

## Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: Causes and Effects

By Hakan Köni

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, 142 pages, £58.99, ISBN: 1527507580

Reviewed by Muhammed Yasir Okumuş, Social Sciences University of Ankara

In *Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: Causes and Effects*, Hakan Köni focuses on Turkish Political Islam's (TPI) transformation in terms of the movement's understanding of secularism and foreign policy. While the structure of the book is quite comprehensive in that it begins with the late Ottoman era, the author focuses on the era between 1960 and 2012. Köni's first argument is that the major ideal of TPI transformed from establishing an Islamic polity to a rather moderate model of promoting democracy for all segments of Turkish society.

Among many reasons behind the transformation of TPI, the author highlights two: the attitudes of the state elite and the influence of globalization. The state elite endorsed a rigid secularism, resembling the French model of laicism, and radically limited the scope of religion in the public sphere. Thus, "secularist state elites have traditionally been the most powerful agent determining the limits and space of action of political Islam in Turkey" (p. 3), as the traditional public sphere, where religion was free, was the ground on which political Islam was sprouted. Such a public sphere, devoid of religion, led to the development of TPI as a rather moderate ideology.

It should be noted that the conceptualization of secularism is missing in the text, making it difficult to make sense of the transforma-



tion of the system and the actors in Turkey. How the author defines secularism is a significant issue, because both the Ottoman and Turkish experiences of secularism have peculiarities. Preferably, the term "laicity" is more comprehensive in explaining the Turkish experience. Laicity expresses a public sphere owned by the state, in comparison to secularism where the public sphere belongs to the individual. The long-standing debates on the public sphere in Turkey are related to these diverse definitions of laicism/secularism. Furthermore, it can be argued that neither laicism nor secularism is suitable to explain the Ottoman experience. These concepts do not mirror the development of secularism in the Ottoman Empire. Conceivably, a more suitable concept is quasi-laicism,<sup>1</sup> referring to a laicity-like-phenomenon, a de facto laicism so to say.

Chapter one addresses the Ottoman sources of Turkish secularism. According to the author, Turkish secularism dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman secular bureaucracy. The elites of the new republic came from this class. Dividing the Ottoman rule into the classical and decline periods, Köni argues that the role of religion in the state diminished, especially after the Tulip Period (1718-1730). Accordingly, the "prevalent" (p. 7) belief of the reformists that religion was no longer influential in responding to the puzzles of the era inspired the secularization of the state and

the society. The word ‘prevalent’ raises a valid question as to where the author places political Islam: reformist or conservative? Islamism had a reformist side, and yet, Islam is the central reference of the ideology. Islamists’ criticism of the reformists, more precisely of the Westernizers, was that Europe (West) and the Ottoman Empire had vast differences, and if reforms were to be initiated, the reformists should have been aware of these ontological differences.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter two focuses on the secularism experience of the modern republic during the single-party and early multi-party eras. Turkish secularism is one of the most rigid secular models in the world (p. 23). The Kemalist elites saw religion as the main obstacle to the goal of reaching the level of contemporary civilizations, namely Western civilization. In Turkey, where religion was institutionalized in terms of socio-cultural terms, secularism should be as stiff as possible (p. 24). The secularist tendencies of the elites definitely had their ups and downs. The society witnessed a loosening of secularism during the Democrat Party (DP) era (1950-1960). The DP was not in favor of militant secularism (p. 27-28). Although the author focuses on a certain era, debates on secularism have always been popular in Turkish Politics.

Chapter three discusses the impact of the February 28 process on the transformation of TPI. Köni explains the shift in discourse and behavior of the National Outlook Movement (NOM) after the February 28 post-modern coup within the framework of party change.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, there are three factors of party change: leadership, dominant party coalition, and environmental change. Environmental change towards political Islam was key in the changing discourse and attitude of the NOM. The rigid secularism adopted during the post-

modern coup (1997) consequently caused further moderation of TPI in tone (p. 36).

Chapter four discusses the role of globalization in the transformation of TPI. Economically, globalization has meant the rapid spreading of liberal principles. In parallel, post-1980 Turkey had a flourishing neo-liberal economy. The accelerating neo-liberal developments should be read along with the integration of the Turkish market with global markets, and the widening of the Turkish middle class. Furthermore, increasing levels of education, and developing communication technologies and transportation facilities gave people the opportunity to follow the world and their access to services grew. These opportunities provided by globalization decreased the radical/extremist party discourse and behavior (pp. 3, 57-58).

Chapter five deals with TPI’s approach toward issues of religion and politics from the 1970s to 2012. The relatively sharp rhetoric of the NOM was moderated, for it was a target of the “secularist establishment” (p. 73). The AK Party established its rhetoric on political norms and institutions such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and pursued a more free public sphere by using the available legal and political context. The religious agenda of the AK Party was narrower than that of the NOM (p. 87). The NOM conceptualized secularism liberally, simply referring to freedom of religion, belief, and conscience rather than freedom *from* religion. The NOM took religion not as a matter of individual belief, but as a political program. The AK Party, on the contrary, does not consider Islam as part of a political program, while sharing the secularism definition of the NOM (pp. 4, 87).

The final chapter discusses the foreign policy perspectives of the NOM and the AK Party.

TPI transformed “from a highly religio-cultural to a remarkably rational and pragmatist movement” (p. 4). While the NOM supported a foreign policy constructed on strong ties with Muslim countries and minimal interaction with the West, the AK Party tried to establish good relations with the West while also pursuing good relations with the Muslim countries. A more active role in the UN and NATO and willingness to become a member of the EU is part of this understanding.

The conceptual preferences and time period selection might leave the non-specialist reader with certain gaps in the narrative. It is worth noting that the PhD thesis<sup>4</sup> the book was derived from is more comprehensive in

this sense. All in all, *Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: Causes and Effects* is a concise attempt to present the transformation of TPI.

### Endnotes

1. Ejder Okumuş, *Türkiye'nin Laikleşme Serüveninde Tanziimat*, (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1999), p. 36-37.
2. Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *İslamcılık Cereyanı I*, (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1998), p. 87-94.
3. See Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda, “An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1994), pp. 259-287.
4. See Hakan Köni, “Transformation of the Turkish Religious Right with Focus on the Impact of State Elites Globalization and Europeanization,” unpublished Ph.D. thesis, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2012.

## The Emergence of Kantian Culture in Turkish Foreign Policy (1980-2012):

### A Holistic Constructivist Approach

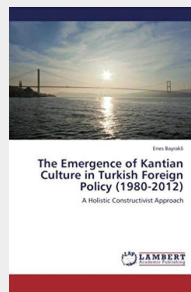
By Enes Bayraklı

Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012, 329 pages, \$101,00, ISBN: 9783659264702

Reviewed by Umut Can Adisönmez, University of Kent

There is hardly a more thought-provoking subject in the contemporary political history of Turkey than the country's transforming state identity vis-à-vis its reflection over the changing foreign policy direction and apparatuses. At this crux, the increasing influence of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AK Party) on the state's already shifting ideological orientation has been a remarkable case to tease out.

Since its foundation in 1923, the Turkish bu-



reaucratic elites' efforts to ensure the state's physical existence and 'Westernizing identity' have found themselves in a critical dilemma: whether to break the cultural codes with its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, and exist as a Western-oriented nation-state, or to develop its relations with the former Ottoman provinces and embrace a 'multifaceted' state identity.

Turkish readers will recognize that the above-mentioned debate, which, at its heart, offers