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Contemporary Turkey: A Country of Tense Coexistence

Fatma Muge Gocek

I. Introduction

The most significant characteristic that distinguishes Turkey today is the tense coexistence of the East and the West within. This is evident in its political structure, in which a popularly elected Islamist government is in power within the only secular state in the world with a Muslim population ratio of 99%. It is visible in the arena of personal rights, where even though the Constitution guarantees the right to education for all of its citizens, women wearing the Islamic headscarf are banned from getting a public education. And it is revealed in its spatial politics, since women dressed in miniskirts are just as likely to be expelled from Islamist coffeehouses as those in Islamic attire are asked to leave Western-style discotheques. It is critical to understand the dynamics of this schizophrenic coexistence, in which one segment of society defines itself as the epitome of modernization, civilization, and the West, while another segment, which appears more religiously oriented and cognizant of the East, has become even more vocal in the post-September 11 world, especially in the recent context of the war being fought to “bring democracy to Islam.” Since contemporary Turkey has spent a long time negotiating the uneasy relationship between Islam and politics, this essay analyzes the dynamics of this relationship through the history of republican Turkey.

Scholars who specialize in the Middle East have studied this *problematique* in depth, but they do so by highlighting the structural and institutional conditions necessary to bring about a truly participatory

political system.¹ What is frequently overlooked is the spectrum of societal meanings of these concepts across time and space. This essay argues that it is specifically this spectrum that determines a particular political outcome. Therefore, it focuses on the formation and transformation of meanings around the particular East-West dynamics in contemporary Turkey. Doing so identifies Turkey's major social actors and institutions from the moment of their arrival in the Middle East as well as the meanings these actors and institutions create as they live through history.

Since the personal is political and objectivity is an often imaginary reality, one could argue that the tense coexistence of the East and West is the focus of this essay because of my particular life story. As a Turkish citizen who spent the first twenty-five years of her life in Turkey to then become an American citizen living in the United States for the next twenty-two years, my life itself has been a microcosm of the struggle between two societies that are so different yet also similar. This personal factor extends into the professional as I research how the East and West were constructed as concepts throughout history, and how non-Western societies in general and Turkey in particular negotiated these concepts. It has also become evident how much the post-September 11 world context has shaped the particular perspective through which I approach contemporary Turkey, given my attempts to make sense of why so much terror and suffering have been inflicted in the name of, and, at the same time, in opposition to Islam. Hence, my hope is that this essay will illuminate the social dynamics of Turkish society and reveal the complexity of the relationship between Islam and democracy, thus reevaluating the efficacy of the agenda that the United States government is actively promoting in Iraq.

Let me start with a disclaimer: even though the main question of the essay is posed in terms of an East-West tension, my intention is to demonstrate that what currently exists is not, as some scholars claim, a "clash of civilizations,"² but rather a coalescence of them. The analysis of contemporary Turkey demonstrates how different elements from the East and West merge into a complex mosaic, one whose pattern must be urgently identified in order to allay the world conflict we are currently enmeshed in. The origins of the shape, style, and content of that mosaic, this essay argues, can be traced to the European Enlightenment and the modernity project it infused in the rest of the world.³ The negotiation of this fusion created certain dynamics in all non-Western societies in general, and in predominantly Islamic ones in

particular.⁴ Turkey, as one such country, commenced this negotiation in the 18th century, while still an empire. After the Ottoman Empire slowly dissolved while struggling with the forces of modernity during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Turkish nation-state continued the struggle into the 21st century.

II. Historical Antecedents of the Turkish Republic: The Emergence and Rise of the Ottoman Empire

The history of the Turkish Republic in Anatolia can be traced back to the 10th and 11th centuries, when the adverse climatic conditions in Central Asia led to the initial westward migration of Turcoman tribes into the Fertile Crescent. The settled urban Islamic empires of the region needed to contain this volatile population and employed some of the tribesmen as mercenaries, gradually directing the rest away from the urban centers toward their northern frontiers with the Byzantine Empire. During the process of migration, these nomadic tribes adopted Islam, replacing their shamanistic religions. It should be noted that this somewhat late conversion of the Turks to Islam was to become a significant factor that Arab communities in the region employed whenever they wanted to delegitimize the eventual Turkish rule that was established over their lands.

The organized raids carried out by these nomadic tribes into the Anatolian territories of the weakening Byzantine Empire eventually led to the formation of many Turkic principalities at the expense of the Byzantines. The principality closest to the Byzantine Empire, which was established circa 1299 in Nicea, was to eventually transform into the dynasty of the house of Osman, later known as the Ottoman Empire. This particular principality came into being as the Turks first gained a foothold in the region by serving as mercenaries to the Byzantine emperor, and then forming strategic alliances with the local Byzantine potentates against him. The 14th and 15th centuries witnessed their expansion at the expense of both the other Turkish principalities and the Byzantine Empire.⁵

The Ottoman mode of expansion was always westward. Even though this was initially because of their choice of conducting conquests against the infidel Byzantines instead of the other Turkish Muslim principalities, it eventually became symbolically affixed as the Ottomans continued to define their identity in relation to Europe. The location of the imperial capitals demonstrates this choice: the capitals

moved westward from Nicea, Bursa, Adrianople (Edirne) in the Balkans. After having surrounded the Byzantine Empire from both the east and the west, the Ottomans eliminated the Byzantine Empire with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, which they immediately made their own capital until their demise in 1922. Their westward orientation would later bring the criticism—one that they themselves would occasionally agree with or take issue with—that they were never truly Islamic in character. It is interesting to note in this context that through the 600-year rule of the Ottoman dynasty, none of the Ottoman sultans ever undertook the Islamic obligation defined as one of the five pillars of Islam. Not one Ottoman sultan conducted a pilgrimage to the Holy Lands of Mecca and Medina, even though they were a part of the Ottoman imperial territories for many centuries.⁶

Yet the structure of rule established in the Ottoman Empire naturalized the superiority of Muslims in society.⁷ Only the Muslims could bear arms, rise politically to the ranks of the ruling elite, and pass these privileges on to their offspring. Still, the Ottoman Empire granted many social, economic, and political privileges to the non-Muslims living amongst them, privileges that were particularly significant at a time when such religious minorities were being persecuted throughout Europe. The Ottoman administration was able to do so through the establishment of the *Millet* system, whereby the imperially designated Ottoman minorities of Greeks, Armenians, and Jews were given rights to self-govern in return for paying a special poll tax (*cizye*). The tax was levied in return for military protection, and legal responsibility devolved to the communal leaders for the actions of their particular communities.⁸ Fully integrated into the empire economically, they could hold significant administrative posts, especially as they pertained to finance. Yet, unlike the Muslims, their political privileges were restricted to their persons because their social contact with the Muslim society at large was carefully regulated. Not only did the Ottoman minorities wear specific attire that visibly marked them as non-Muslim, but they could not pass their political privileges on to their children. The latter was due to the fact that marriage and therefore inheritance across the non-Muslim/Muslim divide was strictly forbidden. Only through converting to Islam and thereby giving up all their communal ties were these minorities allowed to fully integrate into Ottoman Muslim society at large. Still, the presence of this West in their own society endowed the Ottoman Empire with a vigor that led to their rapid expansion in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The eastward expansion of the Empire fully commenced in the 16th century, mostly at the expense of the Persian Empire, the Mamluks of Egypt, and other local Islamic states. The Ottoman defeat of the Mamluks in 1520 was particularly significant in that the Ottoman sultans captured and brought to Constantinople the symbolic post of the Islamic Caliphate, which had been held by the Egyptian rulers. In doing so, the Ottoman Empire attained the symbolic leadership of the Muslim world, a post held until 1924, when the newly formed Turkish Republic abolished the Caliphate. (It is interesting to note at this juncture that in the message transmitted by Al-Jazeera television, Osama bin Laden traces the start of the demise of the Muslim world at the hands of the West to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate.)

III. The Onset of the Ottoman Retraction and Increased Interaction with the West

The Ottoman state established an empire, the boundaries of which extended at its height from the gates of Vienna in the West, to the Arabian Peninsula in the East, to the shores of North Africa in the Southwest. Scholars trace the commencement of the period of imperial retraction to the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1699.⁹ Indeed, the Ottoman Empire was able to expand until it encountered similar imperial powers. The emerging Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires in the West and the Persian Empire in the East delimited the Ottoman borders. The 18th century was the period when the Ottoman state, cognizant of the European Enlightenment and the subsequent political, economic, and military transformations there, became interested in reforming the Empire along Western lines.¹⁰

It was at this juncture that they sent the first Ottoman ambassador to the court of Louis XV with the intent "to observe Western civilization and report on what could be learned and applied from it." I studied this encounter in depth in my first book, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the 18th Century*.¹¹ While the impact of this encounter in France was limited to the appearance of a brief fashion of "Turquerie" in the French court, in the Ottoman Empire it led to the eventual transformation of the entire social structure. Because military victories produced and sustained empires, the first institution the Ottoman state set out to "modernize" (a term that eventually became synonymous with "Westernize") was the military. In order

to maintain a well-drilled standing army in the European manner, it became necessary for the Ottoman administration to not only change military recruitment (which in turn was connected to the existing tax and land revenue systems that also had to be reformed), but also to create military academies to educate the recruits, a special treasury to pay them, and modern hospitals to heal them. These Western-style institutions also came embedded with certain new ideas: the conceptions of liberty, equality, and fraternity of the French Revolution were the most significant.¹² The new societal contract implied in these ideas was addressed not to imperial subjects but to potential citizens. These citizens had to have equal rights and responsibilities regardless of their religion and other communal identities. Their loyalty was not to be directed to an omnipotent sultan, but instead to the abstract notion of a state that respected their rights. It was, therefore, not surprising that once the Ottoman state introduced these Western-style institutions, the Ottoman military students who received this education gradually started to aspire to the equality of all Ottoman subjects and to profess loyalty not to the person of the sultan, as they had formerly done, but instead to the idea of an Ottoman constitutional state that would represent them all.¹³

This new social contract required individuals to construct their political and social identity as citizens. The first step in the transition from imperial subjecthood to citizenship commenced with attempts to formulate an Ottoman Constitution, initially during the period of reform referred to as the *Tanzimat* Period. The efforts to formulate an Ottoman Assembly followed soon after, in 1856. Not surprisingly, it was the Ottoman military cadre, now educated in Western-style military academies, that spearheaded the reform movement and, in the process, became more and more involved in politics.¹⁴ Yet there was another significant social group that was affected by the European ideas of education and political representation: the religious minorities of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians. They likewise started to insist on political equality and full access to the Ottoman administration.¹⁵ Yet among the two groups, the military had a much more central location and more power within the state. When the sultan failed to promulgate the necessary reforms, it was the young Westernized military cadres that intervened in 1908 to replace him and to establish an Ottoman Parliament. From that point onward, the state and the sultan (who used to represent the state in his person) had to share political power with the military.

The burgeoning political identity of the Westernized military and the religious minorities developed in similar yet ultimately different directions. While both groups attempted to sustain the concept of a multicultural Ottoman identity, the increasing European presence in the domestic affairs of the Empire, as well as the search of both groups for an identity from within their own pasts (which had developed differently because of the dynamics of the *Millet* system), led them to come up with disparate solutions. In the volume I edited entitled *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East*, I studied the emergence of these disparate solutions by comparatively analyzing the Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Arab nationalisms within the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶ Even though the dynamics in each one was the same, each nevertheless imagined their own to be unique. Because the Turkish Muslims formed the ruling element of the Empire, it was eventually Turkish nationalism that prevailed at the expense of all the others. Even though the ruling elite attempted to hold on to a unifying Ottoman identity that would have sustained the Empire, the 1908 war in Tripoli against the Italians, the 1910–1912 Balkan wars, and eventually World War I polarized national identities to the point of no return.

The Balkan wars were especially significant in this polarization. When the Ottomans were defeated by the Balkan powers, hundreds of thousands of Muslim Turks (who had been living in the Balkans since the 14th century) had to flee to the Ottoman capital to avoid being massacred. They were eventually settled in the central lands of the Empire, namely in Anatolia. Yet these Anatolian lands were the location of the emerging Greek and Armenian nationalisms as well. With the surge of incoming Muslim Turks, the Ottoman state—now under the sway of Turkish nationalism—eliminated the local Greek, Armenian, and Arab populations to replace them with their ethnic coreligionists.¹⁷

IV. Toward the Demise of the Ottoman Empire

In my book entitled *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Europe*, I tried to comprehend how and why, from the 18th century onward, the dynamics of Ottoman Westernization were not able to preserve the Empire.¹⁸ The European Enlightenment had advantaged the bourgeoisie in spearheading social transformations throughout Europe. What distinguished the burgeoning Ottoman bourgeoisie from the European one, however, was its multi-ethnic character. Therefore, unlike the European bourgeoisie, it could not pool

its social, economic, and political resources across the *Millet* divide to transform the Empire. The newly forming Turkish bourgeoisie eliminated its Greek, Armenian, and Jewish components in the name of nationalism and, by doing so, destroyed the only chance it had of preserving the Empire.

This process of elimination occurred as follows.¹⁹ On the eve of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was ruled by the Committee of Union and Progress, which was comprised of Westernized mid-level mostly Turkish Muslim military officials and politicians. The leaders of the Committee were without exception Muslim Turks of Balkan origin who no longer had a home to which to return. In addition to their ensuing fervent Turkish nationalism, these men had received an Enlightenment education. This led them to legitimate their group in the name of progress and the secularism of science, and thus marginalize the former legitimating ideology of religion. Hence, nationalism and science became the two guiding principles of the new conception of rule. It was at this juncture that the Ottoman Empire joined World War I on the side of the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian Empires. During the war, nationalism took further root. The English and French states that often intervened in the domestic affairs of the Empire in the name of protecting the Ottoman minorities were now the enemy.²⁰ The Ottomans engaged in an unchecked process of ethnic cleansing that reduced the numbers of Greeks and Armenians in the Empire.²¹ The Armenians were especially hard hit in this process because, unlike the Greeks, they did not have a homeland to which to return. Prejudice fostered by the social divide of the *Millet* system rapidly turned into aggression; the Balkan defeats and the consequent massacre of Muslims further worsened existing relations between the ruling Muslim Turks and the Ottoman minorities.

The financial success of the minority bourgeoisie, who did not serve in the military and instead served as middlemen in the growing trade relations with Europe, increased significantly.²² This accumulation of wealth was looked upon unfavorably by the Muslims, especially by those who had fled from the Balkans as well as those whose male family members had been serving in the Ottoman military for almost a decade. The wealth was at first frowned upon, and then sanctioned. The minorities were deported or forced to flee and their confiscated property and goods were distributed among the Muslim Turks, who set about establishing a national Turkish bourgeoisie at all costs. The 1915 deportation and massacres committed against the Armenians,

the deportation of Greeks, and later the migration of the Jews to Palestine all rapidly altered the composition of the Ottoman population. The Muslim Turks of the Balkans were settled in where the Ottoman minorities were divided. Hence, the multi-hued fabric of the Ottoman Empire transformed into the solid color of a nation-state.²³

V. The Formation of the Turkish Republic

After the Ottoman Empire lost World War I with devastatingly large numbers of casualties, it was an Ottoman general from the now lost Ottoman Balkan city of Salonica who was chosen by the now defunct Committee of Union and Progress to lead a war of independence against the occupying Allied Forces. Mustafa Kemal was a very able general who united the Turks and successfully led them in “throwing the occupying forces out” of what Turks considered to be their homeland.²⁴ True to his Westernized education, Mustafa Kemal first formulated a National Assembly in Ankara, away from the former capital Constantinople (also known as Istanbul), which was still occupied by the Ottoman sultan and the Allied Forces. As the Allied Forces tried to bring the perpetrators of the massacres against the Ottoman minorities to justice in Istanbul—and deported the prominent Ottoman statesmen responsible to the island of Malta—many who were not apprehended escaped to Ankara to join forces with Mustafa Kemal.²⁵ The Turkish Nationalists thus fought yet another war during 1919–1922, ultimately forcing the Allied Forces to withdraw from the central lands of the Empire. It was at this juncture that the conflict with Greece reached its pinnacle: the British had allowed the Greeks to invade Asia Minor to reclaim Western Anatolia as their own. The Turks thus fought a war of independence mainly against these Greek forces. The islands of the Aegean quickly became points of contention between the two countries as each laid down their claims. And thus began the fractious relationship between Greece and Turkey that still continues today.

The former lands of the Empire left outside the boundaries of the new Turkish state were also fraught with problems. In the Balkans, the Serbs, Albanians, Greeks, and Bulgarians further negotiated their territorial boundaries through conflicts that have continued until the present. In the East, the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire became the French and British protectorates of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, the Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The Kurds became divided across three countries: while some remained in Turkey, others were within

the lands of the new states of Iraq and Syria. It was the British division of these provinces that was to cause so much continued havoc in the Middle East because the provinces were portioned out in accordance with natural boundaries, such as rivers, rather than by the ethnic and communal identities of the peoples residing in them. Syria has never given up its claims on Lebanon, for example. The Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein initially invaded Kuwait because he claimed those lands should have belonged to Iraq in the first place. Cyprus, which was occupied by the British, contained Greek and Turkish communities that have coexisted uneasily since then. Hence, one could claim that all the current areas of conflict in the Middle East came into being through the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Turkish identity became the unifying force of the newly founded Republic of Turkey. The only institution that managed to survive the transition from empire to new nation-state semi-intact was the military, which then formed, with the help of the bureaucratic administration, the backbone of the new republic after the War of Independence. Mustafa Kemal exchanged his military costume with the civilian suit of a statesman and set out to construct the new republic. His fifteen-year rule, from 1923 until his death in 1938, was marked by a series of radical reforms that made Turkey a secular republic, its face turned unswervingly to Europe with the intent to "join the ranks of the civilized nations of the West."²⁶ The legal system was one of the first to be reformed. A multi-tiered legal system had employed Western laws for legal matters concerning the Westerners in the Empire, Islamic laws of the *sharia* for matters pertaining to the Muslims, and laws promulgated by the sultan (*kanun*) when there was no legal precedent. It was now replaced by a new unified secular amalgam of laws borrowed from countries that seemed "most similar to Turkey in character," namely, commercial laws from Italy, civic laws from France, and personal laws from Switzerland.

The second most important reform was the unification of the educational system. The traditional Islamic education that existed side by side with the new Western-style education, complemented by the minority and missionary education for the Ottoman minorities and European foreigners, were united into one centralized unit. The history of the Turkish Republic was narrated in the textbooks along the lines that Mustafa Kemal had delivered in a six-day-long lecture.²⁷ Religion as a subject was removed from all schools except at the university level where it was taught as an academic subject, and then was

offered solely to those specializing in religion. (It should be noted that this lack of proper religious education probably accounts for some of the quandaries faced by contemporary Turkey in comprehending the boundaries and implications of governance by a party that defines itself as having a strong Islamic component.) All the knowledge thus conveyed through the educational system was carefully crafted along nationalist lines that created a distant historical past for Turkey that went beyond the Ottoman Empire to the imagined lands of Central Asia. The language was purified of “foreign” influences as new words of Turkic origin were constructed.²⁸

These significant structural reforms enabled the new republican state to control the production and regulation of knowledge through education, and social behavior through law. They were complemented by a series of reforms defining Turkey’s cultural and political location in the world. The alphabet reform replaced Arabic script with the Latin one, thereby effectively severing the epistemological ties of the Turks with their Ottoman past. This reform was complemented with the calendar reform whereby the Muslim use of Friday as the day of rest was replaced by Sunday in order to be more like the “civilized” countries of the West. The lunar calendar was superseded by the Roman one, and the traditional time keeping was replaced by the European one.

The French Jacobin separation of church and state was also adopted *in toto*, effectively removing religion from the public space into the private.²⁹ Gone were the religious foundations, sects, and orders. All religion in the public sphere was overseen by the newly established Republican Office of Religious Affairs. Marriages, divorces, and all legal arrangements concerning family life were no longer based on Islamic law but instead on civic laws adopted from the West. Gone, too, was the religious attire of the sheikhs and other religious leaders; it could only be worn within the confines of religious institutions. And the attire of the new republican citizen was likewise reformed. Mustafa Kemal gave a public speech in one of the most conservative Anatolian cities, where he wore a hat, claiming that “this is called a hat, it is what the civilized Europeans wear, and what the Turks who are going to join the ranks of civilized countries are to wear from then on.”³⁰ A few revolts against the Western attire in general and the hat in particular—because its wide brim was especially detrimental to performing the Islamic ablutions—were summarily put down through a number of public hangings.

It is interesting to note that no such regulations of attire were introduced for women; instead, Mustafa Kemal educated them by example. All the women in his retinue were dressed in the latest European fashion and wore no headscarves. Women were also immediately handed the right to vote and be elected, without a social struggle. They proceeded to join the workforce like their European counterparts in their desexualized business suits, their hair tightly bound in a chignon.³¹ I analyzed the dynamics of gender in the Middle East in general and Turkey in particular in the volume I edited, entitled *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, Power*. The volume analyzes the dynamics of the Turkish feminist movement that developed in such a state-centered manner.³² In all, the republican state employed these reforms to create a totally secular social structure legitimated by the modernity of the civilized West instead of the “traditional” Ottoman Muslim past, and manned by an urban secular citizen that professed loyalty to the Turkish nation.

Yet there was one significant flaw in this transformation through radical reforms: the reforms did not take hold throughout the society. They remained confined to urban centers and the newly burgeoning secular national middle class.³³ The state also had to vigilantly guard the boundaries of secularism because every attempt to make the transition from the initial single-party system to a multi-party system ended up mobilizing the masses around the issue of Islamic religion. The first two attempts to found an opposition party occurred during Mustafa Kemal’s reign; in both cases, he handpicked some of his friends to form such parties against the Republican People’s Party (RPP), of which he was the founder and the leader.³⁴ Even though his friends argued that such opposition parties could only take root in society if they did not run against the party of Mustafa Kemal, and suggested that he consider stepping down as leader of the RPP to instead become the politically non-aligned president of the entire country, he chose to remain in political control. Ultimately, as the opposition parties drew a lot of popular support and the populace started to turn increasingly against the RPP, Mustafa Kemal had no choice but to shut down both parties.

VI. Transition to a Multi-Party System and the Cold War

The third and successful Turkish attempt to transition to a multi-party system occurred after the Second World War under the tutelage of Ismet Inonu, Mustafa Kemal’s trusted friend and fellow general, who

had succeeded him after 1938 primarily because he had the support of the military. Official Turkish historiography narrates this transition as Inonu deciding on his own that the time had come for RPP to educate the Turkish populace about acquiring a multi-party system, but I agree with scholars who point out the extraneous factor that forced Inonu's hand: Turkey would not have been permitted to join NATO had it not undertaken such a transition.³⁵ Yet this process, which occurred after 1948, proved to be a rather difficult one. Once again, during the national elections, religion emerged as the main social issue around which the opposition mobilized. The newly established Democrat Party (DP) won the elections by a landslide and started to undertake a series of changes that decreased the influence of the military. As there was not a strong leader like Mustafa Kemal to contain the increasing popularity of the Party and protect the privileges of the state bureaucracy, Democrat Party rule ended in 1960 with the first military coup in republican history. The opposition party was once again harshly suppressed and a number of the DP leaders were tried and hanged.

The military intervention set a pattern that kept repeating itself approximately once every decade thereafter.³⁶ The military ostensibly intervened to preserve the republic. It abolished the government, changed the Constitution, tried and sentenced dissidents, punished party leaders or abolished the parties, then held elections, turned political power over to the elected government, and left. They left every time because of Mustafa Kemal's maxim that "the Turkish military should not get involved in politics and ultimately belongs in the barracks." Yet, ironically, it was another maxim of Kemal that legitimated their intervention each and every time, and this one stated that, "the military are the guardians of the Turkish republic." Each time, the grounds for intervention was a religious threat since the military interpreted the political activities of a party with Islamist tendencies to be undermining the foundations of the republic. No one had the power to contest this interpretation.

It should be noted that Kemal had initially identified another social group, along with the military, as the guardians of the republic—the Turkish youth. But since they had no arms, they could never accumulate enough power to exercise their historical right and responsibility. Instead, most of the political activities of the Turkish youth were sanctioned by the military and the government because of their leftist tendencies. The major factor behind this sanction was the need to protect the existing political distribution of power, but an equally significant

one was the strategic alliance Turkey had chosen to form with the United States during the Cold War.³⁷ Since Turkey had extensive borders with the Soviet Union, the U.S. government elected to form close political ties with Turkey in order to contain the Soviet Union. In the process, it advised Turkey to crack down on the domestic leftist movements under the assumption that all of these were formed to bring about a revolution to establish communism. The flip side of this advice was the bolstering of rightist religious movements under the assumption that such movements were not revolutionary but conservative, and therefore geared to sustain the status quo. Hence, the Turkish military suppressed and decimated leftist movements and leftist intellectuals in the name of stamping out communism. It fostered instead culturally conservative religious movements.

The military had not been willing to accept the presence of Islamic religion in political life as it was defined, interpreted, and introduced by the populace. On the contrary, it formulated a nationalist civic version of Islam that was termed "the Turkish-Islamic synthesis."³⁸ This version defined religion culturally, in terms of the practices the Turks themselves had introduced to Islam. Religion was to flourish only under the total control of the state rather than the community of believers. It is therefore not surprising that some retired generals were among the founding members of the predecessors of the Islamist party that is now in power. This occurred from the 1950s until the 1980s. With the decimation of the left and the nurturance instead of conservative elements, the military had irretrievably tipped the balance of power in Turkish society in favor of the conservative groups. Soon it could not contain the increased political participation of the Islamists. So the military had to abandon advocating "the Turkish-Islamic synthesis" and once again start to actively oppose the Islamists and take a very public political stand against them. They were aided in this endeavor by all the other Turkish political parties that had developed under state tutelage, since all had started to lose significant segments of their voters to these upstarts.

This veiled presence of the military in Turkish political life needs to be studied in further detail because the military is ironically regarded as the major force that preserves democracy, according to some secular segments of population, or that very much hinders it, according to other more religiously oriented segments. The military have always legitimated their intervention in political life on the grounds of the historical role the great leader Mustafa Kemal bequeathed upon them.

And they have always claimed their intervention to be “above politics” because they do not belong to any political party. They have also put forth the argument that their eventual departure from the political sphere after each military intervention demonstrates that their action was not based on their own interests but on the interests of the nation. They have further justified their frequent interventions on the grounds that it is the lack of trustworthy, responsible politicians that forces them to take such action. All of these arguments overlook how the frequent military interventions infantilize the Turkish politicians by enabling them to assume a political position without bestowing upon them the power to practice it and take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. In the meanwhile, the military keeps deciding what its annual budget ought to be without any checks or balances, and this undisclosed figure keeps being accepted by the Turkish Parliament without any discussion whatsoever. It should be noted here that it is estimated that the Turkish military receives about 65% of the annual budget (another 15% goes to paying back the IMF, which leaves the Turkish government about 20% on which to run the entire country).

VII. Economic and Social Liberalization after the 1980s

The last military intervention, which occurred in 1982, was different from the earlier ones on a number of levels. In an attempt to curb the “dangerous” ideologies that seem to keep infesting Turkish society, the military decided to systematically spread instead the one ideology that kept legitimating their intervention: Kemalism. This official ideology penetrated every corner of the country as everything from roads to school buildings to parks became infused with images of Mustafa Kemal. Special institutions to study Kemalism were established at many universities and prizes were given for the best works on the great leader. Yet all these activities failed to engage in a critical dialogue with what comprised Kemalism and how it could meet the evolving needs of Turkish society. Instead, they promoted state ideology, upheld secularism, and suppressed any critical analysis.³⁹

Another major difference of the 1982 military intervention was that the mixed economy (dominated by state monopolies and a state-protected domestic market) and the national bourgeoisie faced a serious crisis.⁴⁰ The lack of market competition had bloated these monopolies and slowed down the economy; the revenues of the military had likewise suffered. Strong economic measures had to be undertaken in

order to keep the country solvent. The military therefore permitted an economic liberalization policy that was started under the tutelage of a new conservative rightist political party, the Motherland Party (MP), led by Turgut Ozal.⁴¹ With this policy, Turkey was to leave behind state protection over the economy and let domestic industries face the challenges of the world markets. This liberalizing move was especially painful for the secular national bourgeoisie that had developed under the protective wings of the state, and that had supported the hegemony of the state and the military in the political sphere in return for profits in the economic sphere. Yet this bourgeoisie was particularly ill suited for such a move because they had initially been brought into existence by the Turkish state through the confiscation of the wealth and businesses of the departing minorities. They therefore lacked the initial skills to build and sustain businesses over the long term.

Although this economic liberalization was, and still is, painful, it nevertheless introduced two very significant new forces into Turkish society. The first came about with the abolition of state control over communications, which bolstered civil society. The other was the opportunity to establish direct contact with global businesses without the mediation of the state, which produced a new social group of provincial Anatolian bourgeoisie.

As businesses needed to have direct access to information in order to compete in the world markets, the state monopoly over communications (radio, telephone, and television) was summarily abolished. In 1984, within months, hundreds of radio and television stations, and later cellular phone companies, mushroomed throughout Turkey.⁴² Access to information brought along hours-long chat shows on television about social issues as the Turkish public saw and defined itself through the silver box. Radio stations transmitted messages of all sorts in all political colors, often discussing the particular dynamics of Turkish society. As television cameras covered every corner of the country, especially in the 1990s, it was hard to prevent the surfacing of both the complicit behavior of the bourgeoisie, often in the form of white-collar crime, and the undercover intelligence activities of the military, often directed against its own populace and politicians. Hence, the state apparatus and its co-dependent bourgeoisie, now under increased scrutiny, appeared more and more corrupt and compromised.

The communications revolution and the opening up of world markets fueled the emergence of a new social group, a provincial bourgeoisie that had been marginalized by the state and big businesses

for their relatively smaller size as well as their aspiration to define their identity through religious values. This bourgeoisie was religious but not traditional. As it had been socialized in the secular educational system of the Republic with the ideals of Western modernity, it ended up employing technology to its fullest. It therefore managed to develop what has since been called an “alternate modernity,” one that combines a religiously conservative self-definition with technologically cutting-edge business acumen.⁴³ The accumulation of economic resources by this new social group, aptly named the “Anatolian Tigers” after the Southeast Asian economic powerhouses, ultimately enabled the political success of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (JDP) that is in power in Turkey today. Previous opposition parties in republican history had always been formed with state approval and had drawn extensively on the resources of the state; in return, they had never been able to refuse state tutelage in their political actions. Yet the economic liberalization of the 1980s produced a new bourgeoisie that could generate, for the first time, resources outside the control of the state. This bourgeoisie then invested these resources in a political party that developed in spite of fierce opposition from both the Turkish state and the military.⁴⁴

VIII. Turkey’s Contested Location in the New World Order

The JDP and its intellectual predecessor, which was the Welfare Party (WP), advocated an economically liberal program that was targeted at both the religious and the secular segments of society.⁴⁵ In addition, unlike the existing mainstream parties, it developed new political tactics to form an extensive voter base. The WP and later the JDP studied cutting-edge U.S. political campaign management skills. The JDP generated computer databases of voters, conducted opinion surveys every three months to pinpoint campaign issues, and actively recruited members.⁴⁶ I personally remember how in 1990, when a Turkish colleague and I conducted a survey of the Islamist movement in Turkey, we wanted to compare our results with those we assumed had been collected by the political parties. When we contacted the parties, we were surprised to find out that out of all of them, only the WP had conducted statistically rigorous surveys and could therefore provide comparative data for us.

Yet, in spite of this political mobilization and technological sophistication, the leaders of the JDP seemed painfully aware that the Party still

remained at the mercy of the military insofar as the latter controlled both the state apparatus as well as the republican narrative portraying the military as the guardians of Turkish democracy and secularism. In addition, the opening of Turkey to the world markets had revealed the urgency for Turkey to join an economic consortium within which to weather the exigencies of the world market. Since Turkey had aspired from its inception to be a part of Europe, it had applied for European Union (EU) membership very early, in 1963.⁴⁷ The secular bourgeoisie wanted to join the EU because its economic interests in the world market would be bolstered and protected within such a union. The Islamist bourgeoisie likewise saw the economic benefits from such a merger. In addition, they saw in the EU a political ally. As the EU promoted the exercise of democracy and human rights in all its member states, it would protect the right of the JDP to remain in Turkish political life against the threats of the military. These threats had become especially significant after the post-1982 formation of the National Security Council (NSC) by the military to further control Turkish political life. This council still functions at a level above the president, National Assembly, and the confines of the legal system. It was no accident that one of the first stipulations of the EU, in order for Turkey to qualify for membership, was the abolition of the NSC. The military was naturally opposed to this on grounds of national security.

This potential EU membership has generated a very interesting realignment in Turkish politics. For the first time since the inception of their relationship, the state bureaucracy, dominated by the military and the secular bourgeoisie it fostered, developed divergent interests. While the secular bourgeoisie realized that its interests lay with the EU, the state bureaucracy quickly became aware that any engagement with the EU would severely curb its power, both in terms of control over the economy (through the privatization of state monopolies) and the society (through the abolition of the NSC). And for the first time, the economic and political interests of the secular and Islamist bourgeoisies became aligned. Both wanted EU membership and aspired to bring democratic practices and political stability to Turkey in order to accomplish it. It is this political standstill, with the military finding itself on the wrong side of the global equation in opposition to the secular bourgeoisie, which has enabled the current domestic political situation to persist without the political intervention of the military.

Even though the portrayal above depicts EU membership as the panacea to all of Turkey's problems, there are still significant obstacles

to such a peaceful solution. The most significant obstacle lies within the structure of the EU. Because member countries are politically represented in the European Assembly according to population size, the very large Turkish population would guarantee it significant political clout at the outset. And the balance of power between the southern and northern countries of the EU, which is now dominated by the northern powers (England, France, Germany, Scandinavian countries) would shift to the advantage of the southern ones (Spain, Portugal, Italy). In addition, Turkey has to fulfill a significant number of domestic reforms. It has to improve its human rights record, abolish trials for crimes of thought, enable the self-expression of ethnic and religious minorities such as the Kurds and Assyrians, and acknowledge the crimes committed against these and other minorities in history, especially against the Armenians and Greeks. The most significant obstacle to such a public acknowledgment of past and present crimes is the still strong Turkish nationalism that is constantly fostered by the Turkish military and the state bureaucracy that they have trained and socialized after their own image. Any thought or action that might challenge/criticize the Republic is still punishable by law.⁴⁸

Also, Turks are constantly inundated with the nationalist rhetoric that the whole world is against them and they should therefore keep defending themselves and always expect the worst. It should be noted, however, that this nationalist instinct was recently undermined by a natural phenomenon, the devastating earthquake in 2000 that led to more than 30,000 deaths. As rescue efforts were immediately brought under scrutiny, two facts became very clear. First, the state bureaucracy was totally unprepared and ineffectual in mobilizing to help the victims.⁴⁹ The military, in turn, employed its forces to first rescue and evacuate a military base instead of helping out the populace. Emerging triumphant were civil society organizations of students as well as non-profit organizations, which quickly set up social support networks. The nationalist rhetoric that Turks have no friends in the world was proven thoroughly wrong as help poured in from all over. Still, these developments are relatively recent and have not been in place long enough to sustain democracy in Turkish society.

IX. Conclusion

I want to conclude with a discussion of the most significant factor hindering the possibility of a robust democratic Turkey in the future: the

imagined presence of an East-West divide in general, and a religious-secular divide in particular. Even though the East and West have had a long tradition of coexistence in Turkey, there are still very few people in the country who are willing to acknowledge this coexistence. The staunchly secular and Westernized military and their bourgeoisie still insist on defining Turkey solely as a modern, Westernized nation, one that has not, should not, and could not have an Islamic identity, which they see as traditional, backward, and uncivilized. For them, since the West and its modernity has been defined in Enlightenment terms as the ultimate triumph of science over religion, modernity over tradition, and secularism over Islam, being civilized means being European and therefore certainly not Islamic. As they have been socialized in an educational system formulated on the radically secular Jacobin model of secularism, Islam for them is the "Other" they do not know, an evil monster lurking within spidery cobwebs, one that could at any moment emerge to drag and topple Turkey into nothingness. Even though they unwillingly acknowledge that the Islamist government in Turkey has not, after one and a half years, brought about a religious revolution like that in Iran, they still believe it is cloaking its true intention of destroying the Turkish republic. Overcoming this deep mistrust of Islam is still extremely hard for the dominant secular state and its bourgeoisie. In the meanwhile, the Islamist bourgeoisie is constantly professing its loyalty to Turkish secularism in order to allay this fear. And they still have not generated enough knowledge or accumulated adequate experiences to define themselves on their own terms, for what they are rather than what the secular bourgeoisie claims them to be.

When Colin Powell, in an attempt to provide a positive model for Iraq and also to gently pave the way to pass the occupational torch to Muslim political allies of the United States, declared that, "what they aimed to accomplish in Iraq was an Islamist democracy like those in Turkey and Pakistan," there was a major outcry in Turkey.⁵⁰ "How dare Mr. Powell define us as a Muslim democracy?!", decried the secularists, pointing out that Turkey is a constitutionally secular modern democracy. And how could they be compared to Pakistan, when Turkey has always measured itself against the Western democracies? The Islamist government defended Mr. Powell's statement by querying, "wasn't it natural for him to refer to the democracy the Turks had established for themselves as a Muslim one since 99% of the people in Turkey were Muslims?"⁵¹

This debate demonstrates the distance Turkey still needs to traverse before establishing a true democracy. Bridges need to be built between the liberal segments of both the secularist and Islamist bourgeoisies. Only then will it become clear that what makes countries like Turkey unique is the long coexistence of the East and West, rather than the East against the West. In the 21st century, no one can afford to hold onto or create such binaries. ●

Notes

1. Feldman 2003; Benard 2003; Diamond Plattner and Brumberg 2003; Price 1999; Esposito and Voll 1996.
2. Huntington 1996.
3. Cascardi 1999; Berlin 1956.
4. Lewis 1982.
5. Kafadar 1985.
6. Lewis 1969.
7. Inalcik 1973.
8. Braude and Lewis 1982.
9. Inalcik 1973.
10. Davison 1990.
11. Gocek 1986.
12. Mardin 1962.
13. Zurcher 1998; Ahmad 1993.
14. Hanioglu 2001, 1995.
15. Findley 1989.
16. Fatma Gocek, ed., *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East* (State University of New York Press, 2002).
17. Akcam 2004.
18. Fatma Gocek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1996).
19. Hanioglu 2001, 1995.
20. Sonyel 2000.
21. Akcam 2004.
22. Lewis 1969.
23. Keyder 1981.
24. Kinross 1964.
25. Akcam 2004.
26. Lewis 1999; Landau 1984.
27. Ataturk 1963.
28. Lewis 1999.

29. Berkes 1964.
30. Landau 1984.
31. Gole 1998; Arat 1998.
32. Gocek, *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
33. Mardin 1989.
34. Zurcher 1998; Ahmad 1993.
35. Ahmad 1977.
36. Lombardi 1997; Hale 1974.
37. Aydin 2000; Oguzlu 2004.
38. Cetinsaya 1999.
39. Yerasimos, Siefert and Vorhoff 2000; Cizre-Sakallioglu 1994.
40. Bugra 1994.
41. Aral 2001.
42. Oncu 1995.
43. Kadioglu 1999; Gole 1998; Tapper 1998.
44. Skafidas 2003.
45. White 2002; Navaro-Yashin 2002.
46. Breu and Marchese 2000.
47. Oguzlu 2004; Kubichek 1999.
48. Zurcher 1998.
49. Mitchell 2004.
50. BBC *Monitoring European*, London, 4 April 2004.
51. www.habergazete.com.

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