Kitap Tanıtımı

The struggle over power between Islamism and the state; re-reading "Between State and Islam"[1]

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Alongside its political ramifications, the Arap Spring has once again reverted academic interest to the interaction between religion and politics in general, and state(s) and Islam(ism) in particular. Often the discussions are centered on the power struggle between so called Islam(ism) and Islamist actors and many authoritarian governments in the Middle East. In this dichotomy Islam(ism) has come to either confront the secular states or negotiate the terms of their co-existence. Reading Turam's political ethnography would bring a refreshing insight into this intriguing relationship, if not exhaustive and conclusive at all.

The Turkish state was not the only secular state with a majorly Muslim population that has led to (re)shaping the nature of Islamic action. However, by far, it has been the most authoritative and pioneering one for seeking to secularize the nation and control religion at the same time (Turam, 2007). Ironically, Islam was used as an antidote by the state against the spread of communism during the Cold War. One should also consider the increasing demands of the growing conservative bourgeoisie as a driving force behind this change. Nevertheless, the state repression on religion exasperated in the 1990s, reaching its peak with the 28 February post-modern coup in 1997, which, once more, conspicuously marked the ideological clash between official secularism and Islamism. The confrontation was eventually alleviated with the beginning of a new millennium and turned into a negotiation process by the new Islamic actors (Ibid. p.23).

The various Islamic movements across the globe have been represented by scholars as the sum of all projects aimed at connecting the Umma (Muslim community of believers) through the means of civil society apparatuses (p. 25). As such, Islamic movements and brotherhoods tried to fill the gap where states have not been able (or not wishing) to reach. Similarly, in Turkey, Islamization has

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[1] **Between State and Islam: The Politics of Engagement** by Berna Turam, Stanford University Press, 2006.

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largely been regarded as " a pragmatic project of civilization," (Saktanber, 2002).

Yet, the extent to which the Islamization project will be tolerant towards pluralism has remained as a question for secular people (Ibid.). It is evident to all that there is a need for mutual tolerance so that the state and the civil organizations can negotiate over each other's demands. The civil societies do not flourish under a totalitarian regime, nor does the horizontal networking of civil societies, employable in the private or public sphere, survive without a responsive state (p. 31). To illustrate with an example, the Islamic forces in Egypt were co-opted and those in Iran were suppressed throughout the 1990s to put an end to the radical and revolutionary spirit of Islamism (p. 31). Likewise, in Turkey, for a long time the political inclusion through a competitive multi-party system benefited selectively the Secular Turks while marginalizing Islamic actors and ethnic minorities. The commitment to the six pillars of the official ideology was a precondition for inclusion (p. 33). Faced with such obstacles, the previously marginalized Islamic forces have evolved to use the democratic channels to engage horizontally with the society, and vertically with the state (ibid.).

The clash between the state and religion started long before the secular Turkish Republic. The earliest constitutional document in the Muslim world, the Tanzimat charter, introduced the first formal breach between the temporal and the religious (Berkes 1999 cited in Turam, p. 39). The state-led reforms led to a dual system, a split between religion and socio-political spheres.

Significantly, the mutual recognition of boundaries between religion and the state has provided autonomy for Islamic actors (p. 65). From 1969 to the present, religiously oriented cadres in Turkey have increasingly adapted themselves to the secular and democratic system (Heper & Toktas, 2003). Turam observes in her challenging ethnographic study that the secularists have believed in the existence of a heinous attempt to conspire against the state and 'undermine the achievements of the Republic', beyond the facade of civil society organization of the religious groups, especially the Gulen movement. Turam's informal contacts, through her 'Ataturkist' (in her words) parents' connections reveal this scare driven perception shared by many secularists. For example, in a conversation with a leading figure of 'the Association for Support of Modern Life' (Cagdas Yasami Destekleme Dernegi), Turam was asked by her interviewee whether she had uncovered the real faces of the followers of Gulen and if they had really let her in (p. 75). These distrust and suspicion propelled questions evince the extent of the conspiracies around Islamist movements.

This is not to say that none of the Islamist movements want to overthrow the existing system in Turkey. However, ironically enough, Turam (73) found out that both the Islamic actors' and secularists' worldviews draw on similar sensibilities and mentalities regarding progress and civilization – worldviews that can be traced back to Ataturk's understanding of civilization. Both secularists and Islamists seem to ignore

the fact that the enlargement of any social movement is enabled by more access to power and the appropriation of the means with which it steers the state to respond to its demands. In this struggle, the conspiracy theories serve to (mis)-represent the other. as Turam subtly unleashes, the contestations between Islam(ism) and secularism are deeply embedded in people's personal lives as well as politics. The possibility of negotiating these chasms in a democratic milieu, where people can disregard differences even for a while for personal encounters, is not out of question. The politicization of personal lives widens the splits among individuals, and the mass media exacerbates these both by skewing the image of the 'Other'.

Furthermore, following her encounters with people who left the movement and the followers of the Gulen movement who are being criticized by hard line Islamists for being liberal, Turam reveals an interesting paradox. The so-called neo Islamists of the Gulen movement is seen as too light to be passionate for the 'real' Islamists and 'too secular to be true' for the dedicated secularists. They do not fit anywhere in the black-and-white political environment in Turkey.

Turam argues that the very diverse nature of nationalisms cuts across the Islamism-secularism divide and facilitates cooperations between the state actors and the Islamic actors (p. 106). The cooperation of Turkish Islamic social forces with secular Turkic states (Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) in the ex-soviet region, for instance, challenges the prevalent dichotomy between religious and secular nationalisms.

Another parallel between secular and Islamic actors' idea of reform concerns gender reform. 'Civilizing women' by increasing their visibility in the public sphere have been the focus of both Islamist and secularist actors (p. 109). Women have rendered to be the objects of reformation from the point of view of both ideologies. Ataturk's reforms, as expressed in his own statements, aimed at freeing women from social pressure and prepare the grounds for achieving social equality with men. Paradoxically enough, there was not enough room for women to participate in the male-led reformation despite legal amendments (p.11). In fact, this male-led gender reform has benefitted a group of privileged rather than underprivileged women. The Gulen movement follows a similar pattern in 'modernising women' by avoiding gender segregation in the public sphere. However, as Turam observes, the private lives of members of the Gulen movement are distinctively different from their public affairs. The gender segregation is strictly deployed at home and only educated women seem to be enjoying the void of segregation in the public sphere.

The irony is that Turam's own work seems to treat women as 'objects of male-led modernization'. For example, women's choice of not mixing with men is not mentioned at all and is treated as contradictory with modernization (p. 118-9). The bright side of this male –initiated gender reform is the immanency of women's

turning this clock other way around for the benefit of women (p. 132). It is a question of whether change should come by confronting the system or engaging with it. Yet, both secular and Muslim women have been enjoying, to an extent, the unpredictable outcomes of this top-down reformation process.

The representation of the main cleavage in the Turkish society as that of between Kemalism and Islamism is now becoming a problematic overgeneralization. One needs to look at their historical transformations. Adherence to Ataturk and his ideas has largely remained dynamic enough to adopt itself to changing conditions (102) while Kemalism has remained more or less a persistent source of conflict. Overall, the process of this transformation can only be understood as an outcome of multi-dimensional engagements between increasingly autonomous forces of a society and an increasingly responsive state (145). Both Erdogan and Gulen have been able to align their ideas and worldviews with broader national and global changes. Both envisage a model of secularism that doesn't curb religion or pose a threat to religious freedoms. The alleviation of the Kemalist/Laicist rigidity turned the confrontational tendencies of Islamists into a more tolerant engagement with the 'secular' state.

Conclusion

Although Islamic parties' participation in procedural democracy has played a role in their modernization, the major contribution of moderate Islamic actors has come from their unintended engagements with the state in day-to-day life (156). *The moderate Islamic actors have formed alternative vertical channels between society and the state.* Islam in Turkey does not simply enter the public sphere to Islamize the Turkish state and the public sphere. Nor does the state agree with the demands of Islamic actors verbatim. These, according to Turam, provide a leeway for the Islamists to negotiate their religious freedom and seek from the state a more liberal stance towards religious demands without submitting to them (161).

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