

## **A Reinterpretation of Tradition? - The Turkish AKP and its Local Politics**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the role of tradition for the political performance of Turkey's governing *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP, Justice and Development Party). It is argued that a political program relying on traditional values as well as a political strategy relying on traditional interaction patterns is responsible for the party's exceptional success. To prove this hypothesis in a first step the party's foundation and political program are presented. In a second step the general rise of conservative beliefs in Turkish society are related to the values the party pursues. Decisive influences on the party's political concept "*Muhafazakar Demokrasi*" (Conservative Democracy) like former Islamist parties, the development of an alternative elite consisting of pious businessmen (Anatolian Bourgeoisie) or the opposition of secular-kemalist forces are discussed. A third step focuses on the AKP's local politics as they are believed to be decisive for its national success and offer ideal possibilities to observe the interaction between party and population. In this part the dominant interaction patterns used by the AKP and its predecessor the Islamist *Refah Partisi* (RP, Welfare Party) are described. It is shown how the parties apply "*himaye*" and "*imece*" and how these became an important tool of political mobilization. It is also explained how perceptions of a "just society" underlying these interaction patterns got integrated into the party's national politics.

## The AKP's Political Program

The Turkish *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP, Justice and Development Party) was founded in 2001 and won the national elections in 2002 (34,28%). Since then it turned out as the strongest party in all national and municipal elections. This leads to several questions such as: why is the *AKP* one of the most successful parties in Turkish history; what are the principles of its politics and which political strategy does it use?

The hypothesis I am trying to proof in the following is that the *AKP* represents – regarding its political program as well as its political strategy - a reinvention of tradition in Turkish politics. By this term I indicate that it is translating traditional values and communication patterns which originated in a village context to an urban context and uses them for political work.

This article will begin by introducing the *AKP* and giving information about its political program. In a second step the political program will be put into relation with the general rise of conservatism in Turkey. It will be discussed which traditional values and perceptions determine the discussion. The second and last part looks at traditional interaction patterns and tries to work out how they are used for political mobilization. This part focuses on *AKP*'s local politics for these are believed to be decisive for its national success.<sup>1</sup> Here the activist engagement takes place, here the first and most direct contact to the potential voter is established, and here political topics are developed. I believe that only by observing party members and activists and by trying to understand how they think and act, the multilayered relations between politics, culture and civil society can be detected and analysed.

Before getting to the main text some reoccurring words should be defined briefly. I define tradition as transmitted principles and practices, values and norms. These differ, even within one country, as they are influenced by religion, ethnicity, tribe or class. Conservatism is harder to grasp as it differs from historical and geographical circumstances, a text of reference like “The Communist Manifest” for Communism is missing. Briefly, it can be described as an ideology that prefers stability over change and fixed social relations over greater personal freedom. In general conservative beliefs are influenced by religious ones, which makes it often difficult to distinguish whether actions and convictions are based on religious or conservative beliefs.

## The Party

The Turkish *AKP* defines its political concept as “*Muhafazakar Demokrasi*” (Conservative Democracy). As basic purposes the party identifies the realisation of a free market economy by liberalisation and privatisation, the improvement of the situation of human rights and a stronger democratisation of Turkey. In terms of foreign policy it votes for an EU entry much more actively than all other Turkish parties. In this regard it has carried out numerous structural reforms which will change and influence the country in a long-term perspective.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is related to my PhD project at Hamburg University, comparing *AKP*'s local politics in two cities (Konya/Eskişehir). The main focus of research is Konya. The city is coined by a conservative life style which orientates itself on village traditions and religious rules. It is characterised by high social homogeneity - ethnic or religious minorities hardly exist. An important point is also that in Konya the *AKP* reached results wide above the national average. The investigation period is 2002 (government takeover of the *AKP*) to 2011 (parliamentary elections), although I will also compare the *AKP* with the political approach of former conservative or Islamist parties when necessary.

<sup>2</sup> See Cizre, Ümit (ed.), *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey, The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, London 2008, p. 80-106; Yavuz, M. Hakan (ed.), *The Emergence of a New Turkey, Democracy and the AK Parti*, Salt Lake City 2006; Öniş, Ziya, “Globalization and party transformation: Turkey's Justice and Development Party in Perspective”, <http://portal.ku.edu.tr/~zonis/-publicationp.htm>, 21.02.09; Safi, İsmail, *Türkiye'de Muhafazakârlığın Düşünsel - Siyasal Temelleri ve 'Muhafazkâr Demokrat' Kimlik Arayışları*, PhD

The most crucial point in this aspect is the loss of power of the armed forces, which will lead to a stronger democratisation of Turkey. Although the military is not allowed to intervene in politics it sees itself historically as a “Guardian of the Republic and its Kemalist heritage”. Whenever it saw these values threatened in the past it tried to restore the order by a military coup as happened in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997.<sup>3</sup> Besides, it heavily influenced civil politics through the institution of the *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council).<sup>4</sup>

Another important step towards further democratization of the country was the constitutional amendment in September 2010. The main points of the amendment were the strengthening of civil control of the military, the abolition of the impunity for the generals of the military coup in 1980, the aggravation of party bans and a strengthening of human rights.<sup>5</sup> Other reforms in relation to an EU-accession concerned minority rights. Especially the third, sixth and seventh harmonization package (between 2002 and 2004) were crucial for the Kurdish question. As a result the first official radio and television programs in Kurdish were broadcasted in March 2003.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of 2009 a channel for “multi-language programs” was created by the official television council *TRT (Türkiye Radio Television Kurumu, Turkish Radio and Television Council)*.<sup>7</sup> Also language classes in Kurdish were made possible by the harmonization packages.

The *AKP*’s relation towards religious minorities seems to be influenced by a desired EU accession. The resolution of a new law concerning religious foundations in February 2008 is a step in this direction. It ameliorates the legal status of religious minorities, but leaves a lot of important questions such as the education of their clergy unsolved.<sup>8</sup>

It should not be forgotten to mention that there are aspects of *AKP*’s governing that are discussed quite controversially. One example is the party’s women politics, precisely the party’s position in the penalty law reform process in 2004. Its suggestions concerning the degree of penalty for rape<sup>9</sup>, the suggestion to make adultery a crime<sup>10</sup> and its perception of honour killings<sup>11</sup> arouse national and international feelings.

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thesis, Ankara Üniversitesi 2005; Tekin, Üzeyir, *AK Parti’nin Muhafazakâr Demokrat Kimliği*, Ankara 2004; Insel, Ahmet, “The AKP and Normalizing Democracy in Turkey”, in: *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.102, No 2/3 (2003), p. 293-308; Ilkcaracan, Pınar, “Reforming the Penal Code in Turkey: The Campaign for the Reform of the Turkish Penal Code from a Gender Perspective”, <http://www.idp.ac.uk/ids/Part/proj/pnp.html>, 03.08.09; Arato, Andrew, Democratic constitution-making and unfreezing the Turkish process, in: *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 36, no 3/4 (2010), p. 473-487.

<sup>3</sup> In 1960 the military led a coup against the Menderes-Government. In 1971 it forced the Demirel-Government to resign. In 1980 it intervened to end a bloody conflict between extreme left and right groups. In 1997 it forced the Erbakan-Government to resign, because it feared an Islamization of Turkey. Joppien, Charlotte, *Die türkische Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP), Eine Untersuchung des Programms „Muhafazakar Demokrasi“*, Berlin 2011, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> The *MGK* was founded by the new constitution of 1961. Between 1982 and 2003 it met monthly. Only lately its influence has been reduced by the *AKP* government.

<sup>5</sup> Joppien (2011), p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> See Duran, Burhanettin, “The Justice and Development Party’s “New Politics”, Steering toward Conservative Democracy, a Revised Islamic Agenda or Management of New Crises?”, in: Cizre, Ümit (ed.), *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey, The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, London 2008, p. 80-106. p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> See Internet haber, „TRT Kürtçe bugün yayında“, [http://www.internethaber.com/news\\_detail.php?id=171523&interstitial=true](http://www.internethaber.com/news_detail.php?id=171523&interstitial=true) (13.06.09).

<sup>8</sup> See Söyler, Mehtap, “Der demokratische Reformprozess in der Türkei“, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 39-40/2009, p. 3-8, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> In 2003 it became public that the *AKP* wanted to keep a law that guaranteed diminution of detention to the rapist in case he married his victim. This was thought to restore her honour destroyed by the rape.

<sup>10</sup> Shortly before the adoption of the new penal code the *AKP* tried to introduce adultery (*zina*) as a criminal offence in the new criminal law. Until 1996 adultery was a criminal offence in Turkish criminal law, the details of the law were discriminating women. Erdoğan explained that with reintroduction of a law on adultery, the party would follow the „wishes of the Anatolian woman“. The party argued that reforms of the gender relations were influenced by western images and a threat to the cultural identity of Turkey. See Radical, „Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi 'zina'da yalnız kaldı“, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=126733>, 13.05.09; Zaman

The party's position towards religion is a topic which gets only little attention in Europe but is the centre of a heated debate in Turkey. By constitution Turkey is a secular country – still there are constant discussions to which extent religion should influence state politics or vice versa. Secular-Kemalist forces accuse the party of trying to establish *şeriat* law and an Islamic republic following the model of the Iranian theocracy.<sup>12</sup> They call the party's human rights and democracy discourse *takiye*.<sup>13</sup> Their accusation is based on three arguments: the Islamist past of a lot of *AKP*'s leading figures<sup>14</sup>, Prime Minister Erdoğan's conviction because of anti-secular behaviour in spring 1998<sup>15</sup> and the party's politics that favour Sunni Muslim groups and lifestyles.<sup>16</sup> This led to several conflicts between the government and the secular forces (which are still very influential in the military, bureaucracy and justice) like the one over the presidency in 2007 or the accusation of the party as being a centre of anti-secular activities in 2008.<sup>17</sup> The *AKP*'s political program is also shaped by these accusations and the permanent threat of a party closure.

Despite the ongoing debates on the *AKP*'s "real identity" and its political aims it is, no doubt, a People's Party. At the moment it is the only Turkish party which succeeds in uniting large parts of the population. Besides, it crosses social and ethnic, sometimes even religious differences. In the following I will try to show how the party's success is connected to a general rise of conservatism in Turkey and which values the *AKP* supports.

## A Rise of Conservatism

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online, "Bakan Akşit: AB'ye gireceğiz diye değer yargılarımızdan vazgeçemeyiz", <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=85818>, 12.08.09.

<sup>11</sup> Now in addition to honour killings (*namus cinayetleri*) also the crime of traditional-conditioned killings (*töre cinayetleri*) was introduced. This means the killing of girls or women by their families after a "decision by the family committee". It can not be subject to a mitigation of punishment anymore. See Senkyr, Jan / Tröndle, Dirk, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, „Die Ehrenmordproblematik als Dialogthema im Länderprogramm Türkei“, [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_9112-544-1-30.pdf](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_9112-544-1-30.pdf), 19.11.09.

<sup>12</sup> The term *şeriat* is the Turkish equivalent of the Arabic term *sharī'a* and describes the Islamic law system. It should be added that this has been interpreted differently in history as well as in different areas.

<sup>13</sup> *Takiye* is a strategy which avoids catching attention as a religious community in times of danger. Religious demonstration may be given up to escape prosecution. See Dietrich, Alexander, Die Welt, „Reformer oder Wolf Schafspelz?“, [http://www.welt.de/printwelt/article341831/Reformer\\_-oder\\_-Wolf\\_im\\_Schafspelz.html](http://www.welt.de/printwelt/article341831/Reformer_-oder_-Wolf_im_Schafspelz.html), 20.4.05.

<sup>14</sup> Additionally a lot of the *AKP*'s leading members have an Islamist past and belonged to Erbakan's *Milli Görüş* Movement. The term *Milli Görüş* describes an international Islamic organisation whose aim (at least at the time of its founding) is to found a political, economical and social system based on Islamic principles. Figures like Prime Minister Erdoğan or president Gül broke away from the movement and founded the *AKP* in 2001 after they have been left out by Erbakan although they were very popular in the public. See Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, „Islamistische Organisationen in Nordrhein-Westfalen“, Düsseldorf 2008, p. 63-68.

<sup>15</sup> He had cited a poem by Ziya Gökalp in a public speech in Siirt:

„The democracy is only the train on which we climb up, until we reach our aims. The mosques are our barracks, the minarets our bayonets, the domes our helmets and the believers our soldiers“. See Joppien (2011), p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> At the end of the seven-year-old term of office of president Sezer, a new head of state had to be elected in 2007 by the parliament. In its position as the governing party the *AKP* presented foreign minister Abdullah Gül as its presidential candidate. The opponents of *AKP* thereby saw the danger of an Islamization of Turkey. Up till then president Sezer had prevented many legislative initiatives of *AKP* by his veto. At night of the 27th of April 2007 the army leadership tried to influence the election by the so-called "e-mail military coup". A warning appeared at the official homepage of the military that announced a military intervention if it would remark signs of an Islamization of Turkey. In May 2007 the constitutional court upheld a complaint by the opposition party *CHP* on annulment of the first presidency election because the necessary two third of the representatives were not present at the time. As a result Gül drew back his candidature, and the *AKP* called for new elections in July 2007. The party was able to improve its last results of 34 % in 2002 to over 46%.

<sup>17</sup> After the election victory of the *AKP* Gül ran for presidential election again and was chosen president in August, 2007 in the third ballot. In March 2008 the constitutional court accepted an accusation against the *AKP* and its 71 representatives. The public prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya had demanded a party ban, because of its supposed "activities against the secular state". At the end of July the ban application was rejected with 11:6 but however left the *AKP* with a high fine. See Joppien (2011), p.11-12.

For a long time strong conservative convictions were typical for a certain social group in Turkey. The question to which extent state and society should be „modernised“ has first been only discussed within the state apparatus. Only in the Young Turk period the question started to be discussed also in public.<sup>18</sup> The overwhelming majority of intellectuals thought that western science and technique were useful but that western values should not be embraced. After the founding of the Turkish Republic by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 westernization, diminution of religious authorities and the break with “backward traditions” were proclaimed as the state’s new philosophy. These events led to the opposition of traditional forces in Turkish society. This social group was only rarely in control of politics, bureaucracy or economy and had little social voice so that their beliefs were rather neglected in the dominant discourse. For this reason Mardin characterized them as „periphery“, a term that will be used in the following.<sup>19</sup> The members of the periphery generally had a rural background and an under-average education.<sup>20</sup> Their lifestyle was largely determined by religious and traditional values. The most important value is “family”, shaped by traditional role models which were mostly deduced from religious rules.<sup>21</sup> Central to the family’s wellbeing is *namus*, the honour of the women, which has to be protected by the male family members.<sup>22</sup>

After the introduction of the multi-party-system in 1946 the periphery started to engage in politics. The two most prominent and successful parties in this respect were Democratic Party (*DP, Demokrat Partisi*) in the 1950s and the Motherland Party (*ANAP, Anavatan Partisi*) in the 1980s.<sup>23</sup> The *DP*’s political merit was the integration of large parts of the public into the political system as it was the first one that turned towards the needs of the periphery.<sup>24</sup>

The most influential party for conservative politics in Turkey was *ANAP* founded in 1983 by Turgut Özal, the later party leader and prime minister.<sup>25</sup> He was characterized on the one hand by his childhood in a family that belonged to the *Nakşibendi* brotherhood<sup>26</sup>, on the other hand by his studies in the USA where he was impressed by the country’s technical supremacy and social mobility.<sup>27</sup> This background proved to be just right for a Turkey that wanted progress

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<sup>18</sup> The Young Turk organisation was founded among students of Istanbul’s medical school and mainly non-Muslims. In 1908 their committee for Unity and Progress forced the sultan to re-establish the constitution of 1876. See Kreiser, Klaus, *Der Osmanische Staat 1300-1922*, Oldenbourg Grundriss der Geschichte, Band 30, München 2001, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> The Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin divided the Turkish society in his article "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" in centre and periphery. Briefly, he defines as "Centre" state with its bureaucracy, armed forces and judicatory; as "Periphery" the people. See Mardin, Şerif, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?", in: *Daedalus*, Vol. 102, No. 1, 1973, p. 169-190.

<sup>20</sup> See Yilmaz, Hakan, "Conservatism in Turkey", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.7, No 1, Spring 2008, p. 57-63.

<sup>21</sup> See Pusch, Barbara, "Türk Gençliğinin Muhafazakarlığı ve İslamcı Söylemin Zemin", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Istanbul 2000.p. 54.

<sup>22</sup> See Yilmaz (2008), p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> In der Parlamentswahl 1950 gewann die *DP* 53,3% der Stimmen, woraufhin Menderes den Posten des Ministerpräsidenten einnahm. Im Laufe der Zeit nahm der Regierungsstil der *DP* immer diktatorischere Züge an und beschnitt grundlegende Freiheiten der Bevölkerung, wie die Presse- und Meinungsfreiheit. War Menderes vor 1950 noch als Kritiker eines autoritären Regierungsstils in Erscheinung getreten, verfolgte er diesen nun selbst. See Soysal, Mümtaz, „Le Constitutionnalisme républicain et l’Évolution sociale en Turquie“, in: Vaner, Semih (ed.), *Modernisation Autoritaire en Turquie et en Iran*, Paris 1991, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> See Mert, Nuray, *Merkez Sağın Kısa Tarihi*, Istanbul 2007, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Özal joined Süleyman Demirel’s *Adalet Partisi* (*AP*, Justice Party) in 1960. 1967 he became under secretary of the *Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı*, an institution that was occupied with structural stateplanning. After several years at the World bank he was working in high positions in the Turkish economy, mostly in companies with a religious background. His candidacy for the Islamic *Milli Selamet Partisi* was without success but gave him credibility in the eyes of pious Muslims. See Acar, Feride, "Turgut Özal: Pious Agent of Liberal Transformation", in: Heper, Metin / Sayar, Sabri (ed.), *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*, Lanham 2002, p. 163-180, p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> The *Nakşibendi* brotherhood is one of the most influential brotherhoods in Turkey. It developed in the 14th century in Buchara.

<sup>27</sup> See Acar (2002), p. 164.

but at the same time did not want to let go a lifestyle deeply influenced by traditions. As Acar writes, he was able to “[...] *break down the age-old dichotomy of Turkish political life, namely the traditional/Islamist versus modern/secular.*”<sup>28</sup> Similarly a conservative view of the world as well as a liberal economic approach characterized ANAP’s political program.

These developments brought the periphery’s culture to the core of society and establish it as an alternative to the dominating secular, kemalist culture.<sup>29</sup> Different external and internal factors further supported the rise of conservative beliefs in society. External factors were the „green belt“-Strategy of the USA against communism since the 1980s, the fall of the Iron curtain and the civil war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Internal factors were corruption scandals in the 1990s, the economic crisis that came to its peak in 2001 and the Marmara earthquake in 1999.<sup>30</sup>

An official appreciation of conservative believes began after the military coup in the early 1980s. A bloody conflict between left and right groups had exhausted the country in the previous years. In order to prevent these kinds of social fractures, *TİS* (*Türk İslam Sentezi*) was developed as a new “philosophy for the state” on the military’s initiative. In short, the *TİS* aimed at creating a stable homogeneous society by using religion, tradition and conservative values.<sup>31</sup> Discipline and authority became central norms; family was interpreted as the most important institution to secure social stability.

Additionally the state’s role in society changed. In the years following the coup, it drew back from its previous role as a strong economic player, investor and employer. This had far-reaching consequences for Turkey as the differences between poor and rich intensified. Additionally the state reduced its economic support of its “old allies”, the secular, kemalist businessmen. In this changing atmosphere a new social group emerged: the Anatolian Bourgeoisie, or, as they are called as well, the Islamic Calvinists.<sup>32</sup> They originally belonged to the social periphery, their parents being farmers, small artisans or shop owners. Through the education campaign which the state had led since the 1930s to build a “modernised, westernised society” they had gained important skills. In combination with their „cultural capital“, which means in this context their membership in religious brotherhoods and networks as well as a „solidarity among pious Muslims“, it became the decisive factor for their economical success. A large part of the capital for their first investments could be won from the savings of Turkish immigrant workers in Europe or by investments from other Muslim countries, by this investment could be done without violating the Islamic prohibition of interest and without being dependent on kemalist investors or banks.

Following advocates of the “alternative modernities theory”, these Anatolian Businessmen are representatives of an islamically shaped modernity that is characterized by the resurgence of new elites and a strong civil society versus a “non-modern”, authoritative state.<sup>33</sup> They

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<sup>28</sup> Acar (2002), p. 166.

<sup>29</sup> In the past years three important studies were done on the rise of conservatism in Turkey; these are: Pusch, Barbara, “Türk Gençliğinin Muhafazakarlığı ve İslamcı Söylemin Zemin”, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Istanbul 2000; Yilmaz, Hakan, “Conservatism in Turkey”, Turkish Policy Quarterly, Vol.7, Nr.1, Frühling 2008, p. 57-63; Çarkoğlu, Ali / Kalaycıoğlu, Ersin, *The Rising Tide Of Conservatism in Turkey*, New York 2009.

<sup>30</sup> See Çarkoğlu / Kalaycıoğlu (2009), p. 9-12.

<sup>31</sup> *TİS* named two foundations of Turkish culture: Turkishness (which included Pan-Turkism) and Islam. Central Asia was defined as the ethnic origin of the Turks and it was claimed that they were islamised there and not by the Arabs. Although *TİS* was successful in ending conflicts between left and right it could not prevent the development of religious and ethnic identities. See Insel (2003), p. 293-308; Yavuz, (2004) p. 270.

<sup>32</sup> Businessmen that were interviewed by the NGO „European Stability Initiative” compared themselves to protestant calvinists. Just like them they would support hard work, no speculation, no waste and the reinvestment of the money they gained. See European Stability Initiative, *Islamische Calvinisten, Umbruch und Konservatismus in Zentralanatolien*, Istanbul/Berlin 2005, p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> The advocates of this theory believe that modernity can not be reduced to its western (dominated) form but that there are instead various alternative modernities that take regional, social and historical characteristics

have become an important social force and the “financial backbone” of the *AKP*. They also influenced the party’s politics in many ways and led to a moderation of its political positions as will be outlined in the following.

Most of the *AKP*’s leading figures were active members of the Islamist *Milli Görüş* parties in the past. The most successful of these was the *Refah Partisi* (*RP*, Welfare Party) that was in government between 1994 and 1997.<sup>34</sup> It saw itself as the voice of the periphery, especially the urban marginalised. These have come to the big cities in search for work and fortune and settled in squatter areas in its outskirts. Because of their lifestyle that was influenced by the traditions of the village and their bad economical situation they often felt alienated. The *RP* translated this anger into a political program; *adil düzen* – the just order – which largely referred to Islamic principles while attacking the social dilemma.<sup>35</sup> Despite its success the *RP*’s was not representative for the whole population: it remained a class oriented party with a rather radical political program.

In this respect, the *AKP*, that broke away from the *Milli Görüş* movement in 2001, brought a big change by moderating and developing the *RP*’s program. Although it proclaims a just social order, expresses solidarity with the poor and convicts corruption, a big portion of the party’s success lies in its ability to reconcile winners and losers of globalisation.<sup>36</sup> Öniş writes:

*“If Political Islam is primarily a movement oriented towards mobilizing the interests of the underclass of urban marginals and rural poor, the so called losers of the globalization process, it is more likely to adopt a radical posture. If in contrast, it is a movement based on a cross-class electoral coalition which includes a significant proportion of winners of globalization, it is more likely to orient itself in a more moderate direction.”*<sup>37</sup>

He also stresses which influence the Anatolian Bourgeoisie and their associations like *MÜSIAD* have had on moderating political positions.<sup>38</sup> They present a “friendly face of capitalism” enriched with values like solidarity, justice, piety, moderation and generosity

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into account. They believe that modernity does not automatically imply secularisation and observe a “selective modernity” in the Muslim world. See for example: Göle, Nilüfer, “Snapshots of Modernities”, in: *Daedalus* 129, 2000, p. 91-119; Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., „The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity. Modernity as a Distinct Civilization”, in: *International Sociology* 16, 2001, p. 320-40.

<sup>34</sup> The *RP* was founded in 1983; a lot of its members had been active in previous *Milli Görüş* parties before. It reached around 20% in the municipal elections in 1994 and won in 29 cities including Ankara and Istanbul also. In the national elections in 1995 it was strongest party with 21,4%. In the following years (1996-1997) Erbakan was Prime minister in a coalition government. The center accused the *RP* to violate the secular character of the country. The military called on Erbakan to implement a catalogue of political changes. Although he agreed the party was closed in 1998 by constitutional court. See Yavuz M. Hakan, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, Oxford 2003, p. 218.

<sup>35</sup> See Güneş-Ayata, Ayşe / Ayata, Sencer, “Ethnic and Religious Bases of Voting”, in: Sayar, Sabri / Esmer, Yılmaz (ed.), *Politics, Parties and Elections in Turkey*, Boulder 2002, p. 137-155, p. 149-150. The program contained demands for a welfare state, industrialisation and stronger influence of Islam on politics and society.

<sup>36</sup> See Öniş, Ziya, “Globalization and party transformation: Turkey’s Justice and Development Party in Perspective”, <http://portal.ku.edu.tr/~zonis/-publicationp.htm>, 21.02.09. and Öniş (with Fuat Keyman), “A New Path Emerges”, in: *Journal of Democracy* 14, 2003, p. 95-107.

<sup>37</sup> See Öniş, Ziya, “The Political Economy of Islam and Democracy in Turkey: From the Welfare Party to the *AKP*”, <http://portal.ku.edu.tr/~zonis/-publicationp.htm>, 21.02.09.

<sup>38</sup> 1990 parts of this group founded the businessmen association (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*, Union of independent Industrialists and businessmen) as a counterweight to *TÜSİAD* (*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği*, Vereinigung Türkischer Industrieller und Unternehmer) which was closer to the center. The aim of *MÜSIAD*’s members is to multiply the economical and political influence of pious Muslims and to enable connection of capitalism with Islamic ethics and moral. See Yavuz (2004), p. 279.

which they affiliate with the true character of Islam. They declare, that there is no conflict between capitalism and Islam and give Muhammad's practise as a tradesman as an example.<sup>39</sup> The Anatolian Bourgeoisie believes that the strive for profit is a "way of praying" as it leads to an augmentation of Islam's position and power. This philosophy also influences their charity work which is inspired by Islamic principles. Surprisingly they do not only support mosques or religious brotherhoods (fields directly related to religion), but also the building of schools and hospitals or other social projects. They are inspired by the Turk intellectual Fethullah Gülen (born 1938) who initially belonged to the *Nurcu* community and founded a worldwide education network. The schools focus is on natural sciences and languages. Values and morals derived from Islam are brought to the students through the teachers' person, extracurricular offers and the activities offered in student homes. He preaches that only an Islam that on the one hand preserves tradition while at the other hand is open to change and engages in education could survive and serve the people. In return the best way to serve Islam is to "serve the people". In this respect he calls the building of a school a bigger service for the purpose of Islam than the construction of a mosque.<sup>40</sup>

A similar form "dynamic-conservatism" can be observed in the political program of the *AKP*. It presents itself at the same time as the preserver of national traditions, religious values as well as a dynamic party actively engaged in progress and development. Erdoğan describes the party's approach as following:

*„A significant part of the Turkish society desires to adopt a concept of modernity that does not reject tradition, a belief of universalism that accepts localism, an understanding of rationalism that does not disregard the spiritual meaning of life, and a choice for change that is not fundamentalist”.*<sup>41</sup>

Highly influenced by the Anatolian Bourgeoisie the *AKP* developed an understanding of tradition, which also values development and change. Whereas traditional values and society structures are given high emphasis, in the field of science, business and state structure the party calls for change. In comparison to western conservatism the biggest parallels exist with the American conservative model.

### **Muhafazakar Demokrasi**

Asking ourselves what the party's values are, the first look is at the party's political program. Conservatism is described by the *AKP* as a gradual change which favours balance instead of radical solutions. It names family, tradition and the achievements of former societies as the most important conservative values.<sup>42</sup> The *AKP* defines its original political concept as *Muhafazakar Demokrasi* („Conservative Democracy“) which was developed only after the election success of the party in 2002.<sup>43</sup> This is unusual and raises the question whether „conservative democracy“ is either an expression of "inner convictions" or rather a chosen

<sup>39</sup> See Buğra, Ayşe, "Class, Culture, and State: An Analysis of Interest Representation by two Turkish Business Associations", in: International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 30, (1998), p. 521-539, p. 531.

<sup>40</sup> See Agai, Bekim, Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs, Das Bildungsnetzwerk um Fethullah Gülen (geb. 1938), Die flexible Umsetzung modernen islamischen Gedankenguts, Hamburg 2004.

<sup>41</sup> See Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, "Conservative Democracy and the Globalization of Freedom", Rede am American Enterprise Institute, 29.01.2004, in: Yavuz, M. Hakan (Hg.), The Emergence of a New Turkey, Democracy and the AK Parti, Salt Lake City 2006, p. 333-340, p. 335.

<sup>42</sup> See Akdoğan, Yalcin, AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi, Istanbul 2004, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> See Hale, William, "Christian Democracy and the JDP: Parallels and Contrasts", in: Yavuz (2006), p. 66-87, p. 66.



political "label". Ignoring these contrarities the party believes that its concept is revealed better by its "practical application" than by theory.<sup>44</sup>

At a conservatism congress organised by the party in 2004 Fırat, the late vice president of the party, defined conservative democracy as a "*synthesis of conservatism and democracy that connects traditional Turkish values with elements of European conservatism*".<sup>45</sup> The creation of the term "conservative democracy" instead of using "democracy" alone is two times advantageous for the party. By choosing the adjective "conservative" it assigns itself – not at least in the international context - to an established ideology. Concerning Turkey it positions itself in a row of approved, conservative actors. On the other hand, the term "conservative democracy" allows the party to set up its own discourse within the conservative discourse. The message to the public (and the voter) is that of a new political beginning without losing the connection to the past.

Also Erdoğan, current prime minister and party president, claims that the social and cultural traditions of Turkey need to be preserved while dealing with the West.<sup>46</sup> The aim of the party would be "*to reproduce our system of local and deep-rooted values in harmony with the universal standards of political conservatism*".<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately he does not go into more detail to explain what these principles of conservatism and tradition are. It can be speculated, that the party means traditions and rules that regulate the social life concerning gender relations, social hierarchies and family life.<sup>48</sup>

Religion is not part of the self-definition as "conservative-democratic". This might be surprising at first glance as a lot of the party's functionaries started their political career in the Islamic parties of the *Milli Görüş* movement. However *muhafazakar* has a wider meaning in the Turkish context, as the term also implies "being-muslim". For this reason the *AKP*, in describing itself as conservative/conservative-democratic, does not need to stress its valuation of Islamic principles as well. But, as religion has an influence on most conservative thoughts all over the world, a steady exchange and mutual interaction should be understood as a rather normal phenomenon.

## Using Traditional Structures for Political Mobilization

Another important factor for the rise of conservatism in Turkey was the strong migration within the country since the 1960s. People moved from east and central Anatolia to the west coast as well as from villages to bigger towns. Surprisingly a lot of the migrants did not adapt to the urban life style (*şehirli*), but stuck to their village traditions and values (*köylü*). By doing so they were able to use their traditional networks (family, ethnicity, religious brotherhoods, same origin etc.) also in the "anonymous town". Often this was the only economic and social resource accessible to them. These networks had different tasks: they worked as marriage bureaus or employment agencies, supported members who had difficulties or transferred money.<sup>49</sup> A life that follows traditional values like family, religion,

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<sup>44</sup> See Party program (2007), I. Introduction and Akdoğan, Yalçın, "The Meaning of Conservative Democratic Political Identity", in: Yavuz (2006), p. 49-65, p.54.

<sup>45</sup> See Fırat, Dengir Mir Mehmet, "Kapanış Konuşması", Uluslararası Muhafazakarlık ve Demokrasi Sempozyumu, 10./11.01.2004 İstanbul, [www.akparti.org.tr/siyasivehukuk/dokuman/KonusmaDengirBey%20UMDP.doc](http://www.akparti.org.tr/siyasivehukuk/dokuman/KonusmaDengirBey%20UMDP.doc), 21.02.07.

<sup>46</sup> See Erdoğan (2006), p. 335.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> By this he puts the *AKP* in line with a conservative discourse that dates back to the Ottoman Empire and which I have already mentioned in the beginning.

<sup>49</sup> Interesting findings concerning this phenomenon offers Tahire Erman's study, that researched migrants decision for/against an identity as *şehirli* (respectively *köylü*) and the reasons for this decision. Jenny B. White describes – from an anthropological perspective – the formation of networks in the *gecekondu* areas (houses

authority and segregation of the sexes is "recompensed" in this system, whereas adaptation to the urban society is "punished" by exclusion of the network. After the military coup in 1980 socialist solidarity networks in the cities were destroyed, leaving a vacuum that was filled up quickly by religious brotherhoods (*tarikats*) and communities (*cemaats*).<sup>50</sup> Motivated by religious ideals they did charity work like distributing coal, cloth or food and brought a "conservative consciousness" also to the workers and urban poor.<sup>51</sup>

The first party that effectively used traditional networks for political mobilization was the *RP* when it connected them to their local organization. They established a tight structure with "district leaders" which appointed "neighbourhood leaders", which themselves appointed "street leaders".<sup>52</sup> With this structure the party was able to react sensitively to local particularities. For example an *Erzurumlu* (someone who originates from the city of Erzurum and migrated from there to Istanbul e.g.) was responsible for a neighbourhood of other *Erzurumlu*. This organisation took into account that migrants generally preferred to live in an area with migrants from their village or their region of origin.<sup>53</sup> It shows how the *RP*'s political strategy effectively targeted local particularities in their attempt to develop personal connections with the people.

Besides, the *RP* used a special form of communication with the voter. Here I rely on Jenny B. White who examined the interactions between the *RP* and the inhabitants of Istanbul's Ümraniye district in the 1990s.<sup>54</sup> Two interaction patterns, *imece* and *himaye* have turned out as dominating most of the relations between party and people.

The concept *imece* originates from the village context. It describes collaboration and support within a certain social group, originally the village community.<sup>55</sup> Examples for this collaboration are laying down water pipes, building roads or constructing a mosque or a bridge. Also cooperative partnership projects like buying seeds or a tractor for the whole village can be summarized as *imece*. An aspect of *imece* that is reserved for women is the support of people in need. This includes helping widows, disabled, ill or the poor by sharing food, coal or clothes. The different activities are fulfilled by the partners without expecting any kind of compensation – be it direct or indirect. *Imece* creates what White describes as a "durable and flexible web of mutual indebtedness and obligation" between the single members of a group as well as every single to the whole group.<sup>56</sup> As each one is at the same time giving and taking, each one is at the same time motivated and obliged to carry on with collectivist work. Although the village members are not kin, *imece* creates an "as if kin" perception of one another that might also cross ethnic or religious borders.

Interestingly *imece* which was originally developed as a tool of "self-help" independent of the state became a tool for political motivation in the 1990s. The *RP* used it for political motivation by calling on the sense of unity, belonging and solidarity within a group. Political work was reinterpreted as a "community task" as previously the building of a road or the reparation of water lines in a village context. The "wellbeing of the village" was replaced by the "wellbeing of party" – or the society as a whole. This definition was based on the problems resulting from the conflict in Turkish society between secular, kemalist and

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which were constructed illegally overnight) in Istanbul. See Erman, Tahire, "Becoming 'Urban' or Remaining 'Rural': The Views of Turkish Rural-To-Urban Migrants on the 'Integration Question'", in: International Journal of Middle East Studies (1998), p. 541-561; White, Jenny B., *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study of Vernacular Politics*, Seattle 2002.

<sup>50</sup> See Hale, William, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, London 1994, p. 246.

<sup>51</sup> See Çarkoğlu / Kalaycıoğlu (2009), p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> See White (2002), p. 180.

<sup>53</sup> See White (2002), p. 198.

<sup>54</sup> See White (2002).

<sup>55</sup> See Delaney, Carol, „Traditional modes of authority and co-operation“, in: Stirling, P. (ed.), *Culture and economy: Changes in Turkish village life*, Hemingford 1993, p. 140-55.

<sup>56</sup> White (2002), p. 70.

traditional, pious forces. The *RP* successfully presented the idea that a change of the society would start in the neighbourhood. *Imece* is also an important tool of *AKP*'s mobilization of activists. Members of the periphery constantly felt and feel neglected by the state as well as dominated in the exercise of their original lifestyle. Their partial exclusion (e.g. students with headscarf from university) leads to a strong feeling of group belonging. It causes that *AKP*'s local politics are understood not as "only politics" but as a bigger social movement. Due to their close connection to the voter the *AKP* is able to motivate huge groups of people in a relatively short time e.g. for demonstrations or charity campaigns.

It should be added that an understanding of *imece* as the simple opposite of a "modern, individualistic" lifestyle would be short-sighted. The engagement in collective work can also be understood as symbolic capital in the sense of Bourdieu.<sup>57</sup> The social acceptance gained through *imece* might be used as a currency in social interaction. In this respect it might be "traded" for other goods such as marriage partners, job opportunities, business opportunities, positions within a social party or a raise of social status in general.

Different from village life, where women generally had little say in *imece* decisions they became a decisive factor for political activism in the cities. Tasks like construction work or acquiring a new tractor for the community are less likely in the city. Instead "social tasks" rose as people were confronted with unemployment, feelings of loneliness and alienation. Unlike men women are able to enter other households easily, chatting about family life or sharing food. This enables them to act as an interface between the party and the people. They do social work, report troubled family situations to officials or establish a connection between these families and foundations. On the other hand, they are the "human side" of the sometimes abstract and complex national party politics. Their motivation is only partially political, but much more collectivist inspired by traditional and religious perceptions of the "right behaviour".<sup>58</sup>

*Himaye* is a vertical principle of protection by and loyalty to the family, the religious group or brotherhood, or the region of origin.<sup>59</sup> It presumes one party more powerful than the other and describes the protection of the group members by this hierarchically higher person. This can be the family head (father), the village-oldest or the family boss. In return the group member is obliged to loyal, respectful and deferential behaviour. It encourages people to solve their problems independently from rigid, anonymous state structures by relying on personal, paternalistic relations.

The economical success the Anatolian Bourgeoisie gained during the 1980's and 90's that turned them into an alternative elite made them role models for the members of the periphery. In their companies *himaye*-based interaction patterns can be observed as the absence of labour unions is typical for these kinds of companies. The employer-employee relationship is perceived as a family structure in which the employer takes the role of a „strict, but caring father whose "children" (employee) owe him obedience and compliance. Different interests are not supposed to compete with each other but to be brought in harmony by the patriarch's figure. This is rooted in patriarchal notions of society that do not believe in contest and debate but in certain fixed positions and privileges.

The *RP* established relations to the population that remind of *himaye* by putting the mayor as a father-like figure. By this they made a real difference to the distanced, formal interaction patterns other parties offered. Their mayor actually seemed to care about the people as he

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<sup>57</sup> Symbolic capital is a sociological concept introduced by Pierre Bourdieu. As a currency of social recognition and social power the symbolic capital symbolizes prestige, reputation, honour and privileges related to it. See Kumoll, Karsten, From the native's point of view. Kulturelle Globalisierung nach Clifford Geertz und Pierre Bourdieu, Bielefeld 2005, p. 49-78.

<sup>58</sup> See Joppien (2011), p. 149-151.

<sup>59</sup> White (2002), p. 73.

wrote congratulation card on occasions like weddings or circumcisions. The party also introduced monthly *halk günleri* (people's days) on which the people could come to the mayor and seek help for problems like for example a rotten water pipe, difficulties to find a job or to pay the son's wedding ceremony, conflicts in the neighbourhood or assistance in filling out official papers. The mayor and his staff then took care of these problems in a personalized, unbureaucratic manner.<sup>60</sup>

Also the *AKP* gives the people an impression of emphasis with their lives and difficulties. Entering the party headquarters in any Turkish city the visitor is welcomed in a personal manner. Not only does the party offer comfortable sofas or chairs, a water dispenser and colourful brochures to take away, the visitor is also taken care of. Everyone is greeted politely, often using forms of relatedness like *abi* (brother), *abla* (sister) or *teyze* (aunt), asked to sit down and offered tea. This "ceremony" is an important psychological factor when establishing a connection to the people.

It should also be mentioned that the *AKP* has a perception of the political play that is comparable to the *himaye* patterns. Although the *AKP* describes pluralism as one of the most important values of its concept, the idea of its application differs from what one might expect.<sup>61</sup> The party sees Turkey in the middle of several tensions and names "*religion and politics*", "*tradition and modernity*" and "*authoritarian state and civil society*".<sup>62</sup> As reasons the party identifies the suppression of the periphery by the centre as well as the denial of the country's Islamic past. To harmonize these tensions Erdoğan denies a conflict-driven political style.<sup>63</sup> He believes that the political articulation of differences is dangerous and destructive and claims that Turkish politics should not be based on conflict and polarisation but on comprehension and tolerance.<sup>64</sup> He suggests to transform different identities into cultural and social pluralism.<sup>65</sup> Conservative Democracy denies the competitive character of politics. Social stability oriented on traditional value is one of the party's most important values which should be obtained by a strong state.

## Conclusion

The *AKP* presents itself as a democratic new beginning for Turkey that opposes the secular-kemalist elite dominating the country since the founding of the republic in 1923. In regard to its values the *AKP* is a conservative party; its politics being influenced by rural traditions and religious codes of behaviour. The most important values are the honour of the family (symbolized by the women's honour *namus*), a stable society and respect for authorities. This brings the *AKP* in line with conservative beliefs which developed toward the end of the Ottoman Empire. These are generally associated with the society's periphery (rural, traditional, pious population) which also forms the core of the party's supporters. It was shown which external and internal factors led to a rise of conservative beliefs in Turkey and how the party's political program responds to them.

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<sup>60</sup> See Massicard, Élise, L'islamisme turc à l'épreuve du pouvoir municipal. Production d'espaces, pratiques de gouvernement et gestion des sociétés locales, in : Critique internationale 2009/1, No 42, p. 21-38, p. 30-31.

<sup>61</sup> I define pluralism as the peaceful coexistence of different beliefs, religions, cultures, ethnics and lifestyles in one society.

<sup>62</sup> See Akdoğan (2004), p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> See Erdoğan Recep Tayyip, "Konuşması", Uluslararası Muhafazakarlık ve Demokrasi Sempozyumu, 10./11.01.2004 İstanbul, [http://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/Recep\\_Tayyip\\_Erdo%C4%9Fan%27%C4%B1n\\_15\\_Ocak\\_-2004\\_tarihli\\_konu%C5%9Fmas%C4%B1](http://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/Recep_Tayyip_Erdo%C4%9Fan%27%C4%B1n_15_Ocak_-2004_tarihli_konu%C5%9Fmas%C4%B1), 21.02.07.

<sup>64</sup> See Bianet, Radikal, „Erdoğan'dan DEHAP'a Sert Tavır“, <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/36788-erdogandan-dehapa-sert-tavir>, 26.08.09.

<sup>65</sup> See Erdoğan (2004).

Most of *AKP*'s leading figures have started their political career in the Islamist *Milli Görüş* parties. Although these influences can still be detected it was proven that the Anatolian Bourgeoisie had high influence on the party's political program. This group of pious businessmen led to a moderation of the party's attitude and enabled a conciliation of the winners and losers of globalization.

In a second part it was shown how the *AKP* uses traditional interaction patterns for political mobilization. To clarify this also the local politics *AKP*'s predecessor party *Refah Partisi* were discussed. In the 1990s it "invented" the use of traditional (religious, ethnic, neighbourhood) networks for political mobilization. Two interaction principles, one collectivist (*imece*), one hierarchical (*himaye*) were explained and their political use by *RP* and *AKP* illustrated.

As a conclusion we can say that the *AKP*'s success lies in combination of a "dynamic conservatism" with the political strategies of the *RP* that rely on traditional networks.

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