

Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Question

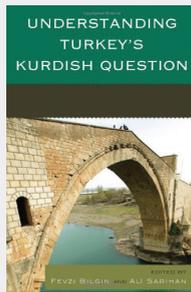
Edited by Fevzi Bilgin and Ali Sarihan

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013, 250 pages, ISBN 9780739184028.

Reviewed by Mehmet Uğur Ekinci

THE KURDISH QUESTION has been one of the most highly debated issues in Turkey for the last few decades, if not earlier. Although researchers and observers have analyzed nearly every aspect of the issue, new publications about the Kurdish question continue to appear. Among these is an edited volume offering a general overview of the issue since its genesis.

The volume is made up of four parts. The first part, which consists of three articles, focuses on the historical evolution of Kurdish nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. In the first essay, Djene R. Bajalan examines several texts that were penned by Kurds during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as early examples of Kurdish nationalist discourse. He argues that this period corresponds to the initial phase of Hroch's model of small-nation nationalism, which is characterized by an increase in literary interest and activity, as well as a lack of political organization. In the second article, Oral Çalışlar provides a very general summary of the history of the Kurdish question during the Republican period with a larger emphasis on the past few years. Without engaging with any academic study, Çalışlar, who is an experienced journalist in Turkey, presents his understanding of how the Kurdish question emerged and developed over time as well as his observations and suggestions on the democratic opening launched by the AK Party in 2009. The third article, written by E. Fuat Keyman and Umut



Özkırmımlı discusses how the Kurdish question is conceived and approached in Turkey. Underlining the continuing dominance of nationalist views and communitarian concerns among both ethnic Turks and Kurds, the authors claim that the permanent settlement of the Kurdish question can only be reached through its “de-ethnicization,” whereby both parties prioritize universal values such as equality, diversity and human rights.

The second part of the book consists of six articles and examines various aspects of the Kurdish question in Turkey. In the first article, Cengiz Çandar presents a general evaluation of the roots, present state and prospects of the Kurdish issue. He defines the Kurdish question as the struggle of the Kurds – “the only stateless people of the Middle East” – to establish their own nation-state and asserts that the question will be resolved either when the Kurds achieve this aspiration or when they are fully recognized, with appropriate power-sharing arrangements, by the societies that they live in. In the following chapter, Michael M. Günter briefly introduces a number of groups and organizations that have taken part in the Kurdish movement spearheaded by the PKK. He argues that although the PKK started off as a small and isolated party with a Marxist outlook, it has developed a violent insurgency into a broad, complex and multifaceted nationalist movement by forming ancillary organizations with various political and social functions.

Ali Sarihan compares the situation before and after the PKK's unilateral ceasefire that took place in 1999-2004. He argues that the marked decrease in the intensity of conflict in the latter period was due to: 1) changes in the PKK's strategies; 2) the government's increased use of soft power alongside security measures; 3) a decrease in the support of neighboring governments for the PKK as a result of improved relations with Turkey; and 4) the more compromising attitude adopted by Öcalan to get out of prison. Kılıç Buğra Kanat attempts to untangle the lack of consistency that the PKK has shown in respecting its unilateral ceasefires and peaceful declarations. He claims that the organization has used "diversionary attacks" on military and civilian targets as a tactical tool for its survival; by provoking retaliation by the state, the PKK was then able to (re-)mobilize Kurds under its leadership "by victimization."

In the following chapter, Hugh Pope evaluates the AK Party's democratic opening for the Kurds. According to him, while this eventually led to the Turkish state's recognition that the Kurdish question was not solely a security problem and necessitated a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach, mutual confidence between state authorities and "Turkish Kurds" is still limited. In the final article of this part, Gökhan Bacık and Bezen Balamir Coşkun seek to explain why the Kurdish question has not yet been solved. The authors argue that the responsibility falls mainly on the Turkish state, which adhered to military means in tackling the question for a long time and refused to compromise the Kemalist understanding of nationalism. This, in turn, created a spiral of conflict, mutual alienation and distrust, making a peaceful understanding increasingly difficult.

The third part of the book pertains to the civil society aspect of the Kurdish question and

consists of two monographs on two Islamic civil society groups that have operated in the East and Southeast of Turkey. In the first one, Mustafa Gürbüz examines the Kurdish Hezbollah, first as a revolutionary Islamist organization that fought the PKK, and then as a rather peaceful movement of Islamic revivalism. In the following article, Doğan Koç discusses the sociopolitical impacts of the Hizmet (Gülen) Movement on the Kurds in Turkey. He argues that with its pacifist and non-political outlook that integrates traditional and modern values, the movement's educational and fellowship activities, albeit not purposely, drove many Kurds away from not only participating in but also supporting the political violence of the PKK.

The final part of the book examines the international dimensions of Turkey's Kurdish question. H. Akın Ünver examines the place of the Kurdish question in Turkey's relations with Europe and the United States until the late 1990s. He argues that while the grievances of the Kurds did not make a significant impact on how the U.S. and Europe approached Turkey for decades, the increasing role of social forces in politics gradually strengthened the position of the U.S. Congress and European Parliament in foreign policy and caused complications in Turkey's relations with the West. Joshua W. Walker discusses recent developments (until 2012) in Turkey's domestic politics and Middle East policy that are related to the Kurdish question. Claiming that the settlement of this question is essential for the security of the whole region, the author concludes that the optimism heralded by the conciliatory discourses and deeds of the AK Party government was damaged by a number of developments after 2009.

There are a few editorial shortcomings in the book. First, there were apparently no clear

standards set for contributions, resulting in a large variety of writing styles from theory-based discussions (Keyman & Özkırmılı) to opinion pieces with a few or no references (Çalışlar, Çandar & Pope). Second, apart from the 15-page introduction, which provides short synopses for each chapter, there is no attempt on the side of the editors for a broader evaluation or synthesis of the arguments presented by the contributors. To correct a couple of errors, the name of the chief of general staff in 1998 was Hüseyin (not Hayri) Kıvrıkoğlu (p. 106), and instead of “international conjecture,” which is frequently stated in pp. 157-62, it must be the “international conjuncture” that has helped the AK Party government in its struggle against the PKK.

It is also a pity for the contributors that the Kurdish question entered into a new phase when a “solution process” was launched in late 2012 through proxy talks among the government, the PKK leadership and Öcalan in

prison. Even though one of the editors points this out in the introduction, the articles were evidently written before this process began. Therefore, no serious commentary or assessment regarding the present state and the future of this process is found in the book, and some remarks, such as the pessimism regarding the slowdown of the 2009 Kurdish opening (p. 235), were already irrelevant when the book entered the market.

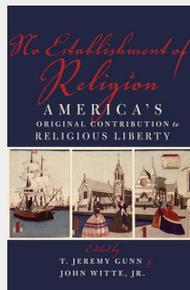
All that said, this volume, which consists of essays by renowned scholars and journalists, provides valuable information and commentary about the past and present of various aspects of the Kurdish question, and any student who would like to have an understanding of not only the earlier phases of the Kurdish issue but also the on-going solution process will benefit from it. In addition, with all its shortcomings, the book can bridge the need for an updated basic reading, if not a textbook, for Turkey’s Kurdish question.

No Establishment of Religion America’s Original Contribution to Religious Liberty

Edited By T. Jeremy Gunn and John Witte, Jr.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 432 pages, ISBN 9780199860395.

Reviewed by Brett G. Scharffs

JOHN WITTE, JR., the Director of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University, and Jeremy Gunn, a professor at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco and a Senior Fellow at the Emory Center, have edited a valuable new book, *No Establishment of Religion: America’s Original Contribution to Religious Liberty*.



True to its title, the book is a survey of the history of the non-establishment principle in the United States, and an assessment of how the non-establishment clause of the First Amendment contributes to the protection of religious liberty. As Professor Witte explains, “This volume aims to deepen our understanding of the establishment clause in