

Emine Evered,

*Empire and Education under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform and Resistance from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks,*

London: I.B. Tauris, 2012, 333p.

This book charts the complex politics of modernizing the educational system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author's main emphasis is the struggle between the central Ottoman government and local populations of Ottoman provinces over the implementation of the social and political agendas of the Ottoman educational reform scheme. The populations of local provinces were far from passive recipients of Ottoman educational reforms. The book highlights the complex and diverse reactions to Ottoman educational policies which ranged between acceptance, adaptation, negotiations and sometimes total rejection.

The first chapter of the book outlines the practices of the late Ottoman educational reforms and the potential challenges impeding the successful implementation of their ambitious plans. The author took of the educational act in 1869 as the starting point of her research. The act initiated wide scale educational reforms that had two main goals: fostering Ottoman nationalism amongst the Empire's subjects and boosting the economy by introducing vocational training to prepare for massive industrialisation plans. The author proposes an interesting argument at this point. She argues that the educational reforms could be interpreted within the framework of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, which he applied to modern Western nation-states. According to Foucault, modern Western states monopolized knowledge to rationalize social control. The significant difference between the Ottoman Empire and the Western nation states which challenged Ottoman educational reforms was the religious and ethnic diversity of peoples living in the wide geographical territories of the Ottoman Empire. The strong rise of ethno-nationalism in lands controlled by the Ottoman Empire, accentuated by Western powers, hindered the success of the state's reforms. The Ottoman state responded to these reforms by being flexible, sometimes nurturing equality amongst its citizens regardless of their religion, other times emphasizing its bonds with its İslâmic subjects.

Each of the remaining chapters of the book represents a case study to explain how local populations reacted differently to the Ottoman state's educational reforms. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the Ottoman educational reforms in the Balkans, the Ottomans' most valuable possessions in Europe. The chapters cover a critical

period in the history of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, when the Ottomans already lost significant parts of their possessions in the area after the San Stefano agreement. The author highlights the struggles between the Ottoman state's attempt to protect its remaining properties in Ottoman Albania and Macedonia, despite financial strains and Western encroachments, and the local population's efforts to protect their own interests. To achieve their goals, the Ottomans monopolised modern devices of control such as the census and the maps. The Ottomans used fact finding missions, statistics and maps to determine the numbers of the different religious and ethnic groups in the Balkans, their geographical concentration, and their different aspirations. They resorted to a rule and a divide policy by strengthening their religious claims to their Muslim subjects in the Balkans to counter the rise of ethno-nationalism. This policy was also in the best interest of the local religious dignitaries of non-Muslim communities, who wanted to protect their position in society. The Ottoman policies was clearly reflected in the educational policies in Ottoman Albania and Macedonia. The curriculum was taught in Ottoman Turkish. Students were divided into Muslims taught by Ottoman Turkish teachers, while Christian children were taught by Greek Orthodox. Education was a tool in the hands of the Ottomans' adversaries. The author insists that the people of the Balkans were not passive, waiting to be the spoils of the war. Rather, they could negotiate some of their demands with the Ottoman central authorities, making use of the latter's anxieties, to keep all the local taxes for the funding of their local schools, rather than sending part of their taxes to fund Turks in Istanbul.

In chapter 4, the author offers a different model of the relationship between the centre and the periphery with regards to the educational reform policies. Facing the common threat of Christian missionaries well-funded by the French government, the author presents the project of the travelling *'ulema* as a strategic partnership between the Ottoman central government and the local Syrian *'ulema*. The *'ulema* were traditional power holders who exercised monopoly over traditional education, who perceived the Ottoman imperial government's centralization of education plans as an encroachment on their privileges. Rather than openly resisting these reforms, the *'ulema* participated in the local educational councils as a measure of maintaining their power. Both the Ottoman central state and local *'ulema* encountered the common threat of Christian missionary schools who by then attracted Sunni Muslim students. In response to suggestions from the local *'ulema*, the Ottoman imperial government founded the travelling *'ulema* project, which funded *'ulema* to travel to remote villages in Syria to preach the principles of İslâm and warn parents against sending their children to Christian

missionary schools. In contrast to previous scholarship on the topic, Emine Evered argues that the travelling ulema project was a local initiative, rather than top-down reform scheme. The plan was accepted by the central state because it served two purposes: thwarting the Western imperialist agenda and polishing the image of the Ottoman Sultan as the Caliph and protector of İslâmic faith.

Financial restraints and the political and military weakness of the Ottoman Empire stood in the way of the Ottoman Empire's realization of its aspirations in educational reforms. The high cost of the travelling *'ulema* project forced the minister of education to terminate the project and find an alternative. In chapter 6, the author also demonstrated how the shortage of financial resources jeopardized the Ottoman educational reforms in neighbouring Iraq. Iraq, with its diverse population and its geographical closeness to the competing Iranian Empire, represented a challenge to the Ottoman imperial government. The latter attempted to use education to control its *shiite* Muslim subjects.

In chapters 5 and 7, the author shows how the weakness of the Ottoman central state *vis a vis* the European power made it problematic for the Ottomans to impose its decisions effectively within its own territories. In Ottoman Aleppo, when the local government found one of the Western female teacher unfit to open a school because of the cultural differences, the imperial government failed to carry out the decision for the closure of this school to avoid confrontation with the French government. In Ottoman Benghazi, the situation was not much different. The 1869 Education Act enables the ministry of education to inspect and close foreign schools which did not meet the criteria set by Ottoman central government. However, the Ottoman state failed to implement these regulations, despite its awareness of the imperialist agendas behind the opening of Italian schools in Libya, to avoid political conflict with Italy.

The book tells us of stories of successes of educational reform plans because of the cooperation between the imperial and the local government. The story of the Ottoman medical school in Damascus was given as one example. The medical school was founded, despite the shortage of funding, by reallocating of butchers' taxes which was supposed to be spent on charity, to be spent on financing the school. In Mosul, which had a majority of Muslim Sunni population, the local administrators' resourcefulness and the cooperation between the Ottoman imperial state and the people enabled them to find ways of raising funding for primary and secondary schools.

Overall, this book offers an important body of scholarship on the Ottoman educational plans in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. The author successfully challenges some of the givens that dominated historiography of the Ottoman Empire. She does not simply accept the dominant view of the Ottoman Sultan as representing the despotic ruler and argues that the relations between the Sultan and his subjects were far more complex. Although we see clear examples of single-minded Ottoman bureaucrats such as Zuhdu Paşa, minister of education, there were other cases in which the Ottoman imperial government was responsive to the demands of the local communities. The Ottoman educational policies were not static, but rather pragmatic and flexible. The Ottomans' attempt to monopolize knowledge and use it for enhancing its legitimacy was not, as the author explains to her readers, from other modern states at the time.

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