

## Book Review: Turkey in Turmoil, Social Change and Political Radicalization during the 1960s

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### Abstract:

This book edited by Berna Pekesen provides a detailed evaluation of the 1960s in Turkey by the pioneering specialists of each topic from social, political, economic, and cultural perspectives. This review, after highlighting each paper of the book individually, points out some of the shortcomings of each contribution and levels a number of criticisms to them. It then concludes that the book is an important contribution to the Turkish social science literature.

**Key Words:** *Social Change, Economic Policy, Mobilization, Poverty*

**JEL Codes:** *A13, D00, E60, J6, I3*

## Kitap İncelemesi: Turkey in Turmoil, Social Change and Political Radicalization during the 1960s

### Özet:

Berna Pekesen'in bu derlemesinde ele alınan konular, önde gelen uzmanlar tarafından, Türkiye'nin 1960'lı yıllarını sosyal, siyasal, ekonomik ve kültürel açılardan mercek altına alıyor. Bu değerlendirme yazısı, makaleleri ana hatlarıyla tek tek değerlendirdikten ve yazarların katkılarını vurguladıktan sonra yazıların kimi eksikliklerine işaret ediyor; kimi konularda ise eleştiriler yöneltiyor. Sonuç olarak ise, kitabın Türkiye sosyal bilim alanına önemli bir katkı niteliği taşıdığına işaret ediyor.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Sosyal Değişim, Ekonomi Politikası, Mobilizasyon, Yoksulluk*

**JEL Kodları:** *A13, D00, E60, J6, I3*

The book under review consists of fourteen papers, originally presented at a conference at Hamburg University in June 2014. They are written by scholars based in different countries, including Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, United States as well as Turkey. The book documents various aspects of Turkish social, economic, and political life ranging from political radicalization and strife and economic interest groups to import-substituting industrialization and developments in music and cinema. The book basically covers the 1960s but some authors go back to the 1950s, forward to the 1970s and even beyond for a more complete presentation of their arguments. The chapters of this meticulously edited book are well-written, concise, and highly informative. Some of the chapters start with a theoretical background of their subjects which no doubt helps readers to gain a better perspective.

Following the editor's introduction, Çağlar Keyder in the opening chapter of the book provides an insightful and thorough analysis of main developments on the basis of the interaction between social and political change in historical perspective with some emphasis on the movements of students and organized labour.

The rest of the book is neatly divided into three parts. The first part which is devoted to an analysis of the sources of radicalization of political groups against the background of social change consists of four chapters. Heiko Schuß provides a detailed and balanced analysis of the import-substituting industrialization strategy from its inception in the early 1960s to its culmination with a deep economic crisis at the end of the 1970s. Schuß emphasizes the inner divisions within the private sector and the reflections of the activities of different interest groups in the political realm. Elise Massicard explores the decline of Alevi isolation under the spurt of rural-urban migration, the increased politicization of Aleviness and its association with the political and even revolutionary left. Yavuz Köse traces the evolution of Turkish-American relations in a wide range of spheres and draws attention to the increase in anti-Americanism developing into open hostility, especially after 1970, under the leadership of a number of armed leftist groups. Brian Mello gives a detailed account of state-labour relations, the origins and the aftermath of the divisions within the labour movement broadly along left-wing and right-wing lines, the sharp divisions within the leftist movement, and finally the growing violence between rival armed groups.

Part two of the book entitled “Rationalization and Characteristics of Violence” consists of four chapters. Hamit Bozarslan focuses on the leftist movement during the 1960-1980 period and provides a good overview of its emergence, evolution in its outlook, its growing radicalization, and finally transformation into “armed struggle” under different organizations. He opens new ground in a hitherto insufficiently researched sphere, identifying the different domestic and global influences on the left, ranging initially from Kemalism, to viewing the army as a revolutionary force, and then to Palestine, Europe, Cuba, and China. The factors behind its transition to armed struggle and the characteristics of the organizations involved are well-documented. Tanıl Bora provides a good discussion of the perception of right-wing activists of communism and communists and their legitimization of violence against left wing activists. His analysis clearly shows that the united front of extreme nationalists, the Islamic movement, the army and other organs of the state conducted a “holy, heroic, and violent” fight against the left which they regarded as a big threat against the survival of the Turkish state. After tracing the historical sources of the anti-Alevi sentiments, Burak Gürel presents a thorough and well-balanced description of the main actors behind the extremely violent 23-25 December 1978 events and their aftermath in Maraş which left at least 111 predominantly Alevi/Kurdish people dead and many more wounded. Based on in-depth interviews with residents and former activists, Tahire Erman analyses the efforts of leftist activists in the second half of the 1970s to help the urban poor in urgent need of housing by constructing houses and infrastructure on state lands in *gecekond* areas (shantytowns in the Turkish context) in Ankara and İzmir and in the process transform their residents into political subjects. She also describes the violence that has erupted when leftist activism was counteracted by ultra-nationalist groups and draws attention to the escalation of violence across Turkey with the number of deaths in street fights between the two groups rising from 27 in 1974 to 2206 in 1980.

The five chapters constituting Part Three of the book entitled “Symbols, Rituals, Artistic Manifestation” start with Berna Pekesen’s article which provides a detailed description of the role, position, and profile of women activists vis-a-vis their male counterparts in the stormy political environment of the 1960s and 1970s and broadens our horizon, again in a hitherto little explored subject. Starting from the premise that the 1968 protest movement in Turkey was basically a male concern, Pekesen, on the basis of the surviving stories and memories of women activists, provides a detailed account of the factors behind the subordinate position of women and compares and contrasts this with the position of women in Western Europe. She notes that while violence until the mid-1970s was strictly a male preserve, female veterans, like their male counterparts, believed in the legitimacy of revolutionary violence. She also emphasizes that the main concern of the student movement was “salvation of the people” rather than personal advancement. Bülent Batuman presents a detailed discussion of the interaction between developments in housing, cinematic production, popular culture and urban politics. On the basis of the contrasts between the *gecekond*, the emerging apartment blocks with modern amenities and luxurious houses built at great expense as presented in films, he draws attention to the growing tension, even

hatred between the “oppressed and exploited squatters” and “morally corrupt” inhabitants of the “bourgeois home” in the political sphere. Christoph Ramm provides a good exposition of experiments and innovations in music and the emergence, under the influence of European and American and earlier generations of Turkish musicians, of new music trends over time. Ramm also draws attention to the growing politicisation of folk music in particular, parallel to the rise of leftist movements. Karin Schweißgut analyses different dimensions of poverty, one of the main subjects of Turkish literature until 1980, mostly on the basis of a number of selected short stories and novels about life in *gecekondu*s, focusing on the late 1960s and 1970s. She argues that in contrast to the importance given to the village and poor quarters of cities, the literature on *gecekondu* was limited in quantity and quality, exerting its influence basically through cinema. She identifies the *gecekondu* as a symbol of poverty and leftism and discusses the interaction of poverty with class, gender, ethnicity, and age. Based on her personal observations, secondary literature, and oral history interviews, Jenny B. White in the last chapter of the book identifies common characteristics among right-wing, left-wing and Islamist activists in the increasingly violent environment of the 1970s, such as authoritarian internal hierarchies and continual splitting, collectivism, factionalism, masculinity, hostile and violent group formation, and romanticism attached to martyrdom. She emphasizes that concepts like “hero” and “traitor” have framed the Turkish social and political life and links this with cultural mechanisms such as low inter-personal trust and high levels of intolerance of anyone who is different, but intense solidarity within individual groups.

At the expense of oversimplification, I can identify eight main themes which are at centre stage in this book.

*‘68ers*: Frequent references to ‘68ers, referring to the mass movement dominated by students, go a long way in broadening our knowledge of their profile, main objectives, and prudish outlook shaping their daily lives. They come out as patriotic individuals, holding objectives like independence and development of their countries and interests of the working class, the poor, and the downtrodden above all else.

*Turkish-American relations*: While both Berna Pekesen and Hamit Bozarslan place anti-Americanism at the centre of their analysis of left-wing activism, Yavuz Köse, using material from left-wing journals and several dailies, draws attention to the importance of American military and economic assistance to Turkey and the contradiction between the anti-Americanism in the political sphere and a deep American influence on the cultural front encompassing, in particular, music and cinema.

*Gecekondu-Migration*: In several chapters of the book rural-urban migration and *gecekondulaşma* (spread of shantytowns in major provinces to such an extent that in 1970, 65% of Ankara’s and 45% of İstanbul’s population lived in a *gecekondu*)) which went hand-in-hand with it are rightly identified as an all-embracing and central phenomenon of social, political and cultural change with deep repercussions on literature, music, cinema, and last but not the least, on the emergence of revolutionary activism, extreme nationalism, and

religious fundamentalism.

*The Anti-Left Coalition and State Coercion:* Although the 1961 constitution brought about new liberties for leftist politics in general and labour rights in particular, several contributors to the book clearly show that even during this period there was a strong and parallel move to restrict leftist, Kurdish and Alevi activities. These authors have shown that the anti-left coalition included the army with its counter-guerrilla strategy, Islamic and other right-wing parties, in particular the extreme right one with its tightly-organized and highly violent militia, anti-communist associations, big business, and the behind the scenes activities of foreign intelligence agencies. The anti-left activities of these groups led to the military intervention in March 1971 which not only removed the liberal clauses of the 1961 constitution but also opened a new repressive period of which the Turkish Workers' Party (TİP, Turkish acronym) as the main leftist political party, organized labour, leftist NGOs and intelligentsia were the main victims. It is clearly shown that the left which was at the receiving end of violence until around the mid-1960s gradually emerged as one of its actors thereafter. Another sign that the "free" 1960s was not as free as some observers would like us to believe was the policies of the State Broadcasting Company (TRT, Turkish acronym) which had no scruples in banning "politically suspicious" artists as well as certain types of music from the airwaves and screens.

*Radicalization, Polarization, Fragmentation, and Violence:* The roots of the ideological divisions, fragmentation and polarization of Turkish society which to some extent continues to this day are described in detail. The division that cuts across almost all of the micro-level divisions is the deep conflict between those on the right and the left of the political spectrum. Ample evidence is provided to this effect by the contradiction between capital and labour, violent confrontations between the socialist left and the far right, in the divisions between the Sunni and Alevi populations, the divisions within the student and labour movements, and the factions within political parties leading at times to their splitting up into rival formations. The evolution and gradual radicalization of the left-wing movement in Turkey from the establishment of TİP in 1961 to the emergence of splinter groups representing the Turkish versions of different shades of global socialism, to the dominance of various groups at the turn of the 1970s, prioritizing armed struggle are documented in detail. As one of the authors has succinctly shown, in the 1970s the number of leftist fractions had reached as high as 45. The conflict of interest within the private sector, most notably between the traders and the industrialists and the emergence of the conflict between large industrial firms operating in a monopolized environment in and around İstanbul and small and middle-size enterprises in Anatolia can also be seen in this light, pointing to fragmentation and polarization at different societal levels, penetrating even into different layers of the government. The polarization and fragmentation between the "right" and the "left" was accompanied by increasing violence throughout the country which had reached such proportions that by the end of the 1970 about 30 civilians a day were being killed in armed conflicts between rival groups.

*Import-substituting industrialization (ISI):* Schuss provides a good and thorough desc-

ription of ISI and the protective foreign trade regime that accompanied it. Unlike many, if not most observers, he presents an open-minded treatment of ISI and discusses its “beneficial effects” alongside its “problems” especially those in the 1970s and draws attention to its role in the simultaneous expansion of state economic enterprises and the private industrial sector. The impact of the ISI and the increasing difficulties it faced towards the end of the 1970s and the deep economic crisis characterized by galloping inflation and severe balance of payments problems accompanied by increasing industrial and political strife is described in detail. This partially makes up for the absence of a chapter devoted solely to economic developments which, with their role at centre stage had a lot of explanatory power for much of the social and political events covered in this rich body of essays.

*Poverty:* The oft-neglected topic of poverty which in 1973 affected as high as 38.4 % of the population, together with developments in income distribution is another theme highlighted in the book. Attention is drawn to government’s reliance on economic growth and social solidarity mechanisms as the main poverty alleviation mechanism. In this respect, it is pertinent to ask the question why the governments of the period were by and large oblivious to the issue of poverty which drew so much attention in the films and literature of the period. One can advance several answers to this question which is non tackled in this volume at the level of detail it deserves. 1960s was a period of rapid growth and low inflation. Rapid labour migration to Western Europe had to some extent alleviated the pressures on the labour market. High agricultural support prices, rising urban real wages, subsidized prices of goods and services produced by the State Economic Enterprises, as well as the inflow of migrant workers’ remittances were instrumental in increasing the welfare of low income people in both urban and rural areas. Moreover, in the politically tense and polarized environment of the sixties, for planners and policy-makers poverty, in contrast to income distribution, was considered a “soft” subject. As argued by Schuß, the poor population’s lack of capability to organize as an effective interest group has no doubt also played a part in this respect.

*Gender Issues:* It is interesting to note that the passive and subservient role of women was deeply embedded in Turkish conservative culture even when women’s liberation movement was in its heyday in Western Europe. Relations remained tradition-bound in terms of gender relations; morals were much in evidence even among the politically sophisticated right-wing and left-wing activists. On the other hand, in her perceptive article on a subject which we know little about, Berna Pekesen is quick to point out that women activists considered feminism as a “bourgeois ideology” and tied their hopes for the removal of patriarchal structures to the socialist revolution.

Apart from its contributions in the detailed treatment of the above themes, a number of other more specific contributions of the book need to be mentioned. The chapter by Tanil Bora on the rightist and the chapters by Mello and Bozarslan on the leftist movements complement each other well and together give us a comprehensive picture of the motives of these two deeply antagonist sides which were responsible for much of the polarization and violence in the 1960s and 1970s. I strongly agree with the assertion of one of the aut-

hors (White) that the 1960-1980 period, in particular the set of events that have led up to the 1980 coup has not received the attention it deserves from social science research on Turkey. The chapters in this book go a long way in filling this gap. The attention devoted to the Kurdish problem, until recently one of the taboos of Turkish political history and the grievances of the Alevi population has no doubt enriched the volume, by providing a more complete picture of developments in the 1960s and 1970s.

Most students of Turkish history of the twentieth century would date the beginning of the Kurdish problem to events around the mid-1980s. Those with longer memories would remind us of the Kurdish uprising in 1925 and the events in Dersim in 1938. I find it noteworthy that Çağlar Keyder attaches much importance in this respect to the 1960s when the enlargement of political liberties enabled the Kurds to organize on the basis of the ethnic question and find some support within the TİP. Likewise, it is notable that Burak Gürel, while drawing attention to the lack of government initiatives to deal with the early signs of major events, identifies the death of many Kurdish/Alevi people in the December 1978 events in Maraş as the milestone in the Kurdish armed mobilization in the region. Many observers of the Turkish economy will be surprised by the information that Köse brings to light that the majority of tourists coming to Turkey from the 1950s through the early 1970s, were from the United States. The efforts of some of the authors to link their discussion of events in the 1960s and 1970s with developments in subsequent decades is also noteworthy.

In addition to its aforementioned contributions, the book directly and implicitly provides interesting ideas for future research. Among these several stand out. A more comprehensive analysis than attempted by White in this book, comparing the activism of the youth in the 1960s and 1970s with the Gezi protesters in 2013 is the first that comes to mind. Likewise, a comparative analysis of the student movement in Turkey as covered in this volume with similar movements in other countries, most notably those in W. Europe and North America deserves increased attention of social scientists. The role of the United States in the three military interventions in Turkey in 1960, 1971, and 1980 referred to in this book requires further research. Likewise, subjects such as the sources and evolution of the Alevi-Sunni cleavage and the link between Aleviness and the leftist world view merit more attention by social scientists. The cultural factors behind the question of how a deeply polarized society in the 1970s could rapidly exhibit a united front in the face of the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 and the subsequent American arms embargo may be another interesting topic for future research.

The important contributions of the book as outlined above were accompanied by a number of minor errors and shortcomings in this otherwise carefully edited book. The name of the third revolutionary activist who was executed on 6 May, 1972 was Yusuf and not Beşir (p.52). When CKMP was renamed in 1969, the new name in Turkish became Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, and not Milliyetçi Halk Partisi (p.137). Military intervention in 1971 was a heavy-handed one and had far-reaching consequences but was not a military coup *per se* (p.309) as the army was behind the scenes dictating the course of events to a civilian go-

vernment, whilst keeping political parties intact and the parliament open. Kızılcahamam is not a village of Ankara (p.197) but a small town within the Ankara administrative division. It must be pointed out that, in contrast to its meaning in the United States, the term college in Turkish usage (p.217 and p. 267, for example) has referred to fee-paying secondary schools in which the curriculum was in a foreign language, usually English. İş Bank is not state-owned (p.72) but is a private commercial bank. Reference to the extreme nationalist movement in the 1960s and 1970s as “fascist” and the widespread civil disorder during the same period as “civil war” could have been more appropriately expressed as “fascist-like” and “widespread fighting with heavy casualties between right-wing and left-wing youth groups”, respectively. The political science department at the Ankara University” (p.232) should read as Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University. English translation of Leyla Erbil’s book should read “A Strange Woman” (p.292). Finally, although the title of the book indicates coverage of the 1960s, there is a great deal in it on the 1970s. Moreover, according to most observers, including the present reviewer, 1970s would deserve the word “turmoil” much more than the 1960s, a decade characterized also by favourable events such as the emergence of a degree of political liberalization under the spurt of the liberal 1961 constitution.

In extending their analysis back to the 1950s, no mention is made by authors of the growing authoritarianism of the government in the second half of that decade. Talking of “turmoil” in the 1960s, one would have expected some coverage of the two important coup attempts on 22 February 1962 and 20-21 May 1963. I find myself in agreement with the view of one of the authors (Bozarslan) that the left-wing movements in Turkey were not receiving any support from the Soviet Union (p.128) but think this view should be qualified by the fact that there were a number of pro-Soviet front organizations in Turkey and abroad, especially among Turkish workers and students.

Keyder’s treatment of the occupation of state lands by rural-urban migrants and building houses on them gives the impression that the movement took off despite public authorities’ strict control of this process whilst my reading of it is that the populist governments, after turning a blind eye to this process earlier on, started to control this process at a much later stage when the growth of cities made urban land more valuable as a source of rent. The treatment of the twin and mutually reinforcing processes of *gecokondulaşma* and migration could have been accompanied by a much more detailed discussion of their labour market implications, in particular the emergence of a large and growing informal sector and rising unemployment.

More space should have been devoted to TİP, in particular the split in the party in the second half of the 1960s and the role of its loss of power and influence on the leftist movement taking a violent turn. Likewise, in a book dealing with various aspects of Turkish society in the 1960s and the 1970s one would have expected frequent references to Turkish labour migration to Western Europe which has had profound effects on the Turkish economy through workers’ remittances and no doubt also on social life through permanent returnees and short-term visitors.

There are a number of unsubstantiated as well as highly controversial statements in the book which also need to be pointed out. It is true that 1970s witnessed a sharp division in society extending to public employees such as teachers and the police force, but this reviewer finds himself in disagreement with the statement that the “army itself was split” (p.310). I also disagree with the view that big industrialists began to advocate export-oriented policies in the 1970s (p.43).

While welcoming the development of “counter-hegemonic” interpretations of historical events, this reviewer finds himself in disagreement with two issues raised in the book. There are many references in the book to Kemalism, all of which invariably representing its critical treatment. Like all other ideologies Kemalism should not be immune from criticism as long as it is the product of an objective assessment and is not preconceived. This reviewer finds the reference to the statement that Kemalism along with Islam and leftist ideology was “a source of women’s oppression in Turkey” (p.232) unjustified not least because a modern Civil Code was adopted in 1926, women’s right to vote came into force in 1934, much earlier than some of the European countries and much emphasis was put on female education in the early Republican period. Likewise, Bozarslan’s assertion that Kemalism was “widely inspired by the Italian fascism” (p.120) somehow ignores the fact that in terms of its sources of inspiration the same could be said, for example, of Switzerland (Civil Code), the Soviet Union (etatist economic policies) and even France (secularism). Atatürkist (p.106 and p.140) and Atatürkism (p.140) are other concepts used in the book. The readers will be eager to know the difference between the latter and Kemalism. I can only offer, at the expense of overgeneralizing, the explanation that Kemalism refers by and large to negative critical assessments by some academic writers and intellectuals while Atatürkism is the favourable usage by major sections of the population

Finally, almost all Turkish people will find one of the author’s reference (Bozarslan, p.118) to the tragic events of 1915 as “Armenian genocide” highly offensive. This subject needs to be objectively explored in depth before a firm judgment is passed on it. The following aspects of this event should be taken into consideration in this respect. The Anatolian ethnic populations, including Turks and Armenians have for many years lived in piece in the same provinces with good neighbourly relations. The tragic events took place in the middle of a major war when the Ottoman Empire was fighting on several fronts. The Armenian population showed increasing secessionist tendencies and some inclination to collaborate with the “enemy”. There was heavy fighting between the two sides resulting in many Turkish and Armenian casualties. From a humanistic perspective, the decision to relocate the Armenian population from the sensitive war zones was a highly ill-conceived one which led to the tragic loss of thousands of Armenian lives. This reviewer for one, like millions of his compatriots, deeply sympathizes with Armenians across the border for the painful and tragic events their forefathers went through. He regards this as a big loss not only for its human aspects but also as a loss for Turkey’s economic and cultural life, depriving Anatolia, in the absence of its Armenian population, of a much livelier and colourful social life. But at the same time he objects his country and people to be called *genocider*

not least because some of his forefathers' misjudgement had also been responsible for the death by freezing of thousands of their own Ottoman soldiers in Sarıkamış shortly before the Armenian tragedy. This reviewer, for one has heard his mother mention on many occasions their Armenian neighbours with affection and how they developed a solidarity to protect each other against the atrocities of the fighting gangs from both sides. Emphasizing the view that genocide should involve a deliberate decision to kill on a massive scale, this reviewer calls for an objective study of the subject by an international tribunal of historians and political scientists before one or the other verdict is readily taken as an historical fact.

The book under review provides an in-depth historical analysis of social change in the 1960s and beyond from an interdisciplinary perspective shifting the focus of analysis from industrial economy and the layers of state structures and institutions of previous studies to the level of society. It covers a wide field encompassing the emergence and radicalization of left-wing and right-wing positions, ethnic, religious, student, and working class activism at the political level as well as the interaction between social and cultural change. The volume is an important contribution to social science literature on a very interesting period of Turkish history. It will deeply enhance our knowledge of developments during this period, uncovering the crucial factors behind certain events hitherto inadequately explored. Readers of the book will get a more comprehensive picture of the period, especially if read together with Barbaros and Zürcher (2013) in Turkish, covering a similar ground.

## References

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