

## BOOK REVIEW

# MUSLIM AND MODERN

By Nilufer Göle, *Muslim and Modern*, Albanian transl. by Verjon Fasho, Logos-A, Skopje, 2023, 224 pages.

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*Muslim and Modern* is a book authored by Nilüfer Göle, a distinguished Turkish-French scholar, high-profile sociologist, director of the “École des hautes études en sciences sociales” (EHESS) and the “Centre d’Analyse et d’Intervention Sociologiques” (CADIS) in Paris; professor at Bosphorus University, whose research interests also include critical theory, Islamic studies, sex-gender issues, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and the religion-Middle East relationship.

In this work, the author, who essentially adheres to the socialist worldview, examines the complex relationships between modernity, religion and gender in the Turkish context and beyond; the polarizations created regarding the issue of Muslim women’s covering in modern society, in particular the headscarf among young women.

Prime subjects of this book are active religious women, who differ from “ordinary” Muslims, on the one hand due to their access to secular education, social visibility, and due to their claim to interpret Islamic texts on the other. According to her, the category of Turkish student youth promoted a different perception regarding the religious symbol of the headscarf/veil, which began to appear everywhere in the social agora, which today is moving towards the center, including public institutions, considered secular or non-religious. In this regard, the publicized woman, emerged into the public sphere, will communicate with men and, thus, had to prove her honesty, professionalism and patriotism, without losing anything of her femininity, motherhood, religiosity and so on.

In Agamben's words, the body that belongs to the *zoe*, the biological, is penetrating the field of the *bios*, or political life. Meanwhile, the Islamic (as a religious sign) and Islamist (as a political sign) covering/veiling is not a means of locking women within the house, on the contrary: it is a means of her leaving the house, of her socialization, which represents a radical paradigmatic shift (Tan, 2019), which has stirred debates even in Islamist circles that revolve around the approval, dilemmas and even the refusal of women's employment, claiming that career defeminizes the Muslim woman; that the veil, from a symbol of holiness, is being transformed into a symbol of concretized or visualized aesthetics. However, the believing woman, experiencing a post-patriarchal momentum, through her covering was determined to protest against the government that regulated women's lives, bodies and image. (Dönmez, 2013)

This text attempts to answer the following questions:

What is the sociological significance of the modern *turban* in Turkey and beyond? Does it differ from traditional forms of covering? Why has it become an issue? What is the weight of the political debate about it? Is the headscarf part of the Islamist project and does it threaten the secular order? Does it have political claims? (İncirlioğlu, 1998:311) Does it make the social status of women secondary?

The sphere of the intimate, discrete, and private (*mahram*), which is being relativized today thanks to the media and social networks, constitutes a weighty issue that is challenged by modernity, while being defended by tradition and conservatism, which justifies its preservation and affirmation with ethical vectors, with the apology of public or social morality, with the notion of alternative modernity. According to Göle, only by participating in social life can a woman achieve the status of a civilized human being; a woman's freedom is linked to her socialization (acquiring a social function).

Considering the treatment she gives to the covering, from the perspective of critical sociology, Göle is accused by Islamists and Easternists alike that, with the eyes of a modernist or Orientalist, she is presenting the veil as deprivation (*mahrûm/iyet*), pathologizing this "issue," creating the basis for the polemics about its ban (Arıkan, 2023). She is also labeled by modernist circles for attacking the modern Turkish woman, who has been the driving force of the "Kemalist civilizing project"; for affirming the "mahrem"; at other times she is seen as an apologist for the *burqa* as the "power of the minority." (Koray, 2010)

The issue of the covering/headscarf, “the debate on which never ends” (syri.net, 2022), pejoratively referred to as the *ferece* (veil), has recently become topical on a planetary level (since 2014: World Hijab Day). Of course, it has also been debated in Albanian lands, more strikingly in Kosovo, in most cases approaching it as orientalization, interpreted by former communist and secularist circles as Easternization, as cultural backwardness. Unlike the covering in “Islamic countries,” where in one way or another it is protected and encouraged by the state, in Albanian lands it is an individual matter, while its bearer, the covered woman, self-actualizes as much as she works and advances on the social scene. In our environments, those who excommunicate women wearing the veil or secular radicals forget the sociological truth that it is an integral part of Albanian identity. This is clearly visible from old postcards of our bazaars, from early filming to the streets and squares of Albanian dwellings, where this element maintains its vitality despite the challenges and aggressiveness of the “agents of emancipation,” Occidentalism and Westernization.

The covering is such a serious issue that we cannot turn a blind eye and ignore it. Explanations like “the headscarf is a sign of slavery or an obstacle to emancipation” are simplistic. Today, the covered Albanian woman is generally not uneducated and no longer stays at home: she is a lawyer, activist, psychologist, teacher, doctor, member of parliament, researcher and in other positions with critical social responsibility. Meanwhile, debates continue among Muslims about what the true Islamic covering is, ranging from the extreme of what has become a trend/fashion (Durrur, 2017), fashionism (Basha, 2016), hyper-modern (multicolored), a sign of boasting rather than modesty and devotion to God, to the *tesettur* or black *hijab* (veil, niqab, jilbab, himari, burka) that is seen as an identifying element of a minor category of believers (from 1990 onwards), which differs from the covering that dominates today. This minority describes itself as bearers of the veil of the prophetic time, or as *sunnah clothing*. It is a fact that the Islamic veil has evolved (in the 1970s “hram,” then “manto,” “capote,” “overcoat,” to today’s *trench coat*, “tunic,” “scarf” combined with pants and jeans), has been modified (brands: Tekbir, Armine, Kayra); has been modernized, extremely alienated (see the “*Âlâ*” magazine); even, according to a Turkish writer, today what has remained is the scarf, not the veil. (Şenlikoğlu, 2018)

On the value of this work, where Göle examines the *post-secular transformation* (Göle, 2012), focusing on the actor/subject with a critique of Eurocen-

trism from the perspective of the reality of new Islamist identities, speaks the fact that her book has been translated into languages such as French, English, German and Spanish, giving the author a fame in this regard.

In Albanian, it is rendered with a masterful translation by Verjon Fasho, who has managed to authentically convey the author's message and spirit. We recall that this book, which goes beyond the classic "veil in Islam" or "Islamic veil," will spark a variety of readings, interpretations and debates about this sensitive point of the social scene-life, which is gaining ever more prominence, after almost a century of staying in the private sphere, thus challenging the materialist and consumerist culture, as well as encouraging multidimensional reflections and studies in the field of sociology, cultural studies and beyond.