

# Populism and the Bourgeoisie: The Role of Intra-Elite Factionalism in the Growth of Populism in Turkey

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the role of upper-class elements in the rise of contemporary populism by focusing on the socio-cultural divide and factionalism within the Turkish business class. Current scholarship on populism revolves around the discursive, strategic and stylistic-performative dimensions; but the revival of populism—and the reaction against it—in our age has its own political sociology based on various coalitions of distinct social forces with diverging economic and mobilisational capacities and resources. Classical and contemporary studies analysing the social bases of populism have overwhelmingly focused on the role of lower socio-economic segments. This paper, in contrast, deploys a historical and socio-cultural analysis to highlight the role of upper-classes in the rise of populism today, and argues that economic and socio-cultural factionalism within the bourgeoisie paves the way for the “underdog” bourgeois factions to support populist politics.

## 1 Introduction\*

The rapport between populist leaders and low-income peripheral majorities is vital for the phenomenon of populism to thrive.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the cross-class/group nature of populism is evident, as is the ability of populist actors to engage with seemingly different social and status groups

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\* It was Francisco Panizza who pointed out the important role played by factionalism within the bourgeoisie in the rise of populism in his comments on the paper I presented at the APSA conference in 2016. His comments inspired the writing of this paper. I also benefitted immensely from the criticism and suggestions of the co-editors of this special issue, Gülay Türkmən and Sinem Adar, as well as the recommendations of two anonymous reviewers. I am indebted to all for their valuable contributions.

<sup>1</sup> See studies on populism in Latin America that highlight popular sector mobilization as the basis of the phenomenon, e.g. Ostiguy (1997), Knight (1998), de la Torre (2000), Collier and Collier (2002 [first edition: 1991]), Levitsky (2003). See also Norris and Inglehart (2019) for the emphasis they put on a similar social basis in their analysis of the current rise of populism in established Western democracies.

(Conniff, 1999:14). While it is absolutely vital for populist parties and leaders to incorporate the masses, the populist ruling elite do not usually experience similar socio-economic conditions to their low-income constituencies. Instead, populist political elites may come from higher socio-economic status groups and the constituencies of populist parties tend also to include upper-class elements. The relationship between populists and popular sectors is relatively understandable, since the hallmark of populism is a “plebeian culture and mannerism” (Panizza, 2005: 24), a “low” socio-cultural and political-cultural appeal (Ostiguy, 2017), and the distinction it makes between the people and the elite. But what explains the relationship between populist politics and some sections of the elite, the upper-middle classes and specific segments of the “business classes” or the “bourgeoisie”?<sup>2</sup> How can we understand

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<sup>2</sup> In the rest of the paper, I will usually refer to these business classes as “the bourgeoisie”. By the term “bourgeoisie”, I do not refer to the urban middle and

the strong support some populist parties enjoy among certain economically privileged segments of their constituencies?

This paper seeks to answer these questions through a close examination of the case of Turkey. Turkey's modern history since the foundation of the Republic in 1923 represents a key case in this analysis since it contains a broad variety of examples of the relationship between the bourgeoisie and party politics as well as a history of solid factionalism within the business class that is embedded in the socio-cultural divides of Turkey. Therefore, the case of Turkey has theoretically and empirically inspired the entire analysis in this study. In this paper, I argue that the bourgeois support for populist actors in a given setting is related to the emergence of different factions within the business class with different judgements of taste and uneven cultural capital. Methodologically, this paper engages in a historical analysis that focuses on the relations between politics and different factions of Turkey's business class. In order to complete this historical analysis, the paper particularly focuses on the socio-cultural reflections of factionalism present within the Turkish business class by examining the perceptions contained in various academic and semi-academic accounts, newspaper commentaries and popular culture products that evaluate Turkey's upper-classes, the lifestyles and political engagements of members of different business factions, and the public statements of politicians in Turkey regarding the Turkish business elite.

## **2 First- and second-wave literature on populism: bringing social forces and socio-cultural affinities back into the current debate**

In the last couple of decades, we have witnessed a renewed interest in populism. Most of these studies, with their attention to conceptual clarity and concept building, underline the importance

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upper classes, but rather to businesspeople in the possession of means of production and capital and who employ several or more workers in their businesses.

of either discursive elements (Mudde, 2004; Hawkins, 2010), strategic dynamics (Weyland, 2001), or stylistic components (Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy, 2017) of populism. Although first-wave studies (starting with Ionescu and Gellner's seminal 1969 volume) misleadingly associated populism with certain social classes and stages of development, their efforts to draw attention to the social forces behind the phenomenon should be acknowledged. In contrast, the current focus on the form and content of the populist message and rapport has diverted the attention of students of populism away from the social forces behind the phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> The role of rural segments and radical middle classes in the rise of populism in North America was addressed by first-wave studies.<sup>4</sup> In western Europe, Betz, for example, underlined the fact that in the 1980s and 1990s, radical right-wing populist parties were supported overwhelmingly by "less well educated working- or lower middle-class voters" (1994: 156). More important than this, while conflating patron-client relations, import-substitution economy and populism, some studies from the first-wave literature were at the same time addressing a very important dynamic with regards to populism: the cross-class/group appeals and the coalitions upon which populist movements, parties and leaders relied.<sup>5</sup>

It is surprising to see that while populism is still a cross-class/group phenomenon, this dimension of populism is rarely highlighted in the current literature,<sup>6</sup> since many studies have moved away from more empirical analyses with a focus on the social class dynamics behind the phenomenon in order to focus on the discourse and appeal of populism.<sup>7</sup> Although some schol-

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to the classic volume by Ionescu and Gellner (1969), see also Germani (1978) and Collier and Collier (2002).

<sup>4</sup> See particularly the chapter on American populism by Canovan (1981) and Hofstadter (1969).

<sup>5</sup> See Stewart (1969).

<sup>6</sup> An important exception here is the account of V. R. Hadiz (2016) on Islamic populism.

<sup>7</sup> Studies comparatively analysing the socio-economic and socio-cultural profiles of populist constit-

ars and commentators have paid attention to the obvious irony that certain wealthy populist leaders, such as Berlusconi in Italy, Palmer in Australia, and Trump in the US, have so little in common in socio-economic terms with their low-income, peripheral constituencies, the relationship between upper-classes and populist leaders and parties is still an underexplored phenomenon. Yet, it is enormously important to understand the reasons for this strange chemistry between resource-rich populist leaders (some of whom are wealthy), upper and middle classes and popular sectors. What, exactly, has brought these different socio-economic groups together in a populist movement/party? How are certain segments of the bourgeoisie able to generate populist appeals when promising a better future for the unprivileged, ordinary people? What connects rich populist leaders with their low-income constituencies?

In order to address these questions, in this paper, I embrace Pierre Ostiguy's approach (2017) to populism, which considers the phenomenon as the politicization of the socio-cultural hierarchies and divides in a given society through a populist style and script. Ostiguy defines populism as "the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting in politics of the culturally popular and 'native', and personalism as a mode of decision making" (2017: 84). According to Ostiguy, this stylistic aspect is complemented with a populist script which celebrates the downtrodden, excluded "people from here" against domestic and international elites (2017: 76-77). Therefore, his definition shares core features with other predominant definitions in the literature.

Nevertheless, Ostiguy's approach moves beyond these stylistic<sup>8</sup> and discursive elements

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uencies are limited. For a couple of recent analyses engaged in such an inquiry, see Norris and Inglehart (2019) and Spruyt et al. (2016).

<sup>8</sup> The link that connects Ostiguy's approach to a kind of political sociology of party systems is precisely the fact that he sees populism as something embedded in the populist actors' and audiences' "manners, demeanours, ways of speaking and dressing, vocabulary, and tastes displayed in public" (2017: 78). There

and incorporates the analysis of populism with social divides/cleavages<sup>9</sup> and the formation of party systems. He argues that the distinction between anti-populism and populism (or "high" and "low", as termed by Ostiguy) is orthogonal to the distinction between left and right, and these axes together form a "two-dimensional political space" in many party systems (2017: 77-88). This also means that populism could be combined with left or right and it is independent of ideological and programmatic appeals regarding the distribution of wealth and power. For Ostiguy, while "high" politics stems from a political and historical legacy that aims to modernise or civilise societies from the top, "low" represents a kind of resistance to these "modernizing" or "civilizing" missions. The low is usually in congruence with the historically entrenched and spontaneous cultural inclinations of the masses, which could be religious, patriarchal, nationalistic, nativist, egalitarian, popular, low-brow, non-sophisticated, and so on, in their content (2017: 75-84).

In contrast to Ostiguy's approach, neither Mudde's (2004) minimal definition nor Laclau's (2005) discursive approach nor Weyland's (2001) strategical understanding helps researchers to fully engage in a kind of historically informed analysis that is sensitive to historical resentments and social tensions underlying the phenomenon of populism. This does not mean that the definition and methods proposed by Mudde and Kaltwasser, Laclau or Weyland are inadequate or wrong. In fact, for example, the minimal defini-

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remains only a small step from this point to connect populist style with a kind of socio-cultural habitus embedded in social divisions. See Ostiguy's explanation in Baykan (2018a). Populism can appropriate different divides and it is not necessarily related to social class distinctions in *economic* terms. In my view, populism can also be related to a sense of poverty and/or deprivation in *cultural* or *moral* terms, something widespread among populist actors and audiences.

<sup>9</sup> See a body of literature starting with Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) seminal account and including more recent takes on the issue such as the work by Deegan-Krause (2007), which essentially argue that party systems are based on overlapping and diverging economic, social and cultural cleavages or divides.

tion proposed by Mudde (2004) can be extremely useful in both small-N and large-N comparative studies of contemporary populism.<sup>10</sup> Yet, for an analysis such as the one developed in this paper, which takes a longitudinal view on the development of populism in a single case, it seems indispensable to incorporate the public discourse and performance of populist actors with a social, historical and cultural background narrated through a “thick description” (Geertz, 1993). Hence, Ostiguy’s approach has the potential to develop a historically and sociologically anchored understanding of the phenomenon that does not consider populism as something merely ideational, discursive or stylistic. Therefore, in this analysis, I focus on the socio-economic as well as socio-cultural components of social divides in Turkey by examining factionalism within the Turkish bourgeoisie.

### 3 Factionalism within the Turkish bourgeoisie and its socio-cultural consequences

#### 3.1 Historical background

The initial formation of the Turkish business class in the late Ottoman period paved the way for future factionalism within the bourgeoisie. The ascent of the Turkish business class accompanied a process of, what Brubaker (1995) called, “unmixing of peoples”, in which non-Muslim merchants and businessmen were gradually “cleansed” as a result of the increasingly nationalistic orientation and policies of the Ottoman military and bureaucratic elite. The catastrophes of World War I and its aftermath resulted in the destruction and expulsion of the majority of non-Muslim ethnic groups in Turkey, such as Armenians and Anatolian Greeks. A considerable number of people from these ethnic groups were engaged in trades, commerce and business (Göçek, 1999). The wealth left behind by these populations, as well as their privileged positions in the economy, were subsequently transferred to Muslim merchants and businessmen through

<sup>10</sup> See editions by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) and Hawkins et al. (2018) for this merit of the minimal definition.

the intervention of the political and state elite.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the late Ottoman period and the early Republican era (roughly from 1923 to the middle of the 1940s) represented a phase of rapid rise for a Muslim and Turkish business elite under the auspices of an increasingly nationalistic Turkish state (Atagenç, 2017: 74; Karaveli, 2018).

Yet, the decisive secularist turn of the state during the foundation of the Republic sowed the seeds of a future rift by gradually incorporating the embryonic business class into the secular nation building process.<sup>12</sup> Factions of this new business class close to the secularist ideology and centre of the state enjoyed unprecedented privileges, while peripheral and provincial segments were pushed away by this increasingly secularist state ideology. The rise of the submissive secularist “fat cats” (Cammett, 2005) in commerce, industries and finance during the early Republican era and the incorporation of the first-generation bourgeoisie with a secular metropolitan urban culture started to create an “underdog” business class embracing a conservative and populist worldview.

This recently-arrived business faction (mainly consisting of landowners, small and provincial merchants) turned to the masses and to seasoned populist leaders for the protection of their factional interests. The underdog business faction also embraced a populist and conservative political worldview since “Islam” was the important virtual component of the “Turkishness” that was constructed during the early Republican period (Yıldız, 2001; Çağaptay, 2006). For those elites, the secular nation-building process ignored and belittled this important component:

<sup>11</sup> I would like to point out the importance of the complicity between the first-generation bourgeoisie in Turkey and the state during the Turkification of Anatolia during the first quarter of the 20th century. This was accompanied by a massive wealth transfer from non-Muslim groups to Muslim merchants and was a very crucial moment which transformed Turkey’s business elite into submissive accomplices of the state at a very early stage of their emergence. See Keyder (2003).

<sup>12</sup> See Keyder (2003) for these economic developments.

the “true self” of the nation. Hence, class factionalism and cultural divisions started to overlap and intermingle, creating the cross-class coalitions of “populists” (the political tradition roughly encompassing conservative right to centre-right positions) and “anti-populists” (the political tradition encompassing positions stretching from secular left to secular and liberal right) in Turkey.

From the perspective of political economy, the rift within the Republican People’s Party and the rise of the Democrat Party from within the former, in the middle of the 1940s, could also be seen as an outcome of this class factionalism, which pushed landowners and provincial merchants to defend their rights through a kind of conservative populism that effectively mobilised the poor rural and urban masses (Eroğul, 2014; Karaveli, 2018: 113-123). It is important to note that the organisational and mobilisational capacity of this populist centre-right tradition has largely been linked to its populist style and script, more than to its religious appeal. As the works of Demirel (2004; 2009; 2011) illustrate in rich and vivid detail, vast majorities in Turkey were drawn to the appeal of these new centre-right political parties, to a great extent, due to their cadres’ warm, “humane” (2011: 123) attitude when making contact with the masses, as well as their successful implementation of urban and rural patronage. This contrasts with the highly reserved and bureaucratic approach of the Republican People’s Party elite towards the masses.

After the coup of 27 May 1960, this conservative and populist tradition was inherited by the Justice Party of Süleyman Demirel, who had an extraordinary ability to engage with the low-income and poorly educated sectors of Turkish society (Komşuoğlu, 2007). Although the Justice Party of Demirel was by no means a major opponent of Turkey’s first generation business faction, it helped the second-generation bourgeoisie to grow in major urban centres across Turkey throughout the 1960s and 1970s. After the coup of 12 September 1980 and during the 1980s, the major representative of the populist

centre-right in Turkey was Özal and his Motherland Party. While the Motherland Party was by no means an enemy of secular big business in Turkey either, the party’s liberal policies targeting the dissolution of the import substitution economy of the previous era, in which the state was a major player, mainly benefitted the second generation bourgeoisie (the “underdog”, small- and medium-sized business groups) in Turkey. These groups took advantage of the somewhat more competitive economy of the era and the new opportunities provided by the liberalisation of international trade (Şen, 2010: 71). The economic liberalisation of the era combined well with the colourful and down-to-earth personality of Özal, whose warm and relaxed demeanour in the public space appealed to a cross-class coalition, including the urban poor.

In the 1990s, however, the growth of Turkey’s underdog bourgeoisie found itself under dual pressure when Özal passed away and his Motherland Party lost momentum and entered a period of gradual dissolution. This dual pressure stemmed from both the secularist state elite and the Islamist Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan, whose ideas on economy (or, more precisely, his hostility towards liberal market arrangements) were becoming increasingly alienating for small- and medium-sized conservative business circles across Anatolia (Yıldırım, 2016: 88). Meanwhile, at least from the middle of the 1990s, the underdog conservative business faction in Turkey sought to curb the power of the secular establishment, and its secular big bourgeoisie, by supporting liberalisation and reducing the size of the state (Atasoy, 2009: 118-120). This was one of the factors that paved the way, at the beginning of the 2000s, for the rise of Erdoğan’s JDP (The Justice and Development Party – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) (Jang, 2005), which was strongly supported by the new Islamic bourgeoisie in Turkey and their business association (Gümüüşçü & Sert, 2009; Şen, 2010; Hoşgör, 2011). In a comparative study, Buğra (1998) illustrates the concrete differentiation within the Turkish business class: while the established, secular big business

is organized under the roof of the TÜSİAD (*Türk Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği* – The Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen), the new provincial business faction, which became enriched after the 1980s, is organized under a different business association: MÜSİAD (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği* – The Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen).

Regardless of their sincere beliefs and the factual validity of their claims, the business association of the second-generation bourgeoisie in Turkey always presented the business faction it represented as the hard-working Anatolian entrepreneurs who have always been treated unfairly by the secular state and big business. As Lord observed: “MÜSİAD ... has typically asserted that it represents Anatolian national capital, a bottom-up social (Muslim) movement in a Muslim society that it claims has been deprived of access to resources previously dominated by minority, monopolistic İstanbul rentier capital that comprises an elitist group of secularist Kemalist bureaucrats and big business and that are dependent on state patronage. Narratives of victimhood pervade the body’s discourse, with MÜSİAD’s journey being described as a ‘painful walk from periphery to the centre’ while facing discrimination and being impeded by the Kemalist elite and centre” (2018: 176). In fact, the second generation business elite or the “new Islamic bourgeoisie” in Turkey explained the rationale behind the presence of MÜSİAD vis-à-vis TÜSİAD through a distinction between “the people” and “the elite”, and by presenting themselves as the representatives of the “Anatolian people and lower strata” in the business world against the “elitism of the İstanbul capital (*İstanbul sermayesi*)” (Yankaya, 2014: 103).

The worldview of the second generation bourgeoisie and their material expectations of Erdoğan’s JDP led this class faction to incorporate itself into Erdoğan’s populist project.<sup>13</sup> The

<sup>13</sup> For the populism of the JDP, see Dinçşahin (2012), Yabancı (2016), Çelik and Balta (2018) and Baykan (2018b).

rise of the JDP was, after all, based on a very well organised party structure across Turkey that penetrated into the smallest corners of the country (Baykan, 2018b). This organisation facilitated a large and all-encompassing clientelistic network across Turkey. Apart from the economic growth registered during the early phases of JDP rule and Erdoğan’s highly convincing populist style, these clientelistic networks were also key to the party’s success, and crucial, therefore, for protecting the interests of Turkey’s underdog business factions. As Esen and Gümüşçü (2017) and Lord (2018: 202) illustrate, in return for privileges in state bids and other business-related regulations that particularly benefit small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs, second generation bourgeoisie in Turkey financially supported the JDP’s clientelistic networks by pouring money and aid in kind into waqfs, religious charities (Göçmen, 2014) or party branches, to be distributed to the urban and rural poor.

Here, the importance of these underdog businessmen sharing a common socio-cultural background and habitus with their workers and “clients”<sup>14</sup> cannot be stressed too much. Academic monographs based on detailed ethnographic research and interviews documenting the rise of the “Anatolian tigers” or “the underdog business faction” in Turkey demonstrate the painful childhoods of these emerging “patrons” spent in poverty and in grim working conditions (Cengiz, 2013). As a result, these businessmen were well aware of the problems and expectations of low-income and poorly educated constituencies and had a kind of natural affinity with the populist style of Erdoğan and the JDP. In addition, these upper-class elements of Turkish society had the advantage of “speaking the same language” (Cengiz, 2013: 163-164) as their “clients” and subordinates, and of being able to convert them to a “hegemonic project” that was not entirely working to their benefit (Tuğal, 2009).

In contrast, the first generation bourgeoisie,

<sup>14</sup> The term “client” here refers to the literature on patron-client relations.

after a phase of “primitive accumulation”, so to speak, under the auspices of the state elite, started to take their privileges for granted as they obeyed the secularist state and powerful politicians.<sup>15</sup> Hence, it was never a viable or necessary strategy for the first generation bourgeoisie to construct grassroots clientelistic networks or actively engage in politics by explicitly supporting parties and politicians. Although the first generation bourgeoisie have not been harmed during the JDP’s rule, more recently, they have started to feel less and less secure in economic terms as power is concentrated in the hands of Erdoğan and as the judiciary has lost much of its independence after the transition to the presidential system (T24, 2019). This has recently driven Turkey’s first generation bourgeoisie to engage more pro-actively in politics.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2 A closer glance at the socio-cultural dimension of factionalism within the business class: “cultured fat cats” against “parvenues”

The historical background briefly described above gave rise to socio-cultural factionalism within the Turkish bourgeoisie. On the one hand, throughout the Republican period, the first generation of the secular bourgeoisie, or the “fat cats”, who were supported by the Kemalist regime, became gradually detached from their provincial origins and located in big cities, particularly in İstanbul. The country’s secular bourgeoisie became increasingly incorporated into the secular nation building process. Although they carefully refrained from any explicit association with the Republican People’s Party,<sup>17</sup> they represented the Kemalist

<sup>15</sup> See Buğra (1995; 1998) for the submissive attitude of the first-generation bourgeoisie in Turkey in relation to the state elite and politicians.

<sup>16</sup> One of the leading members of the Koç family visited İstanbul’s newly elected mayor from the Republican People’s Party after the contested election result, even though the family was well aware of the fact that the JDP government was preparing to appeal against the election results (Habertürk, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> The submissive public attitude of the first-generation secular bourgeoisie in their relations with the populist rule of the JDP should be discussed in this

ideals of Republican citizenry with an emphasis on their cultural capital in their daily lives. For example, regardless of the factual consistency of his portrayal of the *nouveau riche*, İshak Alaton, a member of Turkey’s first generation secular bourgeoisie expressed the following view of the second-generation bourgeoisie, highlighting the socio-cultural component of factionalism within the Turkish business class:

Those in the first group know a few languages. They are cultured, they are into fine arts and classical music. They contribute to Turkey’s image as a developed country. They are philanthropists, they are tolerant... [For the second generation bourgeoisie] financial power is at the forefront. They try to counterbalance their lack of culture with generous gestures, by spending a lot of money... They mistreat waiters and frequently insult service personnel. Their watches have thick golden straps ornamented with jewellery. They frequently wear a wide open shirt and you can see their thick golden necklaces (as cited in Bali, 2002: 39-40).

In contrast, the most prominent representatives of the country’s secular bourgeoisie, the Koç and Sabancı families, gradually directed their economic capital into cultural investments, and, in recent decades, have become formidable patrons of arts and sciences. Koç and Sabancı families support numerous museums and art events, and, more importantly, they have financed two high-quality private universities: Koç and Sabancı Universities. The leading figures of these families have started to be perceived as part of Turkey’s high culture. For instance, a member of the Koç family who had started to appear in the ruling

context. Public figures from Koç and Sabancı families frequently appear in newspapers and on TV reluctantly confirming government policies or cautiously criticizing them. Yet, I also think that in these cases, the “hidden transcripts” (the views that the first-generation bourgeoisie cannot state publicly) are entirely different. It is also remarkable to see the zealous support for government policies among the second-generation bourgeoisie, provided by figures such as Galip Öztürk. Such an attitude is entirely lacking in the first-generation bourgeoisie, who, time and again, do not shy away from upsetting the JDP government by commemorating Atatürk through high-quality advertisements in newspapers and on TV.

bodies of the Koç Group was welcomed by columnists in the secular media:

Ömer Koç graduated from Robert College high school and studied at Columbia University in New York, completing an MBA at the same university. He lives in London and İstanbul. ... He knows English and French and has a serious collection of French literature. At his home, there are pictures of great artists, such as Egon Schiele and Francis Bacon, as well as a huge collection of İznik ceramics (Eğin, 2016).

On the other hand, there was a silent capital accumulation process in Anatolia during the 1970s and 1980s, by which time the country's secular bourgeoisie had already accumulated a considerable amount of influence and fortune and started to transform their economic resources into cultural and symbolic capital. Increasing urbanization and industrialization in Turkey brought new waves of entrepreneurs to Turkish cities. While some of these entrepreneurs came from an already rich stratum of traditional local elites, such as large landowners, some of this new small-scale entrepreneurial class consisted, at the beginning, of poor immigrants in the country's medium-sized and large cities. Within a generation or two of their emergence, they had acquired great wealth through commerce, and subsequently through small-scale production in many medium-sized cities across Turkey and in İstanbul. Unlike the gradual growth of the secular bourgeoisie (or "fat cats") over decades and under state protection, these new and relatively small businesses and their owners rapidly found themselves with considerable wealth and influence while lacking cultural and symbolic capital.

This rapid rise and the mismatch between the economic and cultural capital of these new entrepreneurial groups generated some deeply rooted stereotypes in Turkish culture following the 1960s. The country's secular bourgeoisie, as well as the urban upper and middle classes that had been rooted in cities for several generations, looked down upon this so-called *nouveau riche* (*türedi*) faction of the Turkish bourgeoisie. After the 1960s, the country's brightest artists began

focusing on the rise of this so-called *parvenue* (*sonradan görme*) class. One of Turkey's most talented directors, Ömer Lütfi Akad, depicted the typical story of a provincial entrepreneurial family which migrated to a big city and enlarged its business through small-scale retailing in the 1970s. From the point of view of a young bride in the family, the movie *The Bride (Gelin)* tells the dramatic story of how this large family, consisting of an older mother and father and several married sons with children, accumulated its capital. The plot underlines the fact that while the family achieved its ambitions by expanding its business, this was accomplished at the cost of the life of a family member due to greed and a narrow-provincial outlook which disregarded the health complaints of the bride and the child. Hence, capital accumulation processes that Turkey's second generation bourgeoisie went through have disturbed the country's cultural elite and, despite acknowledging the diligence of these "provincial" (*taşralı*) entrepreneurs, a certain hostility towards these segments of the bourgeoisie has prevailed among Turkey's secular, urban upper and middle classes.

The new Islamic wealth created during the JDP era has also been looked down upon and evaluated with contempt by the secular upper and middle classes. For example, an architect who decorates the houses of the new Islamic bourgeoisie describes their taste as "extravagant, exaggerated, Arabic" (T24, 2009). Considering this new wealth and the tastes these segments have embraced, one of the columnists of the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, the bastion of secularist high culture in the Turkish media, does not even want to refer to these segments as bourgeois: "To be bourgeois is an elegant undertaking, which is not a suitable description for those who lack culture, experience in arts and living, who lack refined tastes moulded throughout centuries" (Aral, 2012). As highlighted by this comment, the contempt of the secularist upper and middle classes for Turkey's new bourgeoisie is obvious. Yet, it should also be mentioned that this socio-cultural rift between the first-generation bour-



geoisie and the second generation, rather more pious, business class also usually overlaps with the secular vs. religious, central-urban vs. provincial-rural separations. In this analysis, however, I am not embracing the centre-periphery paradigm (Mardin, 1973), as I agree with the criticisms drawing attention to its culturalist and dualist approach to Turkish politics (Açikel, 2006) that solely focuses on the contestation over religion (Çınar, 2006) and its reductionist understanding of the concept of “state” (Navaro-Yashin, 1998). In fact, the socio-cultural rift that I highlight in this analysis extends beyond the contestation over religion and is not always and necessarily related to a struggle around the state. In the next part, I will take a closer look at some representatives of the business class that demonstrate the socio-cultural divide within the bourgeoisie in Turkey.

### 3.3 Turkey’s “low” bourgeoisie that indirectly supports the JDP: Ağaoğlu

In order to see the cultural resonance between the second-generation bourgeoisie and populism in Turkey, in this section, I would like to take a closer look at a specific example. Ali Ağaoğlu is a popular media figure and a business tycoon specialising in real estate development in İstanbul. Ağaoğlu comes from a provincial region on Turkey’s eastern Black Sea coast, famous for its street-smart, small-scale constructors. Although Ağaoğlu has no explicit political engagements with the JDP, he does not shy away from publicly praising the party (*Ensonhaber*, 2012), and his relations with Erdoğan, thought to have provided him with certain advantages in his investments, have been highlighted by an opposition deputy in Turkey’s Grand National Assembly (*Sol*, 2012). Moreover, his rise to prominence, and to the status of a popular media icon, overlapped with the rise of the JDP drawing on a highly convincing populist style/appeal. Building on his father’s fortune, Ağaoğlu enlarged his real estate construction business during the JDP years.

Ağaoğlu, a married man, often features in Turkish tabloid headlines with his various luxury

cars and new girlfriends who are much younger than him. Unlike the country’s first generation bourgeoisie, he enjoys showing off his fortune. For instance, he has emptied his pockets and counted his money on a live broadcast on CNN Turk and has many times caused sensation by what he says in interviews that belittle women (Türk, 2011). Although most of the JDP elite would refrain from such showy lifestyles that include extramarital relations, Ağaoğlu’s tastes and pompous demeanour strikes a chord with the new public and official symbols and spaces created by the JDP and Erdoğan, such as the sumptuous new Presidential Palace. Not surprisingly, Ağaoğlu has always been received with visible hostility by Turkey’s urban secular upper and middle classes. In the secular liberal media, he is usually depicted as a *nouveau riche* who lacks manners and taste. It is apparent that, socio-culturally, there is a huge gap between this new type of wealth and power and that of Turkey’s well-entrenched secular upper and middle classes, who have been established in the country’s big cities like İstanbul and Ankara for several generations.

### 3.4 First-generation bourgeoisie takes matters into its own hands – and fails: Boyner

The relationship between the bourgeoisie and politics in Turkey is, of course, not restricted to populist movements indirectly backed by the second-generation bourgeoisie. In the middle of the 1990s, the country’s traditional secular bourgeoisie flirted temporarily with party politics when Cem Boyner, from a well-known family of textile industrialists in İstanbul (Öğüt, 2013), decided to lead a political organization called the New Democracy Movement (*Yeni Demokrasi Hareketi*). At that time, Boyner was in his late 30s. He had been educated at the country’s most prestigious colleges and universities, such as Robert College and Boğaziçi University. He successfully managed his father’s businesses during the 1990s and 2000s and chaired TÜSİAD.

When Boyner founded the New Democracy Movement with the backing of some of the

country's prominent liberal intellectuals such as Cengiz Çandar and Asaf Savaş Akad, Boyner's liberal democratic agenda was received with enthusiasm by Turkey's secular-liberal media. The Turkish political scene in the 1990s was characterized by the diminishing popular appeal of centre-right parties alongside the general decline of the legitimacy of the political system. The rise of this new party was seen as a promising possibility among the liberal intellectual circles. Boyner, after all, was not only a well-educated person committed to liberal values, but he was extremely telegenic too. He was handsome, fashionable and representing the ideals of Turkey's upwardly mobile urban middle classes in the 1990s in every respect. He was also a true Istanbulite gentleman with his manners, accent and taste in clothing (Bali, 2002: 190-194). Nevertheless, despite the support of Turkey's mainstream liberal media, the New Democracy Movement could only attract 0.5% of the vote in the 1995 general elections, and later on lost momentum and disappeared from the political arena. The quick fall of the New Democracy Movement illustrates that the kind of appeal that Boyner had is a liability more than an asset in Turkish politics. As Bali emphasizes (2002: 194), the majority of the electorate in Turkey attaches great importance to "candor" and a plebeian political style that resonates with the tastes of Turkey's lower classes. Moreover, personalism is more important than abstract ideological narratives (Baykan, 2019). In contrast, Boyner's political movement identified itself as an anti-populist force in Turkish politics which had a thick liberal doctrinaire content.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4 Conclusions: populism and the upper-classes in Turkey and beyond**

In this paper, I have examined the relationship between populist politics and the bourgeoisie by focusing on the case of Turkey. Although, many studies highlight the role of "popular sectors" or

"social groups who feel left behind by a cultural shift"<sup>19</sup> or "poor and excluded segments", very few studies have examined the role of the upper classes in the phenomenon of populism. In this attempt, I have put a strong emphasis on the role of upper classes, more precisely, the business elite, and proposed to investigate the roles of resource-rich social segments in the rise of populism. I have pointed out the role of intra-class factionalism within the bourgeoisie, which distinguishes between well-established, globally connected, old business classes and new, smaller, more national or provincial bourgeoisie. I have demonstrated that the underdog bourgeoisie is prone to financially and organisationally support populist leaders and parties, as well as these leaders' and parties' clientelistic networks, in order to protect their class-factional interests through political patronage.

Based on the leaders and movements analysed so far, it is also clear that it is not only the socio-economic position of these figures but the appeal/style of the leader and his/her socio-cultural resonance with the populist audience and supporters -including the "underdog bourgeoisie" and "popular sectors"- that is key. Populist audiences have no major problem with socio-economic inequalities as long as there are no widespread feelings of economic insecurity (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), but they are more worried about being pushed aside socio-culturally as a result of socio-economic change (Gidron & Hall, 2017). It is even possible to argue that populist audiences and supporters enjoy the leadership of a strong man with economic resources who speaks the language of the poor and the excluded, and who embraces "plebeian mannerisms" and tastes.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising to observe that populist audiences are so resistant to corruption accusations against their "leader." Populist audiences often enjoy how the leader "gets around"

<sup>18</sup> See Mahçupyan's analysis (1994), which juxtaposes the New Democracy Movement against Turkey's populist traditions, in an edition published by the New Democracy Movement.

<sup>19</sup> See Norris and Inglehart (2019).

<sup>20</sup> This part is based on the psychoanalytical dynamic highlighted by Ostiguy in an interview. See Baykan (2018a).

the official system and they may even be happy to think that the leader is getting stronger against the “establishment”. Hence, these populist leaders emerge, in the eyes of populist audiences, as modern, national-scale “patrons”, “caudillos” or “aghas/sultans” who appear to possess the resources to protect their supporters and solve their problems. Moreover, these “national-scale patrons” extract resources from culturally similar resource-rich upper-class sectors, or from “small patrons”, in return for favours and privileges for their businesses, and redistribute these resources to their poor constituencies through charities and party branches.

Thus, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to understand the upper-class component of the populist politics of our age. Without the personal or financial involvement of social sectors with considerable economic resources, such as new business elites, the populist projects of our age would have been remarkably weaker. As such, future research should focus more seriously on the elite component of populism to better understand the global rise of populism and the democratic backsliding related to this wave.

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