
Mehmet OZKAN

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/mehmetozkan/141/
The rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkish politics has been the subject of many studies since 2002. For some scholars, this rise represents a departure from the secular orientation of Turkey and thus jeopardizes secularism and democracy there. For others, the ongoing AKP period characterizes a decade in which the most significant contribution to the expansion of democracy and the rule of law in Turkey has been made.

Banu Eligur approaches this debate from the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) perspective, arguing that the Turkish case is a good example of how movement entrepreneurs are able to seize upon an existing POS and construct a new one for movement mobilization. In her categorization, the first phase of mobilization of Islamic movements took place from 1980–1991, thanks to an official state policy of “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis,” which created an environment for strengthening the organizational network of the Islamist Welfare Party and its successors. Starting from the 1990s, Eligur argues, the Islamist parties were able to frame the “malfunctioning state” as an additional POS (136–137).

Eligur’s highly ambitious book offers a very broad and interesting overview on Islamism in Turkey, but it is not immune from major analytical gaps that call the conclusions of the book into question. First, there are issues of terminology. She sees the AKP and its ideology as a mere continuation of Islamists dating back to 1980s. Departing from this point, she employs the terms “Islamist” and “political Islam” abundantly to analyze the politics and ideology of the AKP and those who supported it. The terminology is very important because it is not only an analytical tool, rather it often defines the studied subject.
A second critical point relates to her *a priori* assumptions. Turkish Islamists are a “noncivil, peripheral, and resource-poor movement opposed to democracy,” and they have taken advantage of the existing democratic system in Turkey to “mobilize the population in support of redefining a secular-democratic structure in accordance with a politicized form of Islam.” “Since” she argues, “the Turkish state has a secular-democratic character that is contradictory to the Islamist state model, the Islamist movement targets the civil state itself” (11). The argument that the Islamist movement is “noncivil” is a polemic that has been employed by the opposition in Turkey. Eligur in her book neither explains the “noncivil” character of Islamist movements nor questions it. The same holds for calling them “peripheral,” as most members of the Islamist movement in Turkey have a high social standing and occupy a central place. Similarly, the idea of “Islamist state model” intellectually has been left behind in early 1990s, and politically after 28 February process in 1997. In that sense, it is difficult even to imply that the AKP has pursuing the idea of an “Islamist state model.” On the contrary, according to many observers, the AKP has contributed to the advancement of democracy in Turkey to a great extent and a fine example of “Muslim democracy”.

Eligur’s analysis and interpretation of the developments in Turkish Islamist movement are also problematic. She assumes that there has been no change in Islamists’ approach to politics. For example, she emphasizes the idea that Islamists used the idea of a “Just Order” to appeal to the masses. But while this may well be true in late 1980s and early 1990s, after 1995 such rhetoric lost its meaning for many Islamists, when the Islamist Refah Party won the elections and onward, because democracy and liberal values were more attractive both to public and Islamists. That is where one can find the origins of the split in Islamist movement and the establishment of the AKP in 2001 by the moderate wing. Eligur’s book seems to be intended to focus more on the conservative and the traditional wing of Islamist politics in Turkey, namely on the ideology of the Refah Party (which later became the Saadet Party) and the Fazilet Party, which won only 2.5 percent of the vote during the 2002 elections, 2.3 percent in 2007, and 1.3 percent in 2011. Her interviewees who represent mostly the conservative wing in the Islamist movement also seem to confirm this. The final part of the book, which extends the analysis of the 1980s and the 1990s’ Islamist movement on the AKP, seems to have been done as an update on developments in Turkey before the book went to print, rather than a thorough analysis of the AKP experience in Turkey.

Despite these shortcomings, this book is good in terms of providing important information based on interviews and anthropological research
on the organizational structure of the Refah Party during the 1990s, but has little to offer in understanding the current ruling party AKP and its ideology in Turkey.


doi:10.1017/S1755048311000745

Paulette Otis
*Marine Corps University*

In *Faith in the Fight*, Jonathan Ebel takes on the difficult subject of how the religious forces of early 20th century America influenced the lives of individual men and women during the Great War. He uses letters and diaries of American soldiers as examples of individual soldiers’ religious faith in relationship to the war experience, and contextualizes those experiences in the religious climate and political forces of the era. World War I was not fought over religion; nevertheless, religious ideas motivated individual soldiers, and religious institutions, by and large, supported the war effort. The author aims to provoke thoughtful discussion on how Christianity and the American experience came together in the World War I era, how theology was used as ideology in the formation of civil religion, and how individuals rationalized war experiences through the lens of religious belief. Religion provided meaning to the larger war effort as well as to soldiers’ personal sacrifice. In addition, *Faith in the Fight* provides an excellent introduction to the war poetry of the era, including Rupert Brooke, Alan Seeger, and Archibald MacLeish.

Ebel contends, not that men fought always and everywhere with “God on their minds and a prayer in their hearts,” but that religion contributed to a sense of moral duty, provided a purpose for living and dying, imbued war with symbolic ritual, and gave transcendent rationale to apparently random death. The idea of redemption directed soldiers’ eyes beyond death to salvation. Furthermore, he argues that prior to the First World War, the United States lacked a military identity. The purpose of the military until this time had been to “do” specific things: separate the country from England, fight the Civil War over slavery and national sovereignty,