

**Muslims in modern Turkey: Kemalism, modernism and the revolt of the Islamic intellectuals.** By Sena Karasipahi. London & New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2009, pp. 247. ISBN 978-1-84511-783-2.

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The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led to the emergence of secular modernist movement that tried to uproot Islamic tradition in the Turkish modern nation-state. The *Kemalist* ideology, introduced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, imposed modernity and embarked on the abandonment of Islam as a traditional belief and worldview. *Muslims in modern Turkey: Kemalism, modernism and the revolt of the Islamic intellectuals* explores this development in the Republic of Turkey and the factors that led to the evolution of the new stream of Islamic intellectuals in 1980s that revolted against the modernization project established by the *Kemalist* modernist elites and intellectuals. The major objective of the book is to discuss the factors responsible for the emergence of the Islamic intellectuals, their beliefs and thoughts.

The first chapter explores the internal and external factors that led to the emergence of the Turkish contemporary Muslim intellectuals and their increasing influence. Among the internal factors are the inability of Atatürk's educational reform to reach to the rural masses; the failure of the *Kemalist* ruling elites to fulfill the promises they made in terms of social, economic and political modernization; their obsession with eradicating Islamic tradition without paying much attention to industrialization; and the like.

The author also points out the inherent paradox in *Kemalism*, "a unique expression of the modern nation-state formation in Turkey" (p.11), which contradicts Western liberal values. *Kemalism* values republicanism over democracy, homogeneity over heterogeneity, the military over civilian, and the state over society. The rise of globalization, development of international trade and global economy, the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, as well as political liberalization of the developing countries all served

as external factors that triggered the evolution of the Muslim intellectuals.

The author also discussed the reforms brought about by the military coup in September 1980 including the “Islamization of secularism,” “nationalization of Islam” (p.34); liberal and relaxed policies towards Islam, Turkish incorporation to the global economy, and the like. These reforms led Muslim intellectual to use modern tools and instruments in communication, information, mass media and education.

In the second chapter, Karasipahi tries to uncover the origin of intellectualism in Turkey which gave rise to the Islamic intellectuals. She argues that during the Ottoman Empire, knowledge used to be monopolized by religious authorities. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first model of intellectuals known as “The Young Ottomans” emerged. This group was characterized as scientific, materialist, social Darwinist, elitist and anti-religious. It is not clear how the author arrived at these characteristics and, more importantly, no explanation is provided as to what these terms mean. Their major concern was Turkish nationalism and their success was later on reflected by the *Kemalist* ideology.

The Young Ottomans served as the prototype of intellectuals in Turkey including the Islamic intellectuals which began to develop after World War II with the influence of a famous Muslim poet and thinker, Necip Fazil Kısakurek and his magazine *Buyuk Dogu* (The Great East). In the 1970s, Sezai Karakoc (a poet and an Islamist intellectual) took the role of Necip Fazil and established his magazine *Dirilis* (Revival). *Dirilis* was central in nurturing and influencing the current Islamic intellectuals who was aided by others like Ali Bulac (1951-), Rasim Ozdenoren (1940-), Ismet Ozel (1944-), Ilhan Kutluer (1957-), Ersin Nazif Gurdogan (1945-), and Abdurrahman Dilipak (1949-). These intellectuals “approach issues from an Islamic standpoint with a Muslim identity (p.56).” It is not made clear how the “Young Ottomans,” the anti-religionists, became intellectual fathers to the Muslim intellectuals despite apparent enmity in their ideologies.

In the third chapter, the author examines the Turkish Muslim intellectuals’ thoughts on several concepts. The first among these

concepts is *Kemalism* – as the backbone of their discourses – which, according to the Muslim intellectuals, is the scapegoat of all the different conflicts in the Turkish Republic. On the concept of state and nation, they conceded that state exists in order to ensure the rights and freedom of its people, and also live with the diversity within its boundaries but which the modern Turkish state is not. Likewise, nationalism is just a means of worshiping some things other than God. Their argument in relation to science and technology is philosophical and epistemological in nature. They do not challenge modern science and technology *per se* but the philosophical root which is immoral and value free that emanated from the uncompromising centrality of reason and rationality.

Islamist intellectuals define religion as “the aggregation of belief and rules that are accepted as the source of truth and its reality” (p.122). Religion regulates the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of society and hence human beings’ life cannot be planned outside religion. They further contend that Islam is the only undistorted religion representing the Divine truth, although, they accuse Muslims of living in conformity with non-Islamic systems. The last issue discussed in this chapter is that of history. Karasipahi mentions Muslim intellectuals’ view on history as different from its modern definition. They hold that every single event in history is attached to the Divine wisdom and rationale which is “the conflict of justice and oppression” (p.134).

In the final chapter, Karasipahi compares the contemporary Muslim intellectuals and their intellectual predecessors between the 1930s and the 1950s vis-à-vis non-Turkish intellectuals. She divided the chapter into two sections. In the first section, she presents a historical account of the leading Muslim revivalist in the Arab world from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward. According to the author, Arab thinkers evolved from “*nahḍah* (renaissance), to *thawrah* (revolution) and to *awdah* (return to the foundation),” (p.139). The prominent *nahḍah* thinkers were modernist and Islamist like Rifāa al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801-1873), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897), and Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905). The non-secular and anti-modern Muslim intellectuals include Ḥassan al-Bannā (1906-1949), Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966) and Abul A‘lā Mawdūdī (1903-1979). ‘Alī Shari‘ātī (1933-1977) and some few likeminded thinkers became a new group

which began to make “Islamist self-criticism for the first time” (p.150). The author did not mention which group the Turkish Muslim intellectuals are identified with. In the second section of this chapter, Karasipahi compares the contemporary Turkish Muslim thinkers with three earlier revivalist Turkish Muslim thinkers and four leading modernist Muslim thinkers from the Middle East. Muhammad Arkoun (1928), Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-), Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (1943-) and Abdolkarim Soroush (1945-) are the four Muslim modernist Muslim intellectuals. Badiuzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960), Necip Fazil Kısakurek (1905-1983) and Sezai Karakoc (1933-) are the three earlier Turkish revivalist Muslim thinkers.

In the concluding remarks, Karasipahi argues that in spite of the common feature shared between the Turkish contemporary intellectuals and their counterpart from other parts of the Muslim world that is writing and thinking from an Islamic perspective. There are some major features that differentiate the two sides. Firstly, the non-Turkish Muslim intellectuals are actively involved in the politics of their countries. Secondly, the Turkish Muslim intellectuals are unrealistic and utopian. Thirdly, the Turkish Muslim intellectuals are producers of original ideologies. Finally, the non-Turkish intellectuals are more sophisticated and more scholastically sound than their Turkish counterparts.

*Muslims in modern Turkey: Kemalism, modernism and the revolt of the Islamic intellectuals* deserves a special commendation. The book offers an informative account on the clash of modernism and Islam in the modern Republic of Turkey. The comparison of Turkish contemporary Muslim intellectuals with the non-Turkish prominent scholars also provides a clear picture of the former’s ideology and worldview and where they stand from the entire Muslim intellectuals. However, the author should touch upon the existing relationship between the incumbent government of Turkey and the Muslim intellectuals as she does in the case of Young Ottoman intellectuals and Kamal Attaturk’s secular government that established and introduced *Kemalism* ideology to today’s modern Turkey. Although her comparison of non-Turkish Muslim thinkers with the Turkish modern Muslim intellectuals help in understanding the latter’s ideology, more focus should be given to the Muslim intellectuals’ worldview.