

Jenny White

Muslim Nationalism and the New Turk. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. 264 pp.; \$24.95, hardcover.

In *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, Princeton University Distinguished Anthropology Professor Jenny White has adroitly addressed the puzzles of contemporary Turkish politics in the context of the standoff between secularism and Islam as well as the debate on nationalism, identity, the headscarf controversy, a fear of missionary conversion, and other topics. She ably documents that, from the late 1970s when there was the revival of Islamism across the world, political Islam in Turkey has emerged in such a potent way that it has posed a challenge to the secular nature of the nation. Therefore, from the state (or nation) to the society, what has been noticed is a sort of re-Islamization.

Professor White, in her efforts to explain the dichotomy of secularism and Islam, has argued that tension has begun from one side to allow the side to accuse the other of the imposition of its own values and practices on Turkish society as a whole. As demonstrated in the well-written book, secularists are of the belief that the national tradition is heavily grounded on Kemalism, which is Atatürk's model for society, a secular life style, and an emphasis on cultural, linguistic and racial purity. Conversely, Islamists have been nostalgic to the glorious past of the ancestors, thereby urging for subjectivity and vision for the future that is to be shaped by an imperial Ottoman past, that is overlaid onto a republican state framework, but divorced from the Kemalist state project (p. 9).

Throughout the book, the author discusses the controversy that emerged when centering nationalism. She further argues that although Turkey was established through the Kemalist project of nationalism, which dominated the state and social affairs for years, it has been challenged by the Muslim nationalism because of the consequence of the vacuum created by the weakening of the country's Kemalist project over recent years and the increasing inability of the central authority to control the definition of Turkishness, thereby shaping the identity of Turkish youth (p. 3).

Professor White also contends that it is not so much Islam that has challenged the *status quo*, rather it is what Islam has become in post-coup urban, modern, and globalized environment. In that way, many religious and national identities – similar to commodities – have become objects of choice and forms of personal expression. Toward that end, the author explains: “The separation of religion from culture and the personalization of Islamic identity... have shaped a new understanding of the nation based not on bloodlines and Muslim heritage but on Turkish culture/civilization and Muslim faith,” (p. 49).

According to *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, the massive transformation of Turkey from Kemalist version of nationalism to Muslim nationalism happened in post-1980s or what she calls “the third Republic”, mainly because of the three dramatic changes, which are the 1980s *coup d’etat* that radically reshaped the political landscape; the opening of Turkey’s insular, state led economy to competition in the world market by the first elected leaders after the coup; and the rise of Islamists’ political parties that showed ever stronger election results through the 1990s (p. 7). She then contends that, with the social transformation, a new bottom-up way of doing politics has arisen, emanating particularly from within Islamic circles, and thereby paving the way for a future that is quite unpredictable. However, she also demonstrates quite aptly the magnitude to which blood-based notions of Turkishness have been instilled in state institutions, public discourses, and in people’s sense of national belonging since the establishment of the republic.

Meanwhile, a significant theme the book deals with is the transformation of selfhood and outgrowth of solidarity groups. The author analyzes that cultural mixing poses cultural challenge to personal level; “loss of a national self” leads to “angry individualism,” “loss of interpersonal trust,” and the need to find similarities (pp. 104-6). She further argues that it becomes harder and harder to maintain certain boundaries among cultures as ostensibly opposite groups converge in their characteristics and practices through the proliferation of individual and group identities. In the, per the author’s estimation, Turkish people unremittingly negotiate their individual choices and need for belonging, forming “solidarity groups” as a refuge from recent moral unsettlement and social disaffection.

Finally, it has generally been claimed that the rise of racist politics as well as ethnic and religious cleansing in Turkey has produced a sort of security threat for the country. The threat, political and military persons argue, can be from within and also outside of the country. In these contexts, the argument is that Turkey’s non-Muslims are the “enemy within”, working as agents of “the enemy without”, thus the European Union, and the United States, and Israel (p. 186). However, the enemy within has not been specified by the leaders but, as White writes, in the name of enemy within, the leaders have individualized and generalized the threat. She added that “it could be you and it could be me. Anyone can be an enemy,” (p. 60). Also, the non-Turks in the country are regarded as potential threat to national unity because of cultural differences, as cultural mixing and hybridity are as well perceived as threats to the nation.

The book, which postulates the changing trends of Turkey from secular liberal to more conservative Islamists society, should be very useful to scholars, students and the general reader interested in getting deeper into Turkish