



ATATÜRK YOLU DERGİSİ

JOURNAL OF ATATÜRK YOLU



Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi/Journal of Atatürk Yolu, 75 (2024), 377-379.

Geliş/Received: 01.07.2024

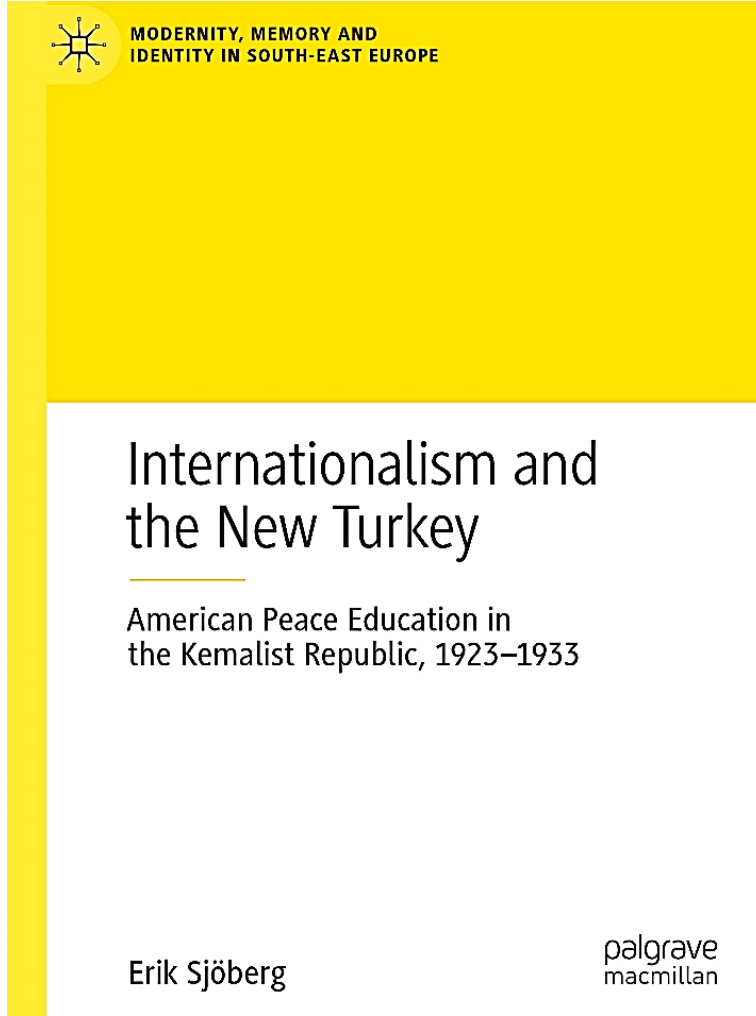
Kabul/Accepted: 17.10.2024

DOI: DOI: 10.46955/ankuayd.1508215

(Kitap İncelemesi/Book Review)

ERIK SJÖBERG, INTERNATIONALISM AND THE NEW TURKEY: AMERICAN PEACE EDUCATION IN THE KEMALIST REPUBLIC, 1923-1933, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2022, (ISBN: 978-3-031-00931-0), 264 p.

MUSTAFA KOÇ*



*PhD. Candidate, İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of History, İstanbul/Türkiye. mustafa_koc@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-6441-6273.

Professor Erik Sjöberg's book *Internationalism and the New Turkey: American Peace Education in the Kemalist Republic, 1923-1933* focuses on international education in Turkey (on the history of education and nation-building in the first decade of the Turkish Republic) and analyses Turkish-American cultural relations during the founding years of the Turkish Republic. Sample of the study, which consists of a total of five chapters (excluding the introduction and the conclusion) is chosen as Robert College, an American educational institution in İstanbul. Edgar Jacob Fisher (1885-1968), who taught and served as the dean of Robert College from 1913 to 1933, is at the centre of the study. The main source of the study is the records of Robert College. Some of the records of American colleges in İstanbul are in the Archives of Boğaziçi University. However, most of the records are outside Turkey, in Columbia University Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts.

The introduction of the book (pp. 1-22) presents the historical background of the topic and the key concepts chosen in the book are internationalism and new Turkey. The chapter begins with an assertive observation that Robert College and its sister school Constantinople Woman's College fulfilled the elite need of the late Ottoman society as well as the foreigners in İstanbul. According to the author, although American missionaries and educators left Turkey, their liberal educational philosophy remained as a legacy in Turkey. The author, who provided a general analysis of the sources in the introduction, considers the records of Robert College and Constantinople Woman's College (after 1932 the American College for Girls at İstanbul) as important sources of Turkish-American relations. The author mentions that there are a number of studies in the literature on two American colleges in İstanbul based mostly on the memories of the college presidents and states that there has not been a qualified archival research on Robert College and Kemalist Turkey before.

The second chapter of the book (pp. 23-56) analyses the transformation in the Ottoman Empire with the Tanzimat Edict and discusses the question "*Why does Turkey have American colleges?*" The author, who thinks that the establishment of Robert College in particular should be examined within a larger framework, emphasizes that unlike the British and French schools, American colleges in İstanbul were open throughout the First World War. According to the author, the fact that the USA did not declare war against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War ensured the uninterrupted existence of American colleges –as neutral institutions- in the Ottoman Empire. The chapter also describes in detail how the officials in Robert College closely followed the Lausanne Conference negotiations.

The third chapter of the book (pp. 57-110) deals with the question "*What role did the American educators working at Robert College and Constantinople Woman's College play in the foundation of the Turkish Republic?*" and discusses the adaptation of Robert College to the new republican order between 1923 and 1927. The author maintains that the removal of the capitulations transformed Turkey into a nationalist regime (which is) determined to centralize and control all forms of education. Besides, he has regarded Turkish nationalism and Kemalism as identical since the mid-1920s. According to the author, Turkey was –in many aspects– a similar version of the Turkified empire (a centralized state with uniform language, religion, education, and national loyalty) established by the Young Turks. The third chapter also focuses on the Fischer incident, which occupied the public opinion for a long time in Turkey and on the changes in American educational institutions in Turkey (such as the restriction of teaching Armenian or Greek at Robert College according to the regulation issued by the Ministry of National Education) and explains the effects of Turkish nationalism on Robert College with examples.

The fourth chapter of the book (pp. 111-150) attempts to answer the questions of what modern education meant in post-Ottoman Turkey and how American educators understood the Turkish nationalism. The origins of internationalism were examined in this chapter in particular and it is emphasized that in the 1920s, international agreements –and even many non-governmental organizations– advanced the cause of internationalism. The author who discusses John Dewey's views on Turkey in detail included striking statements such as "*Turkish opinion is so strongly against internationalism, and ... so bent upon developing a peculiar Turkish nationality* (p. 127)". This chapter also discusses the status of student societies in Robert College (Political Science Forum, Debate Union, Peace Forum etc.) and the essay/composition competitions organized by these societies.

The fifth chapter of the book (pp. 151-197) analyses the reactions of Robert College students to Fisher's internationalism. The main questions of the chapter are: "*How did Robert College students interpret Ottoman past and the transition to Republic?*" and "*What did Robert College students think about minorities, ethnic or religious groups in Turkey?*" The author discusses how students, who were exposed to Fisher's teaching, understood the concepts of modernity, peace, international good will and brotherhood. The author also claims that the essays

written by Robert College students explained much about how Turkey viewed its Ottoman heritage. The statements in one of these articles are very interesting: "*Until the finish of the War of Independence Turkey was governed by unable Sultans* (p. 161)." According to the author, Kemalists described themselves as the heirs of the French republican tradition. However, for Kemalists, secularism did not mean the rejection of Islam. As a matter of fact, the problem was not Islam according to Kemalists. The problem was the corruption of religion in Turkey through false teachings and its transformation into a superstitious belief that contradicted modern science.

The last chapter of the study (pp. 199-233) discusses the defeat of internationalism and the downfall of Fisher. In the second half of 1920s, Robert College seemed to be relatively shielded from the developments outside the campus. Throughout the 1920s, Turkish authorities did not interfere with the curriculum or the activities of the College much; however, this began to change in the early 1930s. According to the author, Kemalist nationalism became increasingly xenophobic in the early 1930s and the totalitarian orientation of Kemalism had a significant impact on Robert College. The rest of the chapter covers the efforts for Fisher's return to Robert College and the deportation of Fisher from Turkey in detail. The author states that Istanbul newspapers were very happy about the deportation of Fisher. He also cites the newspaper reports that Fisher was portrayed as an enemy of Turkey in the Turkish press of the period.

In conclusion, the book is a meticulous archival research that fills a neglected gap and it is a guidebook for anyone who wants to study this subject (and understand contemporary dynamics). There are no repetitions in the work. Professor Sjöberg provides a good historical background, uses a plain language and writes in a comprehensible way about complex historical events. Offering an alternative perspective to Kemalist Turkey is the most important contribution of the book to the literature. I must admit that I found the references especially at the end of the chapters, rather didactic. In the references, studies on the topic in many languages, including English, French, German and even Swedish, are presented to the reader. In addition, the photographs used in the book strengthen the academic stand of the study and adds depth to the understanding of the topic.

