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In 2002 the *AKP* (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice- and Development Party) won the nationwide elections (34.28%) in Turkey and is still ruling.¹ This sudden success was surprising to most commentators as the party was founded only one year before. The party defines its political concept as “*Muhafazakar Demokrasi*” (Conservative Democracy).

In my MA thesis, which was published in November 2010, in the series “Studies on the Modern Middle East” (Klaus Schwarz Publishers, Berlin), I have tried to examine the AKPs political concept and to put it in relation to their political praxis. Nevertheless, I think that the success of the party can not be explained sufficiently by an analysis of national politics. Therefore in my doctoral thesis I examine the municipal politics of the party comparing two central Anatolian cities (Konya and Eskisehir) showing their connection between party, society and economy. My research follows two main hypotheses:

(1) Context has a strong influence on the behaviour of actors. In addition, the success of AKP is grounded in the ability to adapt itself to the local context and to develop a political language corresponding to it.

(2) In her investigations on the municipal politics of the *Refah Partisi* in Istanbul in the 1990s, Jenny B. White has shown how interaction models from a village context were used for communication between party and population. I presume that AKP is using these and other related interaction patterns. In conclusion, the success of the party would be attributed to a successful “(Re) Invention of Traditions”, that means the recreation of village traditions in a new, urban context.

Starting from *Bourdieu's Habitus* concept I use theories of context research to examine the influence of context criteria on the behaviour of the actors. As actors I define (1) the party as a “thought unity” towards society and (2) actors within the party or in its periphery such as mandate holders, leaders of women's departments and youth departments, regular party members or related activists.

¹ See Belgenet, „3 Kasım 2002 Seçimleri“, <http://www.belgenet.com/secim/3kasim.html>, 21.02.2009.

I am interested in the ways of interaction and political language the party chooses vis à vis the population. Does it “translate” or “adapt” its political message to local norms? How does it work together with other social actors like party related organisations, business associations or religious and ethnic groups or use existing networks for a promulgation of its political message? Do female networks play a decisive role in interacting with society?

Concerning the actors within the party I follow Özbuduns categories of political participation.

The aim is to characterise

- which forms of participation occur
- which identifications / motivations are involved / decisive
- to which personal and social aims engagement is connected
- to what extent context influences political action? Does context “reduce” or “simplify” political decisions? Which context qualities are decisive for motivation and action?

As, unfortunately, research on questions of interaction between parties-networks-society in the Middle East are limited in Germany, I would be more than happy to get in contact with international PhD students to present my topic, exchange experiences and share information.