

# Unthinking the “Turkish Case”

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## Abstract

The essay proposes to critique ‘identity politics’ as an Orientalist discourse of imperial politics by unthinking the “Turkish case”. It argues that the intermingled processes of de-politicization, de-nationalization, de-secularization and the emergence of a hegemonic neo-liberal political rationality in the country have been concurrent paths leading to a metamorphosis of ‘democracy’. Taking up a political economy perspective, the essay also argues for the inevitable need of a paradigmatic shift, free of Orientalist residue, that must be geared towards an enhanced understanding of the relationship between a rising neo-conservative hegemony grasping the language of democracy and the endurance of a redistributive institutional structure.

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*“...But they were all agreed on one thing, and that was that when ill thought-out accusations are made, they are not ignored, and that once the court has made an accusation it is convinced of the guilt of the defendant and it's very hard to make it think otherwise”.*

*“Very hard?”, the painter asked, throwing one hand up in the air. “It's impossible to make it think otherwise. If I painted all the judges next to each other here on canvas, and you were trying to defend yourself in front of it, you'd have more success with them than you'd ever have with the real court”. (p.68)*

*The Trial, Kafka*

*“We didn't ought to 'ave trusted 'em. I said so, Ma, didn't I? That's what comes of trusting 'em. I said so all along. We didn't ought to 'ave trusted the buggers”. (p.42)*

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*“You haven’t a real appreciation of Newspeak, Winston,’ he said almost sadly. ‘Even when you write it you’re still thinking in Oldspeak”. (p.66)*

*“Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth. Just once in his life he had possessed—AFTER the event: that was what counted—concrete, unmistakable evidence of an act of falsification.” (p.95)*

*“You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves”. (p.323)*

1984, George Orwell

### **The Political Economy of Imperial Politics and its Discourse**

In the latter years of the century, the dyadic vision of the Cold War Era gave way to a plethora of images shaped by, as Mamdani puts it, ‘culture talk’ -more so than ‘culture’ itself. Those commentators noting the increasing relevance of religious identity -in contradistinction to the secular aka modern- have offered robust explanations of the matter curiously based on a shared reading: there is a need to (re)discover the ties, apparently invisible, between the secular (modern and European) and the religious (non-modern and non-European). Assuming the correctness of categories, the new dyad, then, has taken a firm stand in academic psyche, consciously or unconsciously, shaping the way in which national histories, institutional systems, and local cultures of particular countries –of interest, in this essay, Turkey- would be analyzed.

While the standard of democracy drafted by the 20<sup>th</sup> century American hegemony has solely been the concept of the “free market”, the global stage of the East or the South, in the post-Cold War Era, was set by Huntington’s much applauded and equally criticized New World Order. The paradigmatic boundary of this setting has not merely resonated in mainstream European and American opinion on Turkey, which is fond of showing the country as “a successful example of democracy” to the Islamic world and the governing party as her major democratizing force. It has also determined the mainstream Turkish commentators’ mindset. This ‘new world order’ model presumed, confirmed and even depended on that an earlier question on Turkish secularism, modernity, and Islam has long received a definitive, positive answer: Is the “authoritarian state secularism”, which is strictly observed throughout

the republican history, the cause of the main tension in regulating the Turkish Muslim society? The question, bearing an intrinsically authoritative voice on the ‘Other’, reveals a set of, I would argue quite Orientalist in essence, unwritten assumptions, i.e. (state) secularism in a Muslim society is *by definition* authoritarian (by implication, in a Christian society, it may be unauthoritarian); secularism, in a Muslim society, is to be analyzed at the state level as a socially disconnected phenomenon (by implication, a society where the individuals happen to be Muslim is characterized first by the identification of its religious –*and consequently not secular-* etiquette); those members of the society, who, having internalized a secular state tradition, world-view and way of life, think of themselves as Muslim, and profess an Islamic faith, constitute a societal anomaly unrepresentative of the larger ethos, and can be readily ignored or treated as such in analyses; any political issue in a society of Muslims is to be approached through an analysis beginning from the distinction of its religious affiliation; the dichotomy of secularism and religion in a Muslim society means, apriori, that the state is the (overly-)secular (for the religion of Islam) side –regardless of anti-secular policies induced by both governments and the army.

The mindset in question not only represents a powerful consolidation of ‘identity politics’, which is a hegemonic discourse of the very paradigm -the neo-liberal “new world” order-, but also embodies a decade-long process of de-politicization pertaining to the emergent neoliberal political rationality on top of a historical process of Orientalism. Challenging the new political rationality and its historical processes requires exposing its political economy foundations. For that, one needs to re-read and re-connect Polanyi, Gramsci, Foucault, Said, Wallerstein and Bourdieu. Clearly, this is a task quite out of possibility in this essay, though the essay aims to offer an opening into this tremendous task<sup>1</sup>.

In *Depoliticized Politics, From East to West*, Wang Hui puts the decline of the political party at the core of the contemporary crisis of democracy since the weakened party system provides the context for the depoliticized nation-state<sup>2</sup>. De-politicized politics as the medium of the political rationality of the new world order can be contextualized within an analysis of the structures of power (in international and national domains), neoliberal reconfiguration of interstate and intrastate politics, changing nature of civil society, ‘organic intellectuals’ -in Gramscian lexicon-, and global capitalism. In this context, de-politicization as the new political rationality is closely related to the retreat of the state (in function, authority, and legitimacy), the unlimited expansion of the market economy into the political,

social, and cultural fabric of the society, and the emergence of a utilitarian view of democracy shaping the new intellect.

Wendy Brown explains the American background as: “[w]hat this suggests is that the moralism, statism, and authoritarianism of neo-conservatism are profoundly enabled by neoliberal rationality” and vice versa; accordingly, “neo-liberalism does not simply produce a set of problems that neo-conservatism addresses or, as critics often claim, operate as neo-conservatism’s corporate/economic plank. Rather, neoliberal political rationality [...] has inadvertently prepared the ground for profoundly anti-democratic political ideas and practices to take root in the culture and the subject.<sup>3</sup>” These profoundly anti-democratic political ideas and practices become the new public truths. While the neoliberal concept of the market is itself an ideological tool that leads a fundamentally apolitical process; it is through the operation of this tool that socio-political forces that *ethnicize* or *religionize* politics in the East or South are unleashed.

Because these socio-political forces rest firmly on the paradigm of the new world order legitimized by the discourse of identity politics (aided, in turn, by that of human rights), they are more than often celebrated as *agency* by progressive academic pondering. Sometimes supported by a postmodern parlance, these discourses, despite certain relevancy for marginalized masses as a form of political articulation, disorient the substantive political problems concerning welfare, rights, liberties, and representation all of which are socio-economically rooted institutional phenomena. Indeed, it is because of this disorientation taking place on the institutional plane that these forces fail, in the first place, to emerge as progressive forces of democratic political change. Instead, the substantive reaction to neo-liberal policies takes the form of either complete and open rejection of cosmopolitan definitions of modernity and its affiliations or a neo-liberal transformation of such forms thus approved by and in collaboration with the major cosmopolitan seats of imperial politics. Again, the very disorientation and its root causes, being not addressed, strip the agency factor away from these socio-political forces, for it would be artificial to speak of any agency in a redistributive institutional system whereby transformation toward a productive structure remained blocked. As in *The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing*, Michael Mann reminds us that “democracy is as problematic a form of political regime as any other<sup>4</sup>”, democracy too can be appropriated as a hegemonic discourse to justify the forces working against its basic principles, to silence ‘the other’ in the name of

‘the other’ (or rather creating an *artificial ‘otherness’* in the first place) and to consolidate a globalizing trajectory of mass demobilization, international militarism, and one-sided neo-liberal economic policies. Hence, I suggest, as long as the linkages between the political economy of the said discourses and the neo-liberal order are not directly addressed, the critique will not go beyond a critical assessment of the entanglement of cosmopolitan human rights ideals with imperial politics.

To give a concrete example to what this means, let us quote from Andrew Arato’s *Empire’s democracy, ours and theirs*, on a different yet relevant matter, the occupation of Iraq: “it seems undeniable that in the midst of all that was wrong with the war, the overthrow of the Saddam regime and the freeing of political energies in Iraq were, (very) abstractly considered, a good thing”<sup>5</sup>. If the political economy of the existence of a cruel dictatorship in Iraq as the prime obstacle in the way of a neo-liberal imperial project of dividing a country and its people into –at least- three can be ignored, the accidental possibility of a delivery of human rights to ‘oppressed populations’ may account for the very difference of ‘our’ (universal) versus ‘their’ (imperial) democracy that Arato, in this piece, explicitly sets out to delimit. What, to many contemporary progressive observers, genuinely and in the very abstract, may look like ‘the freeing of political energies in Iraq’, yet, accompanies for Iraqis the civil desperation of a ‘feeling of rape’, as an Iraqi friend, who had lost a brother in the war with Khomeini’s Iran and another one to Mukhabarat, said of his emotions watching Saddam’s execution by an illegitimate outsider for a future with no foreseeable prospects for *national* sovereignty and therefore individual -or social for that matter- *agency*. Thus, the political energies freed, based on *ethnicization* and *religionization* of the political, economic, and cultural space, harness rather more antidemocratic tendencies than ever democratic.

As Naomi Klein and David Harvey<sup>6</sup>, among many others, well document, contrary to quite a forced connection between democracy, prosperity, and neo-liberalism; democracy failed badly in the era of neo-liberal ascendancy, institutionalizing (and not solving) corruption, chronic economic instability, underdevelopment, and political violence. The failure is due to not a direct causal relationship initiated by global capitalism, but rather multilayered socio-political consequences of neo-liberal restructuring that diminished the intersection of state and civil society threatening state sovereignty and authority. Employing the common Weberian definition of the state, this is not to argue that the state is less capable of army and/or police violence than it was before; yet, it is to argue that the processes of de-

nationalization and de-secularization triggered by this structural distortion aim to violently and non-violently appropriate economic and public resources, legitimize a counter ideology, redefine the *regime*, and reconfigure the state institutions. The artificially constructed new public truths are then promoted as a rhetorical justification of neo-liberal and neo-conservative domination subverting and reinventing the meaning and definition of democracy. This is a global condition with similar yet different repercussions in diverse countries whereby the difference lies with the particular country's historical legacy, patterns of institutional evolution, and method of imperial interventions, and similarity with the nature of reaction to the neo-liberal domination.

To situate the globalism of this condition is to turn back to Karl Polanyi's the *Great Transformation*<sup>7</sup>. As the early 20<sup>th</sup> century free market theorists' utopian desire to disembed the economy from society produced two world wars instead of a borderless world of ever-growing prosperity, the creed of market self-regulation of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists (which is perpetually immune to a discredit by historical experience since the human society consistently draws back from the edge of destruction by 'counter-movements') intensified conflicts from Asia to Africa, the Balkans to the Middle East. When in the first half of the century, the 'double movement' - the laissez-faire movement to expand the scope of the market and the protective counter-movement (headed by the working-class) emerging to resist the disembedding of the economy- failed to impose a solution to the crisis, fascism, taking over Europe, broke with both laissez-faire and democracy. In a similar vein, where the double movement contemporarily fails perhaps more dramatically to impose a solution, particularly in the void due to the global retreat and local destruction of the Old Left, and the transformation of its remnants with a neo-liberal rhetoric; religious ideology with claims over the political, cultural and economic space has gained currency. In the technology-importing country, since the economy is in one form or another dependent on the dynamics of market expansion by technology-producing countries, which proceed as ill-defined excursions into the economy -and therefore the politics and society- of that particular country, the subjective conditions of ideology are constituted independently from the objective conditions of the economy. Coupled with structural deficiencies such as divided class structures with feudal(-like) remnants and (destructive) rent-seeking activity gaining ethnic and religious outlook within a newly emergent system of 'charity-economy'; the political regime is transferred to reactionary hands with neo-liberal faces. Beyond political cadres, the context is the thorny and

well-known facade of development and underdevelopment on whose grounds the political and legal language of democracy, representation, freedom, and liberty is captured by the reactionary ideology. It is the familiar context of Gramscian ‘passive revolution’, a slow metamorphosis: socio-political transformations that emerge without mass participation under the impact of outside forces (yet, in the case of Turkish Islam, with the Orientalist etiquette of a ‘mass identity’ by the very same outside forces), and perpetual, molecular social transformations that concurrently occur still behind the back of conservative/reactionary political regimes<sup>8</sup>.

### **The Path to New Public Truths**

Mahmood Mamdani elaborates the Cold War Era American policies against secular, nationalist mass movements around the world that have constituted a tangible threat for the efforts to establish Americanist ‘puppet-ally’ regimes. These movements of a leftist praxis of solidarity for national political sovereignty -without which neither economic development nor social democracy could be constituted- were crushed through direct or indirect interventions which involved full support for right wing ideologies along with their illegal penetration into state institutions. As “... the United States supported the Sarekat-i Islam against Sukarno in Indonesia, the Jamaat-i Islami against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan, and the Society of Muslim Brothers against Nasser in Egypt”<sup>9</sup>, the Turkish stage, since the Truman Doctrine, was not immune: the Islamist, and the ultra-nationalist groups, the arc enemies of the Turkish Left were identified as possible collaborators. The secular-nationalist and/or socialist intelligentsia were victimized as a result of a systematic politicide by ultra-nationalist mafiazation, religious fundamentalist organization and groups now many refer to as ‘NATO’s Islamists’ entrenched in state institutions and civil society.

On the one hand, while the Turkish case is best analyzed as a national developmentalist state with economic relations similar perhaps to Southern Europe; the social democratic movement in 1960s and 1970s was not operative in fueling a democratic restructuring of governmental institutions as the negotiator of terms with a powerful bourgeoisie and capitalist state -as more or less was the case in Western Europe<sup>10</sup>. The variance with the Eastern European experience, on the other, originated from the limited social politicization repressed in the name of ‘order and democracy’, -‘restricted’ or ‘guided’ democracy-, by two NATO supported army interventions (1971 military ultimatum and 1980 coup), which paved the way

to the destructuring of the nationalist developmental state. Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein identify the end of socialism and national developmentalism stating that “what the forces of change have yet to realize is that this road is leading them—or at least most of them—not to the promised land of North America but to the harsher realities of South America or worse”<sup>11</sup>. These forces of change in Turkey were mainly the army induced forces of capitalism in search of a so-called integration with Europe. Yet, as the European periphery, including Turkey, struggled with the dictates of the American neo-liberal revolution on the restructuring of the state, economy and society without a contingency of an institutionally grounded democracy, the state faced an ultimate decline in its capacity, legitimacy, autonomy and authority as the sovereign embodiment of the dominant moral community, that is the national community. In other words, the state, as the political space to facilitate articulation between governmental institutions and social groups, shrank drastically with the suppression of class-based movements disempowering masses in terms of participation in decision-making, representation, recognition, distribution or social change. The economist Korkut Boratav, reflecting on the changing (inter-class and intra-class) relations of distribution in Turkey, traced the origins of resulting ‘obscurantism’ and ‘de-politicization’ in Turkish society in quite a parallel manner (and timing) to Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein:

This [1970s] was a period when in the daily lives of the urban masses the working place and the trade union were becoming more and more central compared with the ‘residential quarters’ and the shanty town; when ‘working in a factory’ and ‘having the status of a regular worker, belonging to the workers’ insurance scheme’ had significantly higher prestige than survival in informal activities; and when increased inflow from the ranks of worker and peasant families into university campuses was taking place. The striking reversal in these tendencies should be, in our view, related to the distinct shift into religious obscurantism, de-politicization and the emergence of hooliganism in urban centers as widespread new phenomena of the recent years<sup>12</sup>.

A significant number of the intelligentsia of the Old Left, arguing that social democracy was sacrificed to stabilize the country during the cold war antagonism, opposed a trajectory that reinforced hegemonic American control -strategically agreed upon by the Soviet Russia- condemning the country to a brand of Third-Worldism among other examples set by the larger Middle East, Asia and Latin America. This trajectory, for the defiant, involved: the increasingly unchallenged hegemonic dominance of American influence over

Turkish politics; expropriation of public economic and political assets at the expense of social welfare and justice; decadence of the independent, secular political space defined by civic consciousness and civil society, and its appropriation by ethnically and religiously defined communities; institutionalization of corruption; forms of legalized and illegal state violence to govern the increasingly conflict-ridden socio-political space –often involving underground networks among the state, business and neo-patrimonial patronage communities mobilized with ethnic and religious networks and discourses. The Old Left, in its defiance, regardless of ideological differences, drew explicitly upon principles of: *laicism* in state institutions -that is non-divine originated legal system and scientific\rational world-view to create and maintain political, economic, and social spaces not dominated by a sectarian interpretation, organization and use of religion; national *sovereignty* and *social state*; socio-economic *development* and *social justice*; and *social democracy* and *peace*, which it considered to be the republican legacy of Kemal Ataturk. Those committed to hegemonic principles that have cleared the political space and its lexicon from the Old Left -with “help” from ultra-nationalist or Islamist factions- and hence come to determine the status quo in the country ironically also claimed the syntax of the same legacy.

Thus, the neo-liberal restructuring in the country, starting in 1980s, did not merely initiate economic liberalization, market financialization and privatization of public resources. Rather, it was the redefinition of the state in terms of party politics and the disassociation of politics from society that the neo-liberal restructuring conveyed. The rationale was to prevent the reoccurrence of what was then viewed to be ‘dysfunctional –class-based- politicization’ of the earlier decade. Predictably, the terms of this redefinition of the state eventually caused a prevailing destabilization in the prior definition of the regime -which had failed to maintain a stable position in any case- through emergent religious and ethnic identities deconstructing the national. De-nationalization and de-secularization have been the two legs of this deconstruction because not only the legitimacy of the national identity overarching many ethnic differentiations is historically not unrelated to secular legitimacy but also the lexicon of legitimacy in the non-secular political ideology operates through *ummah*, the religious (as opposed to national) community. While civil society defined on principles of secular sovereignty and social democracy has been dissipated –and its language and intelligentsia made irrelevant-, religious and ethnically-defined communities mobilized a powerful idea of “representational legitimacy” which was favored as the new form of “civil society” and a

barricade against the former ‘dysfunctional politicization’, with tendentious hegemonic backing. Systematic de-politicization and obscurantism have thus become the grounds on which re-politicization based on ethnic and religious affiliations would take roots. Concurrently, the de-democratizing neo-conservatism occasioned by the contemporary neo-liberal political rationality has started the process of ideological restructuring of the state on its own terms.

The socio-political effects of this present reconstruction process of state-building by a peculiar, neo-liberal Islamism with an allegedly neo-Ottoman(ist) signature can be located within the increasingly permeating impulse that casts ordinary citizens as *Us* versus *Them* in opposing, non-negotiable moral-political universes where both sides adorn –or seem to adorn– themselves in the robes of democracy while the political and economic causes and effects lie in the crux of institutions. The trajectory of neo-liberal entrenchment has subtly encouraged crime and market-oriented nepotism; the politicization of ethnic and religious communities under claims of polyphony and representation; the collapse of civil societies, social democratic and leftist movements; and the emergence of local actors (and entrepreneurs) who can easily mobilize under-classes with a discourse of identity politics while simultaneously expropriating public resources, civil, legal, and political rights. In fact, it is precisely the underprivileged and marginalized masses in the country cross-cutting *all* existing sub-identities that were rendered powerless, if not self-destructive, with well-known travails on this trail, despite a discourse of *and for* the ‘oppressed’<sup>13</sup>.

Yet, the formative characteristic of the neo-liberal political rationality does not lie with the anti-democratic nature of its conservatism; rather, the issue at hand is the way in which *all* vernaculars of democracy become its medium. This is not to suggest in passing that just as for instance the abuse or hijack of human rights ideals and cosmopolitan dispositions by those pursuing a distinctly imperial project empties the discourse of all substantive content, the abuse or hijack of democratic ideals by a neo-liberalized Islamist ideology reduces the meaning of democracy to absurdity. It is rather to highlight the paradoxical entanglements of an active process of political change under the banners of liberal democracy with proudly explicit illegality, illegitimacy and anti-democratic ethos in thought and action. Still further, the neo-liberal political rationality of governance configures what was, in the prior Turkish political consciousness, the ideology of political Islam as democracy *in and of* itself and the vernacular of democracy at once *as* this conformation. Precisely because this configuration is

the etiquette of ‘moderate Islam’ (*İlumlu Islam*) for the country in American parlance, an unknown in Turkish political lexicon until the neo-liberal revolution; it is the political economy of this hegemonic reconfiguration for which the energies toward a social-theoretic explanation must be gathered.

Nancy Fraser, in *Abnormal Justice*, specifies today’s abnormalities as “historically specific and reflective of ...the breakup of the Cold War order, contested US hegemony, the rise of neoliberalism and the new salience of globalization” under which “established paradigms tend to unsettle, and claims for justice easily become unmoored from pre-existing islands of normalcy<sup>14</sup>”. She further argues that “subtending otherwise disparate political cultures of First World social democracy, Second World communism, and Third World ‘developmentalism’, the distributive interpretation of the ‘what’ tended to marginalize noneconomic wrongs and...obscured injustices of misrecognition, rooted in hierarchies of status, as well as injustices of misrepresentation, rooted in the political constitution of society<sup>15</sup>”. For the sake of clarifying the meticulous relevance of institutional political economy -if we may replace the concept of justice with democracy: *abnormal democracy*-, I would argue that the obscurantism happens not in the denial or abuse of recognition, representation, distribution rights -or at least prior to happening on that immanent level-;but rather on the historically specific institutional plane that initiates the very misrecognition et al in conjunction with hegemonic incursions on its patterns of evolution. In this sense, misrecognition, misrepresentation and maldistribution appear as only implications of the process of effective neo-colonization of the country while the elite that actively pauperize the state (while recreating their own) specifically pauperize on the grounds of the same discourse.

In examining the political economy of hegemony, *on the Cunning of Imperialist Reason*, Pierre Bourdieu and Lõic Wacquant state the need to confront the notion of globalization in all of its presuppositions and implications:

“We would need here also to analyze in all of its presuppositions and implications, the strongly polysemic notion of globalization, which has the effect, if not the function, of submerging the effects of imperialism in cultural ecumenism or economic fatalism and of making transnational relationships of power appear as a neutral necessity. Thanks to a symbolic inversion based on the naturalization of the schemata of neo-liberal thought, whose dominance has been imposed for some 20 years by relentless sniping of conservative think

tanks and their allies in the political and journalistic fields (See Dixon, 1997; Grémion 1989, 1995; Smith, 1991), the refashioning of social relations and cultural practices in advanced societies after the US pattern –founded on the pauperization of the state, the commodification of public goods and the generalization of social insecurity- is nowadays accepted with resignation as the inevitable outcome of the evolution of nations, when it is not celebrated with a sheepish enthusiasm eerily reminiscent of the infatuation for America that the Marshall Plan aroused in a devastated Europe half a century ago”<sup>16</sup>.

The naturalization of the particularities of neo-liberal thought is truly dependent upon symbolic inversion by American conservatism. As I have already argued, the reflection of this inversion in the case of Turkey has eclectically been on the domain of ‘democratic grammar’ in terms of not only social-ontological and epistemological bases of democracy but also the masters, definers, beneficiaries and holders of these bases. The inversion foremost meant a transfer of hands with also ideological transformation within the neo-liberal creed: thus, most characteristically, while the new public truths have been naturalized as democratic, the critical sides have been designated as outmoded, introverted, even fascist. Bourdieu and Wacquant go on to say:

“Just as the products of America's big cultural industry like jazz or rap, or the commonest food and clothing fashions, like jeans, owe part of the quasi-universal seduction they wield over youth to the fact that they are produced and worn by subordinate minorities (see Fantasia, 1994), so the topics of the new world vulgate no doubt derive a good measure of their symbolic efficacy from the fact that, supported by specialists from disciplines perceived to be marginal or subversive, such as Cultural Studies, Minority Studies, Gay Studies or Women's Studies, they take on, in the eyes of writers from the former European colonies for example, the allure of messages of liberation. Indeed, cultural imperialism (American or otherwise) never imposes itself better than when it is served by progressive intellectuals (or by ‘intellectuals of colour’ in the case of racial inequality) who would appear to be above suspicion of promoting the hegemonic interests of a country against which they wield the weapons of social criticism”<sup>17</sup>.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of consent on a proper foundation for political democracy –at least in political theory-, if we stipulate it in the ‘*institutionally protected right to non-conformity*’, it is theoretically, practically, historically and contemporarily self-evident

that any religiously inspired political ideology, by definition, occludes processes of democratic, progressive thought and action. What is less self-evident ex-ante is the depth, scope and extent of the neo-liberal and neo-conservative appropriation of (the epistemology and ontology of) democracy when the so-called progressive intellectuals, in the aftermath of the crisis of ‘universal cosmopolitanisms’ –which, in part, was due to their failure to confront the power to universalize particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition inherent to Habermas’ ‘universalism of old empires’-, tend to particular schismatic categories. The leftist praxis, once striving for ultimate cosmopolitan universalism to which even particular nationalisms fit only to the extent that they could be mobilized as forces against imperial domination (hence the basis of the nationalist streak in Latin American or Turkish leftist movements), completely changed its course towards a struggle for recognition of particular antinomies in the form of ethnically or religiously defined categories. One could certainly argue that the new tendance is merely the microcosm of that previously ‘nationalist’ course as i. e. the defense of oppressed minorities or social groups within nation-states. Yet, the problematic is that even when that is the case, because it is the hegemonic interests that direct the very definitions, boundaries and discourses of categories, the ‘oppressed’ merely gains another etiquette, Muslim, Shite, Arab, Kurd, Circassian, etc, while institutionally productive paths to contest or disrupt her oppression remain occluded.

The concurrent possibility of advancing Islamic ethos -backed by hegemonic approval- in a ‘moderate Islam’ discourse and fully replacing the secular grammar of (secular) politics with that of a religious one is viable only by the rhetoric of and practice based on laissez-faire policies, values, principles, and ethics. Therefore, neo-liberalism for Turkish Islamists meant what the jeans did to subordinate minorities. If Orientalism “created” the Orient with the active partaking by the Orientals themselves; by claiming the ‘truth of religion’, a political ideology contributed a great deal to certain representation of the Orient in the power-knowledge of Western imagination ‘being real’, and thus had a very powerful, intellectually common interest base with the Orientalist West. It was the “representative legitimacy” discourse of this base that was later discovered to be ‘defended’ by the democratic Old Left - exceptions notwithstanding- who could in this way still hold a claim to leftism, since the grammar under global dictates had already long moved to identity politics.

## Conclusion

While it is quite the routine to reflect on the Turkish case as one of resurrecting Islam against a model of allegedly authoritarian secularism, I argue that this routine, a favorite of the Orientalist paradigm and a base for the contemporary discourse of identity politics, awaits a social-theoretic, historical, and political economy challenge. There is a prominent need for a critical assessment of entanglements between *ethnicized/religionized* politics as part of the ascendancy of neoliberal political rationality *and* secular legal system and politics confronted by religious neo-conservatism as part of global capitalism, which is in the process of redefining, transnationally, the state, rule of law and democracy. While the conservative and religious nature of this political rationality is globally pervasive, these entanglements form the junction where strict market values of the economic plank are extended and disseminated to all social and political institutions, and a new type of citizen is produced.

Classical liberalism articulated not only a distinction but also a tension amongst the criteria for individual moral, political and economic actions, while the state tradition –at least in the Old World- rested upon the idea of a social contract. The neoliberal political rationality, yet, triumphs upon their extinction. On the one hand, we witness institutional paths opened up during the neo-liberal process to challenge, absorb and transform the bases of state legitimacy and ideology. On the other, this process is supported by academic and non-academic discourses, which, blessed with postmodern tendencies, claim the very modern legitimacy for an alternative ‘modernity’. In the analytical narrative of this unfolding ‘new world order’, I propose to reinterpret Polanyi’s concepts of double movement, countermovement, and embeddedness in light of, for instance, the recent so-called ‘Arab Spring’ and its off-springs – if not for the Latin and Central Americas.

For a lengthy period of time, having been viewed as the ‘exception within the exception’ by intellectual trends of modernization long passé; the seat of the old Porte, that is the Turkish Republic, does not fail yet to possess some exceptional trends in this world conjuncture: a case of the silenced reception of de-democratizing forces of a neo-liberal conservatism within a relatively secular blend of Islamism emergent due to decades of democratic politicide and post-1980 de-politicization and obscurantism. Such reception, I argue, is, as a local reflection of a global phenomenon, facilitated in a political and intellectual culture shaped by the de-containment of religion in the late modern epoch -to the demise of

the modernization theory- and further appropriated by postmodern discourses that validate and legitimize a ‘religious modernity’ alternative. The de-containment of religion, which is primarily related to the declining nation-state sovereignty that has always depended upon not only containing but also subtending economic and religious power, is unique to neither Turkey nor Islam. Rather, it is the historical institutional side that would complement the analysis putting forward the distinct characteristics of the Turkish evolutionary path. Far from an archaic interest, recurring socio-political and socio-economic structural deficiencies of modern Turkey are embedded in the way in which, historically, the redistributive institutional structure constitutes her contemporary predicament and its inherited, if unresolved dilemmas.

Thus, what is highlighted in this essay is the inevitable need to develop a critical and comparative paradigm, free of Orientalist residue, for examining an extremely complex treatment of the antinomies and ambiguities relegating to institutional deficiencies: an institutional pattern of de-democratization based on a peculiar redefinition of rule of law and democracy. To examine the currency of global discourses and their augmenting capacity to serve as grounds for asserting political agency for the current governing Islamism, we need to analyze the historical failure to transit to a productive institutional structure as the plane of explanation for the unbroken organic ties of productive classes, including the intelligentsia, with the center, which has now become a new political ‘class’ in and of itself tied to transnational capital movements. The unbroken organic ties of the intelligentsia not only add a conservative bias, which, due to the ambiguously redefined package of ‘liberalism’ and its equalization to democracy, assumes “democratic validation”, but also gain strength and support as the hegemonic Orientalist paradigm is, in this way, better perpetuated. Yet, it is towards an enhanced understanding of the relationship between the rising hegemony of neo-liberal Islamism grasping the language of democracy and the endurance of a redistributive economic structure that the paradigmatic shift needs to be geared. We may, then, be in a less artificial position to engage with such discourses as human rights as *‘il faut’*<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This essay draws from an on-going research agenda and book manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Hui, “Depoliticized Politics, From East to West”, **New Left Review** 41, pp: 29-45, September-October 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism and De-democratization” **Political Theory** 34 (6), pp: 690-714, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Mann, “The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing”, **New Left Review** 235, (May/June 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Arato. Empire’s democracy, ours and theirs, in Amy Bartholomew (ed.) **Empire’s Law: The American Imperial Project and the ‘War to Remake the World’**, London: Pluto Press, 2006, pp: 217-45.

<sup>6</sup> See particularly, Mahmood Mamdani, **Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror**, Pantheon, 2005; David Harvey, **New Imperialism**, Oxford University Press, 2003; Naomi Klein, **The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism**, New York, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Polanyi, **The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time**, Beacon Press, 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Arrighi, Giovanni, Hegemony and Antisystemic Movements, prepared for the **International Seminar REGGEN 2003**, Rio de Janeiro, p. 8, 10. See further Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> See Mahmood Mamdani, **Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror**, Pantheon, (2005).

<sup>10</sup> For further, see Çağlar Keyder, **State and Class in Turkey**. London and New York, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein. 1989, The Continuation of 1968, **Review** (Fernand Braudel Center), Vol.15, No.2, Spring 1992, p.231.

<sup>12</sup> Korkut Boratav, Inter-Class and Intra-Class Relations of Distribution under ‘Structural Adjustment’: Turkey during the 1980s. in Tosun Aricanli and Dani Rodrik (ed.). **The Political Economy of Turkey**. Macmillan, (1990), p. 225-226.

<sup>13</sup> One could say with the exception of those connected with the center via nepotistic networks (as an institutional consequence of the endurance of the redistributive economic structure); and yet, despite short term, visible economic or social gains, those in these networks are also the losers of the system -at least in the long run- precisely because their gains are due to the nepotistic structure.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Fraser, Abnormal Justice, **Critical Inquiry** 34, pp: 393-422.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.403.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason, **Theory, Culture and Society**, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Vol.16 (1), 1999, pp: 41-58.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.51.

<sup>18</sup> “Il faut” attributed to Derrida. For more: Jacques Derrida. Autoimmunity: real and symbolic suicides. A dialogue with Jacques Derrida, in Giovanna Borradori (ed.) **Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida**, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp: 85-136.

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