

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Şaban Halis Çalış, IDEAS, IDEOLOGIES AND NORMS: DECONSTRUCTING THE FOUNDATIONS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY**

Nobel Yayıncılık, Ankara 2021 (pp. 329)

Kritiği Yapan: Murat POYRAZ\*

**Citation:** POYRAZ, M. (2022). "Ideas, Ideologies and Norms: Deconstructing the Foundations of Turkish Foreign Policy", İMGELEM, 6 (11): 715-719.

**Atf:** POYRAZ, M. (2022). "Fikirler, İdeolojiler ve Normlar: Türk Dış Politikasının Temellerinin Yapısökümü", İMGELEM, 6 (11): 699-704.

Received / Başvuru: 02 August 2022 / 02 Ağustos 2022

Accepted / Kabul: 25 October 2022 / 25 Ekim 2022

Book Review / Kitap Kritiği.

In his outstanding book, *Ideas, Ideologies and Norms: Deconstructing the Foundations of Turkish Foreign Policy*, Şaban Halis Çalış explores the roots of Turkish foreign policy by adopting a post-positivist position in International Relations. The author employs a combined theoretical approach focusing first on the concept of deconstruction and then on ideas, ideologies, and norms in order to make sense of the foundations of Turkish foreign policy established mainly by Kemalist leadership and cadres. He attempts to demonstrate that the composition of Turkish foreign policy needs to be comprehended as a process in which construction, reconstruction and even deconstruction in some cases can be seen.

The book is made up of eleven chapters, the first of which is an introduction and theoretical chapter, and then there are nine empirical chapters and a short conclusion. In the first chapter of the book, the author, firstly, concentrates on deconstruction "as a method like an archaeology or a genealogy of policy and political behaviour to analyse the foundations of modern Turkish foreign policy" (p. 8). It later delves into slightly the concepts of ideas, ideologies, and norms, all of which are considered "interwoven" (p. 29) for the subsequent discussions in the book. The following chapter looks into the formative particulars of Turkish identity within the context of classical Ottoman history, by and large. In this section, Çalış provides seminal insights into deep-rooted experiences the Turks had gone through at the time. While analysing the composition of the Turkish identity, the author attaches particular

---

\* Research Assistant, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of International Relations, Rize, Turkey, E-posta: [murat.poyraz@erdogan.edu.tr](mailto:murat.poyraz@erdogan.edu.tr) ORCID Numarası: 0000-0002-8352-0241

importance to the migration phenomenon. For the author, migration is “one of the most particular aspects of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey alike” (p. 32). In this vein, the author successfully argues that migration as both an age-old phenomenon and issue has emerged as an experience designating its relations with the presence as in many cases, for example, the migration of millions of Turks towards Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. As he discusses, this dimension points to deconstruction. They mostly backed up conservative Islamist movements in the modern Turkish state, although many of them had lived in modern European capitals and the founding fathers of the country had sought to dissolve secularism.

The third chapter investigates the roots of traditional Ottoman diplomacy by focusing on some concepts, which evolved out of both Islamic teachings and the nomadic traditions of the Ottomans. In this chapter, he critically examines the dichotomies of the Dar’ül İslam (House of Islam) and Dar’ül Harp (House of War), touching also upon other concepts related to the Dar, such as Dar’ül Cihad and Dar’ül Eman. After guiding the reader through these discussions, an important part of this section is allocated to an examination of how the Ottomans played a substantial role in the formation of the modern European identity, together with its enormous impact on European politics both before and after the Medieval Age. In this regard, he also maintains that the Ottomans did not isolate themselves from European Continent, even though it is widely conceded that the Ottoman state at the zenith of its power preferred to take a unilateral stance in relations with Europe.

In the fourth chapter, conditions influential in the collapse of the sublime state are initially presented, with slightly more attention to ideational transformations. These conditions would push the Ottomans to think “measures needed to be taken to save the State from collapse” (p. 94). To that end, he later goes on to give four conflicting ideologies – Ottomanism, Islamism, Turkism and Westernism – which are invented to save the Ottoman state from collapsing when it began losing its power. The next chapter delves deeper into the Europeanization efforts of the Ottomans whose primary aim was to stop the Ottoman state’s decline. This chapter of the book also goes into principles and norms, like non-intervention and *pacta sun servanda*, which shaped its relations with the world in general, and Europe in particular. According to the author, in this new environment, the Ottomans followed a policy of harmonization with the European continent in keeping with its period of transformation. In compliance with the previous chapter, the sixth chapter digs into the question of why and how Turkey under the Mustafa Kemal leadership went through the modernization period, after the establishment of the Turkish

## **Book Review: Ideas, Ideologies and Norms: Deconstructing the Foundations of Turkish Foreign Policy**

---

Republic. In this chapter, the author also discusses that, in order to civilize the Ottoman people in accordance with their own understating of what civilization required to become a civilized nation, Mustafa Kemal and his cadres made a tremendous number of radical reforms, many of which “attacked the foundations of old identity patterns and their Islamic premises in particular, and sought to radically transform Turkey” (p. 163), such as the abolition of the Sultanate in 1922 and the Caliphate in 1924, the termination of the Ministries of the Sacred Law and Pious Endowments, and the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code.

With a different conceptual framework, the next chapter seeks to examine the relationship between Turkey and the West in ideational aspects by adopting concepts of “the standards of civilization, identity, the other, unspoken assumptions, and the barbarian option” (p. 174). This chapter especially goes on to argue that the Turks were considered as the barbarians of the European continent and “the dominant other” (p. 185) in their construction process of identification and that the otherness of the Turks seems to be an unresolved issue for both sides, even though the Turks took serious steps to be a part of the Western civilization. Additionally, although the author makes the importance of experience in their relations visible – which eventually seeks to fortify the general framework – the standards of civilisation can be viewed as a driving factor. For instance, Çalış regards the Copenhagen Criteria as an essential sample setting out the standards of civilisation for candidate countries, including Turkey, to the European Union. In the eighth chapter, the author covers the subject of identity for modern Turkey. In doing so, the author focuses on the dichotomy between the self and the other. In this chapter, the author particularly wants the reader to know about the dichotomy that compared to Western identity transformation whose other is “chosen from ‘enemies’ outside of national borders” (p. 191), the Ottoman identity as a dominant identity keeping the Ottomans united was viewed as the other found within the national borders of modern Turkey (p. 191). In other words, the Kemalists saw the Ottomans as the dominant other in the formation and development of national identity after the establishment of the country.

The ninth chapter dwells on Kemalism as a national ideology developed to justify Kemalist reforms after the Liberation War. The principles of Kemalism – republicanism, nationalism, secularism, populism, statism and revolutionism – are discussed in this section. In connection with the previous chapter, the author argues that the Kemalists attempted to transform the Ottoman society into a new Western-style society that barely penetrated into all segments of social structure for a variety of reasons. This attempt failed to encompass all

segments of Turkish society; nonetheless, it reached the ruling class and elites largely. From 1923 through 1938, the next chapter elaborates on national and international norms in Turkish foreign policy under the Atatürk administration. He initially underlines that “Mustafa Kemal’s primary concern in the 1920s in particular was to establish a nation-state and then to define Turkish national identity. As far as foreign policy was concerned, the basic issue was, therefore, the consolidation of national independence and sovereignty in the modern state” (p. 236-237). In addition to this, the aim of ensuring Turkey’s unity and security was also taken into account. On the other hand, the author specifically claims on norms in Kemalist foreign policy that whereas many norms, such as Westernism and respect for international law, are inherited from the Ottoman past, secularism and estrangement from the Islamic World are the amongst norms that the Kemalist cadre further developed and put into practice in the conduct of foreign relations. The final chapter finishes discussions by placing importance on some concluding remarks relative to the previous chapters.

The main success of this book emanates from its attempt to probe the foundations of Turkey by way of a critical theoretical framework and to provide significant insights into the classical age of the Ottomans, Ottoman diplomacy and the Ottoman modernisation period. On the other hand, in certain discussions, the author offers a chronological narration that makes it easy for the reader to comprehend and follow the turn of events in Turkish foreign policy. However, the book also has some shortcomings that should be mentioned. One of the flaws in the book is that the general theoretical framework of the study is presented in the introductory part; nevertheless, the seventh chapter starts with a different conceptual framework, as pointed out earlier. Notwithstanding the noticeable tendency of the author aiming to consolidate the general framework of the book, it might have been justified in the opening pages of chapter seven. Besides, the book also suffers from self-contradictions. For instance, in the seventh chapter, he uses barbarian and civilization dichotomies in the relationship between Turkey and Europe. The author accepts the relevance of these concepts by stating that “this assumption is also relevant in the case of Turkey, for even though it has no colonial past, it has sought for more than two hundred years to become part of ‘civilised’ Europe as have many other colonial nations” (p. 174). However, he also asserts that the civilized group needs a group ‘that can be represented as barbarians against which to define themselves – in this case the colonial subjects’” (p. 174). Therefore, the reader must be aware of such contradicting opinions in the book.

In conclusion, *Ideas, Ideologies and Norms: Deconstructing the Foundations of Turkish Foreign Policy* can provide a good basis for understanding present-day Turkish foreign policy

## **Book Review: Ideas, Ideologies and Norms: Deconstructing the Foundations of Turkish Foreign Policy**

---

with its remarkable title. It also offers a critical approach to the foundations of Turkish foreign policy. Students of different disciplines can benefit from this book, notably those studying International Relations, History, and Political Science. Plus, any reader interested in gaining more knowledge regarding Turkish foreign policy and regional and global politics can find this study thought-provoking and insightful.