

Between Identity and Difference: Turkey's AK Party and Its Discourse of Conservative-Democracy

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Abstract

Amidst continuing debates whether it is a democratic or an authoritarian political actor, this study suggests a postfoundational view of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AK Party). According to postfoundationalism, *society* is a contingent but necessary ground for *the social*, which is open-ended and overrides all social formations with its non-fixable differences. Democracy marks this stubborn character of the social and is antithetical to the idea of society, which entails the fixation of differences and a degree of social closure. On this basis, I argue that the AK Party is, in fact, a hegemonic popular political movement, as opposed to merely a political party, that subscribes to democracy and yet seeks to construct a society. Accordingly, I analyze how it strives to resolve this paradoxical situation by attempting to rearticulate and integrate democracy (and other signifiers) into its conservative/civilizational discourse.

Introduction: The AK Party as a Hegemonic Political Movement

Middle Eastern societies under the rule of secular-authoritarian regimes have undergone vast structural dislocations after recent popular uprisings – the so-called Arab Spring. Some argue that this process of regional political transformation has, in effect, unraveled with the rise of Turkey's Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (The Justice and Development Party [hereinafter “the AK

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Party”]) to power in 2002.¹ Accordingly, the rise of this “neo-Islamist” party to power and its implementation of democratic reform packages has played a significant role in the formation of hope and political demands for democratization in the Arab street. Although the urge for democratization played a pivotal role in its own political ascent, it would be misleading to portray the AK Party as *merely* a democratizing political force or an authoritarian political movement, as some political analysts have insistently asserted.²

The AK Party incorporates both tendencies but can be reduced to neither of them, for it is a hegemonic popular political movement that enforces “a strategy of construction of a new order.”³ This incorporates not only endorsing *difference* by expanding human rights and freedoms, but also aiming at *identity* by having a specific society-project – a conservative-democratic society⁴ – that entails a certain degree of social closure. This will also be the case for the new leadership of those regional states that recently have taken the same path after the Arab Spring. Thus, the analysis of the AK Party is important when trying to make sense of the itinerary of those political movements that seek to provide a ground for their polities.

Based on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse theory, this study offers a postfoundational analysis of the AK Party’s discourse of conservative-democracy. The most crucial difference between the mainstream approaches, such as liberalism and discourse theory, is in their conception of social ontology. The former leans on what we can call “foundationalism,” which suggests that society is grounded on principles that are undeniable and immune to revision, as well as located outside the society and politics.⁵ This perspective leads scholars to focus on the *ontic* dimension of sociopolitical life, such as the specific types of object, practice, and institutions of political life.⁶ In contrast, discourse theory depends heavily on the “postfoundational” conception of social ontology, which takes issue with the idea of stable foundations and grounds⁷ and suggests studying not what society is, but rather what prevents society from being.⁸

This raises two issues. First of all, discourse theory asserts that society is structured like language.⁹ Like language, in which the meaning stems from the relational differences and is rendered through negativity,¹⁰ society is formed as a system of relational differences. As such, the social is coextensive with the discursive, and the extra-discursive does not have a constitutive effect on the social world. Society, therefore, does not have an objective being; it needs to be articulated in order to exist.¹¹

Second, all symbolic systems such as language and society are characterized by the impossibility of closure and non-fixity. All attempts to fix meaning and identity are to remain partial, contingent. Therefore society is deemed

not self-transparent and no social formation or form of society can exhaust *the social*. There is always an insurmountable gap between transcendental and empirical grounds, which figures as the most outstanding feature of modern politics. This marks the openness of the social, which serves as “the constitutive ground or ‘negative essence’ of the existing, and the diverse ‘social orders’ as precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences.”¹² However, this contingency never leads to an “anything goes” type of relativism. Instead, the fixation of meaning is both possible and necessary: “Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order.”¹³

This quasi-transcendental stance implies, then, that the process of grounding, or of presencing/absencing societal foundations, is central to politics. As such, the focus of this analysis will be on various attempts or “moments” of constructing contingent grounds under conditions of an abyssal ground.¹⁴ The AK Party’s rise highlights such a moment of grounding in the context of the Turkish polity. At its center lies the struggle to fill the empty signifier “nation” using content mainly situated around the *conservative* nodal point¹⁵ by rearticulating such significant floating signifiers as secularism and nationalism with a special emphasis on national unity: the “One Nation” theme.

In this endeavor, the AK Party has broken with Milli Görüş’ (the National/Islamic Outlook Movement [MGH]) traditional Islamist discourse and shifted to a new democratic discourse.¹⁶ Democracy has become the critical nodal point in the “new” Islamist discourse, especially in the process of dislocating the crisis-ridden Kemalist hegemony during 2002-09.¹⁷ However, following this period since the AK Party had rearticulated democracy, which has become an empty signifier itself, around the nodal point of conservatism in order to produce a new “society” and “civilizational” particularity in the face of the hegemony of liberal democratic discourse in world politics. This symbolization and fixation of the social around a conservative-democratic society, which gained momentum after 2009, is supported by the aspirational, fantasmatic ideals of achieving societal harmony and reaching superpower status

Nation

Discourse theory contains two types of social movement or subjectivity: popular and democratic. Democratic subjectivity, such as a feminist or an anti-racist subject, struggles to maintain “a plurality of political spaces” in a given political space.¹⁸ It subscribes to the logic of democracy, which “is only a logic

of the elimination of relations of subordination and inequalities,”¹⁹ and pursues a “strategy of opposition” in which the negation of a certain sociopolitical order predominates.²⁰ Democratic subjectivity and its politics, in short, which figure as the subversive moment of the institution of the social, strive to sustain the social open.

In contrast, popular or hegemonic subjectivity, such as an anti-colonialist political movement, endeavors to “construct the division of a single political space in two opposed fields”²¹ in a given political space. Ideally, it implements a “strategy of construction of a new order” in which the element of social positivity predominates.²² This entails the “management of the positivity of the social” and the “articulation of the diverse democratic demands” to a level of maximum integration.²³ As such, it pushes the boundaries, which divide up the political space into two, to the periphery of the social – as noted due to the impossibility of the closure of the social, the complete eradication of the boundaries is impossible. Accordingly, as the boundaries within the society withdraw toward the periphery, a new social formation or “society” arises and claims to represent the metaphorical totality of the society. Hegemonic political subjectivity, in short, which figures the positive moment of the institution of the social, struggles to fill the lack in the social.

From the discourse theory perspective, the AK Party is a popular, hegemonic political movement. In the dislocated place of the Kemalist hegemony, it has emerged as a *myth*, referring to a limited space within a social field and a metaphor of fullness seeking to generate an effect of order, unity, and thus society.²⁴ The conservative-democratic myth has attempted to suture the dislocated sociopolitical space by constituting a new space of representation and functions as a surface for various social demands, such as the expansion of political and cultural rights and freedoms, the provision of better living conditions, the carrying out of a just redistribution of the national wealth, and dislocations in Turkish society.²⁵ It has engaged in rearticulating dislocated elements, such as secularism and nationalism, into new objectivity or a social reality.

This conservative-democratic myth has made an effort to fill the conspicuous structural void by the fixation of meaning around the empty signifier of “order” in its attempt to construct a new society. In this sense, it has striking similarities with Hobbes’ theory of state:

[I]n a situation of radical disorder “order” is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of this absence. In this sense, various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function.²⁶

The empty signifier of political “order,” which cannot be imagined independently of “nation” in the post-1789 period, figures heavily in the AK Party’s search for hegemony. In a world of nation-states in which political space corresponds to the (nation)state-space, the subject of hegemonic competition is to control this political space, namely the definition of “nation” and the state. More specifically, the notion of the state in general rests upon sovereignty as its foundation, and the primary referent of sovereignty today is the people/nation.²⁷ The nation, as a meaningful totality embodying the community of people, is the primary empty signifier or the “missing fullness” (the “universal”²⁸) in the construction of the state-centric world. The preliminary function of the empty signifier is expressing “the absent fullness of the community.”²⁹ The nation, as such, represents this “absent fullness” in the modern era; it is the “imagined community” that legitimizes the nation-state.³⁰ This imagined character or emptiness of the nation, therefore, definitely entails filling by a particular (hegemonic) content, which by all means involves the reification of shared values and scattering and consolidating them among the people.

In other words, any attempt to unite the people around a particular conception of nation, which serves as an empty signifier in this instance, unavoidably involves leaning toward resorting to some degree of “authoritarian” politics. The resulting nation is characterized principally by the closure of the social as well as the fixation of societal differences around specific demands and values. This is inevitable, since internal negativity is the basic quality of all social totalities, including the nation. Internal negativity also entails a process of universalizing one particular definition of the nation, since “an empty place, a void which can be filled only by the particular”³¹ within a given state-space through excluding some and applying a degree of social closure. In short, the nation, as the foundation of the state, requires “the fantasmatic ideal of harmony”³² that currently holds an imaginary status in (world) politics.

However, we should note that an empty signifier is not that empty; there is always a degree of remains, of sedimentation. To empty out the content and generate a lack was imperative for the AK Party’s particularistic social demands and values to be able to fill the empty signifier of “nation.” This primarily has involved concentrating on the “problematic” relations between the people and the Kemalist elite, which was still holding a degree of hegemonic position in the polity (albeit with declining influence). Hence, the party has constantly emphasized the distance between the people and the Kemalist elite in order to disclose and disseminate the sentiment that the Kemalist identity does not represent the metaphorical totality of the society. For this reason, the AK Party has presented the Turkish political space as divided between two antagonistic groups. On one side is the AK Party and on the other side is the

Kemalist regime, which is described as “the old outdated *raison d'état*,” and its political representatives.³³

Only after this sentiment was spread and consolidated after 2009 could the AK Party step in to fill the emerging and expanding lack in the social with conservative-democratic values. This is aptly stated by party leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's former adviser (now a deputy from the AK Party): “There is a belief in Turkish political circles that the AK Party developed solely as a result of feelings of antipathy among the general public toward the ruling Kemalist elite.”³⁴ Similarly, Erdoğan reiterated the slogan of the Demokrat Parti (the Democratic Party [DP]),³⁵ “Enough! Now the people have their say,” which has almost been the motto of popular opposition against the Kemalist elite since the second half of the 1940s, at a meeting before the November 3, 2002 general elections in Ankara: “We say ‘Enough! Now the people have their say’ ... the people will have the power” after the elections.³⁶ In short, in the process of dismantling the Kemalist hegemony, the AK Party has assumed and presented itself as the “true” representative of the people by forming a counter-hegemonic bloc composed of the conservative and economically disadvantaged sections of society, the burgeoning Islamist bourgeois, the Kurds and Turks, and the pro-EU secular liberals against the Kemalist elite.

Democracy

The AK Party's identification with the discourse of democracy is beyond question. This was, for instance, revealed by Erdoğan's post-election (2002) performance, the so-called *balikon konuşması* (the balcony speech) in which he promised, inter alia, to “embrace the whole society regardless of the differences of life-styles” (referring to secular-conservative division of society), “continuing and upholding the EU membership bid of Turkey” (referring to promoting democratic reforms and human rights), and “pursuing the integration of Turkey into global markets.”³⁷

Indeed, democracy intrinsically figured as the most crucial nodal point in the party's attempt to dislocate and roll back the Kemalist hegemony. In other words, its adoption of the discourse of democracy served as a part of counter-hegemonic political struggle during 2002-09. Its emphasis of the lack of democracy under Kemalist rule elicited the dislocation of the Kemalist “society” in the Turkish social space. For this reason, the AK Party resorted to the logic of equivalence,³⁸ which fixated the sociopolitical space around an antagonism between “democratic” and “authoritarian” identities.

However, its grasp on the discourse of democracy would have to decay at some point, because, as noted, democracy allegedly signifies both the *im-*

possibility and the *necessity* of society and shows the contingency of all social formations:

Between the logic of complete identity and that of pure difference, the experience of democracy should consist of the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics along with the necessity of their articulation. But this articulation should be constantly re-created and renegotiated, and there is no final point at which a balance will definitely [be] achieved.³⁹

Democracy, therefore, endorses establishing a set of specific mechanisms and institutions to boost its political ideals. These mechanisms and institutions, such as the rule of law, human rights, and regular elections, not only build up a “protection belt” for defending individual and societal differences against authoritarian attempts to close down the social, but also help “postpone” the formation of society, which requires a degree of closure, and keep the social open for alternative symbolizations. For instance, Slavoj Žižek stresses this function of elections:

At the moment of elections, the whole hierarchic network of social relations is in a way suspended, put in parentheses; “society” as an organic unity ceases to exist, it changes into a contingent collection of atomized individuals, of abstract units, and the result depends on a purely quantitative mechanism of counting...⁴⁰

The AK Party seems to foster this character of democracy, which is underlined by the logic of difference:

One of the most important qualities of contemporary democracy is that the majority will in no circumstances make the fundamental rights and freedoms a topic of discussion and that they shall respect the rights and freedoms of those who are in the minority. Securing the views of the minority and *the right to oppose*, is considered as an element which strengthens *the pluralistic quality of democracy* (emphasis added).⁴¹

This quote refers to the protection of the rights of those in the “minority”; however, this also directly dynamites the idea of society because alternative or rather oppositional forms of institution of the social make visible *the political*, which purports the absence of a societal homogeneity, the intensification of societal differences to the point of political importance, and the contingency of the current form of society or nation.⁴² Therefore, while the intention is to respect differences, any quest for identity or attempt to build up a social totality unavoidably indulges in the integration of those differences into the hegemonic discourse or the exclusion of those differences toward the periphery of

society at best due to its inherent quality of internal negativity. This ontological insight sheds light on the growing tension between democracy and the nation (I will return to this issue later on).

Indeed, the AK Party recognizes the universality of the democratic political ground.⁴³

Universal values that are embodied in the concept of democracy and supported by principles such as human rights, the rule of law, and good governance are products of the collected wisdom derived from different civilizations. Historically, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have all played a central role in forming this collective wisdom.⁴⁴

Similarly, Erdoğan argues in his keynote speech, given at the Uluslararası Muhafazakarlık ve Demokrasi Sempozyumu (International Symposium on Conservatism and Democracy [UMDS]), that Turkey should “institutionalize a democracy incorporating pluralism, diversity, and tolerance.”⁴⁵ Democracy is viewed as “a regime of dialogue, tolerance, and reconciliation.”⁴⁶ The deliberation of the nation’s identity or the public truth in public is hence the leading characteristic of democracies: “[C]losed societies bereft of dialogue cannot produce democratic culture.”⁴⁷ These statements, which can be multiplied, give the impression that the AK Party’s grasp of democracy is somewhat similar to the liberal or deliberative democratic discourse, which primarily posits the necessity of not limiting democracy to holding regular elections.

In fact, this strong emphasis on difference, diversity, and plurality is part of the strategy of delegitimizing Kemalism, which, according to the party, maintains a form of democracy congruent with Turkey’s “special” conditions. In this form, it argues that democracy was reduced solely to conducting regular elections and sustaining some democratic institutions: a “mechanical democracy.” In contrast, the AK Party suggests an alternative or “real” form of democracy – an “organic,” “deep,” or “advanced” democracy in which democratic culture and institutions are expanded to the governmental, social, and political spheres.⁴⁸ “Deep democracy” upholds the fact that the “democratic political ground is the ground to which all societal demands are directed and all societal claims are tested and revised.”⁴⁹ Moreover, the party has recently started to argue that after it came to power Turkey gradually left behind those “turbulent” years and entered into a “normalization” period that has witnessed the consolidation of a “basic” democracy and the rule of law. Now it will provide an “advanced” democracy (*ileri demokrasi*) that will complete the period of “normalization” by replacing the 1982 constitution, which was formed after the 1980 military coup and has a strong anti-democratic tone, with a new one.⁵⁰

This relativistic nature of democratic rule, on the one hand, underlines the rejection of reifying the nation and the politics of truth and instead champions the idea of reaching a sociopolitical truth or “consensual agreements” solely through public deliberation.⁵¹ The party’s leaders concur that the preliminary condition of acquiring political truth exclusively through public deliberation is viable only by protecting and empowering the institution of politics, which provides an environment for an unfettered deliberation of the public truth or the society’s identity, in the face of interventions directed by such extra-political forces as the military and the judicial branches of the bureaucracy.⁵² These interventions straiten the institution of politics and dynamite the democratic political ground. Moreover, specific mechanisms have to be designed in order to enable individuals and social groups to participate in the decision-making process. Thus, in contrast with “electoral democracy,” “deep democracy” emphasizes the relativist and participatory character of democracy.

Democracy vs. Society

As noted, the AK Party recognizes the universality of the democratic political ground that denotes the absence of a transcendental guarantor of authority and is defined alongside popular sovereignty, pluralism, diversity, and difference. In the meanwhile, it declares that it is a conservative political movement aspiring to form a conservative “nation”: “The AK Party, regarding our nation’s historical experience and heritage as a sound ground for our future, is conservative.”⁵³ This makes it clear that conservatism became the most important nodal point after 2009, as the Kemalist hegemony lost ground. The party has enforced the fixation of the social around conservatism in the context of the domestic political space in the Turkish polity. This emphasis has two inter-related and critical dimensions: (1) the relationship between democracy and society and (2) the relationship between the hegemonic global liberal democratic discourse and the party’s own conservative-democratic discourse.

With regards to the relationship between democracy and society, as noted, democracy, from discourse theory perspective, is in a way antithetical to the idea of society because any form of society inevitably entails a degree of homogenization, totalization, and closure, whereas the logic of democracy tends to subvert the institution of society by underscoring the openness of the social. In the case of the strategy employed to construct a new order, “the element of social positivity predominates, but this very fact creates an unstable balance and constant tension with the subversive logic of democracy.”⁵⁴ The democratic political ground marks the absence of a transcendental guarantor of authority, and thus renders all forms of authority questionable. It therefore

highlights the “impossibility of society,” constantly discloses the contingency of existing social formations, and aspires to secure the hiatus between the social and society. All attempts at nation-building involve the fixation of the meaning of the social, which is unavoidably smeared, in the final analysis, with an initiative of closure, homogenization, and imposition.

The relationship between democracy and society is tense and of a complex nature; namely, they tend to negate each other.⁵⁵ More specifically, “democratic rule” needs a stable ground, a sociopolitical *order* (social contract, unity or harmony of people) only within which rights, liberties, and differences can be enjoyed. But in the meantime, this order always carries a threat to suppress those differences since it has to implement a degree of social closure. On the other hand, society comes into being once the hegemonic discourse allows and articulates the elements and differences in the social field into its discursive chain of equivalence; however, those differences, especially the ones that trespass the scope of the hegemonic social formation and cannot be integrated into it, such as religious sociopolitical demands in a secular-nationalist society, may undercut the society. Hence hegemonic political movements, which admit to operating on the democratic political ground but not to pursuing a “politics of difference” (such as feminism) that involves constant emphasis on the particular and difference at the face of closure and homogenization, have to embark on the difficult task of taming democracy without sacrificing it altogether:

A situation of hegemony would be one in which the management of the positivity of the social and the articulation of the diverse democratic demands had achieved a maximum integration – the opposite situation, in which social negativity brings about the disintegration of every stable system of differences, would correspond to an organic crises.⁵⁶

This paradoxical situation between democracy and society seemingly suggests a continuum that consists of authoritarianism and democracy as its two poles. Indeed, authoritarianism and democracy share the same political ground in the sense that both rest on “democratic revolution” – the absence of a transcendental source of authority – and popular sovereignty: “[P]ower stems from the people” and yet “it is the power of *nobody*” (emphasis added).⁵⁷ The legitimacy of rule springs from nowhere but the people: “Conservative democracy considers political legitimacy to be based on popular sovereignty and the rule of law, which, in turn, is based on constitutionality and universally accepted norms.”⁵⁸ However, the authoritarian rule betrays popular sovereignty by claiming to own the “power” and acts as the transcendental guarantor of power: [I]t turns out to be rule in the name of the people but without listening to them.

Accordingly, this incorporates closing down the social for alternative symbolizations through rendering the institution of politics dysfunctional by resorting to the use of various forms of force as well as erasing all individual and social differences in order to obtain homogeneity, totality, and completeness.⁵⁹

Democracy, on the other hand, highlights the individual and social differences and the gap between the social and society in the face of any attempts of closure, homogenization, and totalization. This is what distinguishes democracy as a form of society from previous forms of governance, such as monarchies, in which “power was embodied in the prince”⁶⁰ and the prince acts as the transcendental source of authority. In a democracy, however,

[t]he exercise of power is subject to the procedures of periodical redistributions. It represents the outcome of a controlled contest with permanent rules. This phenomenon implies an institutionalization of conflict. The locus of power is an empty place, it cannot be occupied – it is such that no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it – and it cannot be represented. Only the mechanisms of the exercise of power are visible, or only the men, the mere mortals, who hold political authority.⁶¹

Nevertheless, one should note that democracy is not the cause of this ambiguity emerging from the lack in the human condition, but merely an attempt to come to terms with this lack and ambiguity. That is, democracy does not precede the emergence of a modern political ground, but is rather a political form of modern politics.⁶²

Indeed, as noted, democratic rule mandates the necessity of the logic of identity (society) alongside the logic of difference (democracy). Accordingly, at the midpoint of the continuum of authoritarianism and democracy lie the hegemonic popular political movements that are embarking on producing society.⁶³ They are different from democratic political movements (or “new social”, such as feminism or environmentalism, that resort to a “strategy of opposition.”⁶⁵ The state-centric political movements emphasize not only the importance of diversity, pluralism, and difference, but also of social unity and harmony. Likewise, they champion a distinct form of rule other than authoritarian rule with respect to their acceptance of the democratic political ground and acting in congruence with those democratic procedures and mechanisms: “Conservative democracy favors a limited and defined form of political power. It does not accept authoritarian or totalitarian practices that would lead to a repressive state.”⁶⁶ They are reluctant to start imposing closure on the social; however, due to their desire to form a society in order to ground the state, they apply some degree of closure and positivization. In short, the AK Party faces a situation in which it is supposed to let live and articulate a maximum amount

of societal difference into its conservative-democratic discursive chain of equivalence without risking those differences threaten to dislocate and disintegrate it.

One hegemonic strategy to overcome this dilemma, as the AK Party case has shown, is to draw the boundaries of society as wide as possible to let live yet incorporate and integrate a maximum amount of individual and societal difference into the social totality. In this case, those democratic demands and differences are articulated as richness or diverse colors of the social totality.⁶⁷ In this way, they are thought to be not only less and less obstructive of “society” but also turn out to be the very backbone of social unity: “A variety of social and cultural groups should participate in politics in order to *add diversity* to public debate in the forum of tolerance that is generated by democratic pluralism (emphasis added).”⁶⁸ This conveys an impression that the social base of a popular political force might be relatively larger than an authoritarian form of rule. Nevertheless, we should not miss the point that it is the party that decides the ground, which is conservative-democracy and not liberal-secularism, secular-nationalism, or something else, on which these differences come together and form a totality. So this fragile political positioning unavoidably carries the risk of a pendulum-like swinging between the two poles of democracy and authoritarianism.

Which Democracy?

With regards to its difference with the liberal democratic discourse, the AK Party cites that in the modern period three grand projects of society-building have flourished on the secular-democratic political ground: liberalism, socialism, and conservatism.⁶⁹ And in an important document, the party presents itself as a conservative democratic movement and argues that it shares the basic characteristics of conservatism in general.⁷⁰

Indeed, democracy is one of the most critical signifiers in the world today and lies at the center of political struggles. This means that while it has gradually reached the status of the imaginary in terms of securing political legitimacy across the globe,⁷¹ it has also become an empty signifier. Accordingly, although it currently represents the empty place of the universal, it has become an element articulated and integrated as a moment into various discourses such as liberalism (liberal democracy), socialism (radical democracy), and conservatism (conservative democracy). There is a consensus among these discourses that democracy means the absence of an overarching, transcendental authority⁷² and the “rule of the people,” in contrast with other foundations of sovereignty and forms of governance such as monarchy (the rule of one person), aristocracy

(the rule of the best), and oligarchy (the rule of the few). The party's program highlights this unquestionable fact: "In a democracy sovereignty belongs to the people, and this feature is a basic quality separating democratic regimes from all other regimes."⁷³ Nevertheless, there is a serious disagreement about what democracy means today. Within each discourse, it gains a fundamentally distinct and conflicting meaning. This underlies the fact that democracy itself has become a site of political confrontation in which competing discourses strive to get their articulation of it universalized.⁷⁴

Liberalism is the hegemonic discourse in world politics today. Democracy, when articulated through liberalism, means not only the institutionalization of free and competitive elections, but also the rule of law or equality before the law, the separation of powers, and the protection of basic individual liberties (e.g., the freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and property).⁷⁵ The discourse of liberal democracy attempts to differentiate itself from other forms of democracy, *inter alia*, on the basis of whether basic individual liberties are secured or not. That is, free and competing elections might successfully carry out the principle of the rule of the people; however, they harbor the danger of suppressing those individuals and groups outside the majority. It is by no means out of the question that illiberal forces might win the elections. Thus, according to the liberal democratic discourse, there are "electoral democracies" or "illiberal democracies" that reduce democracy to free and competitive elections, and "liberal democracies" that, besides holding free and competitive elections, give high priority to securing basic individual liberties against majority rule. In short, liberal democracy merges democracy (the rule of the people) with constitutional liberalism.⁷⁶

In contrast with the liberal articulation of democracy around freedom and equality, radical democracy underlines the importance of pluralism, diversity, and difference. Liberal democracy's emphasis on protecting individual liberties or the particular against the majority runs parallel with radical democracy. However, it takes another step, which involves consensus building among those individuals and social groups. This underscores the belief that a democratic society is one that can achieve "emancipation" by sustaining a perfect harmony, consensus, or transparency.⁷⁷ In fact, the process of consensus building reflects the desire for carving out a society without harming individual and societal differences. However, in this very process individuals and social groups are, at any rate, forced to make sacrifices in order to achieve a homogeneity and totality that characterizes the phenomenon of society. In principle, this process seeks to realize a degree of totality and homogeneity, an aspiration that inevitably involves power relations and domination, which underscores interpellation.⁷⁸ Radical democrats portray the urge for consensus building as a form

of oppression, since it works against the maintenance of difference: “[L]iberal democracy begins with an egalitarian and freely self-determining conception of the individual, but ultimately tolerates and even promotes the formation of a highly inegalitarian social order.”⁷⁹ Therefore, they propose radical democracy, “agonistic pluralism,” or the “politics of difference,” all of which involve denying the necessity of consensus building by constantly highlighting differences and obstructing the attempt to reach homogeneity, harmony, and totality. Democratic politics is characterized by “the ineradicability of power, of antagonism, and of the fact that there can never be total emancipation but only partial ones.”⁸⁰ Democracy, then, is nothing more than an institutionalization of the idea of the *impossibility of society*.⁸¹ Thus diversity, plurality, and difference are not obstacles to democracy; rather, the promotion of difference is the underlying requirement of expanding the democratic revolution.⁸²

So far, it has become obvious that there is a somewhat adversarial relationship between the logic of democracy/difference (that keeps the social open) and the logic of society/identity (that envisions a degree of social closure). Radical democracy puts the preservation of democracy against society at the center of its political project, for it is democracy, not society, that has the most important value. Liberal democracy, on the other hand, strives to go beyond democracy by suggesting that a society be built around liberal values via consensus building over the society’s parameters or overarching identity. Yet, liberal democracy gives the highest importance to the consensus building rather than society. In this sense, liberal democracy contains a permanent urge toward society, but the society is always yet to come. Conservative democracy, on the other hand, gives the highest priority to society, for it brings forward the necessity of society and assumes an organic unity between the sovereign (the state) and society. While radical democracy embodies the idea of the impossibility of society for the sake of sustaining individual and societal differences, liberal democracy, despite its desire for forging a society, stands unavoidably for the *postponement of society*. Thus, from the conservative democratic perspective, while radical democracy is a radical form of nihilism or rejection of the idea of society, liberal democracy undercuts the idea of society by reducing it to its formative elements and causing its perennial absence by trapping social groups into an eternal conversation over the identity of society.⁸³

Conservative democracy, however, gives the highest priority to “decision” and impersonates the attitude of the *affirmation of society*.⁸⁴ According to this view, first, society is already formed or a pre-existing entity; from the very outset, it is a meaningful totality. That is, the presence of a set of shared values is assumed and reified with a claim that society’s needs and desires are known. Second, individual and societal differences are considered integral parts of a

larger and overarching entity and are therefore treated as ingredients that enrich the transcendental product: society. In other words, society is a large family of which different social groups and individuals are equal members. Third, society, as a total and homogenous entity, transcends its parts; it is more than the sum total of its parts. Fourth, democracy means affirmation and representation of the will of the people; it is the principal mechanism for bringing society and the sovereign (state) together. Finally, the sovereign or the ruler should be the true bearer of the will of the people. If the sovereign is estranged from society and imposing his/her terms instead of bearing and representing society and its values, the result is tyranny.⁸⁵ Namely, democracy cannot be achieved if the sovereign does not bear and represent the values of the society.

At any rate, there must be an exact accordance of political goals between the sovereign and the people, for only in such a situation can one talk about the existence of democratic rule: “The AK Party’s understanding of conservatism grounds political authority on a basis of legitimacy, which transcends legal and political legitimacy, and it believes that the political authority must comprehend the society and rule it according to the society’s will and values.”⁸⁶ All in all, conservative democracy is a structural approach that has as its starting point not democracy or differences, but the society or the sovereign. The task then is not to sustain differences or achieve consensus among groups; in contrast, the task is to integrate individual and social differences into the social totality and keep an eye on whether there is accordance between the sovereign and the people.

Conservatism

In the AK Party’s projection, conservatism always occupies a central place in fixing the social: “[T]he departure of the AK Party from its National Outlook Movement heritage does not necessarily mean that it cuts its ties with the Islamic movement in Turkey.”⁸⁷ The party keeps “some affinity with the Islamist ontology”⁸⁸ with respect to its emphasis on the “circle of justice,”⁸⁹ which plays a central role in Islamic political thought and constituted the basis of the Ottoman polity.⁹⁰ In his post-election speech on November 3, 2002, Erdoğan boldly underlined (and kept emphasizing in the following years) the theme that sums up of the Ottoman political philosophy: “Let the people live so that the state lives on.”⁹¹ He argues that the party is “a mass political party on the basis of conservatism.”⁹²

The most significant motive behind the party’s choice of conservatism is argued to be that while liberal and social democracy are relatively less sensitive to local values in fixation of the social, conservatism is deeply rooted in

local cultural values: The party “attempts to produce the neo-conservative democratic line of politics in congruence with the genes of conservatism and its historical codes, and yet by resting on the social and cultural traditions of its own geography.”⁹³ Conservatism serves as a good balance between the global and local levels: “Our party is not sympathetic to the idea of turning our back to the modern world for the sake of preserving our local values. Meanwhile, we find [it] unacceptable to destroy our local values in order for Turkey’s integration with the modern world.”⁹⁴ In short, in the Turkish context, conservatism suggests a novel solution to the problem of the particular-universal (or modernity) different from both Islamism, which defends the particular by rejecting the modern world in order to preserve local values, and liberalism and Kemalism, which subscribe to the universal by seeing local values as an obstacle before integration with the modern world.

However, the AK Party vacillated between liberal and conservative articulations of democracy, especially due to its dependence on the global center (particularly with regards to EU membership) in its early years (2002-08) in order to obtain legitimacy and leverage against Kemalism.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it has gradually tilted toward a conservative-democratic understanding of the relationship between society and democracy, as some liberal critics contend: “[T]he JDP [AK Party] shares with the conservative right-wing streak the partiality to the absolute authority of the leadership; distaste for politics of difference and disregard for fundamental freedoms and minority rights.”⁹⁶ After five years of rule, the AK Party’s 2007 General Elections manifesto posits that it had managed to articulate democracy on the ground of its local values.⁹⁷ This reflects the presence of a conservative motivation to distinguish itself from the hegemonic articulation of democracy: liberal democracy.

The party is a conservative political movement and, accordingly, its articulation of democracy is significantly in line with the general patterns of the conservative understanding of democracy. Indeed, its discourse contains a strong emphasis on social unity: “[O]ne nation, one flag, one country, one state constitutes the essence of our politics.”⁹⁸ And again: “The AK Party has come to the point of recognition that radical discourses and attitudes do not contribute anything useful to Turkish politics; we suggest that Turkish politics, instead of division and polarization, should be built on reconciliation, unity, and clemency; and we believe that the society demands moderation.”⁹⁹ In this schema, in contrast with liberalism’s perception of society as composed of atomistic individuals and through the prism of majority-minority division that constantly engage in deliberating the society’s identity, the conservative AK Party views society as a large “family” consisting of various identity groups, rather than as compartmentalized into majority and minority groups.¹⁰⁰

While liberalism and the Left emphasize the particular, conservatism stresses the totality: “[T]he AK Party is the address of the politics of social unity.”¹⁰¹ At any rate, democracy in liberal and radical frameworks functions to preserve the particularity of individuals and social groups in the face of tendencies of homogenization, whereas in the conservative discourse democracy helps strengthen the unity of society by working as a consultation mechanism among different groups in society. In other words, democracy works to provide a platform on which different groups can come together; its principal function is to unify the people, to forge a nation. Hence, in contrast to radical and liberal understandings, democracy does not work to absolutize those societal differences in the face of social totality: “‘Politics,’ according to conservative democracy, is a realm of reconciliation; social and cultural differences attend to this realm as being *different colors* on the ground of tolerance and clemency produced by democratic pluralism”¹⁰² (emphasis added).

Accordingly, this perception of democracy calls for drawing the limits of society as large as possible in order to integrate as many social groups as possible into the social totality so that society does not fall into the category of authoritarian rule. This is one of the most critical themes in Erdoğan’s speech:

Our society, which has been for so long longing for peace and harmony, seeks for a political understanding that is attendant to the problems of society and taking other social sections not as an adversary; the AK Party came to being in response to this desire. Today our challenge is to form a political language and structure that allows and absorb as many identities as possible on the ground of mutual respect.¹⁰³

More to the point: “[T]he AK Party represents the social center and has a political understanding which embraces all of Turkey as one single unit.”¹⁰⁴

Secularism and Nationalism

This emphasis on social unity and harmony in its articulation of conservatism-based democracy is also observable in the articulation of two other floating signifiers of the Turkish discursive field: secularism and nationalism. The AK Party views secularism as a guarantee for maintaining freedoms and sustaining social peace: “We also believe that secularism needs to be crowned with democracy in order for fundamental rights and freedoms to be accorded constitutional guarantees. This allows secularism to function like an arbiter institution and provides an environment of compromise.”¹⁰⁵ This understanding of secularism is contrasted with the anti-religious *laicist* tendencies of Kemalism and clearly rejects all political dispositions, thereby imposing

a political truth on the rest of society. Hence, the party seems to view secularism through a polarization between active/assertive and passive forms of secularism.¹⁰⁶

Active secularism basically attempts not only to secularize entire walks of social life, but also life on the individual level. In the public realm, it strives to wipe out religion's authority for the sake of "progress" and, in its place, tends to institutionalize secularism as a new authority.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, it does not allow any religious sign (e.g., wearing the hijab or a cross) in the public realm. This is where the levels of the public and the individual realms coincide. Besides, having a monopoly over education in spreading secular ideas, those policies of exclusion and limiting access to public services enforce secularization at the individual level. Hence, the most significant characteristic of this form of secularism is that it is defined and articulated in contrast to religion. *Passive secularism*, on the other hand, basically attempts to establish neutrality and relativism with respect to religion in the public realm. Resting on secularism's basic dictum that secularism means the separation of state and church, it avoids imposing any particular belief, religious or irreligious, on the public realm and of course at the individual level. Thus, this form of secularism signifies the groundlessness of the social realm by prohibiting any attempt to impose a specific belief.

The party sides with the liberal or passive articulation of secularism:

Our party views religion as one of the vital institutions of humanity whereas [it] observes secularism as the precondition of democracy, and the guarantee of freedom of religion and consciousness. It strictly refutes articulation of secularism as anti-religion and those attempts to mishandle it.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, it argues that

Secularism, in fact, provides to the members of a religion or faith due conditions that they could practice the requirements of their faith in peace and gives freedom to express their religious views and live in accordance with their religion. Yet, it also allows irreligious people to pursue their life freely and without any intervention. In this sense, secularism is a principle of freedom and social peace.¹⁰⁹

However, according to the conservative-democratic framework, secularism has an additional function: "Secularism is a way of maintaining social diversity in peace and freedom by keeping away from the environment of conflict and tension."¹¹⁰ The conservative articulation of secularism, as in the case of democracy, differs from liberal secularism in that the conservative-democratic project aspires to form a society/nation; this means that there must

be a degree of homogenization. In other words, secularism is not *merely* a guarantee of the freedom of religion, but also and more importantly a mechanism to sustain social peace and unity.

Moreover, the political authority is unavoidably supposed to disseminate some of the values that make up the society's fabric. Erdoğan recently exposed this intention in a speech given to his party members: "We will cultivate pious generations."¹¹ Thus the party tends to emphasize religion's importance in the public realm as being a conservative movement. It explains this situation by distinguishing between giving importance to religion and imposing religion on society: "The AK Party heeds religion as a social fact; however, it does not find it right to politicize religion, exposing the state to an ideological transformation, and organizing around religious symbols." Moreover, he continues that "[e]stablishing a political party in the name of religion or giving such an impression is a misdeed to society and religion. Religion is a sacred and shared value; nobody should cause social disunity and division by making it an issue of partisanship."¹² In sum, the party's understanding of secularism has been developed against Kemalism's active secularism: The AK Party "rejects the interpretation and distortion of secularism as enmity against religion."¹³ It tends to support a liberal articulation of secularism around the freedom of religion. But in contrast to liberalism's emphasis on freedom, as a conservative and hegemonic movement the party places more emphasis on secularism's role in sustaining social unity and peace. In addition, it attempts to propagate religious values at the social level. In short, secularism is articulated around the purpose of serving national unity, and this unity is assumed to be around conservative values, including religion.

Similarly, the party tends to articulate nationalism around the ideals of harmony and unity. Therefore, in congruence with the postfoundational line of reasoning, it embarks on formulating two opposing conceptions of nationalism that help define each other: *positive* and *negative* nationalism. Erdoğan, for instance, argues that "[o]ur way is not negative but positive nationalism."¹⁴ With respect to negative nationalism, he contends

Those who claim to be nationalists are, in fact, not nationalists; they are rather racist and separationist, but not nationalist ... We oppose ethnic nationalism and refute racism ... We have not supported the idea of "love or leave." The "real" or positive nationalism was defined as "[n]ationalism is serving this country; nationalism is serving the nation; nationalism is sharing the sorrows of the nation; this is what nationalism is.

He continues: “We embrace all our citizens; we do not discriminate.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, in his 2005 visit to the heavily Kurdish city of Diyarbakır, Erdoğan officially admitted the existence of the Kurdish problem, which had been articulated around ethnic separationism and refused by the Kemalist elite in the past. He argued that the “Kurdish problem is also my problem. We shall resolve this problem through further democratization.”¹¹⁶

According to this framework, “negative” nationalism highlights ethnic separationism and division, whereas “positive” nationalism propagates national unity by recognizing and integrating ethnic and linguistic differences into the nation. Hence, one can conclude that the former suggests that an ethnic identity should be the base of the nation, while the latter claims to ground the nation around a more inclusive non-ethnic identity. So what should be the overarching identity? After the critical Şemdinli events in 2006 that fanned Turk-Kurd tension, Erdoğan made a speech in which he argued that “We, Turk, Kurd, Çerkes, Laz, and others, shall all get together under the overarching identity of Turkish citizenship. Yet we shall equally be respectful to the sub-identities . . . We reject ethnic, regional, and religious discrimination.”¹¹⁷ This new overarching identity has been declared to be not “Turkishness” but “Türkiyelilik” (being from Turkey), since Erdoğan voiced it in 2003.¹¹⁸ But what should be the content of this empty signifier of Türkiyelilik? It is filled vaguely with references to “shared history, shared culture, shared civilization,”¹¹⁹ and stresses that “we are a family with our millennial fraternity, diverse religious beliefs, diverse ethnic origins, all our social colors.”¹²⁰

All in all, like in democracy and secularism, nationalism is conceptualized around the fantasmatic ideals of harmony and unity. The so-called positive nationalism, due to the society’s multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure, is defined with reference to the imperial period.

The Social Fantasy Dimension: “A Powerful and Democratic Turkey”

All attempts of society-construction are supposed to be supported by an ideal of social fantasy. In other words, the construction of a society takes place, first of all, at the symbolic level and is supported by a social fantasy. Fantasy belongs to the objective realm, although it happens to occur at the subjective level: It belongs to the “objectively subjective” level.¹²¹ A social fantasy’s primary function is to make bearable the lack in the Other or the objective field by offering us the object (*objet petit a*) as a metaphor of our lacking fullness. The crucial fact here is that a social fantasy is maintained by deferring the re-

alization of the object. In other words, the object positivizes the absence of fullness in the Other. This discloses the fact that it can only be shown as lacking; that is, the object appears to be something that we do not have. This shows that we identify with the objective field via the object, which is lacking and desired to be achieved.¹²²

So what objects (*object petit a*) does the AK Party promise? We observe that it identifies with the objective field primarily through two interrelated objects: unity and strength. Its ideal or social fantasy involves harmony,¹²³ which is peremptory for constructing a conservative-democratic nation. The social is symbolized around a conservative-democratic identity with special reference to signifiers (e.g., democracy, secularism, and nationalism) that are articulated in such a way to sustain the harmony and unity of the people, whose “absence” is constantly emphasized. In other words, democracy, secularism and nationalism, inter alia, are argued to be necessary for sustaining social harmony, peace, and unity, all of which are now “lacking.” Besides, the party highlights the importance of local values that shall boost societal unity: “Our goal is to preserve those values forming the identity of this family [society] by reproducing them in the light [of] modern developments.”¹²⁴ These values are claimed to be justice, harmony, equity, tolerance, pluralism, inter alia, rooted in the politico-cultural experiences of two empires, the Seljukid and the Ottoman, that serve as an inspiration for grounding the new Turkish society.¹²⁵

The process of identification between the party and the masses is reinforced by what Ümit Cizre describes as the “politics of the heart,” which replaced the “politics of aloof institutions.” Party leaders are highly successful in speaking the language of “the man on the street.”¹²⁶ For instance, uplifting the standards of democratic rule, as the party argues, will make all Turkish citizens feel like first-class citizens and create gratification among those who used to be discontented, thereby reinforcing their loyalty and the sense of belonging to the republic.¹²⁷ Thus the symptom that obstructs this ideal of harmony and unity is any ideological approach, including the MGH, Kemalism, and Kurdish nationalism, that emphasizes particularity at the expense of unity around ethnic, religious, and secular platforms.¹²⁸ In contrast to those ideological platforms, the AK Party contends that:

Our Party embraces without discrimination all of our citizens, regardless of their sex, ethnic origins, beliefs, and opinion. On the basis of this pluralistic concept, it is one of our Party’s fundamental objectives to develop the consciousness of citizenship and to share with all our countrymen the pride to possess and belong to the country in which we live.¹²⁹

This social unity supports another object: strength. Thus the party constantly highlights the fantasmatic ideal of economic development and strength, which are signified as having been absent for a considerable time. In this regard, its party program distorts and rearticulates the Kemalist fantasy of raising Turkey to the level of contemporary “civilization,” the modern West, and merging with it by getting rid of such local cultural “obstacles” as Islam in front of “progress”: “Our Party regards Atatürk’s principles and reforms as the most important vehicle for raising the Turkish public *above* the level of contemporary civilization and sees this as an element of social peace (emphasis added).”¹³⁰ This ideal is reiterated at other times, for instance: “Raising Turkey *above* the level of contemporary civilization constitutes our primary political objective” (emphasis added).¹³¹

Indeed, in order to attract popular support, the party has set the goal of raising Turkey to the status of being among the most powerful states in the world by 2023, the centenary of the Republic’s establishment: “Our goal is to make our country one of the most influential, powerful, and leading states in world politics in 2023. We are capable of achieving this goal, given our strong economy, society, performance, and culture.”¹³² This ideal of promoting Turkey to “super-power” status seems to resonate among the public. For instance, according to an October–November 2011 poll, almost 70 percent of the public believes that Turkey will achieve this goal.¹³³

Conclusions: The Limits of a Conservative-Democratic Society

From the outset, the AK Party sought to work as a hegemonic political subjectivity with a conservative-democratic society-project. Yet it emphasized the discourse of democracy and the “politics of difference” from 2002–09 to roll back the Kemalist society. After 2009, it shifted the emphasis toward conservatism and started its society-building projects. This shift reshuffled the cards in Turkish politics and decisively ended the “holy alliance” between the party and the pro-EU secular-liberals.¹³⁴ In this new era, the expanding conservative-democratic myth¹³⁵ has confronted a loose anti-AK Party bloc including the Left, (the majority of) liberals, the Kemalists, and Kurdish nationalists.

While the party has spent much of its time and energy to include these “differences,” which stem mainly from secular and Kurdish nationalist demands, in its conservative-democratic society,¹³⁶ the anti-AK Party bloc has struggled to stop the expansion of the conservative-democratic myth. For instance, after the so-called 2011 “Uludere incident” in which Turkish F-16 jets bombed thirty-five Kurdish villagers, Sezgin Tanrikulu, a Kurdish-origin

deputy from the Kemalist Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (the People's Republican Party [CHP]), stated that "this is the first decision of war against the civilians in the history of Turkish state," whereas the Kurdish nationalist Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (the Peace and Democracy Party [BDP]) contended that it was a deliberate massacre of Kurdish civilians.¹³⁷ *Taraf*, a leading left-liberal daily, had the following headline: "The state bombed its own citizens."¹³⁸

Indeed, the party backs the idea that the "emancipation" of Kurds is viable only within a conservative-democratic society that claims to treat all ethnic groups equally and provides (Islamic) "brotherhood" as *the* bond between them.¹³⁹ In contrast, Kurdish nationalists assert that the party's policies toward the Kurds are a continuation of the Republican policies of assimilation and "Turkification." The proclaimed "emancipation," they argue, rests in providing autonomy to the Kurdish regions or, at best, establishing an independent Kurdish nation-state.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, in early 2013 the government announced that the Turkish state was in contact with Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers Party [PKK]), who has been in jail since 1999. Including Öcalan in the peace process and his conciliatory gestures in the aftermath revived the "peace process" related to the Kurdish problem.¹⁴¹ This was followed by other important steps, such as forming a commission composed of famous social figures of society (the Akil İnsanlar Komisyonu [the Commission of Wise People]), to provide societal support.¹⁴² In addition, BDP deputies were permitted to visit Öcalan in his jail in İmralı Island (in the Marmara Sea) to consult with him about the peace process. And in early May, PKK militants began to withdraw outside Turkish borders.¹⁴³

Yet the society's secular-nationalist sections have interpreted the peace process and the preparations for a new constitution as the final blow to the Kemalist regime. This loss of hegemony has fomented their fear, which had already been underway due to the increasing societal visibility of conservative sections of society in recent years, of losing old (symbolic and material) sociopolitical privileges. This fear has turned into fury, as demonstrated by the mass political rallies in major cities calling for protecting the secular lifestyle against the assaults of a conservative government.¹⁴⁴ This so-called "Gezi incidents," which originally started as an environmentalist protest and lasted more than a week in early June, has been the second "civilian coup attempt,"¹⁴⁵ as some have claimed, after the so-called *Cumhuriyet mitingleri* (the Republican protests) that were held in order to stop electing the AK Party candidate Abdullah Gül (the current president) to the office of the presidency in April-May 2007.¹⁴⁶ No matter whether it was a "civilian coup attempt" or a "democratic uprising" against an authoritarian government, the Gezi inci-

dents revealed the anti-AK Party bloc's intention to stop the expansion of conservative hegemony.

All in all, the party has overcome the secular-nationalist backlashes, taken political risks, and implemented significant reforms to solve the perennial Kurdish problem. These have contributed to the maintenance and expansion of the conservative-democratic myth alongside the steady economic growth and lifting of sociopolitical compulsions on the religious sections of society. Yet looking at the societal differences resisting conservative-democratic articulation, it is still too early to say that the conservative-democratic society represents the metaphorical totality of Turkish society.¹⁴⁷

Endnotes

1. Metin Can, "Arap Baharı AK Parti'yle başladı" (The Arab Spring has started off with the AK Party), *Sabah*, 20 Jul. 2012, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2012/07/20/arap-bahari-ak-partiyle-basladi>.
2. Ahmet İnel, "Adım adım otoriterleşme mi?" (Toward authoritarianism?), *Radikal*, 24 Jan. 2012, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=1076576&Yazar=AHMET-INSEL&CategoryID=98>.
3. Laclau and Mouffe describe this particular type of political movement as incorporating "a set of proposals for the positive organization of the social." See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), 189.
4. In this study I use the concepts of *society* and *nation* interchangeably.
5. Don Herzog, *Without Foundations: Justification in Political Theory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 20.
6. David Howarth, "Hegemony, Political Subjectivity, and Radical Democracy," in *Laclau: A Critical Reader*, ed. Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 266.
7. *Ibid.*, 266.
8. Ernesto Laclau, "New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time," *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London: Verso, 1990), 44.
9. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar; Book III, The Psychoses, 1955-6*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993).
10. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. W. Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).
11. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 105-14.
12. *Ibid.*, 95-96.
13. *Ibid.*, 98.
14. Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

15. A nodal point is a privileged signifier that occupies a structural position that ties together a set of signifiers within a discourse. It arrests the flow of differences and becomes a center or a reference point in a political force's attempt to hegemonize the discursive field. It fixes the differences and therefore produces a system of meaning, a social structure as a result. See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 115.
16. See Menderes Çınar, "Turkey's Present Ancien Regime and the Justice and Development Party," in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism, and the Kurdish Issue*, ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London: Routledge, 2011), 15.
17. Burhanettin Duran, "The Justice and Development Party's 'New Politics': Steering toward Conservative Democracy, a Revised Islamic Agenda of Management of New Crises," in *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Islamic Party*, ed. Ümit Cizre (London: Routledge, 2008), 87.
18. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 137.
19. *Ibid.*, 188.
20. *Ibid.*, 189.
21. *Ibid.*, 137.
22. *Ibid.*, 189.
23. *Ibid.*, 189.
24. Laclau, *New Reflections*, 60-62
25. The theme in one of Erdoğan's general elections rallies was *ekmek ve demokrasi* (bread and democracy). See "Ekmek ve demokrasi," *Yeni Şafak*, 28 Nov. 2001, at <http://yenisafak.com.tr/arsiv/2001/Kasim/28/politika.html>.
26. Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 44.
27. See Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, eds., *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
28. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, 28.
29. *Ibid.*, 42.
30. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
31. Ernesto Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, ed. J. Butler, E. Laclau, and S. Zizek (London: Verso, 2000), 58.
32. Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political: Thinking the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 110.
33. "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti 59. Hükümeti Parti Programı" (The Party Program of the 59th Government of Turkish Republic), <http://www.belgenet.com/hukumet/program/59-1.html>.
34. Yalçın Akdoğan, "The Meaning of Conservative Democratic Identity," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 51.

35. The DP, which won three consecutive general elections in the 1950s, figures as the first successful popular political victory against the Kemalist regime.
36. “Erdoğan Ankara’da halka hitap etti” (Erdoğan addresses the public in Ankara), <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/erdogan-ankarada-halka-hitap-etti/4301>.
37. Mehmet Ali Birand, “Son Darbe 28 Şubat (The Last Coup 28 February),” 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUTDtaWLPDE>.
38. The logic of equivalence engages in creating equivalential identities that show a pure negation or unfixity of a discursive system. In this situation, all positivity of identity is dissolved and it is defined in reference to something opposite. Identity has come to be purely negative. See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 128.
39. *Ibid.*, 188.
40. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 147.
41. AK Party’s Party Programme, <http://eng.akparti.org.tr/english/partyprogramme.html#2.5>.
42. Ernesto Laclau, “Introduction,” in *The Making of Political Identities*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London: Verso, 1994), 4.
43. The democratic ground is introduced by “democratic revolution,” which is argued to imply a new form of institution of the social. In contrast with the earlier societies in which “power was incorporated in the person of the prince, who was the representative of God” and society “was thought as a body, the hierarchy of whose members rested upon the principle of unconditional order,” in a democratic society “the site of power becomes an empty space; the reference to a transcendent guarantor disappears, and with it the representation of the substantial unity of society.” See, *Hegemony*, 186.
44. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Conservative Democracy and Globalization of Freedom,” in Yavuz, ed., *Emergence*, 333.
45. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Açılış Konuşması” (Keynote Speech), Uluslararası Muhafazakârlık ve Demokrasi Sempozyumu (International Symposium on Conservatism and Democracy, [UMDS]) (Ankara: AK Parti Yayınları, 2004), 13.
46. *Ibid.*, 13.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *The AK Party’s 2011 General Elections Manifesto* (a.k.a. *Türkiye Hazır, Hedef 2023* [Turkey Is Ready, the Destination Is 2023]) (Ankara: AK Parti Pub., 2011), 8.
51. See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996); Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
52. “The AK Party’s 2002 General Elections Manifesto,” <http://www.belgenet.com/secim/bildirge/akp2002-1.html>.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 189.

55. Yannis Stavrakakis, "Negativity and Democratic Politic: Radical Democracy beyond Reoccupation and Conformism," in *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack*, ed. Lars Tonder and Lasse Thomassen (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), 185-202.
56. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 189.
57. John B. Thompson, "Editor's Introduction," in John B. Thompson, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, ed. Claude Lefort (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1986), 21.
58. Akdoğan, "Meaning," 50.
59. See Robert A. Dahl et al., eds., *The Democracy Sourcebook* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
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61. Ibid.
62. Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, 122-27.
63. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 130.
64. Laclau, "New Reflections."
65. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 189.
66. Akdoğan, "Meaning," 50.
67. Erdoğan, "Açılış Konuşması" (Keynote Speech), 13.
68. Akdoğan, "Meaning," 50.
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70. Ibid.; Akdoğan, "Meaning."
71. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Mary Kaldor and Ivan Vejvoda, eds., *Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Pinter, 1999); Khair el-Din Haseeb, "On the Arab 'Democratic Spring': Lessons Derived," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2011): 113-22; Mohammad Al-Momani, "The Arab 'Youth Quake': Implications of Democratization and Stability," *Middle East Law and Governance* 3, no. 1-2 (2011): 159-70.
72. Elizabeth D. Ermarth, "Democracy and Postmodernity: The Problem," in *Rewriting Democracy: Cultural Politics in Postmodernity*, ed. Elizabeth D. Ermarth (Hampshire, UK and Burlington, VY: Ashgate, 2007), 1-23; Edward C. Wingenbach, *Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy: Post-Foundationalism and Political Liberalism* (Hampshire, UK and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).
73. "The AK Party's Party Programme."
74. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 171-75.
75. See Ricardo Blaug and J. J. Schwarzmantel, eds., *Democracy: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
76. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (1997): 22-43.
77. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) and Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 1996.

78. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*.
79. Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 11.
80. Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (2000): 752.
81. Oliver Marchart, "The Absence at the Heart of Presence: Radical Democracy and the 'Ontology of Lack,'" in *Radical Democracy*, ed. Tonder and Thomassen, 24.
82. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 166.
83. Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).
84. See Chantal Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London and New York: Verso, 1999).
85. Conservative Samuel Huntington depicts Turkey as "torn country" based on the lack of correspondence between the values of the society and the (Kemalist) state. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72 no. 3 (1993): 22-50.
86. "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti 59. Hükümeti Parti Programı."
87. Duran, "The Justice and Development Party's 'New Politics,'" 85.
88. *Ibid.*
89. The "circle of justice" can be summed up as follows: The maintenance of the state requires an army, the maintenance of the army needs wealth, wealth is produced by the *reaya* (subjects), the *reaya* needs justice in order to produce, and justice is sustained by the state. See Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).
90. See M. Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare (*Refah*) Party in Turkey," *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 1 (1997): 63-87.
91. Birand, "Son Darbe 28 Şubat" (The Last Coup 28 February), 2012.
92. Erdoğan, "Açılış Konuşması" (Keynote Speech), 8.
93. *Ibid.*, 14.
94. The AK Party's 2002 General Elections Manifesto.
95. İhsan D. Dağı, "The Justice and Development Party: Identity, Politics, and Human Rights Discourse in the Search for Security and Legitimacy," in Yavuz, ed., *Emergence*, 88-106.
96. Ümit Cizre, "Introduction: The Justice and Development Party: Making Choices, Revisions and Reversals Interactively," in *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey*, 10.
97. The AK Party's 2007 General Elections Manifesto (a.k.a "Nice AK Yillara" [To Many Bright Years]) (Ankara: AK Parti Pub., 2007).
98. *Ibid.*, 7.
99. Erdoğan, "Açılış Konuşması" (Keynote Speech), 12.
100. The AK Party's resistance to defining the Kurds and non-Muslim groups as "minorities" on the basis of ethnicity and religion is a striking example in this regard.

- See M. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat A. Özcan, “The Kurdish Question and Turkey’s Justice and Development Party,” *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 1 (spring 2006): 102-19; M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 171-201; Ümit Cizre, “The Emergence of the ‘Government Perspective’ on the Kurdish Issue,” *Insight Turkey* 11, no. 4 (2009): 1-12; Murat Somer, “Turkey’s New Kurdish Opening, Religious Versus Secular Values,” *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 2 (2010): 152-65.
101. The AK Party’s 2007 General Elections Manifesto, 7.
 102. Erdoğan, “Açılış Konuşması” (Keynote Speech), 12.
 103. Ibid., 11.
 104. The AK Party’s 2007 General Elections Manifesto, 6.
 105. Erdoğan, 2006, p. 336.
 106. Ahmet T. Kuru, “Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey: The Case of the Justice and Development Party,” in Yavuz, ed., *Emergence*, 136-59.
 107. Cizre, “Introduction: The Justice and Development Party,” 1.
 108. The AK Party’s Party Programme.
 109. Ibid.
 110. Erdoğan, “Açılış Konuşması” (Keynote Speech), 14.
 111. “Öğrenci formatlamak bizim işimiz değildir” (Our goal is not to indoctrinate students), *Habertürk*, 6 Feb. 2012, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/713301-ogrenci-formatlamak-bizim-hedefimiz-degildir->
 112. Erdoğan, “Açılış Konuşması” (Keynote Speech), 14.
 113. The AK Party’s Party Programme.
 114. “Erdoğan’dan muhalefete: Ateşle Oynamayın” (Erdoğan warns the opposition: Do not play with fire), *Yeni Şafak*, 24 Nov. 2007, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/Politika/Default.aspx?t=24.11.2007&i=83704Av>.
 115. “Erdoğan: Bunlar milliyetçi falan değil, ırkçı, kafatasçı” ([Erdoğan: They are not nationalists, they are racist]), *Sabah*, 4 Feb. 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/02/04/siy102.html>.
 116. Hürriyet, “Almanak 2005,” <http://dosyalar.hurriyet.com.tr/almanak2005/>.
 117. <http://www.akparti.org.tr>.
 118. Ekrem Okutan, “Afedersiniz, Türkiyeliyim mi dediniz?” (Pardon, Have You Said Türkiyeliyim?), *Star*, 8 Jul. 2010, <http://mobil.stargazete.com/iphone/istanbul/yazar/ekrem-okutan/afedersiniz-turkiyeliyim-mi-dediniz-275929.htm>.
 119. *Soru ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci* (The Process of Democratic Initiative with Questions and Answers) (Ankara: AK Parti Pub., 2010), 4.
 120. Ibid., 4.
 121. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 118.
 122. Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, 47.
 123. The fantasy of harmony is shared by all state-oriented hegemonic political movements. However, there is usually a difference and disagreement around which values societal harmony should be established. In the Turkish context, for in-

- stance, the Kemalist elite asserts that the societal harmony should be constructed around laicism and nationalism, whereas the conservative elite maintain that it should be formed around the values stemming from Islam and the Seljukid and Ottoman imperial heritages.
124. The AK Party's 2002 General Elections Manifesto.
 125. Various speeches given by Prime Minister Erdoğan and other leading party figures mention important historical figures of the Turco-Islamic civilization, including the Seljukid and Ottoman periods. For instance, see 3 May 2010, "Başbakan, 'İnsanı Yaşat ki Devlet Yaşasın'" ("Prime Minister, 'Let the people live so that the state lives on.'"), *Netgazete*, 3 May 2010, http://www.netgazete.com/News/693749/basbakan_İnsani_yasat_ki_devlet_yasasin_.aspx.
 126. Cizre, "Introduction: The Justice and Development Party," 5.
 127. "Soru ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci, 2010," 13.
 128. The AK Party's Party Programme.
 129. Ibid.
 130. Ibid.
 131. The AK Party's 2007 General Elections Manifesto, 7.
 132. Ibid., 146.
 133. "Sosyal, Ekonomik ve Politik Analiz – II," Oct.-Nov. 2011, http://www.genar.com.tr/files/SOSYAL_EKONOMIK_POLITIK_ANALIZ_II.pdf.
 134. Serdar Turgut, "AKP, liberal ittifakının çöküşü" [The collapse of the AKP-liberal alliance], *Habertürk*, 22 Nov. 2011, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/serdardturgut/690263-akp-liberal-ittifakinin-cokusu>.
 135. One indication of the expansion is AK Party's ever-increasing votes in the general elections from 34% in 2002 to 46% in 2007 and from 46% to 49% in 2011. See, "AK Parti'ye 3. dönem vizesi" [The AK Party to rule for the third time], *Sabah*, 13 Jun. 2011. At <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2011/06/13/turkiye-tercihini-belirledi>.
 136. The AK Party introduced the Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi (the National Unity and Fraternity Project) in Parliament. Also known as the "Kurdish Initiative," this package of reforms mainly expanded the rights and freedoms of Kurdish citizens. See <http://www.akparti.org.tr/acilim220110.pdf>.
 137. "Uludere'ye ilk tepkiler" [The immediate reactions to the Uludere incident], *Habertürk*, 29 Dec. 2011, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/701328-uludereye-ilk-tepkiler>.
 138. "Devlet halkını bombaladı" [The state bombed its own citizens], *Taraf*, 30 Dec. 2011, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/devlet-halkini-bombaladi.htm>.
 139. See <http://www.akparti.org.tr/acilim220110.pdf>.
 140. "Demirtaş: AKP Kürt halkını yoketmek istiyor" [Demirtaş: The AKP wants to annihilate the Kurds], *En Son Haber*, 26 Nov. 2011, <http://www.ensonhaber.com/demirtas-akp-kurt-halkini-yok-etmek-istiyor-2011-11-26.html>.
 141. Some argue that the PKK backed down after a series of police operations toward the Koma Civakên Kurdistan (the Union of Communities in Kurdistan [KCK]),

- which is claimed to be the PKK's urban organization, since late 2010 and the PKK's failed military operations against Turkish military forces in 2012. See, "Çözüm sürecinin yol haritası" [The road-map of the peace process], NTV-MSNBC, 4 Jan. 2013, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25411205/>.
142. "Çözüm sürecinin 'akil adamları' belli oldu" [The "wise people" of the peace process announced], NTV-MSNBC, 23 Mar., 2013, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25430820/>.
143. PKK çekiliyor" [PKK withdraws], *Haberler*, 8 May 2013, <http://www.haberler.com/pkk-cekiliyor-4609164-haberi/>.
144. One of the oft-cited reasons for the government's intervention in the secular lifestyle is the recent regulation of alcoholic beverages. See "Yeni alkol düzenlemesi neler getiriyor?" [What changes will the new regulation of alcoholic beverages bring?], *Radikal*, 10 Jun. 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/yeni_alkol_duzenlemesi_neler_getiriyor-1137075.
145. "Sivil darbe engellendi" [A civilian coup attempt aborted], *Yeni Şafak*, 8 Jun. 2013, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/politika-haber/sivil-darbe-engellendi-09.06.2013-530488>.
146. "Secular Rally Targets Turkish PM" BBC, 14 Apr. 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6554851.stm>.
147. The political language or rather "threat" that Erdoğan used during the Gezi incidents, "[W]e have the backing of 50 percent," reveals this situation. See "Başbakan: Yüzde 50'yi evinde zor tutuyorum" [PM: I may not stop the 50 percent], *Hürriyet*, 4 Jun. 2013, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/23429709.asp>.