Turkey at the Crossroads: From "Change with Politics as Usual" to Politics with Change as Usual

ÜMİT CİZRE*

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the new roadmap for Turkey after the summer 2011 elections as not a "resumption" of unfinished business from the last nine years, but from the perspective of the ability of Turkey's ruling party, the AK Party, as well as the opposition forces and actors to "transform" some anachronistic features of the dominant politics as well as deal with troubling new trends in society. The AK Party governments made progress in many areas by pushing forward a series of far-reaching reforms which have genuinely changed Turkish politics. However, Turkey under AK Party rule includes a society which has failed to shed its extreme hostility toward different ideas, identities and values. Moreover, current opposition parties and movements in Turkey continue to be weak in imagination, vision, capacity and leadership, which have led to rigidities and even deeper political divisions. More importantly, the new government will have to create new possibilities out of its past failures and turn paradoxes, contradictions and ambiguities in politics and society, in the country and in the region, into positive achievements.

Insight Turkey Vol. 13 / No. 4 / 2011
pp. 83-105

If each government that came to power after the elections were required to give itself a name to epitomize its political roadmap in the term lying ahead, this post-2011 election AK Party (AKP) government would probably like to describe its new term as "change with politics as usual" to reveal the paradoxes of its conception of "change" for Turkey: in the last nine years in office, the party has been responsible for accelerating democratization, reshaping the structures of the traditional Kemalist power centers, including the higher administrative courts and the military; reducing the role of the "secular" establishment led by the heavy-weight military in Turkish politics, thereby passing the psychological threshold of fear of the Kemalist tutelary institutions; turning Turkey into a model in the region, friendly to Islam but distant from militant jihadism; and achieving better public services and a general degree of economic stability and prosperity. The election showed how much the

* *Istanbul Şehir University, Director of the Center for Modern Turkish Studies, umitcizre@sehir.edu.tr*

The overwhelming electoral and moral support given to the governing party through the local and general elections in the last nine years may not be sufficiently strong to resolve deeper problems and start a "New Deal" for Turkey

country liked that change; however, the paradox may be that, as many fear, the prime minister's governing may change little in the next four years.

True enough, the government's forte is the electoral support that emerged after the elections: the AK Party increased its votes by 5 million and 4 percent from 2007, bringing it from 46.6 percent to 50 percent of all the votes counted in the country; it came in first in 71 provinces; and it won a majority of the seats in the parliament. This is no surprise: popular readiness for further modernization and reform was already foretold by the victory of the "yes" vote in the historical referendum of September 12, 2010 on the government-sponsored constitutional amendments that were in line with accession terms to the European Union (EU). Thus the 2011 elections could go down in history as ushering in a "spectacular" third term for the AK Party and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who established himself as the most successful popular leader in the country with a clear mandate to oversee major changes to the future shape of the Turkish republic.

But what are the chances of this taking place and what are the perils? This article will discuss the politico-social forces contravening and also positively intervening in the presumably new political agenda of the AK Party for the next four years. More importantly, this article looks at the AK Party's new roadmap for Turkey not as a "resumption" of unfinished business from the last nine years, but from the perspective of the ability of Turkey's political class, including *the opposition forces* and actors, to "transform" some negative *new realities* and set the country on an inventive new course which will address genuine social and political challenges.

But first, irrespective of who the leading actors in politics are, what are the most obvious objectives for the new government to achieve? Some of the major priorities that come to mind are focusing on an emancipatory new constitution; continuing to hold the center in Turkish politics, a position held by the AK Party as evidenced from its 50 percent share of the vote; expanding individual freedoms; completing civilian democratic control of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), which has already lost some of its old power and privileges through no cause of the political class but through its own misdeeds; developing a Kurdish agenda which should now include some form of power-generating mechanisms; working for peace both in the narrow (the Kurdish issue) and broader senses (in the Middle

East region); and reinvigorating Turkey's EU accession bid.

Prime Minister Erdoğan's huge popularity and one-man rule have shaped and limited the posture and reaction of the organized fault lines that include the opposition parties

However, and this is where the great paradox lies, even as AK Party governments have made progress in many areas by having pushed forward a series of far-reaching reforms that have genuinely changed the contours of Turkish politics, the overwhelming electoral and moral support given to the governing party through the local and general elections in the last nine years may not be sufficiently strong to resolve deeper problems and start a "New Deal" for Turkey. None of the positive qualities of the AK Party rule, its popularity, its resilience in office, its achievement of enviable economic growth and stability, its making the country an influential player in the region and on a global scale, the absence of the Islamization of the state, and its successful management of a broad coalition of liberals, Muslims, businessmen and Kurds has until recently, together or alone, been able to create a realignment of the central fault lines around the idea of *full democracy* and the need for a process of *"scrapping the old deal and building a new one*" in the last decade.

Among the many fault lines that exist in the country, the most fundamental one is the division around the Kurdish nationalist movement and its shifting narratives, agendas and struggles over identity rights, its models of local and national democracy, and peace. The other fault line is the "for" and "against" positions on the "secular" establishment's beliefs, canons, and dreams about Turkey; and the last central fracture line is the realignment around the ruling party on the one hand and its so-called "secular" opponents on the other. None of these fault lines is unitary and monolithic, but they are well organized and members all share broad objectives and have a huge capacity to reproduce rigidity. Reformist politics have failed to change social behavior and mindsets that have driven the animosity and confrontation against "the other" entrenched fault lines in contemporary Turkish politics. Nor have they been able to substantially diminish or restructure the power relations and connections within ethnic identity fault lines so as to introduce durable incentives for a non-violent resolution of the Kurdish conflict. Similarly, the social and political change achieved so far does not carry sufficient momentum to end the thinly disguised discourse of disdain, suspicion and hatred of the "secular" opposition over what it describes as the AK Party's "secret agenda" or authoritarian impulses. Nor have they helped turn the AK Party into a party which is unconditionally friendly with movements and actors based on rights,

pluralism and freedom of expression. An accountable public bureaucracy, including the democratic control of the no longer all-mighty TAF high command, has also not been fully reached.

In the months since the June 2011 election, violence in the southeast has exploded and polarization and partisanship based on "secular," "ethnic Turkish/Kurdish" and "AK Party" affiliations have not been altered. Nor have they been muted. A rights-based discourse to end the corrosive Kurdish-Turkish state conflict has been shoved offstage and in its place has come a particularly nasty strain of a "military solution" with an unfortunate resonance within society and causing anxiety among liberals, anti-militarists, and intellectuals, both Kurdish and Turkish. Worse, the broader social war in society against the Kurds seems to get uglier and uglier. The racism that was at the core of the exaltation of Turkishness (which underscores the importance of Article 301 of the Penal Code which criminalized the simple insult to Turkishness) is back and it is more mainstream than ever.

Enduring Soft-Flanks

It is almost a cliché by now that buried under the major fracture lines and the AK Party's policy reforms is a corrosive power struggle to redefine the real parameters of Turkish politics. The question still remains: can the AK Party muster sufficient power and ideas in its new term to emancipate itself (and the populace) from its tendency of fragmentary and inconsistent reform while attacking the forces and actors of the status quo? Even when we fully acknowledge the ruling party's achievements, the fact remains that reforms often avoid open challenges to the existing system and even sometimes make U-turns to align with the agents of the secular establishment. Situating the Kurdish question within the broader umbrella of Islamic solidarity so soon after the "opening"-like initiative in the region went afoul is more depressing evidence for a politics of evasion even when a different approach was advocated. Although the ruling party can now rely on its own media, capital, social networks, intelligentsia, associations and think tanks to reverse the rules of the established political game in Ankara, there are still reasons to think that its agenda continues to include a rights-liberties-democracy discourse not as a choice but as a result of circumstance.

The Predictability of the Opposition as a Problem

Prime Minister Erdoğan's huge popularity and one-man rule have shaped and limited the posture and reaction of the organized fault lines that include the opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), and the Kurdish nationalist Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Politics

of division would be a positive thing in terms of constraining the undemocratic tendencies of the ruling party. Anticipation of the scope of the opposition might encourage the AK Party to take more conciliatory lines on issues such as wearing the headscarf in universities which works in its favor in the long run. But more often than not this has only led to a more confrontational line from the secular opposition, like the extremely tense clashes Turkey lived through before 2007 between the "secular" groups and AK Party loyalists. Similarly, it is intriguing to observe that the Kurdish BDP's oppositional politics seem to have veered away from a peaceful narrative—although it still sticks to it as unconvincing lip-service even while by default standing by the mindless violence of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) at a time when the country is almost holding its breath to see what positive new steps the newly elected government is going to take regarding the Kurdish issue.

> The opposition is transfixed in a predictable politics of "accusation rhetoric" with little willingness to comprehend, analyze, and act on the issues confronting them

The opposition may even make some superficial sense in closing and opening new "fronts": until 2008, the secular CHP based its opposition to the AK Party on what it alleged was the party's long-term plan to establish an Islamic state, but since then it has switched to accusations of authoritarianism, increasing corruption, and meddling with the judiciary. The opposition's alignment with a coup-planning military and its advocacy for its impunity, however, do not bear well on any of the allegations it directs against the ruling party's authoritarian tendencies simply because this support itself speaks volumes for the opposition's true concept of Turkish democracy.

If one of the clichéd—but correct—attributes of a mature democracy is the effectiveness of its political institutions in channeling conflicts into policy outcomes as opposed to promoting or perpetuating open confrontation, the other must be the commitment of leaders and institutions to those ideas and ideals that can be turned into policies. Current opposition parties and movements in Turkey, even after the summer elections of 2011, continue to be weak in imagination, vision, capacity and leadership which have led to rigidities and even deeper political divisions. True enough, a culture of opposition devoid of credible alternative ideas to rebuild competent and democratic politics with the only constant being the parties' link to strong leaders has worked in AK Party's favor so far. But *for all their superficial common sense and political expediency,* there are more things wrong with Turkey's opposition parties than their ideational and leadership weaknesses.

The CHP, MHP and BDP frustrate Turkey's democratic development by depriving the public of an open discussion of real issues with clarity, self-conviction, intellectual commitment and readiness to take the risks to resolve them. As a result, polar opposite positions, vicious splits and reprehensible violence in the country reproduce themselves year in and year out with limited or no capacity on the part of the prominent opposition actors to genuinely listen, learn, identify and understand their intricacies critically and in depth. It is next to impossible to see a leader in Turkey take "unconventional" questions from the press or legislators and answer them in depth, either impromptu or otherwise. Nor is it possible for these leaders to get engaged in any analytical and compelling public discussions with each other and thrash out vital ideological or policy points. The opposition is transfixed in a predictable politics of "accusation rhetoric" with little willingness to comprehend, analyze, and act on the issues confronting them.

One might argue that this type of oppositional politics that is characterized by complete disingenuousness is not atypical of democracies in the 21st century, as evidenced, for example, by the one-sided voting on all major issues by Republicans and Democrats under the Obama Administration. But two qualitative areas of difference exist in Turkey. The first is a lack of institutions and traditions that continuously promote transparency and practically require candidates and politicians to answer questions in debates and open forums not just as part of the election campaign but as an ongoing process. The second is the clear, out-of-bounds area of support of Turkey's opposition for non-legitimate political institutions, such as the military, within any governmental or democratic context. Combined with a political tradition which allows for few true meeting points between ideological cleavages and differences of views, and little or no built-in consensus-seeking and power-sharing mechanisms, the CHP, BDP and MHP also turn into creatures of habit isolated from reality and boxed into "white or black" demagoguery.

The failure to distinguish between truth and illusion for Turkey's political parties is at least partially, if not totally, a function of a systemic dysfunction which shapes the behavior and policies of actors. The resulting mindset obscures a real appreciation of the complexity of issues and forces the players to take sides on key national issues simply by identifying themselves with what "the other" position/identity does not advocate. Opposition to perspectives of "the others" entails adopting a "predictable" oppositional position and not taking a thoughtful or moderate posture sometimes agreeing with and surprising the other side.

Not that this is new in Turkish history, the absence of a democratic propensity to accept diversity and differences institutionally, morally and unconditionally, cou-

pled with the emphasis of Turkish public philosophy on a "secular" unity have made such deep inroads into minds and psyches almost impossible. Even those who have their hearts in the right place in terms of being anti-militarist, anti-patriarchal and supportive of democratic procedures tend to get edgy and doubtful when they see the (Kemalist) *ancien regime* which embodies the opposite canons crumble. This is what is happening with regard to some liberal-minded groups' positions on the Ergenekon or Sledgehammer cases in which many military and civilian actors are being tried on charges of plotting a coup against the government.[1] Even though the charges are not even denied by the former chief of general staff, retired General Isik Kosaner,[2] mainstream "secular" society refrains from endorsing a condemnation of the illicit activities of the TAF.

> Looking at the world through "secular"-reactionary lenses certainly oversimplifies the problems and acts as an effective smoke screen which prevents fundamental analysis and the resolving of political problems buried within this divide

Similarly, even with the flare up of violence in the summer of 2011, the elected Kurdish deputies of the BDP continue to do what they have always done in the past: asking for an immediate end to the TAF's operations in the region; expressing their demands for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and restoration of democracy;[3] and more significantly, tacitly hoping that the Turkish public accepts the BDP as a party which cannot afford to oppose the PKK and Abdullah Ocalan whose resort to coercion, cruelty and control over their constituents is on par with that of the state's. The Democratic Society Conference's (DTK)[4] declaration of democratic autonomy for the region on the same day that the PKK killed 13 soldiers in Silvan, Diyarbakir, is a repeat performance for at least one fracture within the PKK for whom habitually, politics is as usual.

It is claimed that during the election campaign, none of the contesting political parties focused on the expected or achieved "Islamization" of Turkey, contradicting their former portrayal of the so-called Islamist threat as an existential issue. This is often cited as evidence of the "secular" bloc forfeiting its apocalyptic fears or hostilities against the other half of the population. It is true that the "secular" opponents of the party also admit that under AK Party rule they have not generally seen much Islamization of the state. This admission reflects the party's drive to position itself in the center of Turkish politics—part of the key to its success. However, the point to note here is that perhaps it is precisely this success in taking and holding the middle ground of the political spectrum, confirmed by the AK Party's

Photo: AA, Emine Konuk

The 2011 elections could go down in history as ushering in a "spectacular" third term for the AK Party and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who established himself as the most successful popular leader in the country.

durability in office as well as its domination over the government, parliament and the presidency—the levers of power—which seems to be a bigger concern among "secular"-ists than that of creeping Islamization.

Simmering Anger and Segregation in Society

It is not just that some in the secular bloc still suspect that the AK Party, despite its moderate façade, has a hidden Islamist agenda that will contaminate "secular" politics and Turkish identity sooner or later, and that the AK Party is moving to introduce a presidential system because Prime Minister Erdoğan wants to assume the presidency at the next opportunity to make his rule unconditional. Looking at the world through "secular"-reactionary lenses certainly oversimplifies the problems and acts as an effective smoke screen which prevents fundamental analysis and the resolving of political problems buried within this divide. However, what is even more serious is the everyday implications of this way of looking at realities from people on either side of the divide. There is plenty of sense in being alarmed about the fact that Turkey's society has failed to shed its extreme hostility toward different ideas and values under the AK Party rule. There exists a hold of a racist/fascist cult in the minds of ordinary Turks who voice reprehensible views

about Kurds, Kurdish political players, and their demands. The republic's unofficial and veiled discrimination against Kurds has turned into an overt and ugly brew of reactionary discourse in large pockets of the metropoles (which have sizeable Kurdish populations) that taps into ethnic Turkishness and economic distress (although to a lesser degree than in Europe). This reaction is reinforced by the demise of the AK Party's Kurdish reform initiative, the "Kurdish Opening" in 2009, following a conservative/nationalist backlash.[5]

The political class has contributed to the emergence of this vicious and paranoid sentiment on the street against "the others"—predominately against the Kurds but also including women, Alevis and other Muslim groups

The political class has contributed to the emergence of this vicious and paranoid sentiment on the street against "the others"—predominately against the Kurds but also including women, Alevis and other Muslim groups—by seeking to harness what they consider the "nation-loving" conservative forces to consolidate power. The ruling party itself has completely ignored or not intellectualized the roots of this new genre of fascist sentiments which remain fixed in a nationalist, authoritarian, and conservative vulgar dogma or morality.[6] All in all, it does not seem to be an exaggeration to suggest that the least impressive gains were made in the social realm in Turkey in the last nine years, in terms of liberalizing and softening of mentalities and attitudes. Instead, engagement with the idea and practice of true equality and emancipation are rapidly eroding in an increasingly segregated society.

The AK Party as a Problem

It would be correct to say that the Erdoğan government has not fared well in areas of freedom of expression and press. Since spring 2007, access to around 6,000 internet sites, including *Youtube* and numerous pro-Kurdish and pro-Christian websites, have been blocked due to allegations of "anti-Islamic" propaganda and insults against Turkishness under the notorious Article 301 of the Penal Code. In this regard the Erdoğan government is losing a public relations battle with the West and its major media networks that are sensitive to violations of press freedoms and regularly expound on the situation in Turkey instead of the positive democratic initiatives, which hardly appear in the Western mainstream media.

Moreover, it is not hard to observe that democracy is an "instrumental" strategy by the ruling party. However, it is not equally easy to claim that the party

The fact that the AK Party governments were compelled to do something about the military does not show that they view effective governance through the expansion of democracy—which includes freedom from a politically powerful military

has a totally undemocratic and "fundamentalist" agenda. The AK Party has been forced to defend itself against a broad-based "undemocratic" assault by the secular institutions that have included attempts to stop the presidential election of 2007, to close the party, to have the Constitutional Court overturn bills passed by the parliament on shaky grounds, and efforts by senior members of the military, together with state bureaucrats, right-wing intellectuals, and journalists, to stage a coup and to overthrow the government through illicit and unconstitutional means. The government's compromises, U-turns, and sometimes unprincipled-seeming behind-the-door negotiations with establishment interests are premised on its belief that state institutions have a historically sacrosanct status and that therefore open conflict with state institutions may not play well on the street.

For instance, the leadership would have preferred to let the TAF high command enjoy a high degree of autonomy rather than having to reshape the role and mission of Turkey's politically proactive military itself.[7] What brought the government's action on were the officers' excessive steps against the AK Party themselves. The fact that the AK Party governments were compelled to do something about the military does not show that they view effective governance through the expansion of democracy—which includes freedom from a politically powerful military—as the real touchstone of popular will. Nor does it show any intellectual preparation and awareness that the TAF's hegemonic role can be addressed through a "democratic control" that transcends bureaucratic mechanisms of oversight and adopts a more inclusive approach that promotes the participation of the Ministry of Defense, the parliament, and wider sectors of civil society in the debate on defense and security. However, when actions had to be taken in the summer of 2011 (see below) in the aftermath of the elections, prominent figures in the party leadership rose to the occasion and adopted a range of radical reforms falling under the rubric of democratic civilian control.[8]

Melting Rigidities

Against this background, something "good" has been in the air of Turkish politics since the September 2010 referendum: there are a number of factors—some

seemingly negative—that are working as catalysts for making Turkey an economic and regional powerhouse as well as focusing on substantive democratic reforms that can close the huge gaps between the different parts of society in the next four years. There is a sense of empowerment on the part of the ruling party as well as a palpable enthusiasm that has created a popular expectation of "something big" to come to refashion relations between the old-guard/state bureaucracy and the political class. It is tempting to assume that this new popular disposition to more democracy is a powerful incentive for a more radical "paradigm" change of the republic. However, the majority of Turks are also aware that it makes more sense to have some key changes in the manner politics is conceived and conducted than a sweeping change in the foundational philosophy (Kemalism) of the regime overnight. In making a difference in the ways in which Turkey's major fault lines are managed, in other words, the burden of selective change shifts to those political actors in power and aspiring to come to power.

The silver lining is that the YAS meeting did not result in a radical showdown between the military and the government as some had feared, and neither did it lead to mass resignations from the TAF

A Democratic Melting Away of the Military Tradition?

The conflict between the Erdoğan government and the military, which considers itself the spearhead of the Kemalist camp, had entered a new phase long before the summer 2011 elections. But after the elections, the government has gained the key advantage of being given a new lease of life by the electorate which is likely to protect it from any immediate overt or covert strategic moves by the military. The immediate post-election dispute centered on the military promotions process which was due to get under way at the beginning of August 2011 with the meeting of the Supreme Military Council (YAS). The military top brass was unhappy that many of those currently under investigation over the Ergenekon case would be passed over for promotion. Matters appear to have come to a head with the public prosecutor issuing a warrant for the arrest of the head of the army in the Aegean. Chief of the General Staff (CGS) General Kosaner complained that he was no longer able to protect officers under his command, and he and the three force commanders resigned.

However, the silver lining is that the YAS meeting did not result in a radical showdown between the military and the government as some had feared, and neither did it lead to mass resignations from the TAF. The transition following

The civilians have not made the constitutional and legal changes necessary to fully depart from Turkey's undemocratic past in which military involvement in the political process has been the norm

the resignations of the CGS and the commanders was smooth. More contribution to achieving normalcy has come from several recent developments and trends which suggest that even as the weight of the past within the military and its supporting coalition endures, other dynamics are emerging and transforming the military to some extent. The recent YAS meeting represents an important break with the military's tradition of being vocal, assertive and arrogant in dealing with elected civilians. The reasons for this shift lie in the dead-end situation the military finds itself in: EU reforms indirectly or directly have affected Turkey's security culture and have worked against the role of the Turkish military. Lack of popular consensus to change the government through military means has already affected the military and has been instrumental in ensuring the leaking of documents to the media. The resulting media attacks on the TAF's own blunders, misdoings and failures in the conduct of the war in the southeast against the PKK, no doubt encouraged by their lack of accountability, have added impetus to the decline of the TAF's organizational unity, reputation, credibility and capacity to counteract against any civilian action.

Needless to say, the true decline started with the revelations of the Ergenekon arrests and the ongoing trials of active duty and retired officers. The Ergenekon affair has underscored the intensity of animosity against the AK Party government in the secular establishment and its determination to use extra-legal means against it if necessary. It has represented the changing relationship of power between the state and the society/political class and has acted as a catalyst for greater recognition of the "military factor" and the culture of security in Turkish politics.[9] With the emergence of tape recordings of former CGS Kosaner admitting unprofessional behavior both in the battlefield and in politics, the public is left with no doubt that Ergenekon and Sledgehammer are not fictitious and that we may have not yet seen the end of them.

However, a note of caution is in order: The recent moves of the high command do not indicate that the *spirit of resistance* within the old guards against a government they very much dislike has ended, or that the military is *downsizing politically on its own volition*. Nor do they indicate the establishment of *full democratic civilian control* of the TAF by the government as yet. The civilians have

not made the constitutional and legal changes necessary to fully depart from Turkey's undemocratic past in which military involvement in the political process has been the norm. Yet the moves do show that the Turkish military is also at a crossroads.[10] The fact that it cannot be expected to play a political role like a political party by offering "better" policies than the AK Party government compels it to reduce its ambitions to simply "wishing" for a different electoral outcome. It is possible to claim that the army has lost its sense of unity, dignity, esprit de corps, discipline, and focus.

> The process of empowering those conservative men and women who were historically in the shadows of life and politics is also the story of enabling them to live in multiple environments and settings with their multiple commitments and networks

Ergenekon has also helped open the doors for an even broader and bolder public debate and for legislation on past killings and irregularities by the "deep state." The list of issues discussed in public is long: the size and professional standards of the army; the transparency and accountability of military expenditures, procurement, threat perceptions, force deployment, and strategic planning; mandatory conscription; and the subjection of military personnel in peacetime for crimes under the Code of Criminal Procedure, including coups d'etats, to trials in civilian courts. As for senior promotions, the government has ended the practice of the TAF high command imposing its own list of promotions and retirements by suspending three generals from their duties for suspected ties to an early coup plot.

The AK Party's Propensity to Let Ambiguities Live

The AK Party's capacity to challenge or threaten established interests seems to be limited by its expediency-based traits. However, there is another facet of the party which probably contributes to moderation and a sense of "normalcy" in the political spectrum: its propensity to secularize religious life[11] by removing religiosity from religious content and identifying it with political partisanship. True enough, this has been acknowledged and treated as cutting both ways: for some, the strong political link between Islam and political leadership is bad news because it has had a conservative effect on society in terms of reawakening religious values and rituals, thereby endangering secular-modern lifestyles. For thoughtful analysts, however, the experience of Kemalist secularism has had a direct effect on the creation of a "power-oriented Islamic movement which shows secondary

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's popular support and appeal goes beyond the dedicated followers of past Islamist movements and has spread among big business elites, emerging capitalists, the urban underclass, and liberals and Kurds

concern for creating a political language for Islam. This is strongly related to the continuing weakness in the intellectual roots of Islamism."[12] Moreover, for this reflexive genre of scholarship which examines the relationship between power and conscience, the secularizing impact of being powerful, rich and socially respectable has caused "a certain loss of an Islamic vocabulary and ethos among the Islamist circles" amounting to "impoverishment."[13] This is not to say that the impoverishment perspective does not acknowledge the new interactive and transformative discourse of the party which embraces pluralism, democracy, human rights and offers a sobering critique of the essentialist and dogmatic aspects of Islamism.[14]

Looked at from a more positive viewpoint, for those who do not see the world through the tabloid press and "opinion" pieces in the media, the suspicions, discomforts, and fears that the public visibility of an Islamic identity in the "secular" public realms evoke among the "seculars" in Turkey are the results of a passé and narrow intellectual vision of politics and religion which cannot move beyond squeezing life-styles into Islamist and "secular" boxes. The missing component here has always been the positive aspects of the *ambiguous* situation in which Muslim men and women find themselves in terms of wanting to live in multiple worlds or amalgamations of Islam, non Islam, Western, modern, political and spiritual.[15] This reality disturbs both traditional Muslim and secular modernist social groups, but the AK Party leadership should be given a huge credit for addressing the "real" issues of democratic daily life by enabling this "ambiguity" to be lived.

The process of empowering those conservative men and women who were historically in the shadows of life and politics is also the story of enabling them to live in multiple environments and settings with their multiple commitments and networks. This has definitely improved the bargaining position of not only Muslim women and men but other political, cultural and ethnic minorities. But more importantly, the ongoing process of creating a more liberated existence for Muslim identity has highlighted the weaknesses in the way the "periphery" has been conceptualized in either "resisting" or "being co-opted" by center-driven national politics and discourses. The lived-in experience of Turkey's ruling party has

shown that there is another option for the so-called peripheries: re-appropriating and shaping "the national" through interactions between the political center and the local spaces at the macro and micro levels of social life.[16]

Turkey is being pulled toward a new formula in which "bi-national, one-state" arrangements/solution will allow for expanded rights to the Kurds in some form of local autonomy, breaking away from the centralized bureaucracy in Ankara

Turkey's establishment upholds a discourse of secularism that, by not going beyond the nebulous separation of religion from politics, the "wall metaphor,"[17] actually depends for its existence on what it denies rather than what it itself is. Perry Anderson captures this link between the rigidity and "intellectual thinness" of Turkish secularism brilliantly when he characterizes secularism as an "ersatz religion in its own right"[18] which "has never been truly secular" even when apparently at fever pitch.[19] In a sense, by highlighting the complicated interface of Islam and secularism, the AK Party experience has brought to the fore and provided a much-needed corrective for the simplistic and misleading assumptions about the secular-religious divide which have conveniently obscured the importance of interplay and integrations.[20]

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's popular support and appeal goes beyond the dedicated followers of past Islamist movements and has spread among big business elites, emerging capitalists, the urban underclass, and liberals and Kurds, especially after the fading of the EU flagship project. Thus, the Prime Minister's nine years in office have actually sown the seeds of practical and potential coexistence of Muslims and non-sympathizing seculars who share common, mutual, similar and reconcilable goals related to the pursuit of a free and happy life liberated from aggression, poverty and absolutism. That the ruling party's political project carries some potential to close the gap between the cracks in politics as well to push back against those who would protect the fault lines to keep their own power is expressed in its commitment to do it through a new/democratic constitution that takes care of individual rights and freedoms including religious freedom in public life around a pluralistic community rather than state-centered concerns and limitations.

To achieve this historical integration process, over the last nine years the AK Party has also left its own identity deliberately ambiguous. Abandoning explicitly Islamist politics in characterizing itself as "conservative-democrat" yet keeping some affinity with Islamist ontology, the party has conveniently wed populist

reformism with conservative sensibilities shaped by capitalist consumerism.[21] Rather than consistently and clearly reproducing a past tradition, the party leadership has relied upon vagueness, contradictions and inconsistencies of "life" itself as the sources for the creativity and energy for their policies. The fuzziness of the AK Party's profile has been criticized for undermining its capacity and will to challenge established interests in a clear and consistent way. This is true, yet this has developed in parallel with the need to prove to the Muslim masses that this is a can-do government that enables all citizens to share a global discourse of "better living" and does not limit their existence to a cultural and social ghetto where a radical and egotistical tradition prevails.

The Kurdish Issue as an Opportunity Window

Since the elections, there have been hints of a radical rethinking regarding the Kurdish conflict, even in the mainstream Kemalist opposition, as a zero-sum game, i.e., Turkey would absolutely lose if Kurds were given greater rights.[22] Nevertheless, the sudden revelation of state officials "negotiating" with the jailed leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, and the PKK's launching of attacks against the TAF in the region, killing soldiers and undermining its leader and the negotiation process, has helped the conflict pass important thresholds in the post-election era: first of all, there is now the growing consensus that politics as usual, that is, a security-minded one-state solution, will inevitably lead to two states which the proponents of the former dread. Much more significantly, the most potentially mould-breaking development in Turkey today is the awareness that the "peace-democracy-end-of-violence-unity-fraternity" clichés have obscured the debate over the real options to the two-state model and outlived their practical utility. Likewise, the futility and redundancy of the idea of separating the Kurdish question from the PKK issue, which had occupied Turkish thinking for the last 30 years, is gaining more acceptability.[23] More importantly, the idea is growing that the only graceful exit from the stalemate is neither a "one-state, one-nation" formula nor a "two-states, two-nations" one. Turkey is being pulled toward a new formula in which "bi-national, one-state" arrangements/solution will allow for expanded rights to the Kurds in some form of local autonomy, breaking away from the centralized bureaucracy in Ankara to allow for educational, cultural and moral zone of freedom. This is still very much a work in progress that it is hoped will be carried out in conjunction with a new constitution.

Secondly, the Kurdish movement has reached some critical thresholds as well, and being able to openly oppose violence as a method for separation has now become a feasible option for some groups within the movement. In addition,

whether right or wrong, widespread Turkish criticism of impotency, inconsistency, inarticulateness, hypocrisy, irresponsibility and lack of inventiveness—read as politics-as-usual—of the BDP in failing to free Kurds from the grips of terrorism has made the BDP emerge in a new light as an actor of its own. It is no longer an actor that is taken for granted as being under the domination of the PKK and showing its predictable "reactions" to the central government. Relentless criticism of the BDP is in fact a tacit admission that it is a hugely important actor and that it cannot delay making clear choices. Nor can it fall short of being a genuine voice for the Kurds and creating its own inventive mechanisms to do so. It seems that the BDP has come to the end of its usual balancing of separatist impulses and democracy-loving rhetoric.[24]

The integration of expanded rights for Turks and Kurds into a democratic order should go hand in hand with coming to terms with the past and clearing the psychological landmines that have been laid in the society

Also, a range of actors both from the left and the right have been brought together since the July 2011 elections to agree on "cleaning Turkey's own house" to ensure that the Turkish state is made livable for all races, cultures and ideologies. This indicates the need for a larger project, hammering out a new constitution—not plugging some holes in the old one—in which the language and spirit of rights are integrated into all aspects of life, at all levels, within all traditions, ethnicities, religions and institutions.

Most of all, there is a heightened sense that the Kurdish identity has hardened its boundaries and has turned into a more self-enclosed and power-seeking agenda group so that various groups in the movement do not feel shy to instigate violence regardless of Abdullah Ocalan's own roadmaps. Turkey's rethinking of the Kurdish question now includes an awareness that a transition from a rights-based discourse to a power-claiming/sharing one puts the burden of innovative thinking about "power-generating" models not just on the Turkish side but also on the Kurdish side. In addition, the integration of expanded rights for Turks and Kurds into a democratic order should go hand in hand with coming to terms with the past and clearing the psychological landmines that have been laid in the society.

Continuing restrictions on the expression of a Kurdish identity and the remarkable zigzags in Erdoğan's rhetoric, which sometimes recalls the hawkish-militarist stance of former prime ministers like Suleyman Demirel, Tansu Ciller

The next four years should be about drawing a roadmap for creating new spaces for women with greater self-consciousness and self-confidence to live as they see fit

and Mesut Yilmaz, have not been helpful. Nor did the Kurds gain much from the AK Party's own balancing acts—read as politics-as-usual—between sustaining its strong electoral backing amongst the Sunni Kurds in southeast Turkey while also retaining support among more conservative, nationalist sections of Turkey's population. True enough, however, the AK party has thus far been the only one to "successfully" challenge ethnic-Kurdish parties for popular support in the southeast and to elect a sizeable number of its deputies from the region. But in its last electoral lists, it did not include many ethnic names from the region. Mostly focusing on religion and Turkish nationalism as the key binding forces, the election manifesto of the AK Party as well as Erdoğan's speeches made pointed references to the "non-existence of the Kurdish question." These are discouraging facets of the ruling party expressing its pragmatic, conservative, non-intellectual and shopkeeper outlook which we hope are left in the past.

The Rising Popular Practices of Otherization in Daily Life: Opportunity Windows?

Significantly, the aspiration for a more democratic redefinition of relations in society[25] resonates in the streets, in the metropoles and small towns, among men and women, Turks, Kurds and Alevis; and even among (some) military personnel. The threshold of a new awareness seems to have been reached that if democracy is not redefined, the mediocrity, hatred, bigotry, paranoia and narrow-mindedness that the Turkish system produces in societal, cultural and political life could not be transcended. In the new agenda for change, "big" concepts like justice, integrity, diversity, and equality seem to be articulated with the recognition that if small people, i.e., the "*bullies*" in politics, society, community, neighborhoods, family, schools, military and other institutions, are not faced up to, the overt hostility and discrimination against women, Kurds, minorities, the headscarved, Alevis, homosexuals, and intellectuals might tear apart the fragile but ongoing consensus developed to date.

Not only statistics but an anecdotal view of the society confirm that irrespective of the secular-religious and Kurdish-Turkish divides, life-threatening conservative interventions seem to have impinged on women's roles and lives in many ways. Gender-specific threats and violence at home have reached epidemic dimensions[26] while figures show that women's employment is falling.[27] Based on

a range of factors that influence or indicate the status of women in a society, such as maternal mortality rates, adolescent fertility rates, percentage of seats in parliament, population with at least a secondary education, labor force participation rate, contraceptive prevalence rate, antenatal coverage of at least one visit, and births attended by skilled health professionals, in 2010 Turkey ranked 83 on the United Nations Development Programme's 2010 global Gender Inequality Index—third to last in the group of countries with "high human development," and six places down compared to 2008.

Surrounding the escalating violence on women there is a growing paradox regarding women's lives. It is true that this violence is connected to the grip of the patriarchal ideologies that dominate the mindset of Turkish men as well as to the lack of a properly functioning police and justice system, although, ironically, since 1999, Turkey has achieved numerous and voluminous legislative reforms under the chapter heading of Justice and Home Affairs to align with the EU.[28] However, the secularizing/modernizing policies of the AK Party governments have definitely played a significant role in the rise of a new "non-compliant" woman type who "won't do" with the continuing patriarchal traditions at home and is ready to escape, circumvent and confound the mistreatment and injustice suffered at the hands of their husbands by demanding divorce. The explosion of "impatient" women who have broken the hold of a rigid conservative patriarchal ideology at home and in the work place, and who *speak across the boundaries* of men-women, headscarved-uncovered, and the modern-conservative divide is an indication of the shifting social and moral landscape in Turkish society and perhaps an inspiration for political actors to start to rethink the impact of modern changes on the lives of women. Clearly, there is an urgent need to be aware of the counter-currents trying to turn the clock back to a time when women were more pliant, spiritual and tolerant. The next four years should be about drawing a roadmap for creating new spaces for women with greater self-consciousness and self-confidence to live as they see fit.

Women's participation in the work force and society in general has declined despite the dynamics and processes associated with the AK Party's modernizing practices. The increasing marketization and downsizing of the economy, discrimination (to both uncovered and headscarved women from both "secular" and religious employers), and the rising appeal for women to stay at home for conservative as well as economic reasons (the lack of affordable child-care services offered by the state) have worked against the transformative politics and perspectives in the country. Turkey's already poor record of political participation of women may

Those opposition actors which collude with old power centers, be they left-wing, right-wing, secular, or Turkish/Kurdish nationalists, stand in sharp contrast to the vitality, urgency and inventiveness of the new popular critique of the past

have superficially increased in parliament[29] but if this fact alone had a positive impact on women's lives, the above picture would not have emerged.

It is important to remember that the boundaries between "us" and "them" in Turkey in the last nine years have increasingly included women as "them." The disempowerment of some groups of women has, needless to say, gone side by side with empowerment of some others depending on their ethnic, religious, social class backgrounds. What seems to play a key role in the declining fortunes of women is the lack of a broad-based women's organization representing the cross-political and ideological interests of women.[30] This absence of alliances and links between women of all groups concerned with women's status indicates that in Turkey's pretty robust process of democratization, women are at worst forgotten actors, at best losers.

Conclusion: Summer 2011 as a Point of No Return to Status Quo Ante

In its first two terms in office, the AK Party government felt the pressure of a number of socio-political cracks in the country, the republican dogmas of the secular elite, the interventionist mentality of the military, the suspicions of intellectuals, the zigzagging support for the government in the business, and the increasingly vocal renunciations on its reformist political agenda. In the still-developing post-election era, there is a more heightened public awareness, critique and anticipation regarding the fundamental issues waiting to be resolved, not in the ways they were managed ad hoc in the past but in sync with emerging new realities. This fact alone points to a need for all actors, including the opposition forces in the country, to adopt a fresh perspective in assessing and restructuring the major fault lines in Turkey. The impending sense of unfinished business on the part of the AK Party government also gives hope that in the new agenda for change the reform priority of the next four years will not be politics-as-usual.

The opposition is also at a crossroads: to only make leadership changes (like the CHP) while everything else stays the same does not play in the streets. In fact, together with the trigger-happy instigators of the conflict that keeps flaring up in the southeast even when there is a truce, superficial changes and rhetoric work the other way in terms of creating urgency and intensity for wishing to see "something

radically different" in place of familiar faces, repetitive rhetoric, business-as-usual attitudes and clichéd ideas. New realizations, aspirations, and trends in the country also stem from Turkey's new found ambition to project Turkish power across its borders for regional stability and as a credible example of democracy for Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya. To be congruent with that image, the need for a political shake-up that would transform societal and political realities and the remnants of the old order seems to be more intense and urgent.

Those opposition actors which collude with old power centers, be they left-wing, right-wing, secular, or Turkish/Kurdish nationalists, stand in sharp contrast to the vitality, urgency and inventiveness of the new popular critique of the past. They also impose limitations on the transformative role the AK Party can play in the next four years. The actors of the *ancien regime* are seriously in need of a shake-up to question their heritage, intellectual preparedness and responsibility in making a New Deal.

Endnotes

1. When grenades were found in the Istanbul home of a retired military officer in June 2007, the investigation into a series of coup plots by an anti-government network named Ergenekon resulted in the arrest of some 130 people, including retired four-star generals, prominent politicians, journalists and academics. As of August 2011, the number of arrested generals and admirals reached 47. The plans were motivated by commanders' indignation regarding the positive turn of Turkish accession to the EU since 2004, and the fears they shared with other nationalists that this might require Turkey to grant concessions on Cyprus, to give greater freedoms to minorities, and to develop a more democratic political system. According to the indictment, the plotters were hoping to bring down the AK Party government in 2009 by causing enough chaos through terror attacks and high-level assassinations that the military would be forced to intervene. The conspirators were linked with various politically-motivated murders, including the assassination of the Armenian intellectual Hrant Dink. Among those arrested were retired generals Veli Küçük, Hurşit Tolon and Şener Eruygur, the chair of the Atatürkist Thought Association; the last two of whom were sent to prison in Istanbul on July 5, 2008 pending investigation. The Ergenekon incident lends credence to the accounts of retired Admiral Ornek's diaries about the two coup attempts by the force commanders.

2. "Kosaner Confesses Flaws in Fighting Terrorism in Recording," *Today's Zaman*, April 24, 2011.

3. For a critique along these lines see Nabi Yagci, "Cogulculasamayan Cogulluk II," *Taraf*, September 5, 2011. For a typical peace-democracy discourse of the BDP, see BDP deputy Aysel Tugluk's speech in Van, "Duygusal Kopus Siyasal Kopusa Goturecek," *Radikal*, September 1, 2011.

4. Democratic Society Conference is a Kurdish umbrella organization composed of 850 members from all over Turkey. BDP is represented by five members in it. On July 14, 2011 it declared democratic autonomy for the southeast in Diyarbakir hours after a deadly clash between the Turkish army and the PKK which cost 13 lives on the TAF side and seven on the PKK.

5. For a detailed account of the insidious processes at work in society regarding the Kurdish question see Dilek Kurban and Yilmaz Ensaroglu, "Kurtler Ne Kadar Hakli, Turkiyenin Batisi Kurt Sorununa Bakiyor," *Demokratiklesme Programi, Siyasa Raporlari Serisi 3* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2011).

6. Ferhat Kentel, Meltem Ahiska and Firat Genc, "Milletin Bolunmez Butunlugu-Demokratiklesme Surecinde Parcalayan Milliyetcilik(ler)," *Algilar ve Zihniyet Yapilari Serisi* (TESEV: Istanbul, June 21, 2007).

7. Umit Cizre, "Disentangling the Threads of Civil-Military Relations in Turkey: Promises and Perils", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2011), p. 73.

8. Deputy chairman of the party, Huseyin Celik, after the 2011 elections and YAS meeting, outlined the new agenda for civilianization of the military in radical terms . See "En Batidan En Dogu'ya Sivillesme Hamleleri," *Radikal*, September 3, 2011.

9. Umit Cizre and Joshua Walker, "Conceiving the New Turkey after Ergenekon," *International Spectator*, Vol.45, No. 1 (2010), pp. 89-99.

10. Umit Cizre, "Disentangling Civil-Military Relations in Turkey," p. 72.

11. For a comparative analysis of the phenomenon see Sultan Tepe, *Beyond Sacred and Secular, Politics of Religion in Israel and Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

12. Burhanettin Duran, "The Experience of Turkish Islamism: Between Transformation and Impoverishment," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2010), p. 12.

13. Duran, "The Experience of Turkish Islamism," p. 13.

14. Ibid., p. 15.

15. Nilufer Gole, "Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries," *Public Culture*, Vol.14, No.1 (2002), p.181.

16. Nilufer Gole, *Mahremin Gocu*, Interview by Ayse Cavdar, (Istanbul: Hayy Kitap Series 5, 2011), p. 117.

17. Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Comparative Secularisms and the Politics of Modernity: An Introduction," Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (eds.), *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age, (New York:* Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.13.

18. Perry Anderson, "Kemalism," *London Review of Books*, Vol. 30 (September 11, 2008), no page numbers.

19. Ibid.

20. For more about the critique of the separation metaphor between religion and secular politics see Cady and Shakman Hurd, "Comparative Secularisms and the Politics of Modernity."

21. Burhanettin Duran, "The Justice and Development Party's 'New Politics': Steering toward Conservative Democracy, a Revised Islamic Agenda or Management of New Crises," Umit Cizre (ed.), *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party* (New York:Routledge, 2008), pp. 80-106.

22. Although the AK Party had lifted some limitations on the Kurdish language during its first term in office—and even launched a Kurdish language TV channel on state-controlled television in January 2009—education in Kurdish remains illegal as does any expression of a Kurdish political identity, such as forming an explicitly Kurdish political party or NGO.

23. See Orhan Miroglu, "Yeni Bir Savasa Hayir," *Taraf*, August 22, 2011; Cengiz Candar, *Dagdan Inis- PKK Nasil Silah Birakir, Kurt Sorununun Siddetten Arindirilmasi*, (Demokratiklesme Programi, Istanbul: TESEV, 2011).

24. Etyen Mahcupyan, "PKK's Dilemma," *Today's Zaman*, July 22, 2011.

25. Murat Belge, "Bir Yol Ayrimi Gorunuyor Gibi," *Taraf,* July, 19 2011.

26. A must read is *He Loves you, He Beats You, Family Violence in Turkey and Access to Protection* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011). See also the first ever report prepared by a government

agency, the Prime Minister Office's Directorate General on the Status of Women: National Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey *(*Ankara: 2008). The latter report shows that the percentage of women who have experienced physical violence by their partners/spouses between December 2007 and February 2009 was 39.3 percent, amounting to four out of 10 women in the country.

27. According to the *Global Gender Gap Report* published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2010, Turkey occupied an unimpressive 126th place among 134 countries when it comes to equality between the sexes. The report finds that in Turkey, women's labour force participation rate is 26 percent, wages are only about a quarter of men's, and only 10 percent women are in legislative, senior government, and managerial positions. Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson and Saadi Zahidi, *World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report,* (Geneva: WEF, 2010), pp. 296-297. According to *Status of Women in Turkey,* published by Directorate General on the Status of Women, in 2010, women represent 27 percent of the paid work force. Only 9 19 percent of women are engaged in income-generating work in Turkey, and in the east this is roughly 10 percent. New illiteracy figures released by the government show great disparities too between men and women: 3.8 million of the 4.7 million people who are illiterate in Turkey are women.

28. An excerpt from *He Loves you, He Beats You* (endnote 23) analyzes the problem in very clear terms: "The research found that implementation of Law 4320 regularly falls short because enforcement officers, judges, and prosecutors neglect their duties, often due to lack of expertise or will to deal with cases of violence against women and girls in a manner that is effective and sensitive to the needs and human rights of victims. Women who do report family violence to police risk being turned away, and face poor enforcement of protection orders: indeed, some women have been murdered after obtaining a protection order against their killer. Shelters are lacking, and those that do exist often exclude certain groups of women, restrict movement and communications, and are vulnerable to security breaches. Environments in which women are supposed to report violence—particularly police stations and family courts—often lack the private space necessary to do so. In addition, differing understandings of the law—specifically, the scope of eligibility for protection orders— undermine its effectiveness and can exclude the most vulnerable victims of domestic violence."

29. Women have held 9.1 percent of seats in the national parliament and 14 percent in 2011 elections. Only 27 of the nearly 3,000 mayors in the country are female.

30. Nilufer Gole, *Mahremin Gocu*, pp. 128-29.