

Turkey, Islamists and Democracy: Transition and Globalization in a Muslim State, by Yildiz Atasoy. London, UK and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005. 190 pages. References to p. 214. Index to p. 227. \$...

In *Turkey, Islamists and Democracy*, Yildiz Atasoy seeks to analyze the growth of the Islamist movement in Turkey by focusing on the internal and international context of Turkey's political and economic development. Although the author notes that 'Islamic politics' has its roots in the Ottoman Empire, she offers only a few observations regarding state-society relations during the Ottoman period. Rather, the main thrust of the book is on the modern Turkish Republic, with special emphasis on the secularization policies which were implemented during the formative years of the Republic, the emergence of new trends in Turkish politics, economy and foreign policy following the transition to democracy after World War II, and the growing political power of the Islamist parties in the 1990s which coincided with the end of the Cold War and the spread of globalization in world economy. The author's principal argument is that Islam in Turkey should be analyzed in terms of the domestic responses to global developments and the "opportunities and constraints [which] are presented to the citizens within these larger mechanisms of change" (p. 21).

Its lofty theoretical ambitions notwithstanding, this is essentially a general survey of political and economic changes in Turkey since the 1920s and some of the major developments in the international system which had an impact on Turkish politics, economy, and foreign policy. The book also provides a similarly general overview of the origins and growth of the Islamist movement in Turkey, with special emphasis on what Atasoy calls the 'Islamist search for selfhood'. Arguably the strongest sections of the study are those which analyze the Islamist responses to the Republic's modernization

project following the onset of political liberalization and multi-party politics in the late 1940s and the impact of the increased globalization in the world economy on the growth of Islamist business activities in Turkey. Although the main arguments of the book are largely based on secondary sources, it is sprinkled with a few personal observations of the author. In one of these, Atasoy offers useful information, drawn from the interviews which she conducted in a youth hostel in a small town near Ankara organized by a prominent religious sect called *Süleymanlılar*, about the inroads which the Islamists have made into the education of the young students in Turkey in recent years.

Despite these interesting insights, however, the book breaks no new ground, especially on the critical issue of Turkey's efforts to accommodate Islam within the framework of democratic politics. Those who are familiar with Turkish politics and the country's international political and economic relations, will not find much that is new in Atasoy's overview of the events which have shaped the course of country's development and its role in the international system since the 1920s. Similarly, *Turkey, Islamists and Democracy* does not offer substantial new information about the role of Islam in Turkish politics and society since much of the material that is presented in the book on "Islamic politics" has already been discussed and analyzed in greater depth in numerous recent books and scholarly articles on the subject.

Moreover, the scholarly quality of the study is marred by numerous problems. They begin with the subtitle of the book which erroneously posits Turkey a "Muslim State" instead of the commonly accepted view that it is a predominantly Muslim country where the state has been a staunch defender and the most important symbol of secularism—a fact which is later acknowledged by the author in a section subtitled

“Cultural Freedoms and Rights: Islam in a Secular State” (p.70). More importantly, although Atasoy sets out to analyze the interaction between domestic politics and international developments with a view toward situating the Islamist movement at their intersection, she mostly describes changes in Turkey and its external environment without clearly delineating the nature and the impact of the linkages between the two. The presentation also suffers from sketchiness: the reader does not learn much by reading barely a one-page long description of the Cyprus issue, or less only half a page on the Islamic political economy in Turkey. Last but not least, Atasoy’s work descends into a polemic when she discusses the policies of the one-party rule in the formative years of the republic. The picture that the author paints resembles that of a totalitarian regime which terrorized its people. For example, we are told that “...all citizens of the country were required to become party members. Those who did not were classified as dissidents and accused of inciting opposition” (p. 49). In fact, the Republican People’s Party failed to open local branches in a dozen provinces in Eastern Turkey until the mid-1940s, let alone require all citizens in Turkey to become party members. These and similar assertions regarding Turkey’s political regime during the period from 1923 to 1946 seem to be informed more by Atasoy’s personal views and sentiments rather than a careful and unbiased analysis of the findings of available scholarship.

In sum, *Turkey, Islamists and Democracy* attempts to provide a new approach to understanding ‘Islamic politics’ by examining the interaction between domestic and international developments. While it succeeds in presenting the broad contours within which the Islamist movement has evolved over the years, the book ultimately delivers far less than it promises.

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