

Localizing Islam in Europe: Turkish Islamic Communities in Germany and the Netherlands

Ahmet Yükleven

New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012. 280 pages.

During April 2012, Salafi Muslims in Germany launched a Qur'an giveaway program to save non-Muslims from hell. Soon after, public debates emerged in the national media concerning broader Muslim transgressions in Europe. Especially the Turks, 3 million strong and two-thirds of Germany's Muslims according to the Federal Migration and Refugees Office, underwent further scrutiny. The August 17, 2012, issue of the popular news magazine *Der Spiegel* posited why Turkish Muslims escaped the backlash against Islamist radicalism this time: Despite their proud Muslim identity, Turks living in Europe yearn to be integrated and feel at home in Germany. Until recently, migration scholars emphasized the incompatibility between Islam and western values, thereby portraying European Turks as another Muslim community that defied assimilation. *Localizing Islam* challenges this scholarship and explains why Turks feel at home in Europe. It compares several Turkish Sunni organizations in Germany and the Netherlands, *reinvents ways they interpret* Islam, and argues that Islam's inner diversity has endured within the European context.

The opening chapters, "Turkish Islamic Field" and "Islamic Authority and Knowledge," consider specific Islamist organizations as principals to supplying and consuming religious interpretations. These organizations pursue dissimilar courses of actions: "The National Vision" (Milli Görüş) is political Islamist, the Kaplan is radical Islamist, the Gülen is education-oriented, the Diyanet is Turkish state-sponsored, and the Süleymanlı is mystical Sufi. They negotiate vertically between the host state and their followers, and compete horizontally with other organizations by claiming that their path is the "true" Islam. Operating through such avenues as religious rituals, reading circles, and public meetings, each organization seeks to reinforce its authority within the broader Turkish community.

Chapters 3 and 4, "Islamic Activism" and "State Policies and Islam in Germany and the Netherlands," respectively, explore dimensions of rivalry between Islamist organizations by demonstrating the extent to which particular "socio-religious activism" (*khidmat*) helps followers exploit opportunistic spaces provided by state policies. Significantly, these chapters find that the manifestation, shape, and adaptation of Islamic organizations depend on the host government's policies. For example Milli Görüş, which must deal with

the difficulties created by the parameters of Germany's exclusionist policies, functions quite freely within the Dutch multicultural system.

The final chapters, "Islamic Organizations and Muslim Integration" and "The Kaplan Community," trace the discourse of Muslim integration into Dutch society and the formulation of the Kaplan's revolutionary message. These chapters suggest that heightened religiosity has both pros and cons: it inspires a sense of belongingness in the community, but simultaneously leads to communal isolation.

Localizing Islam takes a novel perspective by looking at the problem of integration from the community outward and as one involving dialectical processes among stakeholders. It convincingly contests existing assumptions about the formation of Turkish communities and the ability of several Islamic organizations to claim religious authority among their followers in Germany and the Netherlands. The book's valuable contribution comes by way of concluding that, for Turks, being Muslim in Europe is a double-edged sword: Islamic identity exposes them to discrimination and rejection, but the European space simultaneously allows them a freedom to organize and function in a way that would not be possible in the Turkish or Arab worlds. Thanks to sectarian divisions, however, the multiplicity of competing organizations loom large and thus both divides them and limits their chances to confront their societal grievances as a united front. This book enriches the extent of research in the field by its resourceful use of participant observation, surveys, and interviews with several generations of Turks in Europe.

Localising Islam has several flaws in approach, content, and structure, however. To begin, the margins of comparative analysis are not cogently drawn: The introduction considers Europe's larger Muslim community (viz., Arabs in France and Indo-Pakistanis in Britain), yet the following chapters discuss Turkish communities in Germany and the Netherlands exclusively. Thus French assimilationist policies and British multicultural projects are not presented as they relate to Turkish migrations to these countries.

Two of Yükleyn's major contentions are that the migration experience increased religiosity among Turkish Muslim immigrants in Europe and that during the 1980s Turkish Muslim organizations struggled to control each mosque. If this is the case, then the Turks' reorientation toward a stronger Islamic identity and inner communal struggles also requires examining "other Turks," those who identify themselves more with Kemalist values and less with Islamic norms, and the "alternative courses" that Turks have used to cross over organizational lines. Evidently, Turkish families in Europe simultaneously attend activities of multiple organizations: They perform the Eid

prayers in the Diyanet mosque and send their children to both the Gülen and the Süleymanlı (Qur'anic) schools; some even join the summer picnics of Milli Görüş.

Localising Islam would have been well served by providing a more balanced account of Turkish Islamic organizations. Perhaps because the author supports the Gülenists, the book is clearly silent on the movement's shortcomings, especially its lack of appeal to the lower classes and its increasingly notorious image as a pretentious "money- and prestige-loving" group concerned more with networking host country leaders and less with community problems. A more objective approach to Islamic groups (especially when comparing the Milli Görüş, Diyanet, and Gülen organizations) would have added immensely to the book's overall quality of analysis.

The book is often quite repetitive in its descriptions, and the style tends to be rather sluggish (it is an issue this reviewer finds in multiple monographs published by the same publisher. See, for instance, Nizar Hamzeh's *In the Path of Hizbullah* ([2004]). Arguably, a more rigorous editing would have turned the author's dissertation into a better book.

Advanced readers in the field may find the book's depiction of historical developments somewhat shallow. For instance, "since the middle of the nineteenth century," it states, "the Ottoman Empire emulated European military and political administration, equating modernization with westernization" (p. 13). As such Ottomanists as Şükrü Hanioglu and Kemal Karpat have argued, "the Late Ottoman Empire" (government, intellectuals, institutions, and peoples) can hardly be reduced into a monolithic, passive entity that, having reached a consensus on westernization as the only way to modernization, emulated Europe unconditionally. The socio-historical developments in Turkey and Europe seem to deserve a deeper analysis, even though they relate only indirectly to the book's central themes.

Minor points may confuse rather than inform general readers. At one point, Islamic organizations are said to help youths build self-confidence by learning their *own* history, culture, and religion. In another case, the author states that there is no central authority that theologically defines or represents Sunni Islam as there is, for example, in the hierarchical Catholic Church. In these cases, the type of history, culture, and religion "owned" by youths and why Sunni Islam is compared to the Catholic Church must be explained at greater length.

Notwithstanding its flaws, *Localising Islam* is a valuable contribution to the field. Ruth Mandel's *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) and Philip Martin's *The Unfinished Story: Turkish Labour Migration to Western Europe: With Special Reference to the Federal Republic of Germany*

(Geneva: International Labour Office, 1991) might remain the field's reference books, but *Localising Islam* is certainly of great interest to students of Turkish migrations eager to learn about Turkish Islamic organizations inside out.

Emrah Sahin
Turkish Studies Lecturer, Center for European Studies
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL