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Review

Review of Islam and Muslim Resistance to Modernity in Turkey by Gökhan Bacık

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Review:

Gökhan Bacık: *Islam and Muslim Resistance to Modernity in Turkey*.

XII+136 pp. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 53,49 €.

ISBN 9783 030 25900 6.

In *Islam and Muslim Resistance to Modernity in Turkey*, Gokhan Bacık explores critical aspects about the Islamic idea of nature and its theological debates between the Ash‘arī and the Maturīdī schools. The Islamic idea of nature from the theological perspective is attributed to the interpretation of causality, the free will, the theory of knowledge and the idea of God (p. 61). The book brings together diverse intellectual and theological discussions which offer an analysis of the Ash‘arī and Maturīdī schools and their interpretations of these four fundamentals. The theological affiliation of Turkey is underscored with the intention of providing further insight into its contemporary approaches to scientific developments.

Reviewing theological debates and the expansion of the Maturīdī school in Turkish society, the book is composed of six chapters. In the introductory chapter, Bacık connects the undeveloped status of the contemporary Muslim world in general, and Turkey specifically, with their theological understanding of fate. The main argument of the text is that although Turkish people are themselves affiliated with the Maturīdī school, they are followers of the Ash‘arī school in terms of their understanding of nature and theology. Chapter Two deals with the revival of Sunni orthodoxy, its origins, and intellectual debates. The scholastic contribution of Muhammad al-Ghazalī (d. 505 H/1111 CE), an authoritative Ash‘arī intellectual, is referenced in tandem with his close proximity to governors and the dominance of the Ash‘arī school at that time to demonstrate the interwoven character of religion and state (p. 38–43). Chapter Three looks at the elaborate linkage between the key elements of the Islamic idea of nature, which include causality, free will, the theory of knowledge, and the idea of God. Al-Ghazalī’s theological explanations are widely presented to clarify the Ash‘arī stance towards these fundamental concepts while the approaches of the Maturīdī and Mu‘tazilī scholars are referenced according to their original sources (p. 81–82). Chapter Four examines the role of Sunni orthodoxy in Turkish communities and offers a diachronic view of how and why Turkish people are affiliated with the Maturīdī school. At this point, the book provides an accurate snapshot of the relationship between the state authorities and various

religious groups during these periods of history in Turkey. Chapters Five and Six examine the different ways in which the Turkish people obtain their religious education through ingroup socialization. These chapters offer insight into the platforms in which the Diyanet, three mystical religious movements, and religious textbooks provide religious education, communication, and domination. The expansive representation of the three Naqshbandiyya mystical religious movements (Işıkçılar, İskenderpaşa, and Erenköy), their diachronic revival, and their contribution to religious education provides substantial insight into the configuration and dissemination of the mystical factionalism in Turkey. At this juncture, Bacık's analyses of the close relationship between these mystical groups and political authorities, along with the former's hierarchical kinship structures, increase the value of the book (p. 135, 140, 143).

As Bacık accentuates, the dominant theological approach amongst Turkish people is the Māturīdī school, but the author gives the impression that the Ash'arī school's theological doctrine invisibly percolated into the widespread Māturīdī theological doctrines. He states:

[...] the boundary of Ottoman Maturidism was blurred, due to its continuous receptions from the Ash'ari. Thus, whereas the Turks are staunchly Hanafi, their doctrinal identity has been syncretic. Recognizing this syncretism is essential to understanding the Turkish case with regard to Islamic theology as well as the Islamic idea of nature. (p. 102)

Al-Ghazālī's method of establishing cooperation between religion and state in the Ash'arī theology is brought as evidence to substantiate the argument, but this notion is also an entrenched doctrine in the Māturīdī school. In emphasizing the alliance between the state authorities and religious scholars during the time of the Ottoman Sultanate, the author argues that the same relationship exists in contemporary Turkey.

Using al-Ghazālī's idea, that religion is the foundation of the state, and the state is the protector of religion – that is, the state is necessary to maintain religion, and religion is necessary to legitimate the state – the author argues that this new concept of transcendental statehood empowered authorities to enforce state-supported religious understanding (p. 35–44). However, al-Ghazālī's views regarding mysticism, rather than theology and philosophy, need to be explained to understand how his mystical opinions influenced the mystical religious movements in Turkey that are the focus of the last two chapters.¹ It

¹ A good example that provides deep insight into al-Ghazālī's mystical stance and his undeniable contribution to the enhancements of mystical movements is provided in Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 35–46, 64–67.

would have been insightful and elucidative for the author to mention the mystical stance of al-Ghazālī to clarify the sympathy of Turkish mystical movements toward his opinion.

In explaining religious education and socialization, Bacık gives privileged status to the official religious institution of Turkey, stating: “The Diyanet is also a major agent of the reproduction and transmission of Islamic faith in Turkey” (p. 131). However, it seems that he privileges the theological influence of the three mystical religious movements over the Diyanet’s theological predominance while overgeneralizing the repercussions of these religious movements on Turkish society. The resistance to modernity in Turkey is implicitly linked to the affiliation with the Mātūrīdī school, but this argument explicitly disregards the scientific, philosophical, and medical developments that took place in the time of the Mātūrīdī-affiliated Ottoman Sultanate.² It should also be noted that since these religious movements are mainly categorized as mystical groups rather than theological movements, the selection criteria identified by the author are not comprehensive and seem to have been chosen somewhat arbitrarily. The Diyanet and these groups express themselves as the followers of the Mātūrīdī school, but the author combines their teachings with the Ash‘arī school (p. 148, 149). The strong adherence of the İskenderpaşa, Işıkcılar and Erenköy groups to al-Ghazālī’s mystical opinions is evaluated by the author as a theological commitment to the Ash‘arī school.³ Regarding the interpretation of Mātūrīdī theological understanding, the author connects the adherence of these groups to al-Ghazālī’s mystical approach with resistance to modernity.

Additionally, the author’s argument regarding the use of religion by the previous Turkish states to control Turkish society is not sufficiently explained. It is important to note that after the establishment of the Turkish government in 1923, the state implemented a strict secular agenda by making a sharp division between religion and state. The mission, responsibility, and role of the office of Shaykh al-Islām could therefore not be transferred to the newly established religious institution, the Diyanet.⁴ The origins of problematic theological inter-

² See for example: Howard R. Turner, *Science in Medieval Islam: An Illustrated Introduction* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1997), 1–10; Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Science Among the Ottomans: The Cultural Creation and Exchange of Knowledge* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015), 7–17.

³ The teachings of these mystical groups and their connection with al-Ghazālī’s mystical opinions are deeply elucidated in their own publications. See for example: Osman Nūri Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith (Ihsân)* (Istanbul: Erkam Publications, 2017), 54, 83, 103; Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *The Sunni Path* (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, 2013), 65; Mehmed Zahid Kotku, *Nefsin Terbiyesi* (Istanbul: Server, 2013), 20, 30.

⁴ The establishment of the Diyanet, its relationship with the state, and its connection with the Office of Shaykh al-Islām are provided in Emine Enise Yakar, *Islamic Law and Society: The Prac-*

pretations in contemporary Turkey therefore may be linked to the state's secularization policy, since the government applied both the secularist principles and imposed the state-controlled religion upon the Turkish people with the intention of consolidating its authority in the initial period of the Turkish Republic.

Despite these shortcomings, Bacık's book indeed fills a gap in the literature regarding the origins of theological schools and the Islamic idea of nature, along with the role of the Diyanet and mystical groups for the transmission of religious knowledge in Turkey. The last parts of the book provide quite detailed explanations regarding the revival and organizational system of religio-mystical movements, their hierarchical structure and economic powers which broaden the readers mind concerning the influence of religious groups. The additional contribution of the book is the author's analysis of the influence of religious movements on contemporary politics of Turkey.

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tice of İftâ' and Religious Institutions (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 74–90; Emine Enise Yakar, "A Critical Comparison between the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) and The Office of Shaykh al-Islâm," *Kilis 7 Aralık Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 6, no. 11 (2019): 422, 448.