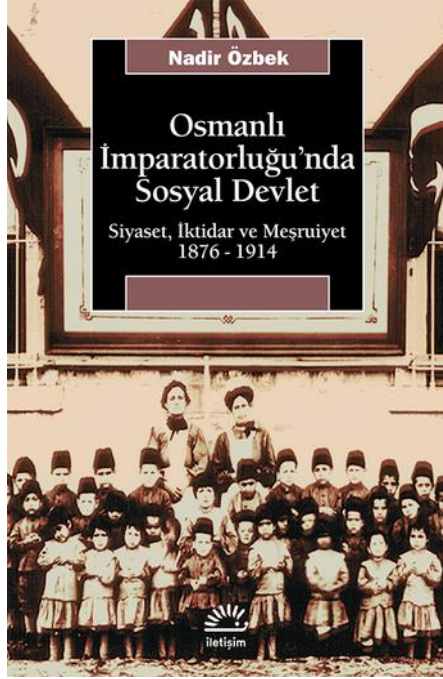


## BOOK REVIEW

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**Book Title:** *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet: Siyaset, İktidar ve Meşruiyet, 1876-1914*

**Author:** Nadir Özbek

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In *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet*, the welfare system in the Ottoman Empire is being examined. The activities, which are considered to be welfare system activities of the Ottoman by the writer, are specially grouped into social aids provided by central and local administrations, gifts of the Sultan, the charity of the Sultan, voluntary charitable acts and donation associations. The writer, Nadir Özbek (2004, pp. 30-31), deliberately concentrated on the late-Ottoman era, that is, the reign of Adulhamid II and *Meşrutiyet* II (Constitutional Monarchy) periods in which, for him, social welfare activities are transformed to new forms and gained new political meanings and objectives. He also provides a common paradigm in analysing these two periods that are usually seen as contradictory in many senses (Özbek, 2004, p. 330).

In the first chapter of the book, philanthropic activities are examined in relation to politics and legitimacy in a broad sense. In the first part of the book, the “formation of the social state in Ottoman Empire” is studied. In this part, in the second and third chapters, the issue of impoverishment and beggary; different attitudes of, and laws enacted by Abdulhamid and *Meşrutiyet* elite towards beggars, the relations of these issues with welfare practices are elaborated on. The second part is concerned with “the monarchical forms of Ottoman welfare system.” In the fourth chapter, gifts of the Sultan (*Atiyye-i Seniyye*), alms of the Sultan (*sadaka-*

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ı *seniyye*), circumcision feasts are explained concerning politics and power strategies of the Sultan Abdulhamid II. The fifth and sixth chapters are all about charity and philanthropic institutions of Sultan Abdulhamid II. The seventh chapter covers voluntary charitable acts in Hamidian (Abdulhamid) regime. In the third part, the charity activities in the second *Meşrutiyet* are considered. For this purpose, new tendencies and the formation process of associations are explained in the eighth chapter. In the ninth chapter, due to the long periods of wars, the relation between charity-donation activities and nationalism and their transformation to the new necessities are examined.

I would like to start with the first argument on which the essence of the book is mainly based. This is “whether the Ottoman Empire was a welfare state or not?” Nadir Özbek states that in the study of Ottoman history, some historians describe the Ottoman state as a “welfare state” because of the existence of waqfs (pious foundation) and complex buildings adjacent to a mosque (*külliye*) founded by palace members. And some other historians search for an Ottoman civil society in relation to waqfs. The writer exemplifies the former category with Halil İnalcık’s naming a chapter of his book, namely *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1600*, as “The Ottoman State: A Welfare State”. The latter group of historians are exemplified as such: Haim Gerber, Kemal Karpat. Özbek (2004, pp. 25-26) argues that the waqfs lost their functions of social aid during the nineteenth century, and Abdulhamid rarely used waqfs for this purpose. Even though the name of his book implies the term “social state” and the general discussions evolved around the “welfare” practices of the Ottoman Empire, the writer does not define “welfare state” and explain his perception of this concept on which there is no consensus among political scientists. He only describes the Ottoman social aid system without any reference to the ideas and approaches of other scholars to the concept of the “welfare state”. At this point -since there is a lack of a definition provided by Özbek (2004, p. 26)- it might be helpful to look at how he describes the Ottoman “welfare system” in the reign of Abdulhamid:

Looking at the issue from the point of view of the central state, it is seen that the role of foundations in the late Ottoman welfare system was not significant. The complex welfare system of the Abdulhamid period, in which monarchical tones predominated, consists of a combination of modern social institutions, an overall gift system consisting of the sultan's *atiyya* and *ihsan*, and charitable activities carried out in the form of ceremonies. This combination, which we call the social welfare system or regime, has been shaped in the shadow of the mutual struggle, negotiation and reconciliation of a number of social and political subjects.

Turning back to the issue of the “welfare state”, the British perception of this may procure a basis for it. For example, Alan Deacon (2002, p. 4) states that “(it) refers to a society in which the government accepts responsibility for ensuring that all its citizens receive a minimum income, and have access to the highest possible provision in the fields of health care, housing, education and personal social services.” Besides Deacon’s definition, Martin Powell and Martin Hewitt (2002: 12) write, “Broadly speaking, the ‘birth of welfare state’ is located in the period 1880-1914, in terms of criteria such as the introduction of social insurance, the extension of citizenship, the depauperization of welfare and the growth of social expenditure.”

In the light of the definitions above, we reach a conclusion that the welfare practices, first of all, require “universality”. However, there is no implication in the book that Abdulhamid regards universality. Moreover, it is argued by Özbek (2004, p. 149) that the system established by Abdulhamid is monarchical and paternalist. Also, for example, the salary was given to some poor people –*muhtacin maaşı*- was not put in order until 1910 (Özbek, 2004, p. 58). Özbek (2004, p. 151) says that there is a lack of information about how much money is spent on philanthropic activities written in Sultan’s *Salname*. Because of that reason, we are not able to

evaluate the growth in social expenditure. Furthermore, there is no information in the book that there is social insurance, minimum income for all in Ottoman Empire. In addition to that, the Ottoman system and especially that of Abdulhamid, was based on Islamic forms. In relation to this, it is argued that the value system of Islam requires the well-being of the Muslim community (İnalçık, 1994, p. 46). However, this contradicts the universality aspect of a welfare state mentioned above.

The core of Özbek's argument lies in the idea that Abdulhamid uses philanthropic activities as a means of overcoming the "legitimation crisis". He refers to Selim Deringil's works about this issue to provide a basis for comparison to his own ideas. Acknowledging some parallelism with Deringil (such as using some symbols by the Sultan as a means of legitimation), Özbek distinguishes his analysis from Deringil while fixing the sources of "legitimation crisis". Özbek states that Deringil is basing his argument on Jürgen Habermas' concept of "legitimation crisis", but seeing the international arena as the major source of this crisis, and Abdülhamid's central attempts are aimed at this arena. However, for Özbek (2004, pp. 35-36), the source of the crisis is internal.

Nevertheless, Özbek does not seem to be successful in linking the sources of Ottoman legitimation before the 1870s and of the reign of Abdulhamid. For example, it is unclear why philanthropic activities become a "major" tool of legitimisation unique to Abdulhamid or are not it the same case before him, and if not, what is the case before him? At this point, referring to one of Faroqhi's (1994, p. 612) articles on "Symbols of Power and Legitimation" in the Ottoman Empire ensures the necessary link: the image of "the sultan as a protector of the hajj and the holy cities through building activity, largesse and ceremonies"; festivities of Ottoman dynasty; gifts and money; Ottoman palaces; the sultan's enjoying himself with activities that are inaccessible even prohibited to most people; sultan's image as a warrior and participant of a victorious campaign. In the reign of Abdulhamid, the symbols such as festivities, gifts, palace and protector of pilgrimage are seen. But the image of the sultan as a victorious warrior is no more cogent in the late-Ottoman period since the expansion is ended. However, this was the most crucial ground for a sultan as a symbol of power and legitimation. The loss of this image may result in Abdulhamid's attaching further importance to philanthropic activities as a way of legitimisation.

Moreover, Faroqhi states that in the late-Ottoman era there was the "ascendancy of institutionalised bureaucracy." Faroqhi (1994, p. 619) writes that: "This shift probably played some role in discrediting individual rulers, and thus facilitating their removal. Such 'delegitimization' and the fragility of imperial tenure of office in turn served the interests of higher-level Ottoman officials, who thereby ensured a sultan amenable to their wishes would be placed upon the throne."

The rise of institutionalised bureaucracy is another contributor to Abdulhamid's intensive reliance on the "welfare" system. A parallel idea is put forward by Özbek (2004, pp. 122-123) too: "The political tension created by the expansion of the ranks of the military and civilian bureaucracy ranks and the formation of a new bureaucratic elite during the nineteenth century manifested as a tension between a monarchical form of power and the search for a liberal and constitutional political ground. This tension had an effect that shook the legitimacy of the royal style of politics."

In my opinion, another factor that resulted in Abdulhamid's attempts to secure his power and legitimacy is the competition and conflict between him and Mithat Paşa. In the book, a table (Özbek, 2004, p. 186) shows the distribution of Abdulhamid's charitable acts among various

states. For example, in the states in which Mithat Paşa was the governor, such as Aydın and Baghdad, the amount of philanthropic acts of Abdulhamid was also very high (Ecevit, 1993).

After examining the reign of Abdulhamid, Özbek (2004, pp. 275-276) moves to the second constitutional monarchy (*Meşrutiyet II*) period. Özbek explains the shift in this period as such: “The new regime, first of all, attempted to liquidate the personified monarchical political discourse that surrounded the social welfare regime of the Abdulhamid period and aimed to bring the concept of 'social aid', which had bureaucratic, modern and secular meanings, to the fore.”

Also, in the *Meşrutiyet* era, the emergence of associations (*Donanma-yı Milliye İlane Cemiyeti, Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti, Müdafı-i Milliye Cemiyeti*) motivated through the nationalisation and militarization of public sphere (Özbek, 2004, p. 296). Niyazi Berkes (1964, p. 412) describes these primary motives of the *Meşrutiyet* era as such: “It was the Turkists who saw that it was the people, Turkish people, who would be the fulcrum for a transformation into nationhood. And it was only indirectly, through their nationalism, that they hit upon a secularist view which gave a new note to *Meşrutiyet* secularism.”

In this book review, I generally concentrate on the issue of being a “welfare” state and its definition, Ottoman legitimisation tools and the change of these during the reign of Abdulhamid, and the transformation of the “welfare” regime in the *Meşrutiyet* era. In this work, the institutions of a social-welfare system that are explained in the book in detail are not my major concerns.

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