

Ceren Lord, *Religious Politics in Turkey: From the Birth of the Republic to the AKP*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). \$105.00 CAD (cloth); \$32.99 CAD (paper); \$26.00 USD (digital). Pp. 386. ISBN 9781108472005.

Turkey remains one of the most puzzling and enticing countries for researchers in the field of social science. Prominent among the reasons for this perennial interest in Turkey are the unique legal, governmental, and societal structures established upon the legacy of the Ottoman Empire—or, more precisely, the multifaceted and convoluted relations these three structures have engendered with one another. Religion—specifically the religion of Islam—and the role it plays in state and society embodies one of the most complicated (seemingly mysterious) aspects of this network of convoluted and multifaceted relations. Into this long-standing discussion, Ceren Lord's new book, *Religious Politics in Turkey*, emerges as a new piece of research, claiming to discuss a new dimension of this intricacy, beyond the classic readings of religion, law, and politics in Turkey.

Lord discusses the growth of religious politics in Turkey, from the birth of the secular republic to the rise to power of the explicitly religious Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, known as the AKP). While Lord addresses multiple facets of the religion-state relationship in Turkey, her focus is on Turkey's gargantuan and influential transnational state institution governing religion, the Diyanet (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, the Presidency of Religious Affairs), as it is widely known. Established approximately five months after the declaration of the republic and initially connected to the prime ministry of the new republic, the Diyanet was created by a law that eliminated the Şer'iyye ve Evkaf Vekaleti (Shaykh al-Islam) the Ottoman ministry responsible for religious affairs. While the Diyanet dates from the earliest days of the secular republic, real debate over its role in Turkish society first materialized during the Islamist and authoritarian era of the AKP, and, importantly, this is a debate that generally surfaces in non-academic channels. Lord, however, brings the Diyanet into the academic conversation about how Turkey was drawn to an Islamist path contrary to its secular state structure.

Lord's main argument is that the Diyanet, despite being commonly regarded as a marginal actor within the state, is utilized by the secular elites to control religion and has, in fact, played an important role in the Islamization of public spaces and in delimiting the boundaries of the nation (9–10). It is striking that Lord asserts this argument repeatedly throughout the book's six chapters (in addition to the introduction and conclusion), which may cause the academic reader to question whether Lord trusts the reader to follow the argument. Although Lord asserts that the new Republic of Turkey distinguished itself from the Ottoman state through the secular status of the republic, the creation of the Diyanet and its acquisition of control over religion-state and societal affairs, as experts have underscored prolifically, indicates that it is a structure unique to the secularism (*laiklik*) of Turkey.

According to Lord, prior studies of religion and politics in Turkey and the Diyanet in particular are premised on the clash and competition for power between the secular state structure and the segment of society with elevated religious values. In this framework, the Diyanet is merely one contested state institution in this struggle for power, one area of the battlefield (8–11). According to Lord, these classic readings view both the state and the Diyanet monolithically and ignore the fact that the Diyanet has its own political objectives and strategies. While Lord appropriately emphasizes that the Diyanet is a political organization, the claim that this fact has been ignored

is misleading. To the contrary, academics such as Ahmet Kuru, Hakan Yavuz, and Nilüfer Göle, whose claims Lord indirectly challenges, describe relatively similar circumstances in their various works using distinct methods.

Lord offers an eclectic reading of religion and politics in Turkey utilizing social movement theory, historical institutionalism, constructivism, and Marxist approaches, which leads her to argue that these prior studies are entirely deficient and/or erroneous. Rather, she believes that the relationship between religion and the state in Turkey is not wholly routinized (13), and that the Diyanet, which she defines as the Sunni ulema (the religious experts of Sunni Islam), plays an active and vibrant role in the constant renegotiation of this relationship. Lord states that the institution of the Diyanet—decidedly not a monolith—has been closely intertwined with Islamism since its establishment and is the continuation of the Şeyhülislam (the chief religious official in the Ottoman Empire) which oversaw the domain of religion in the Ottoman Empire and possessed its own intellect and objectives. This is why, according to Lord, the Diyanet is a vivacious political institution that, in a sense, can negotiate with the state and collaborate with religious communities and seeks to Islamicize the structures of both state and society in Turkey.

Lord makes three key claims to substantiate her argument. First, she characterizes the Diyanet and its administration as the Turkish ulema because of its religious authority structure. This might be true, but it is important to recognize that this ulema secures its power from no religious institution, creed, or structure; rather, as an ulema, the Diyanet holds authority as a political institution. Therefore, its power, influence, and governance are under the control of the state structure. One of the best examples here, I believe, is Mehmet Görmez, who served as one of the most influential presidents of the Diyanet between 2010 and 2017 and retained power both domestically and internationally. Over the course of a single day, however, he was forced to resign and lost all his power because the state, governed by President Erdogan, removed *the head of the ulema* from his position and incapacitated him. As this example suggests, Diyanet officials are state officials, and the Diyanet is primarily a state institution, not an independent or autonomous ulema.

Furthermore, to elaborate on the Diyanet's unique position within the Turkish state, Lord could have more richly sought to discuss the role of the Diyanet in foreign policy after the 1970s, when religion again emerged at the global nucleus of politics, and to position Turkey as a nation influenced concurrently by Middle Eastern and Balkan policies. She could also have pushed it beyond the domain of Turkish studies to contribute to the fields of religion and politics. Yet Lord's study is outside of this broad scope.

Second, Lord both explicitly and implicitly emphasizes that Sunni Islamist groups have been locked in a battle for power within the Diyanet, discussing different historical eras in chapters 2, 4, and 5. Lord's emphasis here is important, for there is not much study of this issue, particularly in English-language literature. It would have been more valuable, however, had she more clearly explained how and why this situation emerged and how this struggle for control reflected disputes between different communities within broader Turkish society. Such a narrative might have told us in chapter 6, for example, the how, what, and why of the Diyanet's inability to dominate the upper echelons of the Turkish government despite the Gülen movement's having been the AKP's closest ally. Or it might have explained the relationship between the growing influence in Ankara of the Süleymanlı Community, which for years had been excluded from the Diyanet, and the international expansion of the Diyanet after the 1970s. Lord's claim is further weakened by the absence of a fundamental methodology, which I discuss later.

Third, Lord notes that the structure of neither the Diyanet nor the Turkish state is monolithic. She notes that the Diyanet engages in different negotiations with the state on issues regarding the religion of Islam, in line with its own pertinent interests, desires, and policies. None of these claims

are erroneous or incomplete, but neither are they new nor previously undiscussed. The state structure of Turkey is no doubt multidimensional, like all state structures, and Turkey has long used religion as a tool within the state. In this regard, it would be inaccurate to claim that Islam and its institutions have no power or seats at the negotiating table in this state structure, which the religion of Islam has dominated for twelve years. While Lord did not fall victim to this error, she offered it to the reader as if it were novel. This is a situation familiar to everyone who studies both political science and real politics in Turkey. But Lord's emphasis here, with fluent language and clear emphasis on the points of change, is undoubtedly an important contribution to the literature.

The strongest chapter is the third, in which Lord delineates the policies of omission and oppression that the Turkish state and the Diyanet have implemented on the Alevi. Lord clearly conveys that the state structure and the Diyanet, from the late Ottoman Empire until today, have imposed systematic policies of Sunnification on Alevi (133–34). Since the founding of Turkey, the state has enacted policies of assimilation through the Diyanet against every segment of society not deemed adequately Sunni Muslim. Using the Diyanet's own publications and policies, Lord reveals how and to what extent it has supported these policies. While mentioning some of the key points of the early republic and multiparty life, she more importantly emphasizes how the Alevi rose onto the state agenda under the policy known as the Alevi Opening during the ongoing era of AKP dominance. Lord contends that Gülenists tried to dominate the Alevi under the shared mosque and *djemevi* (or *cemevi*, house of gathering or worship) partnership during the period of Gülen movement and AKP collaboration. Although this section is slightly controversial, and Lord somewhat overlooks the role of the Diyanet, one important matter stands out: the implementation of assimilation policies against Alevi and Kurds—the religious and ethnic “others” of the state. Lord's emphasis on this is a contribution to future studies of Turkish society and state.

I highlight three points that emerge from Lord's study but which could have been further developed. First, Lord relies on a more expansive literature review and archive study than do most other studies of similar topics, and her work is compelling in that regard. However, a field study supported by interviews of Sunni community leaders, political figures, and representatives of secular structures in Turkey apart from Diyanet personnel may have been more cogent. Contact with these structures, which in turn house numerous structures within and position themselves according to religion, might have helped Lord attain a better command of some nuances. Second, Lord is convincing in her analysis of Alevism, yet there are gaps in her analyses on the issue of Sunni Islamic configurations. For instance, the multilayered structure of the Gülen movement and the roles that structures of the Süleymanî community close to or far from the state played in conservative political parties are key in explaining the policies of parties using Islamic values both during and before the AKP. Lord, however, did not note these points in her study. And finally, Lord could have made a better case for her study's contribution to the general literature in the fields of religion and politics. In both the introduction and conclusion she stresses the pertinence of this study for understanding religion-state relations in nations such as Malaysia, Ireland, and India, and she frequently mentions the salience of religious institutions, yet she is ambiguous regarding *how* the example of Turkey or her own interpretation contribute to general studies of the relations that religious institutions establish with the state and society. That said, Lord's book stands out as a fine study of Turkish politics, Turkish religiosity, and Turkish secularism and is a work at which everyone concerned with these issues should at least take a look.

Ahmet Erdi Ozturk
Lecturer, London Metropolitan University