Revisiting Second Image Reversed: Lessons from Turkey and Thailand

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This article draws attention to some surprising similarities between the recent political trajectories of Turkey and Thailand in order to argue that international norms strongly shape domestic cleavage formations. The timing and the manner of incorporation of particular states into the international system affects not only their political and economic development, but also the way various domestic groups see their mission, their identity, and their opposition. In both Turkey and Thailand, what development has brought is neither the opposition between traditional status groups and the market generated social forces, nor the tradition/religion-based opposition to modernization and democracy that is typically assumed to mark developing societies. What we find in both cases instead is a modernization-generated statist/bureaucratic social middle class that justifies its skepticism of democratization on the basis of norms upheld by the international society itself.

Last decade’s developments in Turkey and Thailand have separately attracted attention from observers, but the surprising similarity between the political trajectories of these two countries has gone unnoticed. This article draws attention to some overlooked commonalities in order to argue that the international system affects not only the political and economic development of particular countries, but also how various social groups understand their own identity and characterize their opposition. More specifically, in the case of countries that were incorporated into the Western international society at a (particular) later date, domestic cleavages reproduce frames of social hierarchy from the international system, especially the supposed distinction between modernity vs. backwardness.

The argument that the international system shapes domestic politics has a long and respectable pedigree in classical political science and sociology. This literature was effectively summarized in a 1978 International Organization piece by Peter Gourevitch, who grouped various approaches studying the effects of the international system under the heading “second image reversed.” In that article, Gourevitch looked at two types of arguments about how the international affects the domestic: those that focus on the international economy and those that focus on the state system. Under the first heading, Gourevitch included Gerschenkron (1963), approaches such as those of Moore (1966), Hirschman (1971), and O’Donnell (1973); theories of dependency (Gunder Frank 1967), most notably that of Wallerstein (1974); the liberal development school; scholars of interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1971; Morse 1976); and state-centered Marxists (Baran and Sweezy 1968; Magdoff 1969) and neomercantilists (Gilpin 1975). Under the second heading, Gourevitch discussed classical realism approaches from IR and sociology, such as that of Hobbes and Bodin but also Otto Hintze (1975) and Perry Anderson (1974). In the intervening thirty years, some of the currents of thought that Gourevitch identified in 1978 became more influential, and others less so. Overall, however, even though most of the research programs identified are still active, in the years since Gourevitch’s seminal article, the distance between the subfields of international relations and comparative politics grew more, not less. For instance, due to the ascendancy of Waltzian neorealism, state system approaches lost interest in domestic politics for the good part of the past three decades. Whatever the reasons, they are beyond the scope of this article, which is instead concerned with another area where studying the impact of the international on the domestic can be fruitful: the realm of ideas, culture, and identity.

This is also the one area Gourevitch bracketed off originally—even though he did concede that it “requires careful consideration” (1978:883). Following the cultural turn in political science, the 1990s brought about

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2 For example, McCargo (2002, 2005, 2008a); Insel (2003); Ozel (2003, 2007); Tepe (2005); Thitinan (2001, 2006); Kazmin (2007); Kitti (2007, 2009, 2010); Monegasano (2007); Surin (2007); Baran (2008); Connors (2008); Thongchai (2008b); Samuels (2010). It has to be said, however, that Thailand is under-studied for a country of its size and significance (and interestingly, such was the case for Turkey until recently as well).

3 This is not to be taken as a blanket statement that all latecomers are shaped the same way. For more on differences caused by timing of incorporation, see Zarakol (2011a).

4 Under this heading, Gourevitch directs the reader only to the review of diffusion theory provided by Michael Hechter (1976), but we may perhaps also include W.W. Rostow ([1960], 1990) here, as well as most literature on economic development with a liberal bent.

5 One exception is his brief discussion (Gourevitch 1978:895) of the work of Franz Schurmann (1974).
renewed interest in the power of macro-level sociocultural patterns. The most famous example of this trend was Samuel Huntington’s (1996) “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, the influence of which was amplified after it was adopted as an explanatory framework for the attacks of September 11, 2001. In fact, when Gourevitch (2002) himself revisited the issue of ideas in IR in a post 9/11 essay, Huntington’s framework was the first he name-checked (Gourevitch 2002:74). The various problems with the “Clash of Civilizations” thesis are well covered (see, for example, Gershman 1997; Matlock 1999; Gourevitch 2002; Sen 2002), but for the purpose of exploring the second image reversed relationship from an ideational angle, two weaknesses are worth re-mentioning: the treatment of religion (as civilization) as a monolithic and static form on the one hand, and the reductivity of the argument on the other. This was a rather deterministic understanding of the ideational dimension of the international system.

Given such shortcomings, it is unfortunate that it should be this particular approach that is enjoying such a high moment in the zeitgeist,⁶ and not the growing body of literature that takes the impact of the social aspects of the international system on domestic politics seriously without falling back on essentialist tropes. This body of work, which focuses on the socializing effects of the international system, pulls together scholars working in a number of different strands, such as constructivism, historical sociology, the English School, sociological institutionalism, critical theory, and even postmodernism, and shares a general concern of moving beyond the positivist and materialist accounts in mainstream IR to understand the great degree of homology that exists among states in modernity, beyond what is predicted by the thin model of socialization implicit in neorealism. We may count under this loose heading works as varied as that of Ruggie (1993), Reus-Smit (1999), Bukovansky (2002), Hobson (2002), Hobson and Sharman (2005), Suzuki (2008), and my own (Zarakol 2011a,b), among many others.⁷ At first glance, the label second image reversed may not seem applicable to this literature because most of it concerns how the international society shapes states as actors in the international society and is less focused on domestic implications. However, once we move beyond the thin model advanced by neorealism, discussions of socialization inevitably involve penetrating changes to domestic institutions, politics, and ideas.

It is this particular effect of the international society on domestic institutions and cleavages I explore in this article, through a comparison of Turkey and Thailand. The modern international system has a particular history, a history that includes standards of “civilization,” colo-nialism, mandate regimes, etc. Elsewhere (Zarakol 2010, 2011a), I have argued that the manner of incorporation of some Eastern territories/states to the Western international society was traumatic in a particular way depending on when and how they were incorporated and that particular trauma often got cemented in national psyches of non-Western states that had enough autonomy and domestic coherence to start nation-building at the time of incorporation. I have also argued that such insecurities can get (almost) infinitely reproduced and have demonstrated that they continue to influence foreign policy choices even in the present day. This article takes a step further by demonstrating that social hierarchies of the international system influence not only the state’s behavior in the international society but also constellations of domestic politics, especially social class identity formation.

Throughout the article, when I refer to “social classes,” I do not utilize the term “class” in the Marxian sense of being determined solely by division of labor or property ownership, but rather in the Weberian sense to include both economically determined class condition (as controlled mainly by distribution) and honor/lifestyle-based status groupings (Cox 1950:224). Weber (1968) noted that in societies where market rules are not in full operation and rather controlled by convention, culture, and rules of conduct, the result is a rigid social stratifica-tion and monopolistic appropriation by status groups. However, even under capitalism, status groups may emerge as the basis of acquisition and distribution become stabilized, and naked class situation becomes visible only in periods of great economic transformation. This is also in line with how Bourdieu envisioned class; he understood it in a space of social relations rather than in relations of production. Economic power (or lack thereof) is not in itself constitutive of class: “rather, the distribution of power is produced and sustained through the practices of classes constituted by shared conditions of existence and the shared dispositions engendered by shared conditionings” (Brubaker 1985:762); power could be accumulated through economic or cultural capital. Bourdieu defines social class as “biological individuals who, being the product of the same objective conditions, are endowed with the same habitus; social class (in itself) is inseparably a class of identical or similar conditions of existence and conditionings and a class of biological individuals endowed with the same habitus, understood as a system of dispositions shared by all individuals who are the products of the same conditionings” (Bourdieu 1980:100, as cited by Brubaker 1985). This is the definition that will be used throughout this article, where in both contexts the focus is on middle classes broadly de-fined—and the primary distinction is between a state-generated, older, urban middle class, and a newer middle class formed by policies of recent economic liberalization.

By focusing on the middle-class wars in Turkey and Thailand, my goal is to show that the timing of incorpo-ration to the international system affects not only political and economic development patterns, as Gerschenkron and Moore, among others, have famously argued, but also how as a result, the normative standards of the interna-tional society shape the way various domestic groups see their mission, their identity, and their opposition. In “late-developing” countries such as Turkey and Thailand, the manner of incorporation into the international system did result in state-led development, as predicted by classical approaches (Gerschenkron 1963; Moore 1966; but also O’Donnell 1973; Evans 1979). Preoccupied with the problem of “catching-up” with the West and distrust-ing the ability of the organically constituted bourgeois classes (even to the limited degree that they existed in the first place) to undertake such a task, the Turkish and Thai developmental plans relied heavily on the state as the engine of development. During the guided transition from agricultural economies to “modern” industry, these states created their own middle classes, which

⁶ The various “dialogue of civilizations” approaches may also be included under this heading since they suffer from the same problems. See Kayaoğlu (2011) for an overview of such approaches.
⁷ See, for example, the World Polity School such as Meyer and Jepperson (2000) or new generations of English School scholarship such as Keene (2002).
consisted of bureaucrats (including military officials) and others employed or funded by the state, as well as their relations who shared their worldview. Both in Turkey and in Thailand, it is this group, this middle class associated with the state, that has now become distrustful of the democratization and liberalization processes under way since the 1980s, sometimes actively seeking military interruption to the political process. Given the insights from classical international political economy, perhaps it is not surprising that there should be statist middle classes who are not particularly enthralled with democracy in “late-developing” countries such as Turkey and Thailand, but there is a twist here that traditional materialist accounts miss. What makes these middle classes in “developing” states especially interesting is that they justify their skepticism of democratization with appeals to reason, modernity, and even the concept of democracy itself.

For reasons that have much to do with the manner and the timing of their country’s incorporation into the international society, these groups subscribe to a developmentalist, modernist, “gardening” view of the state. This worldview also includes an image of the country as belonging to the modern, civilized, advanced part of international society—hence these groups always frame their motivations along values they associate with the “modern” norms of the international society. For instance, they claim (and not necessarily sincerely) to value “democracy” just as they are welcoming military intervention. These middle classes use education and lifestyle privilege as shorthand for distinguishing between themselves and others whom they define as ignorant, traditional, and unfit to rule. Obviously, the observation that status groups practice exclusionary closure is in itself not a novel insight (see, for example, Murphy 1983, 1984; or Elias and Scotson [1965] 1994), nor is the fact that education, which is supposed to instill rational/modern values such as critical thinking and independence of mind, may be used as a lifestyle marker to protect group privilege (Bourdieu 1984). However, the particular manifestation of this dynamic in developing contexts is an underexplored avenue for understanding the impact of the international system on domestic contexts.

There are two significant variations created by the particular relationship countries such as Turkey and Thailand have with the international society. First, given the timing and manner of their incorporation into the international system, these countries have charted a developmental path that is separate from both Western European economies and the formal colonies of such countries. As a result, social forces in Turkey and Thailand do not replicate the patterns of Western Europe, but nor do they follow the trajectory of more traditional economies imposed on by formal colonialism. More specifically, in both Turkey and Thailand, what development has brought is not the opposition between traditional status groups and the market-generated social forces, nor the tradition- or religion-based opposition to modernization and democracy that is typically assumed to mark developing societies. Rather, what we find in both cases is a modernization-generated statist/bureaucratic middle social class that opposes democratization on the basis of norms upheld by the international society itself.

Second, precisely because these middle classes were made in the image of a certain modernist type of state that was defined in its origins by its relative aspirations vis-à-vis the West, unlike status groups in traditional or pre-capitalist societies, they are vulnerable to the pressures brought to bear by the shifts in the international normative order. Because the identity of these middle classes revolves around a mission of modernization and enlightenment, they have not been able to reject economic and political liberalization entirely, especially against the changing backdrop of the international society, which increasingly denotes such outcomes normative. In that sense, they were their own gravediggers and only now are realizing it: It was an outcome of such past policies of liberalization that “the new bourgeoisie” came on the political scene in both Turkey and Thailand, giving rise eventually to the governments of Tayyip Erdoğan and Thaksin Shinawatra. Given the developmental trajectory of both Turkey and Thailand, the “new bourgeoisie” tends to hail from the previously neglected rural areas and shares cultural values with the urban poor and the peasants.

This article is divided into two parts. First, I provide an overview of the unexpected similarities between the recent political trajectories of the two countries. The second section analyzes these similarities against the backdrop of the international social environment, demonstrating the myriad of ways the pressures of international society have shaped domestic divisions. As will be demonstrated, what is left out of the traditional materialist accounts is identity: The social hierarchies in the international system continuously get reproduced in domestic politics in countries such as Turkey and Thailand whose manner of incorporation brought about a preoccupation with modernity and civilization. This identity divide, which mimics the identity dichotomies that existed throughout the history of the modern international system, is as much of an obstacle to Turkish and Thai democratization processes as any economic divide, and certainly more than religion or other reductive variables.

Comparing Turkey and Thailand

Studies of Turkish politics tend to be focused inwardly, eschewing comparisons with other countries except as a metaphor. Analyses of Thai politics are not particularly different, which perhaps has something to do with the fact that both Turkish and Thai state narratives emphasize uniqueness and shun comparisons even with nearby states. This section is motivated by an opposite conviction: even the most unexpected comparison can be illuminating, especially if the goal is to understand the

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8 A Zygmunt Bauman: for example, “The modern state was a gardening state” (Bauman 1991:20); “I suggest, further, that the bureaucratic culture which prompts us to view society as an object of administration, as a collection of so many ‘problems’ to be solved, as ‘nature’ to be ‘controlled’, ‘mastered’ and ‘improved’ or ‘remade’, as a legitimate target for ‘social engineering’ and in general a garden to be designed and kept in planned shape by force (the gardening posture divides vegetation into ‘cultured plants’ to be taken care of, and weeds to be exterminated), was the very atmosphere in which the idea of the Holocaust could be conceived, slowly yet consistently developed, and brought to its conclusion” (Bauman 1989:18).

9 Closure is a Weberian term describing the process “whereby one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group of outsiders beneath it that it defines as inferior and ineligible” (Murphy 1983:23).

10 There are some exceptions of course—with regard to Thailand, after noting the Thai reluctance for comparison, Montesano (2009:231) points out that “The single noteworthy exception to this aversion to comparative perspectives on Thai history has concerned Japan.” Benedict Anderson (1978:197–198) has also noted a similar reluctance with the Japanese exception (Horowitz 2004:446, note 5). Urban middle-class Turks compare themselves favorably to Iran, and negatively with Europe.
complicated relationship between the international and domestic.

The 1990s were a tumultuous decade for both Turkey and Thailand, marred by coalition governments unable to complete full terms. The decade was capped for both countries with severe financial crises, the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997 for Thailand and the 2000 economic crisis for Turkey. Both of these crises made IMF a significant influence in the respective economies, and governments too closely associated with the initial shocks of both the crises and the IMF recipes bore the brunt of the criticism from the public (Haggard 2000:131–132). In Thailand, some stability was achieved after the 2001 elections, when Thai Rak Thai party (TRT) gained the majority of the votes under the leadership of Thaksin Shinawatra. TRT controlled the majority of the seats in the Thai parliament and was able to form a majority government with Thaksin at the helm as prime minister. In Turkey too, the 2000s brought a respite from the unstable coalition governments. In the 2002 elections, AKP, which was founded less than a year earlier, gained 363 seats in the parliament, enough to form a majority government (Tepe 2007:108). AKP had been founded ostensibly as a center-right party by Tayyip Erdoğan and others who had earlier belonged to the reformist wing of Virtue Party, which had been dissolved in 2001 by the Turkish Constitutional Court for Islamic activities against the constitution. Both leaders pursued aggressive policy agendas in their first terms, to the growing anxiety of the establishment (Bowornwathana 2004; McCargo and Zarakol 2012). The rest, as they say, is history. Both Thaksin and Erdoğan faced a series of massive protests from the urban middle class. Thaksin was overthrown in a military coup in 2006. Erdoğan weathered an alleged coup attempt, but his party was nearly dissolved by the Turkish Constitutional Court in 2008. TRT’s successor party was dissolved by the Thai Constitutional Court, essentially placing the old establishment party back in power for a brief period. Both countries remain highly polarized at every level of society, though recently in 2011 both Erdoğan and Thaksin (via his sister) have commanded major electoral victories. Both TRT and AKP rose to power under the leadership of charismatic, self-made men who had prior troubles with the law. Thaksin was a businessman who had started his working life in the police force. Erdoğan had risen from a very humble background and had also engaged in successful ventures, especially after he was barred from active politics in 1998. Erdoğan was accused of a secret Islamist agenda to overthrow the secular government. Furthermore, both leaders had made questionable statements about their utilitarian understandings of democracy. Thaksin declared that “democracy was merely a ‘means’ to the more important end of creating wealth and prosperity for the poor” (Kazmin 2007:218). Erdoğan similarly declared democracy a train one rides only until his destination.

The TRT and the AKP also faced common political enemies: In both Thailand and Turkey, military intervention was desired by a sizable segment among the educated, urban, and middle-class citizens (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2007:4–7; Peterson 2007; Tavernise 2007; Tavernise and Arsu 2007; Carlson and Turner 2008; Thongchai 2008b:26–7). The TRT (and its later reincarnations) also drew support from a similar base (Funston 2002:306; McCargo 2002:116,120) as the AKP in Turkey. Both the TRT and the AKP gained immediate popularity with the masses through their policies, which combined a degree of economic neoliberalism with general populism, designed to appeal to the urban poor and the rural peasants, pouring government funds to regions and neighborhoods previously neglected. The way economic decisions were handled, with serious economic crises fresh in everyone’s memory (initially), gathered the support of industrialists and businessmen as well, especially the newcomers ushered in by economic liberalization (McCargo 2002:116; Tepe 2005:71; Patton 2006:514; Hewison 2007:955; Kazmin 2007:219). In other words, social forces in both Turkey and Thailand have lined up in remarkably similar constellations: The military, civil bureaucracy, urban middle class, and traditional business elites are for the most part on one side11; the new industrialists, the provincial voters, and urban poor on the other (Funston 2002:306; McCargo 2002:116–120; Insel 2003; Tepe 2005; Kazmin 2007:214; Kitti 2007:873), and the intelligentsia remains divided (Thongchai 2008a,b).

TRT’s popularity with the peasants put Thaksin in direct competition with the monarchy, which had fashioned its own image as the patron saint of the poor. Since 1973, the Thai monarchy has carefully cultivated an image that depicts the monarch as sacredly above politics, the protector of the poor, and democratic (Thongchai 2008b:21). The king has been strongly associated with rural development projects, which were intended “to wean the peasantry away from the influence of the Communist Party of Thailand” as part of a so-called “sufficiency economy” pushing the idea “that the poor should make do with their lot” (Hewison 2007:938). These programs were more appealing to urban leftist intellectuals than they were to peasants, who preferred TRT’s populist projects that delivered some tangible and immediate results. There were three main reasons behind the royalists’ discontent with Thaksin: (1) Thaksin had been aggressively wooing rural voters, who were traditionally seen as the king’s key constituency; (2) he had been advising the poor that capitalism could solve their plight, in direct contrast with the Buddhist moderation that the king had long preached (Kazmin 2007:212); and (3) given King Bhumibol’s advanced age, there were serious fears that Thaksin imagined himself a kingmaker (Thongchai 2008b:30). While there is no monarchy or royalism in Turkish politics, it could be argued that the monarchy occupies a similar role in Thai politics as to that filled symbolically by Atatürk in Turkish politics. In

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11 Unfortunately, space does not permit a detailed retelling of the political developments in Turkey and Thailand, so I direct the reader to Figure 1, as well as footnote 1. There are other similarities besides those mentioned here, most notably the insurgency problem (see, for example, Caballero-Anthony 2000:35–37; Croissant and Pojar 2006:187; Croissant 2007; Kazmin 2007:220; Baran 2008; McCargo 2008b; Thitinan 2008; Ockey 2009; Uwee 2009; Warr 2009; Stephens 2010).

12 One of the chief mechanisms of closure utilized by the old establishment in both Turkey and Thailand has been judicial interference in politics. However, in both Turkey and Thailand, this method is decreasing in utility. The Turkish Constitutional Court, despite censoring the AKP, did not dare dissolve it, whereas in the Thai case the dissolution of TRT proved a very short-term solution for the establishment, as recent election results show. For a discussion of judicial closure and its limitations see, for example, Hirschl (2009); within the Turkish context, see Belge (2006); within the Thai context, see McCargo (2008a,b).

13 Under the leadership of Erdoğan, the AKP won the 2011 Turkish General Elections with 49.85% of the votes. Under the leadership of Yingluck Shinawatra, the Phue Thai Party (a TRT successor) won the 2011 Thai General elections with 48.41% of the votes. See McCargo and Zarakol (2012) for a comparative discussion of the 2011 Turkish and Thai elections.

14 The role of the palace in the Thai coup should not be discounted either, but will be discussed later.
other words, both are generally above reproach, thanks to the lese majesté laws which make it a serious crime to offend the person of the monarch in Thailand or insult the memory of Atatürk in Turkey. The royals’ and intellectuals’ fears about the privatization of monarchy in Thailand were echoed in Turkey by fears about the AKP’s undermining of secularism and unitarism, two values closely associated with Atatürk’s legacy. Just as the TRT undermining of secularism and unitarism, two values closely associated with Atatürk’s legacy.15 Just as the TRT undermining of secularism and unitarism, two values closely associated with Atatürk’s legacy. The royalists’ and intellectuals’ fears about the privatization of monarchy in Thailand were echoed in Turkey by fears about the AKP’s undermining of secularism and unitarism, two values closely associated with Atatürk’s legacy. Just as the TRT undermining of secularism and unitarism, two values closely associated with Atatürk’s legacy.

Essentially, what the old middle classes in both Turkey and Thailand fear is the loss of state identity as they know it, whether defined by a certain understanding of monarchical and its mission in Turkey or by Kemalism and its mission in Turkey. Studies show that both in Thailand and in Turkey, education and income are negatively associated with support for (electoral) democracy (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2008:51–52; Üstel and Caymaz 2009). A survey in April 2006 found that 81.8% of the general population was either “satisfied” or “highly-satisfied” with the Thaksin government, whereas Bangkok respondents were very much divided: “over 75% of Bangkok voters were located at the extreme ends of a continuum in support for, or opposition to, a military coup” (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2008:58). Similarly, most of the highly educated respondents surveyed by Üstel and Caymaz in 2008 preferred that the AKP be dissolved through whatever means possible, even as they expressed doubt that party dissolution was compatible with democratic values (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2008:39; see also Bayramoğlu 2006:104). What is especially noteworthy about these democracy-skeptical old middle classes in both Turkey and Thailand, however, is that for reasons that have to do with their country’s placement in the international system, they cannot bring themselves to entirely eschew...
democracy as a model, notwithstanding their distaste for electoral reality.

This is why it is unlikely that criticisms of Thaksin’s rural populism alone would have sufficed to get middle-class, “progressive,” and intellectual support for the coup, had it not been for the corruption charges. Thaksin was considered to be “the epitome of corrupt politicians,” a perception not at all helped by his sale of the Shin Corporation to the Singapore government. It is not that the corruption charges were necessarily fabricated, but rather that they seemed to be used selectively only against certain politicians such as Thaksin. There is no reason to believe that Sondhi, the businessman who helped organize the mass rallies after deserting Thaksin and turning royalist, is any less (or more) corrupt for having had his road to Damascus moment.16 As Thongchai explains, the “discourse of clean politics” emerged in Thailand during the political and economic liberalization of the 1980s (Thongchai 2008b:24). This discourse is championed especially by the urban middle class and the mass media outlets they control. As a result, a perception has been created that corruption is a particularly severe problem in Thailand, much worse than exists elsewhere. This perception is limited to the urban middle class; the rural groups believe corruption to have decreased under Thaksin (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2008:49). Thongchai summarizes the views of the urban middle class on corruption and its relation to democracy: they believe that “(i) politicians are extremely corrupt; (ii) politicians come to power by vote-buying; (iii) an election does not equal democracy; and (iv) democracy means a moral, ethical rule” (Thongchai 2008b:25). It is not hard to see how such a view can lead people to support a military intervention in the name of saving “real” democracy. Munger (2007:474) notes that “urban, educated Thai now seem to mistrust democracy precisely because rural Thai embrace it uncritically and without expectation of controlling their corrupt political representatives.”

The concern over vote-buying is in many ways a concern about mass participation. The urban middle class believes that vote-buying is rampant and that the blame falls on the less-educated and poor voters in mostly rural areas, who lack good morals, who are ignorant and uninformed (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2008:50; Hewison 2007:940) and therefore “allegedly sell their votes in exchange for short-term and petty material benefits.” (Thongchai 2008b:25). Within the discourse of clean politics, the poor masses are “held to be infected by the disease” whereas the urban educated middle classes are depicted as “champions of democracy whose task it is to clean up politics” (Thongchai 2008b:25). The possibility that the rural and the urban poor may be acting rationally by rewarding corrupt politicians who deliver results over a patronizing bureaucracy and elite politicians is dismissed. In this way, the discourse of clean politics allows supporters of the coup to legitimize it as an action against a regime that was not truly democratic.17 Thaksin’s government was supposed to be an “electocracy” or “monetocracy.” This is not to say that vote-buying does not exist in Thailand or is a completely fabricated concern; to the contrary, “[v]ote-buying has been a well-known feature of Thai elections since the 1970s” (Hicken 2007:145). What is noteworthy, however, is the increasingly prevalent framing of the issue by the old middle class as a crisis in lieu of any recognition of Thaksin’s societal base.

The Turkish old middle class is no different. Though as in Thailand corruption charges are often wielded against the AKP as if the AKP invented corruption in Turkey, the favored frame of the Turkish urban middle class concerns not corruption, but Islam. The AKP is often accused of buying votes not only through its populist projects, but also by exploiting the religious sensitivities of the rural peasants18 and the urban poor (many of whom are recent immigrants from rural areas in search of work). Just as in Thailand, the masses are portrayed as backward, ignorant, uneducated, traditional know-nothings who are not informed enough to appreciate what the Turkish state has done for them (through its modernization program) and are therefore easily swayed by petty material gifts and irrational religiosity. During the 2007 election, a popular image perpetuated by the elite Turkish media was that of the typical AKP voter as “a man scratching his belly.” Invented by the op-ed columnist Bekir Coşkun, who has a considerable following among urban middle-class Turks, this image depicts the typical AKP voter as someone who spends his day in pajamas. These voters, Coşkun argued, do not watch the news but only entertainment shows, do not read books or newspapers. They consult the imam at the mosque for finding the holy book recommends for a particular situation. Their most profound thought about leaders is “He is a Muslim, and their only opinion about democracy is “he can steal if he delivers results.”19 Such caricatures dismiss any possibility of rational motivations among the AKP supporters.

Another rhetorical device used against both the AKP and the TRT is the rhetoric of nationalism and anti-globalization. For instance, Thaksin’s sale of the Shin Corporation was criticized not only as a symptom of his corruption, but also because the buyer was a foreign government (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2008:57). Even though the left in Thailand collapsed as a serious political force a long time ago, there is “a lasting legacy of opposition to capitalism and imperialism which remained strong in discourse at least, even as it turned more conservative” (Thongchai 2008a:588). Over time, this anti-capitalist position has come to be expressed in more nationalist terms; globalization is supposed to represent a new round of threats from the West, a repeat of the experience of the nineteenth century. This type of thinking gained a lot of currency in the wake of the 1997 Asian crisis. It could be argued that the leftist of the last century and the populist of the last decade are both offspring of the official historiography of the Thai state.20 McCargo (2001:99) notes that two types of populist thinking became popular post-1997: one that blamed the West for Thailand’s problems and another that saw redemption in a return to agrarian roots. Interestingly, 18 And not surprisingly, many observers view Sondhi simply as an opportunist.
19 Whether or not it was is beside the question.
20 See Zarakol (2011a) for an extended discussion of how seemingly discordant political movements may still be shaped by the same national habitus.
both strands “closely resembled official Thai nationalism, replete with elitist and statist rhetoric” (McCargo 2001:99), mixing it with a romanticized evocation of the Thai people. Whatever their true ideological origins, in the more extreme versions of such nationalist-populist-leftist approaches, advocating liberalization of trade is equal to treachery. In this telling, the newly emerging bourgeoisie, the new industrialists, such as Thaksin, are the agents of forces that have been trying to undermine Thai sovereignty for over a century. The monarchy, the bedrock of Thai nationalism, becomes the only seat of salvation as the symbol of true Thai essence. This construction made it possible for former leftist and activist NGOs to lend their support to a military intervention staged ostensibly to save a noble monarch from corrupt agents of anti-Thai forces.

Just as in Thailand, some former leftists have joined forces in Turkey with the nationalist right in common criticism of the AKP (in a movement known as ulusalçılık). The AKP is alternatively seen to be a project of the United States to spread “moderate” Islam in the region or a hapless agent of Western forces that have been trying to undermine Turkey since the nineteenth century. AKP’s 2009 “Kurdish Overture” was criticized by both the statist CHP and the ultra-nationalist MHP as a completely unacceptable act of treason that the AKP was executing at the behest of the United States. The urban middle class sees itself as superior to the masses and is suspicious of a system that gives the power to such people. If the West is pushing such a system, it must be because it is trying to undermine the achievements of the Turkish and Thai states in the face of Western competition. As the next section will show, these are very old anxieties of the Turkish and Thai states in the face of international society, now recycled as social class antagonisms.

Explaining the Similarities: Second Image Reversed, Once Again

It is not surprising that social classes affirmed by the state would try to hold on to their privileged position by attempting to practice closure, which is precisely what the urban middle classes are attempting to do in Turkey and Thailand. What is interesting about the Turkish and Thai cases is the presence of groups who are opposing democracy, a valued norm in the international system, based on appeals to rationalism and enlightenment principles, other norms also valued by the international order. This has much to do with the way these countries were incorporated to the international system.

Elias noted that in the universal dynamic of the established-outsider, the established think of themselves as vastly superior to the outsiders, and perceived the outsider to be anemic (Elias and Scotson 1994: preface). Outsiders are often characterized as untrustworthy, undisciplined, lawless, dirty, and also as having loose morals (Elias and Scotson 1994:124–125). The “established” are not powerful because of merit—they generate their own power because they have been around longer and therefore form a more closely knit community with a self-policing normative order. Weber had also pointed out that status groups guarantee advantages through monopolization based on lifestyle criteria. Bourdieu observed that “positively privileged status tends to develop a distinctive style of life” and that “positively privileged status groups tend to legitimize their privilege through the cultivation of a sense of ‘natural’ dignity and excellence” (Bebraker 1985:761).

In the sociological literature, the concept of “status stratification” is generally applied to societies where closure is practiced based on “irrational” lifestyle markers. In fact, status groups tend to be associated with traditional societies and generally believed to be undermined by modernization. Therefore, the greatest irony of the modernist–developmentalist state projects in the “semi-periphery,” is the generation of status groups who have an urban middle-class appearance and who speak the discourse of positivism, merit, rationality, and enlightenment while exercising lifestyle closure. These groups are now at odds with the new bourgeoisie generated and empowered by the wave of liberalization post-1980s. In this section, I explore how this development came to manifest at the same time in countries seemingly as different as Turkey and Thailand, with an account that takes the materialist explanations seriously but also underlines the ways the identities of various groups were shaped by system-level normative standards.

There is a direct relationship between the timing of the onset of a country’s industrialization attempts and the type of state–society relationship exhibited after modernization. As historical sociologists (for example, Gerschenkron 1963; Moore 1966; see also Wallerstein 1974; Stavrianos 1981) have argued, missing the First Industrial Revolution was costly—for most of the world, it translated to a fate of colonization after the onset of the Second Industrial Revolution. Even in European areas that were not threatened with colonization because of the legal protections offered by “the Standard of Civilization,” late industrialization had political costs. In countries that had benefitted from the First Industrial Revolution, the capital investment needed for the new steel, chemical, and electrical plants was provided by capital monopolies that emerged from the consolidation of the smaller enterprises from the previous era. In late comers to industrialization, such smaller enterprises did not exist or were not sufficient in numbers to provide a base for competitive monopolies—hence the enlarged role for state investment in the industry in, for instance, Prussia. Considering that the long march toward democratization in Western Europe was a long series of consolidation of power around a centralized modern state alternating with concessions of rights to the middle class created by the simultaneous advance of capitalism, the timing of the rise of the bourgeoisie versus the rise of the modern state was crucial. The more autonomous the capital was before the late nineteenth century, the better the prospects for constraining the rise of the modern Leviathan. The prevalence of fascist governments among such late(r) industrializers has been well observed in the historical sociology literature.

21 The fact that Thaksin himself is depicted as an unreliable Sino-Thai and other times as someone with shady links to Singapore, Cambodia, and the Middle East (McCargo, personal communication, June 18, 2011).

22 Thaksin was sometimes depicted as an unreliable Sino-Thai and other times as someone with shady links to Singapore, Cambodia, and the Middle East (McCargo, personal communication, June 18, 2011).

23 I use this term to denote areas outside of the West that were not formally colonized. In the sense it is used here, “semi-periphery” is interchangeable with the nineteenth century zone of “semi-civilization.” See Zarakol 2011a for an explanation.

24 My focus on examples and literature focused mostly on development in Turkey and Thailand should not be taken to imply that the argument applies only to these two countries, but rather as a reflection of space constraints.
In Western Europe, prior to modernity, central states were relatively weak and territorially limited. Kings regarded their kingdoms as their private domains, but their right to levy taxes was constantly challenged by nobles who raised their own armies. The emergence of capitalism changed this dynamic. The surplus generated by capitalism allowed Specialists of coercion to be bought off with the tax revenue, shifting power to the economic realm and civil society, and, at the same time, making European states much more powerful as violence-wielding apparatuses—that is, the emergence of the Westphalian state. Away from the conditions that precipitated the endogenous emergence of these institutions and social forces, however, the trajectory was different. Moving outside of Europe, what we find elsewhere at the end of nineteenth century (aside from colonies) are a handful of traditional states who were politically viable enough to maintain a degree of legal autonomy (however compromised), but whose economies generated limited tax revenue and were subject to a high degree of European intervention. These were survivors from the agrarian age, varying in size and form, but most were dealing with the legacy of loose imperial structures and tributary relations. Such states traditionally tended to be more removed from society. There were fewer intermediary structures between state and society even if worldviews were more hierarchical formally. As a result, the ability of these states to take the lead in heavy industrialization in a manner comparable to even their Eastern European counterparts was also constrained. The beginnings of capitalist activity at the societal level in such countries had already been undermined by European competition (see Zarakol 2011a for a review, but see also Karpat 1972:247), as well as by the relative strength of the state prior to this development (Mardin 1973). Generally speaking, in any area that was able to withstand (however meekly) the European onslaught of the nineteenth century, there had existed in pre-modernity a state that was stronger than its European counterparts (of that time) vis-à-vis the “civil society” and the merchant classes. For instance, because there was no feudal jurisdiction to diffuse the power of the Ottoman state, it was strong enough to protect the gilds against the monopolistic practices by merchants (Mardin 1969:261). Such state intrusion had the effect of dampening capitalist activity in the area.

By the time centralization presented itself as unavoidable (and urgent) in order to withstand European military pressure, it was natural to conclude that, given the conditions in place, the economic sphere could “legitimately” be sublimated to political goals. Furthermore, unlike Western European states that emerged from a previous state of weakness into a position of strength, Asian sovereigns remembered glorious pasts (Goldstone 1987), did not owe their hold on power to capitalist activity, and were therefore unlikely to concede the necessity of an autonomous bourgeoisie. Yet they did clearly see the need for military and bureaucratic centralization. This is why the dominant pattern among the (semi-)autonomous states outside of Western Europe in the nineteenth century is the creation of powerful bureaucratic elites and not the advancement of liberalism.

Because in the twentieth century military bureaucrats in most of these countries came to control the state and to fashion state identity as a consequence, the presence of (emergent) capitalist groups in non-Western states during the nineteenth and early twentieth century has been downplayed in historical accounts that provide the basis for state identity, rendering capitalist activity as suspect and foreign, even in the present day. Nationalist modernizing bureaucrats (wherever they may be) frame their endeavor as one that was motivated by enlightenment goals to rescue a traditional society from superstition. In such a telling, the struggle is one between modernization as represented by the modern bureaucrats and backwardness as represented by traditional elites. What gets obscured in these nationalist narratives is the extent to which the rise of the “gardening” bureaucrats in the semi-periphery came at the expense of organic manifestation of modern capitalism and how whatever proto-bourgeoisie that had come to exist in these places were destroyed in the name of modernity.

I summarize what is well-trodden ground because the state–society relationship in a given country cannot be examined in a vacuum—it has to be understood in a context of the evolution of both the normative standards of international society and world capitalist system. While the experience of Western Europe has led many to conclude that “modernization” and “democracy” should naturally go hand in hand, there is in fact quite a bit of dissonance between these two goals for late entrants to international society, and that dissonance has been built into modern state identities as an existential tension. As discussed above, in Western Europe, sovereigns had no choice but to compromise with various segments of society over time to centralize power, whereas in the East by the time the necessity of creating a modern state had been internalized by leaders, competing sources of power (once a distraction and perhaps a potential servant) seemed only to stand in the way and doom the country to semi-civilization or even barbarity.

The reaction of both Ottoman and Thai rulers to European encroachment in the nineteenth century was to “modernize” the state (Ahmad 1968; Mardin 1969; Reynolds 1976; Thongchai 1997, 2008a; Gilrind 1982; Wyatt 2003; Lynch 2004; Horowitz 2004), by organizing a modern bureaucracy and establishing a modern army. Both monarchies also entertained notions of constitutional reform and democratic representation. The Ottoman monarchy fares better in this regard, with two periods of constitutional monarchy and six elections before the collapse of the empire in 1918, but Thai historiography also credits the absolute monarchs before 1932 as having prepared the country for democracy (Thongchai 2008b:13). In the Ottoman case, these reforms culminated in the twentieth century in the formation of the Committee on Union and Progress (CUP), a political party made up of military and bureaucratic elite, which came to rule the empire in its last decade through both legal and extralegal means (Mardin 1971:200–201; Akarlı 2006). The CUP increasingly worried about the backwardness of the society that they were trying to rule, precisely because their

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25 See Zarakol (2011a,b) for an overview of relevant literature.
26 For any of the following reasons: because the economic pie itself was small; methods of revenue collection were inefficient; outside intervention in the revenue stream, etc.
27 For example, the Ottoman Empire vs. Russia.
28 Even though the literature on Thailand paints a weaker Thai state, Englehart (2001) argues that this is an overstatement.
29 Space does not permit for detailed treatment of the perverse effects of the standard of civilization on later entrants to international society, but I refer the reader to my earlier works, as well as Hobson and Sharman, Keene, Suzuki, etc.
goal was to centralize and modernize the empire in order to catch up with and gain recognition from the Western international society. What the CUP faced in domestic opposition was a coalition of all disparate elements threatened by the state’s urgent drive toward centralization and assimilation, including but not limited to the new provincial economic players, such as landed notables, merchants and traders, Muslim and non-Muslim, who wanted decentralization and for the government to serve their interests by protecting property and the freedom of enterprise (Ahmad 1968:20–22; Mardin 1969:267; Karpat 1972:244, 251–2, 256–60). The provincial peasants had always been skeptical of the central government as represented by the palace and now became even more so due to the secularizing worldview emanating from the CUP (Mardin 1969, 1973). However, all that the CUP saw in this disparately motivated group were obstacles to its program of positivism and enlightenment. The opposition to the CUP, the laissez faire, anti-centralization Liberal Party was painted as a house of at best dimwitted but more likely treacherous “liberals” by not only the CUP but later also by the official historians of the modern Turkish republic (more on this in a moment). After the collapse of the empire in 1918, the CUP gave way to Atatürk and his followers, many of whom were entrenched in the CUP worldview. Atatürk abolished the monarchy in 1922 and proclaimed the new Turkish Republic.

In Thailand, similarly, the modernizing reforms produced in the twentieth century “a new elite of bureaucrats and military officers who overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932” (Lynch 2004: 350; see also Girling 1982: chapter 3), but were not quite successful as their Turkish counterparts in displacing it altogether. The 1932 revolution was initially led by Phibun Songkhram and the military wing of the revolutionaries against the royalists. However, once Phibun solidified his grasp on the power, liberal revolutionaries who had initially supported him turned against him and struck a deal with the royalists instead, which was also a short-lived alliance. The military dominated Thai politics from 1947 until 1973, with brief forays into electoral politics: “between 1949 and 1951 under the royalist constitution that gave power to the Privy Council; between 1955 and 1957 when Phibun tried a more open politics to gain popular support against his military rivals; and between 1969 and 1971 when a parliamentary system was under military supervision” (Thongchai 2008b:15; see also Wyatt 2003: chapter 9).

In Turkey, the military ruled indirectly until 1950 through the single-party rule of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), founded by Atatürk, staffed by former military officers and other bureaucrats. With the transition to multi-party democracy in 1950, the opportunity arose for the various segments of society thus far neglected to take part in governance. The center-right Democrat Party, which quickly rose to power, was backed by agricultural landlords, new industrialists, and the rural peasants. None of these groups were particularly radical, but they were not completely on board with the state’s modernization program either. In any case, after a decade of DP rule, the military intervened in the name of protecting Atatürk’s legacy and the modern republic (Karpat 1970). The next two decades were marked by coalition governments, and the democratic process was interrupted twice again by military intervention, once in 1971 (when the governing party had to step down under military threat) and more significantly in 1980. In Thailand, between 1947 and 1973, the bureaucratic elite had less to fear from entrepreneurs and their political allies, because the military controlled the state, with only brief forays into electoral politics (Thongchai 2008b:15–6).

Yet these are nuances in what turns out to be a very similar big picture. In other words, the parallels of the last decade between the Turkish and Thai political trajectories are nothing new once we take the long view of the “development” of both countries. In fact, there are so many similarities between Turkish and Thai experiences throughout the twentieth century that such commonalities can only be explained by taking a second image–reversed approach that is also sensitive to the impact of ideational constraints of the international society (see Figure 2).

In both Turkey and Thailand, then, we have the same pattern, with slight variations in degree and timing: Both countries experienced the growing encroachment of European society of states as more or less autonomous entities and had rulers increasingly concerned with catching up to the West and overcoming the problem of retardation vis-à-vis the Western civilization. In the nineteenth century, both countries were discriminated against by the international society and given only partial legal recognition as “semi-civilized” entities. The withholding of full recognition was traumatic for the elites in these countries not only because it undermined the power of the state in a material way but also because the elite came to internalize the judgment of inferiority (Zarakol 2011a). In other words, in the nineteenth century, both the Ottoman and Thai empires faced great material and ideational pressures from the international system.

Their responses are similar as well: First, in the name of catching up with the West, the monarchy creates a centralized state at the expense of the provinces. The centralized state is bolstered by a new status group consisting of both military and civilian bureaucratic elite with a very specific worldview that is, the gardening attitude of the modern state official as discussed by Bauman. This

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30 Even more ironically, much of the “traditional elite” of the Ottoman Empire had been created by the modernizing reforms of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, especially the Tanzimat. In an attempt to bring the Ottoman Empire in line with Western norms, the Tanzimat reforms made subjects into citizens, which meant that the Sultan could no longer confiscate fortunes of officials upon their death—hence the emergence of a property elite. This allowed the creation of both a “traditional” landed notable and a bureaucratic elite (Mardin 1969:277,1971:200–201). The CUP later rebelled against this first class of bureaucrats because most of the CUP were from humble backgrounds and found it difficult to advance in a hierarchy clogged up by officials’ sons.

31 It is also important to underline that most of the new market/trade benefiting groups in the Ottoman Empire happened to be non-Muslim, living in the West of the empire, swept away by the new winds of nationalism and likely harboring secessionist sympathies. This made such proto-bourgeoisie even more suspicious to the bureaucrats who were desperately trying to centralize the empire in attempt to keep it together.

32 Although the CUP was not a mass party, they exploited the fear of the bureaucrats and produced in the twentieth century “a new elite of bureaucrats and military officers who overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932” (Lynch 2004: 350; see also Girling 1982: chapter 3), but were not quite successful as their Turkish counterparts in displacing it altogether. The 1932 revolution was initially led by Phibun Songkhram and the military wing of the revolutionaries against the royalists. However, once Phibun solidified his grasp on the power, liberal revolutionaries who had initially supported him turned against him and struck a deal with the royalists instead, which was also a short-lived alliance. The military dominated Thai politics from 1947 until 1973, with brief forays into electoral politics: “between 1949 and 1951 under the royalist constitution that gave power to the Privy Council; between 1955 and 1957 when Phibun tried a more open politics to gain popular support against his military rivals; and between 1969 and 1971 when a parliamentary system was under military supervision” (Thongchai 2008b:15; see also Wyatt 2003: chapter 9).

33 How and why this concern comes to be the number one preoccupation of elites outside the West is a rather complicated story. See Zarakol (2011a) for an extended discussion.

34 The fact that they have developed various coping mechanisms to deal with such judgment, for example, the Thais imagining themselves as “honorific Europeans,” is not a negation but rather a corroboration of this point.

35 I do not mean to imply a functionalist understanding of state behavior—but the room to maneuver is limited. See Zarakol (2011a) for a discussion of the range of options in the face of such pressure.

36 See Herzfeld (2002:905) for a discussion of the “gardening” mindset of the Thai state. See also Johnson (2006:161–162). The Turkish worldview was discussed above.
bureaucratic elite then turns on the monarchy (to some extent). The bureaucrats of Turkey were more radical than their Thai counterparts—but the earlier transition to constitutional monarchy and then the dissolution of monarchy altogether in 1922 within Turkish context can be attributed to the Ottoman proximity to Europe (and its pressures) as well as involvement in World War I. Thailand was spared of those influences for a while longer, even though demands in Thailand for a transition to a constitutional monarchy were well underway before 1932 (Thongchai 2008b:14; see also Handley 2006 for an historical overview of monarchy–bureaucracy–military relations in Thailand). In either case, both Turkey and Thailand came to be ruled (chiefly) by military–bureaucratic elites in the second quarter of the twentieth century, and it is these elites that created the first middle classes of Turkey and Thailand in their own image. Both countries lacked a vibrant bourgeoisie to begin with, and as discussed above, they sacrificed whatever such groups existed prior to the twentieth century to the altar of modernization and centralization. There was no sizeable working class because both Turkey and Thailand remained primarily agricultural economies until after World War II. After the war, both countries experienced relatively rapid economic growth, led very much by the state and following ISI policies (see Doner 2009). In Thailand, the Sino-Thai entrepreneurs were instrumental in this growth, but they were under the thumb of the military government, which withheld rights from the Sino-Thai as a means to defend its own dominance (Pasuk and Baker 2008). The important point is that both Turkish and Thai states created their own winners in industry, while remaining generally aloof to rural areas.

The real recipients of state favor were the urban middle classes who embodied the ideal citizen norm. Members of the urban middle class worked in mostly low-level government jobs in state bureaucracies, schools, hospitals, and state-controlled economic enterprises, which were extensive in number in both countries until the 1980s. Ideologically, they embraced the new principles of modernization around which the new national identity had been fashioned. They supported and legitimized the new state, just as they were supported and legitimized by it. After 1980, both Turkish and Thai politicians were radically transformed due to economic and political liberalization. Afterwards, “the new bourgeoisie” started to emerge as a sizeable group out of rural populations who were now taking advantage of the opportunities in the private sector. At the same time, while the number of people directly employed by the state has steadily decreased since economic liberalization, many young urban Turks and Thai are products of families that fit this profile and/or continue subscribing to the same worldview about modernity and civilization. Currently, it is these two social classes, the old and the new middle class, that are clashing in both Turkish and Thai politics. The ideational dimension of this supposed class conflict should not be dismissed, because there is a direct link between how these first middle classes see the new middle classes created by the liberalization policies after 1980 in both Turkey and Thailand, and the anxieties of the modernizing elite in the face of end of nineteenth century international society.

As discussed above, instead of being seen as agents of modernization that they were in Western Europe, the merchant classes, local proto-capitalists, and the bourgeoisie were treated with disdain by the modernizers of the sphere of “semi-civilization.” Because they resisted centralization, they seemed to be torpedoing the modernization efforts of the bureaucrats—which rendered them treacherous in the eyes of the modernizers. Such a trajectory put modernization and democratization directly at odds in the semi-periphery in a way that they never were in Western Europe. Any attempt to liberalize, decentralize, and to assert pluralism threatened the “gardening” state and its civilizing mission and hence was an act of sabotage. Furthermore, these are not simply prejudices of the past, but were integrated into national historiography—even today the state historical narratives continuously recycle these anxieties.

After the military–bureaucratic cadre of Kemalists established the modern, secular Turkish Republic in 1923, they downplayed the degree to which Ottoman politics had been pluralistic and representative (Kayal 1995:265) and instead emphasized the picture of a backward, religious society in need of immediate rescue. In the twentieth-century official framing of Turkish history, which is taught in schools to this day, the CUP faced opposition from selfish Sultans, religious mobs, ignorant masses, non-Muslim traitors, and traditional elites who simply wanted to capitulate to the Western powers (see, for example, Ahmad 1968:29). It was supposedly these internal enemies who kept Turkey out of its rightful place among the civilized countries of international society (see Zarakol 2010, 2011a), brought about the end of the Ottoman Empire, and it was only because of Atatürk and his deputies (first as military men, later as statesmen and bureaucrats) that Turkey was set back on the right course for modernization and the population elevated from backwardness (Yalman 1973:153–154).

The Thai case is not that different. In Thai historiography, it is not so much the military and the bureaucracy that get credit for the modernizing effort in the face of great backwardness, but rather the monarchy (the military gets some credit by proxy, especially when it works with the monarchy): “the endlessly repeated images of the monarch traveling through remote areas, visiting the altar of modernization and centralization. There is no doubt that “the new middle class” in Turkey is more developed and more sizeable than its counterpart in Thailand. Nevertheless, this paper rejects the more common frame of characterizing Thaksin supporters as rural villagers, rather. They are very similar to AKP supporting new middle classes in aspiration and self-description. See Naruemon and McCargo (2011).

See, for example, Göle (1997); Gülalp (2001); Pasuk and Baker (2004); Connors (2007); Tepe (2007).

In a sense such is also the case with the Turkish military—they are respected to the degree that they claim mantle of Atatürk.
walking tirelessly along dirt roads, muddy paths and puddles, with maps, pens and a notebook in hand, a camera and sometimes a pair of binoculars around his neck, are common” (Thongchai 2008b:21; see also Handley 2006). Despite many times hindering the development of Thai democracy, the monarchy gets credit for supposedly helping Thai democratization along, which is then believed to have faltered throughout much of the twentieth century because the people were not yet ready. As discussed earlier, the Thai monarchy occupies a similar symbolic place in state narratives as Atatürk does in Turkey, and both are seen to be both “above” politics and beyond any reproach. Just like the Thai monarchy, Atatürk is also given credit for preparing Turkey for democracy because during his rule, he twice allowed the formation of an opposition party (only to shut them down later). Forays into multi-party rule (before 1950, and also later) are considered to have failed because people were not yet ready. Pictures of Atatürk, among the people in Western attire, teaching the new alphabet are similarly ubiquitous in Turkey. These are images of men on a civilizing, gardening, and enlightenment mission and are quite reminiscent of colonial dynamics of the nineteenth century (see Mitchell 1991), except for the fact that they involve national heroes. The discourse about the people not being ready for democracy also calls to mind the nineteenth-century standard of civilization, or the tiered categorization of the League of Nations Mandate system regarding the fitness of various peoples for self-rule.

The members of the old middle classes cherish such images, because such images affirmed the privileged place of the state-created bureaucratic middle class by defining this social class as the enlightened, civilized, and educated group among a population that still needed to be elevated by the state, once again replicating the international social hierarchy between the West and others (Zarakol 2011a), except this time in domestic politics (Özyürek 2006; Thongchai 2008b). This is why there is quite a bit of irony in the fact that “leftist” thought in both Turkey and Thailand implicitly embraces this “civilizing” mission. Thongchai (2008a) discusses the troubling racism implicit in much of leftist, supposedly progressive Thai political thought. Yalman (1973:155) notes that many Turkish leftists were unhappy with the transition to multi-party democracy in 1950. Their problem with Kemalism was not its authoritarianism, but rather the belief that it did not go far enough to reengineer a conservative, religious, unequal society. The village institute policy of the 1940s is still remembered fondly by many leftists (Baran and Şahn 2008), which strikes an interesting parallel to the idealization of the Thai village in the leftist “Chattip School” of Thailand (Thongchai 2008a). However, the real nostalgia the urban middle classes (of left or right leanings) feel is not for the essence of an imagined Thai or Turkish village, but what Özürek (2006) calls “the modern”—a time, in fact a “Golden Age,” in the beginning of national “awakening,” where the state, whether embodied by the symbolism of Atatürk or the Thai king, unabashedly and unapologetically carried on its modernizing vision to the masses and continuously reaffirmed the group charisma of the enlightened ones in the process. There is also the fact that given the norms and standards of the international society, many in these groups sincerely believe in this modernizing/civilizing mission of the state and are skeptical of the designs of the new bourgeoisie.

Conclusion

To sum up, while it is indisputable that the current climate of political polarization in Turkey and Thailand stems to a great degree from material concerns and the reluctance of a formerly powerful social class to give up power in the face of recent empowerment of formerly disenfranchised segments of society, focusing on material motivations alone paints a partial picture at best. On the other hand, it is also a mistake to focus on local cultural variables alone, attributing the polarization in Turkey to political Islam and the situation in Thailand to urban-rural divides or corruption. These labels mask deeper patterns of stratification that can be more usefully compared. The structural view gives us a better understanding of what is at stake in both Turkey and Thailand by illuminating the degree to which both countries have been shaped by their earlier interactions with the modern international system, and the complicated—not to mention complicating—ways “modernizing” norms originating in Western center of international society have diffused and continue to do so throughout the world.

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