

**TURNING FACE TOWARDS THE WEST:
The Transformation of Qur'anic Studies in Turkey**

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ABSTRACT

The overall aim of the study is to demonstrate that the study of the Qur'an in Turkey has been extensively re-shaped by western-originated methods and perspectives because of Turkey's particular history of secular and westernised religious politics. The republican period, the main stage for the transformation of Turkish Qur'anic studies in regard to the adaptation from the western methods, necessarily occupies a larger place in this study. As can be realised, transforming the structure of intellectualism and religious academia of a Muslim country towards western pattern is a very complicated issue and requires institutional, individual and intellectual analysis. The contextualisation of Turkish Qur'anic studies, therefore, necessitates such a kind of study that focuses different aspects of interactions and influences to arrive at some useful analytical outcomes.

Key Words: Turkey, Qur'anic studies, Western influence, Secularism.

**BATIYA YÖNELİŞ:
Türkiye'de Kur'an Araştırmalarının Değişimi
ÖZET**

Bu çalışmanın en temel amacı, seküler ve batılılaşmış dini politikaları nedeni ile Türkiye'de Kur'an araştırmalarının batı kökenli metot ve perspektiflerle yeniden şekillendiğini göstermek olacaktır. Batı metotlarının kullanılması konusunda Cumhuriyet dönemi öneminden dolayı bu çalışmada büyük bir yer tutmaktadır. Tefsirin Batı modellerine doğru bir değişimini incelemek, takdir edileceği üzere, oldukça karmaşık bir konu olacaktır, bu nedenle, kurumsal, ferdi ve entelektüel bir incelemeyi gerektirmektedir. Bu çalışmada, öncelikle klasik tefsirin modern tefsirden ne gibi bir farklılığa sahip olduğu ele alınmakta ardından, bu farklılığın Türkiye örneğinde değerlendirilmesi yapılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Kur'an Araştırmaları, Batı etkisi, Sekülerizm,

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to examine methodological developments in contemporary study of the Qur'an in Turkey. In this paper, firstly the intellectual and institutional backgrounds of Turkey will be studied. In this regard, secularist, modernist, and westernised political and intellectual attitudes and their reflections in Qur'anic studies will be presented. The aim is simply to show snapshots of Turkey with regard to each dimension. This is because of the second aim of this study: to investigate the implementations of Turkish policies on Qur'anic studies. Therefore, while a picture of paradigm shift is taken, the impact of Turkish policies will already be in the frame. The paper explores then to what extent Turkish exegetes, who were or still are attached to academic institutions in the West, have been influenced by western ideas of how to read and interpret the Qur'anic text. On the basis of the main scholar circles in Turkey the study explores how far modern western historical critical methods has been discussed and applied. The analysis is led by the following questions: How and why do Turkish scholars apply western and secular methods in their studies of the Qur'an? What were the political and intellectual circumstances in which application took place? What are the external and internal factors that contributed to the transfer of new methods to Turkey? What has been the role of the (non-Turkish) pioneer scholars in the application process? What were the practical results of such an application process? To what extent do Turkish scholars differently apply new method and how / why do they differ from their European/American counterparts?

This study does not deal with the specific methods and theories developed by the West or adapted by Turkish scholar. Instead, it simply aims to reflect the current picture of the Turkish Qur'anic studies which are under influences of the West and to show the methodological transformation. To study on the transformation of the structure of intellectualism and religious academia of a Muslim country towards western pattern requires institutional, individual and intellectual analysis. Therefore, the contextualisation of Turkish Qur'anic studies necessitates a study that focuses different aspects of interactions and influences to arrive at some useful analytical outcomes. Nonetheless, the inclusion of all these aspects seems quite understandable within the limits of this study. To be consistent with the structural analysis of the transformation, political, institutional, intellectual and academic background of Turkish Qur'anic studies are to be the subject of this study. Before looking at the new configuration of Qur'anic studies in Turkey, this study provide a brief history of Qur'anic interpretation for a fundamental framework for academic analysis.

2. TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF QUR'ANIC STUDIES

The tradition of Qur'anic interpretation emerged since the first century of Islam. After the Prophet Muhammad's death, the hermeneutical problem of understanding the Qur'an was encountered. The first generations of Islam sorted it out by referring to the Qur'an or Sunnah, and, in the absence, they used their common sense, their religious experience, and vast pre-Islamic literature particularly poetry so as to reach a good understanding the Qur'an.

The two terms, *tafsir* and *ta'wil* came to designate two distinct branches of the general science of the Qur'an (*Ulum al-Qur'an*). *Tafsir* means, as a technical term, the act of interpreting, interpretation, exegesis, explanation and also commentary on the Qur'an. The origin of the word has been etymologically discussed. The western scholars refer to Arabic *fassara* and also Aramaic and Syriac origin, *peshar* or *pashshar*, in order to prove that Muslims or Pre-Islam Arabs took the word over from the Jews or from the Christians.¹ However, Muslims have suggested an etymology by metathesis in Arabic. In other words, the root of *tafsir* also comes from *safara* which means to unveil and to uncover.² As a technical term, it includes the elucidation of the *occasion* or *reason* for the revelation of a verse (*asbab al-nuzul*), its place in the *surah* to which it belongs, and its story or historical reference. *Tafsir* also determines whether a verse or passage belongs to the *meccan* or *medinan* period of revelation, whether it is *muhkam* or *mutashabih*, *naskh* and *mansukh*.

Ta'wil, as the second technical term in the field of Qur'anic Interpretation, literally means to return to the beginning.³ It occurs eighteen times in the Qur'an signifying the interpretation of events (Q. 12: 6, 21, 101), of dreams (Q. 12: 34, 100) and the correct interpretation of the words of the Qur'an (Q. 3: 7). The difference between *tafsir* and *ta'wil*, according to some scholars, is that *tafsir* is concerned primarily with the transmission (*riwayah*) of tradition, whereas *ta'wil* is concerned with the deeper comprehension (*dirayah*) of the inner meaning of the sacred text. According to al-Maturidi (d. 333), *tafsir* belongs to the Companions of Prophet because of their witnesses on the events and the circumstances of the revelation of the Qur'an while *ta'wil* belongs to

¹ For instance see: Horovitz, *Jewish Proper Names*, p. 74, Jeffery, A., (1938) *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Baroda: Oriental Institute, p. 92.

² For Further information see: al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, Beyrut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyye 1987, v. II, p. 381.

³ For Further information see: al-Suyuti, *Ibid*, p. 381.

next generations of religious scholars, particularly to jurists.⁴ The distinction between two terms is also asserted by Suyuti that *tafsir* is explanation (*bayan*) of a term which has only one meaning whereas *ta'wil* is the reduction of multi-sense term to a single signification.⁵

The traditional Qur'anic interpretation historically developed within two periods. The first which is called *the formative period* is understood to extend from the beginnings of unwritten and also written exegetical activity to the introduction of paraphrasal, philological, grammatical, legal and narrative etc. sciences in exegetical works.⁶ This period consists of collections of exegesis that were supposed to have originated with the Prophet, his companions (*ashab*) and their successors (*Tabi'un*). It can be asserted now that the formative period emerged from the beginning of Islam and developed by the early second century. However, it should not be concluded that the works in this period were complete commentaries. On the contrary, they might have accepted as *sahifa*, a kind of notebook and did not explain the entire Qur'anic text. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310) is generally accepted as the most crucial scholar who started *the classical period* of *tafsir*. His *Jami'al-Bayan* is a collection of source which is made up of reports transmitted from early authorities. A number of other commentaries mark this essential character of classical exegesis. The commentary of Abu Layth al-Samarkandi (d. 373), entitled *Bahr al-'Ulum*, for example, relied chiefly on tradition.

Linguistic, narrative, legal, and allegorical are also well-known categories in the classical period. To start with, questions of vocabulary and syntax, lexical explanations, grammatical analysis and an agreed apparatus of variant readings of the Qur'an (*Qira'at*) are raised. What is the meaning of a given Qur'anic word? Which of the several possible meanings of a word is intended in a given context? Then questions involving rhetoric are asked: how is repetition to be explained in a perfect book? Many statements and gaps in the Qur'anic narrative were filled from a very familiar source, folklore/myths from the Near Eastern World in *Narratives*. In this type of *tafsir* are exemplified the works of the earliest commentators of this genre such as Muqatil b. Sulayman (d. 150) and Muhammad Kalbi (d. 146). *Legal tafsir* material is arranged according to legal

⁴ For further information see: al-Maturidi, *Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunna*, (critic: Muhammed M. al-Rahman) Bağdat: Matbaa al-Irshad 1983, p.5-6.

⁵ For further information see: al-Suyuti, *Ibid*, p. 381.

⁶ Gilliot, Claude, (2001) "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Clasical and Medieval" in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* ed. by McAuliffe, Jane Dammen v. I, p.104

themes. One of the earliest examples of this kind of *tafsir* is that of Ibn Sulayman's "*The Interpretation of Five Hundred Verses from the Qur'an*". This work deals with matters such as faith, prayer, pilgrimage, the conduct of jihad, inheritance, marriage, divorce, inheritance, debts, and contracts. *Ahkam al-Qur'an* of Abu Bakr al-Jassas, *al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an* of Abu 'Abd Allah al-Qurtubi are well-known works in this category.⁷ The genre of *allegorical tafsir* is notable first for its near absence of grammatical, rhetorical, legal, and theological discussions and second for its attempt to go beyond the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic text in order to give hidden and deeper meanings. The *Tafsir* of Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896) is an early example of this kind of genre.⁸

3. MODERN PATTERNS IN THE CASE OF TURKISH QUR'ANIC STUDIES

A- Paradigm Shifts

Until the end of the nineteenth century, *tafsir* was mainly understood as an academic affair. To understand a commentary required detailed knowledge of the technicalities and terminology of Arabic grammar, law and dogmatics (*shari'ah*), as well as the traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*), and the Prophet's biography (*sira*). As a result, Qur'anic exegesis became an exercise for the elite, a practice reserved for ulama. However, there has been a pronounced need to re-interpret the Qur'an in *Modern period*. A crisis descended upon Islam in the encounter with the enlightened and more or less secularized Europe of the 19th century. The Islamic world was under both physical and ideological attack. During that period Muslims no longer ruled their lands; European colonialism encroached progressively on the Islamic world. The modern exegesis of the Qur'an began, not due to language problems, but the inevitably increasing number of situations dealing with the contemporary world's matter.

However, modern interpretation of the Qur'an was under influences of western thought. The impact of western science were, Rippin maintains,⁹ "the major factor in creating new demands and also the element of contemporary life to which much early modern *tafsir* made its response." Most modern interpretations of the Qur'an have been influenced directly or indirectly by the West. The name which stands out in this group is that of Muhammad Abduh

⁷ Rippin, A, "Tafsir" *ER* p.238.

⁸ Rippin, *Ibid* p. 240.

⁹ Rippin, *Ibid* p. 242.

whose exegetical corpus consists of four works: *Tafsir al-Fatiha* (1901), *Tafsir Surah al-‘Asr* (1903), *Tafsir Juz’ ‘Amma* (1922-23) and twelve-volume *Tafsir al-Manar* (1927-35) which was completed after his death by Rashid Rida. Abduh maintains a traditional Islamic scholarship and he is also an accommodationist who regards western scientific positivism and enlightenment with rationality in order to share in the progress of the modern world. It is his intent to explain the Qur’an in a practical manner to a wide public, wider than the professional Islamic theologians, to show that the Qur’an has solutions for the urgent problems of the day. His concern was “to liberate from the chains, to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources.”¹⁰ With the increasingly literate public demanding answers to current problems, which the traditional commentaries did not deal with, Abduh’s commentary inevitably became quite popular. Abduh’s exegesis is determined by “the need of the times.” Thus, for example, the interpretation in ‘Abduh’s reading of Sura 2:27 was to resist western domination, as Egypt was being occupied by the British at that time.¹¹ Sayyid Qutb as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood is also a committed anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist who seeks to revive a Qur’an-based “Islamic system” (*al-Nizam al-Islami*) that remained true to the cultural and social values established by God and Muslim consensus. Western imperialism, he asserts, has created in the Muslim world a “new ignorance” (*Jahiliyya*) that is characterised by immorality, political corruption, and a servile reliance on western paradigms. Vincent J. Cornel explains the title of Qutb’s *Tafsir, Fi Zilal al-Qur’an* (in the Shade of the Qur’an) as an indication of protection from these destructive influences.¹² Because of the influence of western technology and culture, 19th and 20th century Muslim exegetes were forced to focus, as Jansen points out, on three genres of interpretation: *Scientific, Philological* and *Practical exegesis*. We can add *thematic* interpretation on them.

Islamic intellectualism has continued to reshape the Qur’anic studies systematically in parallel to modern developments in Muslim countries. They have pushed the limits of transformation and attempted to reinterpret the Qur’an

¹⁰ Quoted from: Hourani, (1988) *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age (1798-1939)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 141.

¹¹ Jansen, J. J. G., (1980) *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, p.30

¹² Cornel, Vincent J., (1995) “Qur’an” in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern World*, ed. by John L. Esposito, New York and London: Oxford University Press, v. I, p.391.

according to the realities of modern Muslim intellectualism and politics in the light of western values e.g. democracy, social justice, freedom, gender and race equality, tolerance, human rights etc. As the result of the academic and intellectual interaction with the West, eventually, a new intellectual group has emerged. These scholars are similar to and probably inspired by western counterparts. These scholars have adapted western ways of reading as new hermeneutical models of understanding the Qur'an.¹³

The same sense emerges in Turkish scholarship. In dealing with the Qur'an specifically, Turkish scholarship also observed a definite break with the traditional style of interpretation. A number of scholars began to interpret and read the Qur'an through the Western perspective and modern context which is to approach the Qur'an with today's categories, like ethnology, anthropology, history of religion, psychoanalysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, deconstruction, structuralism and post-structuralism.

B- Factors in Transformation

In terms of the factors that played role in adaptation of these methodologies and approaches by the Muslim scholars, we can assert that there are two: external and internal.

1- External Factors:

One of the external factors is modernisation process in Turkey. Modernisation as the substantial policy, has affected Turkish academic life and institutions, including religious education and intellectualism, since the Ottoman period. As a result of the modernisation policy of the late Empire and the Republic period, Turkey entirely accepted the modern social and political system of the West as a model that leads fundamental changes in behaviour and belief about economics, politics, social organization and intellectual discourse and secularisation and rationalisation in religion. Western ideologies, methodologies, and perspectives have eventually been transferred to institutes of Turkey. And finally this modern western systems and institutions have produced a number of scholars with western perspective.¹⁴

¹³ For further information see: Gökkır, Necmettin, (2005) "Critical Interpretation of Religious Texts in the West and the Reflection on the Study of the Qur'an" *Milel ve Nihal*, v. 4, pp. 19-64.

¹⁴ For further information see: Lewis, Bernard (2002) *What Went Wrong?* London: Phoenix; W. M Watt, (1983) "Islam and the West" in *Islam in the Modern World* ed. By Denis Mac Eoin

This process concluded finally with the adoption of secularism and in turn it has profoundly affected the religious spheres in Turkish society. Secularism is described as a doctrine that makes a strict separation between religion and politics and advocates a restricted role for religion in society. It represents a Western religious pattern which is individualistic and intellectualistic. In this kind of religiosity, faith should not be exposed to the public, but kept private. To initiate this Western-style religious programme, in the beginning of the Republic, for instance, the mosque services were set up with new instructions to make them resemble the Western Protestant type of practices which were considered as modernised and westernised. The most common keywords in the discourse of those who supported the state policy of the new suggested practices against the traditionalist ones were purification, simplification and intellectualisation of religion and religious rituals.

However, scholars in the field have drawn attention to the differences between Turkish and Western secularism. Secularism in Turkey, according to Dankwart A. Rustow, is distinguished from secularism in the West on the basis of its control-oriented character.¹⁵ In his discussion of Turkey's secular politics, Bromley highlights that the secularism of the state amounted to rigid state control over religious life and a strict *laicism* in public affairs rather than the institutional separation of mosque and state.¹⁶ All these attempts, for Binnaz Toprak, are "to put Islam under control and make it subservient to authority"¹⁷ and for Bernard Lewis, are "to disestablish Islam, to end the power of religion and its exponents in political, social, and cultural affairs, and to limit it to the matters of belief and worship".¹⁸ The establishment and existence of 'The Directorate of Religious Affairs' which is expressly charged with administrating daily religious practice in the secular state and designed for the interpretation

and Ahmed al-Shahi, London and Conberra: Croom Helm, p. 4-5.

¹⁵ Rustow, Dankwart, (1957) "Politics and Islam in Turkey 1920-1955", in *Islam and the West* ed. by Frye, p. 70.

¹⁶ Bromley, Simon, (1994) *Rethinking Middle East Politics*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 125-6.

¹⁷ Toprak, Binnaz, (1988) "The State, Politics and Religion in Turkey", *State, Democracy and the Military Turkey in the 1980s* edited by Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, p. 120.

¹⁸ Lewis, Bernard, (1968) *The Emerge of Modern Turkey* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 406.

and execution of an enlightened version of Islam, which could be termed state-Islam, is seen as the unique feature of Turkish secularism. The service staffs in the Directorate have usually graduated from state religious schools and serve in the mosques. In Turkish secularism, Islam has been institutionalised in the form of a government agency.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the consideration of the secularism has also led to adaptation of modern secular thoughts and methods in religious studies with alongside the result of the limitation of religion. That is to say that the direct impact of secularism is also seen in the influence of secular theologies. Throughout the secular theologies, that the Qur'an is to be understood in secular manner is the new theme in modern Turkey.

The other external factor for the transformation of Qur'anic studies in Turkey is globalisation. This refers to the development in communication, transport and information technology which bring the remotest part of the world within easy reach, information, methodological and cultural exchanges are taken place between the West and Turkey. It is not just technologies, which carry culture throughout the world, but also people do. The 20th century witnessed development of people immigrating to Western countries, Great Britain, France, Germany and North America from Muslim countries. Turkish Muslim societies have today become part of the West. As an academic consequence of this fact, we can observe that Doctoral degrees in the field of Qur'anic studies as well as other sub-field of Islamic studies in major universities, in Europe, the United States, Canada and elsewhere, are increasingly subscribed by their second or third generation. Consequently, most of these students enter graduate programs with a western educational background and a set of academic assumptions that are almost the same with those of non- Muslim. These too have brought with them the western perspective to the Islamic and Qur'anic studies.

2- Internal Factor:

As for internal factor, the development of mass education and mass communication in the last two decades of 20th century brought a dramatic change in social and religious structure of Turkey. A great number of individuals attended higher institutions. This led to a new mass media audience for intellectual products. Until the 1970's, the literatures of arts, philosophy and history were almost either translations of western originals or deeply influenced by a pro-western model. Consequently, the new generation of educated Muslims had direct knowledge and understanding of the western intellectual and cultural

fashions. Amount of the expansion of mass media and publishing, on the other hand, extended the Qur'anic teachings to the individuals and as a result broke the mediation of classical religious scholars, *ulama*. Modern Muslims started to ask the question of "What is Islam?" "How does it apply to modern life?" These developments have finally created "New Muslim Intellectuals" who challenge to religious authority of the *ulama*. Their common aims are to reinterpret the Qur'an and to redefine and reorganise the concepts with experiences of the West.

B- Institutional Contribution

From the beginning of the Turkish Republic, relations intensified between academia in Turkey and Europe. Several Turkish students have been sent to Europe, particularly England and America, to study and to take advanced degree courses in Religious Studies. These came under the intellectual and cultural influence of the West and, naturally, brought Western ideas and methodologies to their academic studies. Additionally, several institutions have been established as the western model with the enactment of University Reform and the employment of European-University-graduated staff in the theology faculties. It would be very interesting to find out how and to what extent Western academics have influenced Islamic studies.

Regarding Islamic studies, the *Darul Fünun Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi* (*Dar al-Funun University Theology Faculty*), as the first modernised and Western-inspired institute, was established in 1924. From the curriculum declared in the regulation it is understood that the Faculty of Theology aimed to teach the philosophy and sociology of religion, rather than to educate mosque clergy (*imam*). The Islamic sciences were in secondary position compared with philosophy and sociology within the curriculum. The publication of the journal of the Faculty, *Darul Fünun Fakültesi Mecmuası* was one of the significant activities performed by Faculty members. The subjects varied from historical and sociological investigations of minor groups or sects in Muslim society to current philosophical, theological, mystical, and ethical issues.¹⁹

After closing the Faculty in 1933, two institutes were established at Istanbul University *Şarkiyat* (Orientalism) and *İslam Tedkikleri Enstitüsü* (The

¹⁹ Aktay, Yasin, (1993) *Political and Intellectual Disputes on the Academisation of Religious Knowledge*, (unpublished MA thesis at METU) p. 18.

Institute of Islamic Studies) in 1953. With a pro-Western approach, the first director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, Zeki Velidi Togan, suggested that Islamic studies should be formulated according to the Western pattern of lectures. Tafsir, for example, was planned along methodological lines set down by the Hungarian scholar, Ignaz Goldziher.²⁰ The Institute²¹ organized the 22nd International Congress of Orientalists at İstanbul University on 15-22 September 1951.²² Western participants also gave papers at the Institute. One of these scholars, Prof. Alfred Guillaume of London University, gave five lectures on 'Islamic Studies in the West'.²³

Consequently, it has been observed that Turkish policies on religion and on the academic and intellectual formulation of religious studies have been influenced by the ideologies of westernisation and secularism. Westernisation has affected Turkish life and institutions, including religious education, and intellectualism. Qur'anic studies in particular have come under western influences.

C- Religious Intellectual Contribution

Turkey has experienced also a kind of religious modernism and revival since the Ottoman era. A number of Turkish scholars, like their 19th century counterparts, were engaged in re-articulating Islamic discourses in the context of the modern world. They bypassed traditional interpretive authorities and revised classical methods of approaching the Qur'an. They blame the internal decline of Muslim societies, their loss of power and backwardness, and their unquestioned clinging to the past (*taqlid*) and they stress the dynamism, flexibility, and adaptability of the early development of Islam, notable for its achievements in law, education and science. They attempt to reinterpret Islam to meet the changing circumstances of modern life. Legal, educational, and social reforms are aimed at rescuing Muslim society from their downward spiral and demonstrating the compatibility of Islam with modern, Western thought and values. They call for internal reform through a process of reinterpretation

²⁰ Togan, Z. V., (1960) "İslam Araştırmaları Enstitüsü", *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi*, p. 273.

²¹ The institute became a research centre (İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi) in 1982. *The Journal of Islamic Studies (İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi)* has been publishing periodically.

²² For the evaluation of the program see *İslam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1954, v. I, p. 142.

²³ Guillaume's conferences were published in *İslam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1954, v.1, pp. 119-145.

“*ijtihad*” and selective adaptation (Islamisation) of western ideas and values. Their themes are usually the religious, political, social and economic life of modern Muslims: parliamentary democracy, secularism, liberalism in religious diversity and also coexistence in pluralism, women’s rights and their political, economical and cultural contributions, etc. Turkish revivalism and modernism in Islamic life, in relative to other Muslim countries, is of a more nationalist character. They all insist on the translation of the Qur’an into the Turkish language, and the possibility of prayer with translations. Although they maintain that the translation of the Qur’an does not involve religious reform, the issue comes from Turkish republican policy of the Turkification of Islam and also Westernisation in religious life.

While they focus on the different aspects of the modern Islamic issues, their common and ideological framework includes the following principles:

- The failure of Muslim societies is due to their departure from the Qur’an.
- The renewal of society requires a return to, or a strict application of, the Qur’an.
- The assertion of the right of independent analysis (*ijtihad*) of the Qur’an in this application, rather than having to rely upon and imitate the opinions of the classical authorities of Islam.

Their themes are usually the religious, political, social and economic life of modern Muslims: parliamentary democracy, secularism, liberalism in religious diversity and also coexistence in pluralism, women’s rights and their political, economical and cultural contributions, etc. They all insist on the translation of the Qur’an into the Turkish language, and the possibility of prayer with translations. Although they maintain that the translation of the Qur’an does not involve religious reform, the issue comes from Turkish republican policy of the Turkification of Islam and also Westernisation in religious sphere. Because of Turkish revivalism and reformism in religious life is of a more nationalist character, they are defending Islamic/Qur’anic values against the West. Although they are using western values and ideas like rationalism, secularism, modernism etc. in their defence of Islam they are apologists in their use of Western method and theories. They claim these are Qur’anic.

D- An Outcome of Transformation: Historicity and Contextuality of

the Qur'anic Text

Having previously adapted western values to underpin modernisation and reformation, Turkish scholars also encountered the western hermeneutical tradition in the later part of the twentieth century. They have initially introduced the terms *historicism* and *historicity* as an ideological theory. These are usually translated as *tarihselcilik* and *tarihsicilik* into Turkish. Afterwards, there are many attempts to stress the importance of historicity and contextuality in the study of the Qur'an. Having inspired by the ideas of western enlightenment and rationalism, the driving force behind these attempts seems to be the assumption that history moves by causality, that those causes can be determined, and that these causes may change in different historical periods.²⁴ Whereas the effort by western philosophy is to establish a historical-critical methodology for the discovery of the 'original' text, there were different objectives by Muslim commentators to historicize the Qur'anic text. One is to reconstruct the historical context of the revelation-event and to compare it with the context of contemporary readers of the Qur'an. Another is to stress the possibility to understand its divine meaning through the rationalist study of *human* history, *human* language, and *human* intellect. This tendency has always encountered strong opposition by those Muslim commentators who wanted to preserve the unconditional nature of the text, stressing its eternal, ever-lasting and universal meaning. Nevertheless, by translating the works of pioneer scholars, especially Rahman, Arkoun and Abu Zayd, the last two decades of Turkey have seen an increasing interest in the application of historical criticism. Fazlur Rahman was the first scholar to be introduced. The issue of the application of historical criticism after that became a controversial and much disputed subject within the field of Qur'anic studies. The translation of *Islam* by Mehmet Aydın and Mehmet Dag in 1980, *The Major Themes of the Qur'an* by Alpaslan Acikgenc in 1987, and *Islam and Modernity* in 1990 has been followed by academic and intellectual debates, conferences and publications on Fazlur Rahman and his new way of reading the Qur'an²⁵. Abdul-Karim Soroush, Mohammed Arkoun, Hasan Hanafi, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd have also contributed to the intellectual and academic debates.

Among the transmitters, Fazlur Rahman has had a crucial place in Turkish Islamic academia. Before his works were translated into Turkish, he

²⁴ Rippin, A, (1993) *Muslims*, London and New York: Routledge, v. II, p. 104.

²⁵ *İslami Araştırmalar: Fazlurrahman Özel Sayısı (Journal of Islamic Research: Fazlur Rahman Specific Issue)* v.4 n.4 October 1990.

had contact with the Ankara Theology Faculty. He gave a couple of conference papers and initiated lectures in Islamic studies in 1977. He also had postgraduate students from Turkey, Alpaslan Açıkgenç²⁶, and İlber Öltaylı²⁷ for example, when he was at Chicago University. These two scholars have played a crucial role in introducing Rahman and his methodology to Turkish religious academia. Other participants have usually influenced Turkish academia through translations. The first translation of Arkoun, for example, was his article in Turkish “Kur’an-ı Kerim’in 18. suresinin Okunması” (‘Reading the 18th surah of the Qur’an’) by Cemal Baki Akal and Osman Sadettin in an edited book, *Din ve Bugün Felsefe* (‘Philosophy Yesterday and Today’) in 1985. However, until 1994 Arkoun attracted no attention from scholars in religious studies. Some of his articles translated in Turkish are “İslam Tarih Yazımında Yöntem Sorunu” by Yasin Aktay and Cemalettin Erdemci in a Turkish journal, *Tezkire*²⁸, and “Kur’anı Nasıl Okumalı?” by Ahmet Zeki Ünal in *İslami Araştırmalar*²⁹. Eventually, Arkoun’s *Lectures du Coran* was translated as *Kur’an Okumaları*³⁰ by Ahmet Zeki Unal in 1995. Arkoun also gave a conference in İstanbul with Serif Mardin in 1995. This conference is published under the title of *Avrupa’da Etik, Din ve Laiklik*.³¹

A recent and most crucial development in translation might be said to be that of Abu Zayd’s *Maḥmū al-Nass* by Mehmet Emin Maşalı³² in 2001 and *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* by Ahmet Fethi Polat³³ in 2002. Abu Zayd also has had academic contact with Turkish scholars. His article, “İshkaliyyat al-Ta’wil Qadimen wa Hadisen” was published with a Turkish translation³⁴ in *İslami Araştırmalar* in 1996 and “Kur’an Hermeneutiğine Doğru: Humanist Yorum

²⁶ Professor at Fatih University.

²⁷ Professor at Ankara University .

²⁸ *Tezkire* 6/1994, pp. 49-70.

²⁹ *İslami Araştırmalar* 3-4/1994, pp. 247-259.

³⁰ Arkoun, Muhammed, (1995) *Kur’an Okumaları* tr. Ahmet Zeki Ünal İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları.

³¹ Abel, Arkoun, Mardin, (1995) *Avrupa’da Etik, Din ve Laiklik*, İstanbul: Metis.

³² Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid, (2001) *İlahi Hitabin Tabiatı: Metin Anlayışımız ve Kur’an İlimleri Üzerine*, tr. Mehmet Emin Maşalı Ankara: Kitabiyat.

³³ Ankara: Kitabiyat 2002 .

³⁴ Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid, (1996) “Tarihte ve Günümüzde ‘Kur’an Te’vili’ Sorunsalı” tr. Ömer Özsoy *İslami Araştırmalar* 9, pp. 1-45.

Anlayışı” was published only in Turkish.³⁵

Having been influenced by pioneer applicants, Turkish scholars first began with a critique of traditional Islamic discourse on the revelation of the Qur’an. They argued that the Qur’an is a book given to the Prophet over a 22-year period, reflecting the socio-historical context of the community to which it was initially addressed. They assert that the concerns, interests and context in the Qur’an are organically related to the linguistic, cultural, political, economic and religious life of seventh century people of Mecca and Madina. This close connection between the process of revelation and its social context is the main point that differentiates applicants of historical criticism from the traditionalist discourse of revelation. In so doing they are insisting on historicity and its human dimensions in the content and the structure of the Qur’an. Eventually, the application of historical criticism is thanks to the pioneer applicants’ vast contribution, widely used in Turkish Qur’anic studies. Their influences and importance still remain in academia.

Turkish scholars have encountered certain problems from the beginning of the application process. The main issue is the source problem of the new paradigm in reading the Qur’an. It is simply what is the source of historicism: the West or Islam? Salih Akdemir, a Turkish scholar replies:

The poor and humiliated are all Muslims. In this regard, the main reason of our concern about the historicity is the West. But for the West we would not study it. In fact, the terms of *historicity* or *historicité* are produced by Muslim modernist thinkers... Some scholars, especially living in the West, in order to present Islam as an option for Western people, assert that these kinds of punishment are related to the revelation period and they are not in use any more. By doing so, they put *historicity* on the agenda.³⁶

As seen in the above passage, it is evident that the *idea of historicity* is originally produced and applied to the Qur’an by Muslims themselves. Akdemir clearly claims that “the historicity was first used by Mu’tazila in the subject of *creation of the Qur’an*.”³⁷

³⁵ Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid, (2004) “Kur’an Hermeneutiğine Doğru: Humanist Yorum Anlayışı” in *İslamiyat* 7, pp. 39-60.

³⁶ Akdemir, Salih, “Kur’an’ı Anlamada Tarihsellik ve Bütünsellik Sorunu”, *Kur’anı Nasıl Anlamalıyız?*, İstanbul: Ragbet, 2002, p. 108.

³⁷ Ibid: 111.

It can be asked, if Islamic culture has ideas and perspectives on the flexibility and adaptability of the Qur'anic verses, and this helps Muslims to adapt Islam in modern time, why do they use the Western terms, *historicism*, and *historicity*; and why do they discuss an Islamic subject using foreign words. Is it just a matter of fashion to talk in English or French? In the process of paradigm shift, Turkish scholars have always faced the problem of justification. They therefore claim that historical criticism emerged and developed in Islamic culture and that Muslims have been familiar with this perspective. However, blaming Muslim scholars for using Western terms that bring their own paradigms, Ali Bulaç criticises the adaptations from the West as an accommodationism that permits un-Islamic, Western Christian practices to infiltrate Islam. Adaptation, for him, is condemned because it deviates from Islamic paradigms. Bulaç has become worried about Western Christian paradigms, if they are used in legal or any other aspect of Islam. Indeed, he is worried about that changes in one aspect of Islam will change all other parts of Islamic thought and practices in the Muslim world, which will eventually lead to a gradual loss of Islam's identity. He already assesses current streams of Islamic reform as adaptations of the European model of Christian Protestantism, which he condemns, because it is alien to a true Islamic identity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to evaluate the paradigmatic changes in the study of the Qur'an, in Turkey. To do this, we have first taken into consideration political, intellectual, and institutional westernisation and the modernisation process in Turkey. With this regard, the study found that Turkish scholars came under the methodological influences of the West. Furthermore, post-1980, Turkey experienced the application of Western literary criticism in Qur'anic studies. Western-inspired institutions became the base for this transformation. In particular, theology faculties and research centres that have more contact with and direct experience of Western academia first introduced western literary criticism to academia with a general outline of Western-originated Qur'anic studies.

One of the most obvious findings to emerge from the study, in spite of these notable advantages, it can be claimed that changes came into academia belatedly and took a long time to arrive. Because attention has been wholly focused on religious modernisation in the course of the transformation in

Turkey, Western intellectual development was overlooked. While the institutional and intellectual framework was established, full and direct academic relations with the West still remained weak. Instead, despite the well-organized institutions and religious academia in Turkey, the issue of legitimising the adaptation from the West was always entailed in the transformation process. Therefore, the task of the adaptation was to be carried out through translations of the works by Muslim pioneers. Academia in Turkey still seems to be far from fulfilling Western-style secular and scientific progress in religious and Qur'anic studies.