, during the JDP rule, Turkey's GNP increased from 181 billion to 400 billion dollars, marking a 120% growth. As a part of this increase, the GDP per capita increased from 2,598 to 5,477 dollars within the five-year term of the GDP government. Another increase has been observed in the reserves of the Turkish Central Bank. Statistics show that the Central Bank reserves increased from 26 billion dollars in 2002 to 65.8 billion dollars. Along with increasing its reserves, the government managed to pay Turkey's debts to the IMF and decreased Turkey's debts from 23.5 billion dollars in 2002 to 8.7 billion dollars. Another very important indicator of improvement in the economy has been the decline in inflation rates. During the rule of the JDP government, inflation declined to single-digit levels in 2005 for the first time in the last 34 years, and has been kept at single-digit levels during 2006. After reaching stability with lower level inflation, the central bank dropped six zeros from the Turkish Lira. This was a symbolic achievement that added credit to the JDP government. Finally, one of the more problematic issues of Turkey, unemployment, was partially solved by the JDP government. After long years of increased rates, the JDP government managed to decrease unemployment rates from 10.3% to 9.9% in their fourth year of rule. In addition, the government increased the amount of credits and subsidies given to the farmers and small and medium-sized businesses. All of these improvements, which were felt in daily lives of the people, were reflected in the elections that would follow.

The JDP and Turkish Public Opinion

In his party's first congress, Recep Tayyip Erdogan introduced the party as a movement that would bring the "political wisdom" and "the demands of society" to the politics of Turkey, while arguing,

The JDP represents the feelings of our cherished nation in the government of Turkey. This is our mission as a party. Values which constitute these feelings have become and shall continue to be the fundamental values to form policies. We have achieved a great convergence by opening our door to everyone who embraced the aspirations of the nations. A sulky and burdensome state shall be eliminated, and will be replaced by a smiling and capable state. The concepts of "a nation for the state" will not be imposed any longer; the concept of "a state for the nation" shall flourish instead. The state shall be prevented from becoming fetters around the legs of the nation which prevents its progress (Cited in Tepe, 2003).

These were important promises that the Anatolian people, in other words the periphery of Turkey, needed and expected. They trusted Erdogan because they perceived him as one of them, as the "children of people" (See Insel, 2003). In return, the Erdogan government has worked hard and has achieved considerable success in reforming Turkish political, legal, and bureaucratic structures while improving the economy. The government received increased popular support and trust in 2007 as a result. In a 2007 poll done by MetroPoll in the Eastern and Southeastern parts of Turkey, 59.9% of people responded that they see Tayyip Erdogan as the "most favored leader, politician and statesman." Erdogan was followed by his close colleague, Abdullah Gul (13.3%), and Gul was followed by Devlet Bahceli, leader of the Nationalist action Party, who received support of only 0.9% of respondents (MetroPoll, 2007). The same survey also asked people about main problems of the region and 41.9 % responded "unemployment," 14.7% "terror," 10.9% "economic backwardness," and 6.6% "illiteracy" (MetroPoll, 2007). Interestingly, 64.5% of the respondents said that the JDP is working to solve their problems, while 20.9% responded negatively, and 14.6% remained undecided. Interestingly, only 2.2% think that the main problem is discrimination against Kurds.

Other important data regarding public opinion about the JDP's policies is provided by TESEV's nationwide survey in 1999, 2002, and 2006. These surveys offer a chance to compare the post-1997 coup period and the beginning of the second term of the JDP. Accordingly, in 1999, 30.9% of respondents thought that people could not worship freely, while in 2006, only 14% of respondents answered negatively. Again, in 1999, 42.4% and in 2002, 40% thought that there was pressure on religious people in Turkey, while in 2006 the percentage declined to 17% (Carkoglu and Toprak, 2003: 900).

In addition, comparing TESEV's 1999 and 2006 survey data on the self-identification of Turkish people demonstrates important changes. Accordingly, in 1999, only 35.7 % said that they see themselves as Muslims, while in 2006 this increased to 44.6 % (Carkoglu and Toprak, 2003: 41). Another important change is the decrease in the percent identifying themselves as "Citizen of Republic of Turkey" from 34.1% to 29.9%. Lastly, there is an

important increase in those who see themselves different from what was provided in the survey (namely, Turk, Muslim, Citizen of Turkish Republic, Kurd, Alevi) from 1.3% to 6.5% (Carkoglu and Toprak, 2003: 41). As the numbers show, it is possible that the religiosity of people has risen in seven years; however, I think this may also be because of the pressure of the military coup in 1997. However, with the JDP's intense EU membership program and the reforms of the Turkish democratic institutions, the consolidation of the freedom of expression and religion enlarged as well. This can also be said about identification outside of the categories that were given, including citizenship and religious identification.

Conclusion

In this work, I have departed from Mardin's center-periphery framework, which he introduced in the early 1970s. There he argued that Turkish society has shown itself to be made of two very loosely related worlds for more than a century. Because Turkish society has roots that stretch into Ottoman times, the gap between the two worlds has widened due to the harsh secularization imposed from above, which removed the strongest tie, religion, from between the two. Holding the political power at their hands, the elite at the center distanced themselves from the periphery, including peripheral values and beliefs. However, in this study, I argued that the picture started to change most significantly after 1980s. After the 1980 military coup when there remained an inability to solve ideological violence, the state, acting under the influence of military leadership, appealed to Islam in order to create a more homogenized, religious-nationalist society. Turgut Ozal, winner of the 1983 general elections, carried this project into practice and introduced liberal economic policies as well. Ozal's liberal economic policies not only enhanced liberalization within the social and political realms, but it also helped the peripheral actors to establish themselves in the social, political and economic realms. By treating these realms and their interactions as critically significant, my work here observed that the transformations that Turkish society has been undergone has also altered the very nature of the "center" and the "periphery."

Along these lines, I also have argued that the Justice and Development Party represents a direct outcome of the transformation that the periphery underwent in the political realm. Most importantly, after the undemocratic experience with respect to the closure of the Welfare Party, the JDP emerged with a new ideology, what they call "conservative democracy", and a new "development and democracy" program that helped to inaugurate an intense EU membership process. In this way, the JDP government was able to set the stage for democratization reforms in addition to improving the Turkish economy considerably.

Finally, as a parallel to the rise of the periphery, I argued that the center, which was at one time in the early years of the Republic a revolutionary modernizing force, eventually turned into a disruptive force that became obsessed with unrealistic, "imagined threats." As a result of the center losing its advantaged position of power and influence over society, the skeptical elite of the center attempted to find ways to undermine the process that would result in a further loss.

NOTES

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