



Analytical Bulletin of Armenian and Regional Studies

ISSN: 1829-4502

e-ISSN: 2953-8254

Journal homepage: <https://analytical-bulletin.cccs.am/index.php/ab/index>



*Vardan Papikyan*

“Doğan Gürpınar, Apparatchiks and Ideologues in Islamist Turkey: The Intellectual Order of Islamism and Populism, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 175 pp.”

**To cite this article:** Vardan Papikyan. “Doğan Gürpınar, Apparatchiks and Ideologues in Islamist Turkey: The Intellectual Order of Islamism and Populism, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 175 pp.”  
*Analytical Bulletin of Armenian and Regional Studies (CCCS)* 19 (2024): 112-117 DOI:  
10.56673/18294502-vpd2024.19.2

**To link to this article:** **DOI:** 10.56673/18294502-vpd2024.19.2



Published online:

06 October



[Submit your article to  
this journal](#)



## BOOK REVIEW

*Doğan Gürpınar, Apparatchiks and Ideologues in Islamist Turkey: The Intellectual Order of Islamism and Populism, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 175 pp*

*Դոդան Գյուրփրնար, Ապարատչիկները և գաղափարախոսները իսլամիստական Թուրքիայում. Իսլամիզմի և պոպուլիզմի ինտելեկտուալ կարգը. Փարգրեյվ Մաքմիլան, 2022. 175 էջ*

DOI: 10.56673/18294502-vpd2024.19.2

Received 24 July 2024

Accepted 29 July 2024

Doğan Gürpınar’s book *Apparatchiks and Ideologues in Islamist Turkey: The Intellectual Order of Islamism and Populism* is an important work that deals with the ideological and practical transformations of Islamist movements in Turkey. The book examines the historical development of Islamist movements, their ideological diversity, and their relations with the state.

The book delves into the transformations that Islamism has undergone throughout history. Gürpınar analyzes the changes in the relations between Islamist movements and the state, especially during the AKP period. The historical process is well-documented, but some periods should be studied in more depth. Specifically, early Islamism should be further clarified.

In terms of timeline, Gürpınar provides valuable insights into the development of Turkish Islamism from Ottoman times to the modern Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its enigmatic leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. By contextualizing contemporary events within a broader historical framework, Gürpınar offers readers a deeper understanding of Turkey’s complex political landscape.

One of the most compelling aspects of the book is its exploration of the tension between the “apparatchiks” - pragmatic power players keen to understand the intricacies of Turkish politics - and the “ideologues” - staunch

supporters of a purist interpretation of Islam in governance. Through meticulous research and incisive commentary, Gürpınar paints a vivid picture of these competing factions, revealing the cracks that run through Turkey's Islamic landscape.

The book is divided into eight parts, each of which is devoted to different stages and processes determining the political landscape of Turkey. Gürpınar analyzes the emergence and formation of Islamist movements, their integration into the state system, as well as their impact on society.

The first chapter of the book is entitled "Introduction: The AKP's Intellectual Order and Political Technology in Comparative Perspectives." This chapter presents a comparative look at the intellectual structure of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), placing it alongside other modern populist authoritarian regimes. According to the author, what distinguishes the AKP from the autocracies of the period of democratization before the Third Wave is its claim to represent the people. These are hybrid regimes devoid of ideology, which instead rely on electoral support as the basis of their legitimacy. It requires a malleable mix of discourses to put together a populist blend. Thus, the intellectuals associated with the AKP act as apparatchiks in the order of political technology. However, the AKP and its leadership cannot simply be portrayed as populist, as they rely on an ideological core. Therefore, a comparative perspective requires attention to the Islamist roots of the party. Indeed, from the first page of the chapter to the end, the author remained faithful to this principle and presented the Islamic roots of the party in detail. Gürpınar provides an in-depth examination of the AKP's political strategy, focusing on how the party has managed to consolidate power. He discusses the party's use of state resources, media, and patronage networks to maintain its dominance. The balance between appeasing its ideological base and appealing to a broader electorate is thoroughly analyzed.

The second chapter is called "Quasi-liberal Intellectuals as AKP Apparatchiks: The Second Republic, White Turks, and Other Apologetics." This chapter examines the leftist, secular-liberal intellectuals of the AKP, as well as the strategies they used to justify the party and its descent into authoritarianism. Initially, the AKP came to power with a reformist program

---

that appealed to liberal intellectuals. They used an interpretation of modern Turkish history based on an anti-Kemalist platform that viewed the irreconcilable national statism of Kemalism as a reactionary force blocking the development of an emerging pluralistic society. This version has been used as a populist version of the AKP, which equates democracy with majoritarianism, defeating the historically powerful establishment. The author notes that, although most liberal intellectuals eventually withdrew their support, some adapted to the AKP's authoritarian turn.

The third chapter is entitled "Islamism, Populism, and Nativism: A Syncretic Brand." Here, the author refers to the Islamist intellectuals who had reconciled their Islamic proclivities with liberal democratic premises in the 1990s as a response to the repressive measures, assembling a new synthesis. This apparently self-confident narrative outlined a certain interpretation of the history of modern Turkey. After the authoritarian turn of the AKP, this synthesis was adjusted. The Islamists did not return to traditional and long-standing Islamic narratives but created a new mix that took populism out of the textbooks of Islamism and localized liberalism. This populism has fully capitalized on keywords such as "White Turks," using nationalism, ideas of inauthenticity and eradication, as well as the historiography of cultural hegemony and the cultural establishment to create an unchanging moral dichotomy between real people and a narrow secular elite.

In the fourth chapter, titled "Popular Culture and Conspiracy: Managing the Political Entertainment Scene," the author notes that a number of intellectuals from different political and ideological backgrounds began working as apparatchiks of the AKP. In the era of populism, they used the party the way it used them: individuals made their own way to fame through television, which is not at all like how the intelligentsia was used as apparatchiks in authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century (as in the case of the Soviet Union, the birthplace of the term). The "A News" channel functioned as the mouthpiece of the government: presenters and pundits spread propaganda through a mixture of news and debate rife with conspiracy and eccentricity. Pop music performers were also assimilated into the political sphere, and Erdogan was personally interested in interfering in

football. In this way, celebrity culture and the entertainment industry have been exploited in the service of the populist order.

In the fifth chapter, the author focuses on “Political technology.” This chapter is titled “The Rise of Politico Intellectuals: Think Tanks and the Operators of Political Technology.” Here, Gürpınar observes that the erosion of political power by political parties and the ruling AKP, especially after the transition to the presidential system, has led to the growing importance of non-political paths to political power. The personalization of power has also resulted in a spread of nepotism, clientelism, and networking. Various types of feudal estates were established, and factionalism developed with numerous power pyramids. One avenue to power lies through think tanks, the media, and other intellectual spheres. In this way, political intellectuals became partners of the government. The first example of this rise to prominence was Ahmet Davutoğlu. However, Davutoğlu also represents the last battle of Islamic commitment and ideological purity, as his overthrow by the Pelicans marked the final shift from intellectuals to apparatchiks.

In the sixth chapter, the author provides a detailed analysis of the AKP-MHP political coalition. Gürpınar mentions that after 2016, the AKP’s coalition partner, the National Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP), demonstrated the complete eradication of any political agency, leading to the collapse of its intellectual backbone. Nationalist-minded intellectuals almost unanimously abandoned the party. Although the AKP and the MHP appeared to be united on a right-wing platform, this required the latter to relinquish its deep-rooted Turkish nationalist claims in favor of the AKP’s Islamism, which was seen as opposing the national-state core. Thus, the MHP began to function as a political machine. Other new allies, opportunists, and ideologues who joined the intellectual mix after the coup included various national security intellectuals, as well as retired generals and admirals, forming an influential group that partially supported the AKP regime’s policies in the name of national interests against internal and external threats.

In the seventh chapter, Gürpınar analyzes the state of Turkish universities during the AKP rule. The academy in Turkey has been under strict national security protection since the 1980s, under the supervision of

---

the Higher Education Council (YÖK). In the first five years of its existence, the AKP fought the "academic opposition" before it was able to establish its command over YÖK. This chapter examines the AKP's strategies for the administration, management, and transformation of the Turkish university system. Especially after the failed coup attempt in 2016, mass purges were undertaken. Although the AKP government has largely succeeded in silencing opposition voices in academia, its ambitious attempt to establish the hegemony of Islamist conservatism, which would replace the old Kemalist secular conservatism through new institutions, has failed.

In the last chapter, which is entitled "Historians, Osmanophilia, Perennial Islam, and Contested National Identity in an Era of Cultural War," the author mentions that in the era of the AKP, culture wars broke out in Turkey. Similar to the socio-political split in the United States, following the disappearance of the great national narrative of Kemalism, historians of pop music have become prominent intellectuals of the new intellectual order. In the context of the fall of historical revisionism and the rise of osmanophilia, this chapter examines several intellectuals associated with the AKP and their arguments. They revolve around the Ottoman Empire and the national past, presented as a pristine, eternal moral order that has been corrupted by the advent of Turkish national modernity. It discusses the images of the Ottoman ecumene and their role in the struggle for empire and nation.

The author has produced an interesting intellectual history of the late Ottoman Empire and the modern Turkish state. In fact, "Apparatchiks and Ideologues" is a page-turner. It takes a connoisseur of Turkish politics on a journey to the country's 20 years under Erdoğan's rule, sharing knowledge and intellectual experience in a masterful book that tells the fascinating story of the apparatchiks and ideologues who shaped Turkish life. Gülşinar traces the historical roots of Islamism in Turkey, providing a background that helps readers understand the ideological shifts over time. He explores the transition from early Islamist movements to the establishment of the AKP, highlighting the continuities and breaks in ideological positions.

In general, Doğan Gürpınar's book, "Apparatchiks and Ideologues in Islamist Turkey: The Intellectual Order of Islamism and Populism," is considered a significant contribution to the understanding of the history of

Islamism in Turkey. Although the book attracts attention with the topics it covers and the analysis it presents, some sections have received criticism for their lack of in-depth analysis and a broader theoretical framework. One such criticism relates to the limited theoretical framework, particularly in chapters where Gürpınar discusses the intellectual history of Islamism in Turkey, including its development and evolution. It is argued that the analysis lacks connection to broader theoretical frameworks. While the book provides a rich historical narrative, it could have benefited from a deeper engagement with theories of political ideology, populism, or intellectual history to strengthen the analysis. This can be observed in chapters focusing on the ideological shifts within Islamist movements, where a comparative analysis with other global or regional Islamist movements could have been valuable. Another potential area of critique is the use of case studies or specific examples to illustrate broader points. In the chapters dealing with the relationship between Islamism and populism, it is suggested that the book could have included more detailed case studies or examples to support its claims. For instance, while the book discusses the AKP's populist strategies, it may be seen as lacking in-depth analysis of specific policies or political events that exemplify these strategies. However, despite these shortcomings, the book stands out as a valuable resource for those who want to understand the transformation of Islamist movements in Turkey.

*Vardan Papikyan*  
*University of Bucharest, PhD student*  
*vardanpapikyan1993@gmail.com*