

Book Review:
*Muslim Nationalism
and the New Turks* | **Hüsrev
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Changes in the self-definition of the Turkish people have long been observed by political scientists, sociologists, and social anthropologists. The self-identification of the Turkish state and people historically shaped by the Kemalism of the Republican era governments, which comprehended Turkishness and Turkish citizenry on ethnic and racial lines, was reconstructed by the governments that came to power after the 1980 military coup. Notwithstanding this evolutionary process, the self-redefinition of state and people in Turkey found its current form under the ruling Justice and Development Party. In this present era, Islam and Muslimhood have become more concrete and salient components of Turkey's state identity and Turkish national identity, while the formerly prevalent racial component has lost its significance.

This latest incarnation of Turkish self-identification is conceptualized as the "new Turk" by Jenny White in her book *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, selected as one of the Best Books of 2012 on the Middle East by *Foreign Policy* journal.

White first of all explores the evolution of "what it means to be Turk in Turkey", and the new form it took under the rule of the pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party. In relation to this, White later on examines the battle between the secularist and Muslim sectors of the population that

ended up with cataclysmic divisions between the political discourses of the secular Kemalist intelligentsia and the Muslim elites in regards to democracy, Western orientation, globalism, and internationalism (p. 19). As she notes, "to an outside observer who assumes Islam is anti-West, it would appear counterintuitive that [in the Third Republic as conceptualized by White] it is the Islam-rooted AKP, the Muslim bourgeoisie, and other Muslim publics, such as Gülenists, that are the enthusiastic developers of a globalized economy and that support political liberalization, international political alliances, and in many cases EU membership. Hard-line secularists, however, including some in the military, oppose these same things in favor of an isolationist, globally unplugged 'Turkey for the Turks'" (p. 10). To this end, the new Turks (new rightists or modern rightists according to a new political classification that has emerged among AKP supporters) "are motivated not by Islam but by post-imperial political and economic ambitions that extend far beyond the Muslim Middle East" (p. 11).

In this regard, with the handover of power to a civilian government after the 1980 military coup, new self-conscious Muslim elite has mounted political and economic challenges to traditional Kemalist principles in general. Together, massive public support, the powerful influence of religious networks, a newly emerging

Muslim bourgeoisie in Anatolia, and the civilian government's upper-hand over the military have increased the momentum behind this challenge. The real impact of this was seen in the development of a novel and non-orthodox definition of the national-self in Turkey. To this end, the republican model of the national-self was replaced by a post-Ottoman (as opposed to neo-Ottoman) form of self-attribution: the new Turk.

In accordance with the above-mentioned post-imperial and post-Ottoman perspectives, this new Turk is a cultural Turkist, rather than an ethnic or racial one. S/he believes that "to be Turkish means to be Muslim", "share[s] a belief that Turkish Islam is the better form of Islam", desires to be modern and shows intimacy towards the West, "imagines the nation as having more flexible Ottoman imperial boundaries", and pursues "economic interests without concern for the ethnic identity of its interlocutors" (p. 19). These sentiments run counter to the Kemalist-era vision of economic nationalism against the Arab world. This conception of the new Turk, therefore, entails both Islamic and, to a certain extent, secular features and characteristics. However, this does not mean the historical contention between the secularists and Islamists has been resolved via the construction of this non-orthodox form of a new Turkish identity. On the contrary, as White's careful analysis demonstrates, both parties

continue to condemn one another for "heavy-handed imposition of its own values and practices on Turkish society as a whole" (p. 181).

In order to explicate the evolution of the new Turk, White conducted an ethnographic study in Turkey. In building her narrative, she looks initially at the course of events that set up the relation between Islam and nationalism (or Muslim nationalism) in Turkish historical and contemporary contexts (chapter 2). She later moves on to an analysis of the rival form of nationalism: secular nationalism, which was based on distrust of historical enemies, thus on fear and animosity (chapter 3). Through these two chapters, she demonstrates that both the religiously motivated nationalism and secular nationalism are in flux, and hence took new forms during the Third Republic era (post-1980). The next chapter (chapter 4) is devoted to the elaboration of two issues that have generated the merging and diverging arguments of religious and secular nationalisms in Turkey: missionary movements and the headscarf. Since both nationalisms consider the Turk as Muslim, the missionary activities pose a robust threat for secular-nationalist national identity and for religious-nationalist religious identity. However, despite the relevance and importance of Muslimhood of the Turk for both parties, the headscarf was encoded by secular nationalism -particularly by the Kemalists- as a threat to the very exist-

tence of the Turkish state. The fears of religious dominion, therefore, facilitate boundary making in the formulation of the national identity. The ethnic or religious boundary maintenance and its relationship with *fear* are further explored in the following section (chapter 5). The last two sections (chapter 6 and 7) are devoted to the analysis of the woman in national identity discourse. As they reveal in these two sections, both secular and religious nationalisms describe the nationhood primarily as a male experience.

In conclusion, Jenny White offers a meticulous ethnographic analysis of contemporary Turkey, clearly demonstrating the new forms that nationalisms in Turkey have taken. To this end, I personally agree with her views on the issues relating to the ruptures that occurred in regard to the historical positions and characters of political blocs. However, there are two points in her study that raise questions. My first contention is that the gendered approach to the new Turk, which is based on Muslim nationalism and Turkish Islam, may not contain enough currency. When we consider the Gülen movement and the high ratio of female participation in grassroots activities, claiming that the new Muslim nationalism is a male experience fails to acknowledge female involvement in this process. In this way, she appears to be mixed up with the traditional articulation of nationalism in Turkey, such

as in the discourses of the *ülküçüs*. Thus, I would argue that the female members of the Gülen movement hold a favorable approach to Turkish Islam and Turkish exceptionalism, as Şerif Mardin has argued. Hence, the role of women in the dissemination of the new Muslim nationalism among ethnic Turks and Kurds requires further scrutiny. The second issue is that White's conception of Muslim nationalism is not clear. She does not show how the contention between Islam and nationalism in regards to Muslim nationalism is resolved by the new Muslim nationalists. Moreover, the formation of the Muslim nationalism is underdeveloped. It might have been better if she had linked Turkish exceptionalism to an argument for Muslim nationalism, because the new Muslim nationalists have sought to use Turkish exceptionalism as a means of resolving the contention between Islam and nationalism.