Disciples of the State?

As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, the Middle East and Balkans became the site of contestation and cooperation between the traditional forces of religion and the emergent machine of the sovereign state. Yet such strategic interaction rarely yielded a decisive victory for either the secular state or for religion. By tracing how state-builders engaged religious institutions, elites and attachments, this book problematizes the divergent religion–state power configurations that have developed. There are two central arguments. First, states carved out more sovereign space in places like Greece and Turkey, where religious elites were integral to early centralizing reform processes. Second, region-wide structural constraints on the types of linkages states were able to build with religion have generated long-term repercussions. Fatefully, both state policies that seek to facilitate equality through the recognition of religious difference and state policies that seek to eradicate such difference have contributed to failures of liberal democratic consolidation.

Kristin Fabbe is an assistant professor in the Business, Government, and International Economy Unit at Harvard Business School. Dr. Fabbe is also faculty affiliate at the Middle East Initiative at the John F. Kennedy School of Government's Belfer Center, the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard, and the Harvard Center for Middle East Studies.

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Religion and State-Building in the Former Ottoman World

KRISTIN FABBE
Harvard Business School

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Preface

Like many projects, this one has derived inspiration from some unlikely places. In fact, the ideas behind this book only first came together as the result of a "false start" on another project which forced me to question my assumptions about the secular nature of the state and national identity.

I had been seeking to answer what I thought was a relatively basic question: why did religion and state support one another in Greece and not in Turkey? The question struck me as interesting (and relatively straightforward) for several reasons. Before graduate school, I spent three years working in the nonprofit sector in Greece, where I was fascinated by the institutional synergies I observed between the Greek state and the Greek Orthodox Church. At the time, priests, politicians and citizens had all been taking to the streets to protest a European Union-inspired initiative to remove religious affiliation from state-issued identification cards. Naïve though it may have been, I was surprised that religion was listed on state-issued documents at all. I was even more surprised to discover later, as I traveled the country conducting informal interviews, that the salaries of clergymen were paid by the state. Religion and the state seemed, in fact, inseparable.

Around the same time, I was in the process of learning Turkish and studying Turkish history. At first blush my observations from Greece stood in contrast to what I was reading about religion–state relations in Turkey. Turkish newspapers often had bombastic headlines about the decades-long conflict between the military-backed "deep state" and religion. The secondary literature on Turkey emphasized the avowedly "secular" nature of the state and many commentators openly lamented the potential threat to "state secularism" posed by the rising popularity of moderate Islamic political parties and/or "religious reactionaries." In Turkey, I gathered, religion and state were fierce antagonists.

As I made my first official trip to the field to research Greek and Turkish approaches to religion, I was armed with a number of viable competing hypotheses that could potentially explain such divergence. What I was not prepared for, and what I quickly found out, was that both my original question and my deductive approach were grossly misguided. During my first summer in Turkey in 2006, I conducted a number of informational interviews with imams at mosques in Ankara and Istanbul. I discovered that they too, like their Greek counterparts, received salaries from the state. This led me to initiate discussions with several representatives from the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), Turkey's official ministry of religion, where I repeatedly heard variations on a common theme: religion and state were, officially speaking, working together to support national cohesion and collective morality. Even more eye-opening was the fact that the very same year, as Ankara was trying to bolster its EU credentials, a national debate erupted about whether the state should still mandate that religion be listed on national identity cards. My prior reading about the "fiercely secular" nature of the Turkish state had not prepared me for such similarities with Greece. Clearly my initial question had failed to appreciate some critical and curious overlaps in the Greek and Turkish approaches to governing religion. I scrapped my original question and went back to the drawing board.

The next set of realizations came as I was sifting through transcripts of hundreds of interviews with individuals who had been subjected to the forced population transfer that took place between Greece and Turkey in 1923 as the two states made efforts to homogenize their populations and create loyal citizen bases. Feeling deflated after the failures of my first research endeavors, I had decided to move on from religion and study the politics of forced migration and nation-state building in Greece and Turkey. Nationalism, or so I had learned from a wealth of studies on the topic, was a "secular" ideology based on the concept of sovereignty, and thus a distinctly modern phenomenon. I had expected to find, in the words of Benedict Anderson, that the "dawn of the age of nationalism" would unfold in tandem with the "dusk of religious modes of thought."[1] What I gleaned from the interview transcripts, however, gradually made it clear that it was not time to jettison the issue of religion from my research.

In both countries, religious authorities were often the ones tasked with announcing, overseeing and facilitating state-sponsored forced migrations. State authorities also consistently used religious identity to distinguish rightful "citizens" from those who would be subjected to forced migration, even in regions where interviewees themselves did not report a history of religious conflict or violence. In other words, these two "secular" nation-states were actively using religious identity markers to consolidate authority as well as define citizens and enemies. I began to see that state formation overlapped with issues of religious regulation to inspire new institutions for managing and

producing state-centric religions, as well as new forms of collective identification based on a synthesis of religious tradition and the modern.

My reading of the interview transcripts also drove home several other points that substantially shaped this project. For one, the transcripts revealed the importance of religious elites and institutions in daily governance, making it clear that I would have to take into account the legacy of preexisting forms of Ottoman administration in my historical analysis of the modern state-building processes in the region. I thus became intent on studying the relationship between state-building and religious elites, religious institutions (schools, courts, charities and places of worship) and religious attachments (individual and collective piety, as well as nominal religious affiliations, as forms of identity) in the former Ottoman world more generally. Focusing on religious elites, institutions and attachments led me to a wealth of specialized historical literature and archival sources that showed that the reform of educational and legal institutions – which was when religion often first confronted the expansion of the modern nation-state – would be central to my project.

My academic interest in the historical relationship between state-building and religion coincided with political developments in the Middle East that reinforced the contemporary relevance and importance of the topic. In the wake of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and again after the collapse of several Arab dictatorships in 2011, a number of policy makers and pundits began advocating for the so-called "Turkish model" as a viable blueprint for rebuilding transitional and troubled states. These were not the first times that the idea of Turkey as a model had been invoked. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the so-called "Turkish Developmental Alternative" was promoted as the ideal way to structure state–society relations in the Central Asian Republics.[2] In both instances policy makers (and not just Western ones) advocated for the Turkish "way" based on the country's exemplary status as a "secular" and Western-friendly state with a high level of prosperity, deepening democratic institutions, social stability and civic dynamism.

More recent political instability and democratic backsliding in Turkey have disabused people of the notion that other states should follow in Turkey's footsteps. Upon closer examination – and as my discussion of Turkish and other Middle Eastern cases in this book will make clear – the idea that Turkey ever could have, or even *should have*, been a model exposes a number of contradictions and challenges that eventually culminate in the question: What exactly is Turkey a model of when it comes to religion–state arrangements? In fact, although officially secular in name, due to the country's constitutional principle of *lâiklik*, the Turkish state has never been neutral toward religion; it is also, by no means, an "Islamic state." The often-misunderstood power arrangement between religion and state in Turkey, which involves the state administration of religion via a centralized bureaucracy together with a forged, ideational and administrative synthesis of the religious and the national, is the

product of various historical forces and conditions, and has direct links to repeated instances of violence and the politics of exclusion.

As I will show, it has always been highly unlikely that the early Turkish experience would be successfully replicated either organically or by imposition elsewhere in the Middle East, despite the fact that many modernizers held Mustafa Kemal in high esteem. Recognizing Turkey's road to state formation and religion–state relations also provides a critical backdrop to its resurgence of Islamist politics, because what many believed to be a secular state has always been anchored by deep religious roots. These roots have conditioned the country's path of historical development, which has been marked by the emergence of statist or state-centric political Islamists. These roots are also informing the fault lines that have emerged in Turkish politics as a result of a split not between the secular and the religious, but between the Islamic and the Islamic.

In what follows, I comparatively examine stories of modernization from three countries – Egypt, Greece and Turkey – to better understand how religion and the state related to one another during this transformative process. These stories are relatively well known (especially to the historical experts who paved the way for much of my research), but in situating them together, in the context of their shared Ottoman legacy, they become more illuminating than when studied in isolation. Phenomena and patterns that are often assumed to be unique to the Muslim world are found to operate in a Christian context. European colonialism, an all too familiar villain in post-Ottoman narratives, reveals itself to be just as damaging in its inactions as in its actions. And perhaps most strikingly, the supposedly miraculous story of Muslim Turkey's modernization and secularization and its more recent (and, to some, disappointing) "reversal" begins to seem much less surprising.

The research for this book took place over the course of the last decade and included fieldwork in Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Cyprus and Iraq, as well as data collection[3] and library and archival research in these places and in England, Switzerland and the United States. The more I compared the three stories of Turkey, Greece and Egypt and unearthed their nuances, the more I found myself questioning assumptions so deeply ingrained in my thinking that, quite honestly, I had trouble seeing past them. My attachment to the notion that secularization and modernization unfold in tandem, and that state-imposed secularization is possible, took years to shed. I expect that, similarly, my readers, especially those grounded in the Western tradition, will find themselves reluctant to embrace some of the insights and conclusions that emerge from this book. The promise of secularization has always burned bright – perhaps too bright. Behind the chimera of what long has been referred to simply as secularization, I find the emergence of complex and dynamic power configurations between religion and the state, few of which actually excluded, in any meaningful sense of the word, religion.

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Transliteration of Modern Greek

For other than common English forms (e.g. Athens, acropolis) and online sources I have generally used the following scheme for the transliteration of Modern Greek into roman letters:

α	Α	a
β	Β	b
γ	Γ	g
δ	Δ	d
ε	Ε	e
ζ	Ζ	z
η	Η	ē
θ	Θ	th
ι	Ι	i
κ	Κ	k, c
λ	Λ	l
μ	Μ	m
ν	Ν	n
ξ	Ξ	x
ο	Ο	o
π	Π	p
ρ	Ρ	r, rh
σ, ς	Σ	s
τ	Τ	t
υ	Υ	u, y
φ	Φ	ph
χ	Χ	ch, kh
ψ	Ψ	ps
ω	Ω	ō
αι		ai
αυ		af, av

ει	ei
ευ	ef, ev
μπ	b (initial) mp (medial)
ντ	d (initial) nt (medial)
οι	oi
ου	ou
τζ	tz
τσ	ts

Pronunciation of Turkish

Modern Turkish uses an adapted form of the Latin alphabet, with the following special characters:

Consonants	Vowels
c (*j* as in "jump")	â (long *a* as in "bar")
ç (*ch* as in "church")	ı I (neutral, pronounced *a* in "among")
ğ (silent, lengthens preceding vowel)	i İ (shorter form of *ee* as in "beet" or *i* as in "bit")
ş (*sh* as in "sharp")	ö (German sound "ö")
	ü (German sound "ü")

Transliteration of Modern Turkish, Ottoman Turkish and Arabic

For other than common English forms (e.g. pasha, Istanbul, Sharia, sheikh Gamal Nasser) I have generally followed the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* for the transliteration of Modern Turkish, Ottoman Turkish and Arabic. For the Romanization of texts written in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, I used a slightly modified version of the *IJMES* system. The modification I applied is as follows: For خ in Ottoman Turkish I used ẖ instead of kh; and for ق ص and ط in Ottoman Turkish words, I used ḳ, ṣ and ṭ to distinguish them from ك س and ت respectively.

Plural forms of words are sometimes represented by the simple addition of an –s or –es to the singular form, with the plural in parentheses in the first instance.