

Yeşim Arat and Şevket Pamuk. *Turkey between Democracy and Authoritarianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2019. 296 pages. ISBN-13: 9781139022385.

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Yeşim Arat and Şevket Pamuk's *Turkey between Democracy and Authoritarianism* starts from the globally observable authoritarian turn in world politics, and promises an 'in-depth analysis of the Turkish case' (p. 2). In pursuit of their argument, the authors take the military *coup d'état* in 1980, the third in the modern history of Turkey, as a turning point. Against this backdrop, they depict the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as the logical outcome of an ongoing power struggle between republican and conservative elites that emerged in influence zones peripheral to the epicentres of political and economic power.

In the introductory chapter one, the book sets the conceptual and hermeneutical framework for the analysis. At the conceptual level, it enforces the frequently invoked binary between Islam/Islamism versus secularism and republicanism as the main reference point. The hermeneutical framework includes the transition from the Ottoman Empire to a modern nation-state, as well as the course of democratisation and military coups.

Chapter two ('A Long Wave of Urbanization') provides insightful facts and figures on the social and demographic transformation in Turkey in the post-1980 coup era. It discusses the rapid urbanisation and internal migration after 1980, and declares the failure of the so-called 'secular parties' in coping with basic communal needs in the new urban areas to be the main reason behind the ascent of so-called 'Islamist parties' (pp. 7, 9, 10, 29 et passim).

In a profound and informative way, chapter three ('From Military Rule to Civilian Politics') describes the transformation of power from military to civil authority in the aftermath of the 1980 *coup d'état*. In line with the underlying framework of an elite conflict, the authors describe the constitutional interventions of the military establishment and the strictly controlled handover of power to a civilian government as a precondition for the emergence of 'Islamic-rooted elites' (pp. 55, 72 et passim.). Capitalising on this illiberal turn, so the argument goes, the latter became successively able to provide liberal economic and social policies suitable for mass support.

The abovementioned binary presumption persists and culminates in chapter four ('Islamists in Power'), which looks at developments in the new millennium after the power takeover by the AKP. The authors claim at the outset that 'the weaknesses of the secular elites ultimately precipitated its [i.e. the AKP's] ascent to power' (p. 88), a further presumption of a causal link between this power shift and the 'mistakes' of the secular elites (pp. 10, 262). As with other chapters, this chapter highlights numerous key events and official actions of the AKP in the wake of consolidating its power

against the background of tight military control in an informative manner. These events are clustered, quite validly, into an early liberal period of rule in the first decade of the new millennium and an authoritarian, one-man-centred shift in the course of the second decade. The authors correctly refer to the alliance between the AKP and the Gülenist network in subordinating the military under the auspices of the civilian government and restraining its power. However, by identifying Gülenists as essentially Islamist (pp. 88, 104), the argument succumbs to shortages of its own binary conceptual framework. It dismisses the state-of-the-art insights into the organisational structure as well as the evolution of this movement throughout history, whose state capture activities were marked by opportunist strategic alliances with ruling authorities and cross-party infiltration of different branches of the state bureaucracy.¹

Chapter five ('Uneven Economic Development and Domestic Politics') deals with the manifestation of the neoliberal turn in the global economic policies of Turkey after 1980. Like the main argument of chapter two, which attributed the popularity of so-called 'Islamists' in politics to their positive track record in local governments, this chapter attributes their rise to the emergence of new industrial and export-oriented business hubs in regions previously neglected by republicans. The authors comprehensively address the key moments and topics that shaped the economic development of Turkey after 1980, and thoroughly link them with the takeover of power by the AKP in 2002. Pledges of a better economic record as well as sustainable growth were major parts of its election campaign alongside questions of social justice and individual freedoms.

Chapter six ('The Kurdish Revolt: Nationalism and Ethnicity') is dedicated to the historical roots and different shapes of the Kurdish resistance to republican identity policies since the formation of the Republic. The chapter touches upon the core economic and social determinants of the conflict, and relates it to the illiberal character of Turkish democracy based on republican foundations. The outbreak of the armed revolt by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is put in the context of continuous Kurdish resistance to assimilation policies pursued by the republican establishment. Focusing on the life of Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the PKK, the chapter explains the amalgamation of leftist movements in the face of previous coups with ongoing demands of Kurdish elites for recognition of their ethnic identity and civil rights. In terms of AKP rule, the authors again highlight its Islamism, which they claim to be a major impetus behind its identity politics towards the Kurds. By doing so, they neglect the AKP's considerable opportunism, which manifests itself in cross-ideological alliances in order to retain power; this again can be explained in global terms without reference to its alleged 'Islamism'.

1 For a recent study on the Gülen movement see Yavuz, M. Hakan and Balcı, Bayram (eds.). 2018. *Turkey's July 15th Coup. What Happened and Why*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press. For an overview of the most recent literature on the movement see also Watmough, Simon P. and Öztürk, Ahmet Erdi 2018. 'The Future of the Gülen Movement in Transnational Political Exile. Introduction to the Special Issue'. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*. 19, 1. 1–10.

Chapter seven ('Between Europe and Middle East') describes the cornerstones of Turkey's foreign policy after 1980 and focuses mainly on Turkish involvement at an inter- and supranational level as well as on its regional politics. With respect to the latter, the authors insightfully describe the trends in Turkish diplomacy during different periods of AKP rule, and reconstruct the latter's rhetorical currents towards their Arab neighbours after the revolts known as the 'Arab Spring' (see p. 194).

Chapter eight ('Women's Call for Democracy'), analyses women's demands in the face of illiberal policies of the military establishment after 1980. The authors regroup those feminist movements into three presumptively homogenous groups, namely 'secular feminists', as well as 'Islamist' and 'Kurdish' women. They correctly point to the peculiarities of these groups' respective agendas and understandings of civil rights and liberties. However, they erroneously infer from this heterogeneity of feminism in Turkey an essential distinctiveness of every movement, making feminism appear inextricably interwoven with genuine secular demands. The inaccuracy of such an approach stems from a conceptual narrowness iterated by the binary categories 'Islamist' versus 'secular', as noted above. Such a categorisation is untenable because it presumes the existence of a global feminist movement, and at the same time denies the possibility of heterogeneous manifestations dependent on ideological outlines and local contexts. This again leads to the assumption that there can exist only one feminist movement, which is *the* 'secular one', whereas the demands of other groups are regarded as primarily 'Islamist' or 'Kurdish' rather than feminist.

In chapter nine, the book concludes with a number of explanations of the authoritarian shift in AKP rule. It reiterates the narrative of a failure of secular elites to provide services to new urban and suburban areas and declares them to be the main cause behind the growth of Islamists who 'capitalized on the mistakes of the secularists' (p. 262). This chapter provides an explanatory model for the still considerable public and electoral support for the ruling AKP in the wake of the growing authoritarian turn in its politics. Here again, the overemphasis on an alleged homogenous religious identity of a new urban population is the basic tenor.

The book correctly frames the power shifts and related discourse in modern Turkey as an elite conflict. It contains insightful details, and addresses key topics and the most decisive moments in the recent history of Turkey. However, from a scholarly point of view, the book contains serious inaccuracies at different levels which can be subsumed under three main points, all stemming from an unjustified overstatement of the inherent 'Islamic' character of the AKP and the inherent 'secular' character of the republicans. Firstly, contrary to its initial promise, the book does not integrate a global perspective in a sense that would be useful to reflect upon the Turkish case of authoritarianism at a global level; such an approach would conversely contribute to the trans-contextual understanding of the mutual interaction between democracy and authoritarianism. Secondly, and relatedly, the book lacks conceptual profoundness. On the one hand, it uses 'secular' and 'Islamist' as universal analytic categories and does not appear to consider the increasing literature on the contextuality of secularism and its mutual constitutiveness with religion. This conceptual framework prevents the authors from realising the permeability of ideological boundaries in Turkey,

which articulates itself, for instance, in the secularist claims of the AKP, the increasing theological touch in the slogans of the major republican opposition party (CHP), as well as the debunked ideological opportunism of Gülenists. Thirdly, the book fails to offer a third-level meta-observation of the Turkish ideological landscape. For instance, referring to the manifestation of a globally observable conservatism in a Muslim context, and pointing out the mutual interaction between conservatism and republicanism in the Turkish context would surely generate new trans-contextual insights. By ignoring the global embeddedness of their object of inquiry, the book remains a scholarly manifestation of Turkey's domestic polarisation problem.