



Kitap İncelemesi • Book Review

“Medeniyetler ve Şehirler”*

Civilizations and Cities

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Medeniyetler ve Şehirler

Ahmet Davutoğlu

Kitap İncelemesi

ÖZ

Bu kitap incelemesinin amacı, şehir ve medeniyet kavramları üzerine yeni bir bakış açısı getiren Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun katkısını Medeniyetler ve Şehirler kitabı üzerinden tahlil etmektir. Kitap incelenirken hem açıklayıcı hem de eleştirel yöntem kullanılmıştır. Bu kitap, şehir yapılanmasının medeniyetler tarihi içindeki rolü nedir ve şehir tarihte nesne midir, yoksa özne midir soruları üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Kitabın sorulara cevabı ve aynı zamanda kitabın savı şöyledir: şehir aslında tarihte sadece belirlenen ve şekillendirilen/dönüştürülen bir nesne değil, aynı zamanda tarihin akışına etkide bulunan ve şekillendiren/dönüştüren bir öznedir. Tarihin akışında belirleyici bir eksen rolü oynayan ve bu akışın anlaşılmasında ve anlamlandırılmasında bizler için yön gösterici bir pusula görevi gören bu şehirler, medeniyetlerin eksen şehirleridir. Yazarın amacı, semai dinlerin en temel prensibi olan Tevhid akidesi ve kadim düşüncenin (Çin, Hint, İran, Mezopotamya, Yunan) gelenekleri ile bezenmiş medeniyet ve şehirlerin nasıl bir etkileşime girdiğini anlamak ve anlamlandırmaktır.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this book review is to clarify the contribution of Ahmet Davutoğlu, who introduced a new perspective into the notions of city and civilization, by taking into account the book Medeniyetler ve Şehirler. This book review is analysed on the descriptive and critical review. This book was built on the research questions of what the role of city construct in the history of civilizations is and whether city is the object or subject in the history. Accordingly, the answer of the book to the questions and its argument are as follows; as a matter of fact, city is not only an object that is determined and shaped/transformed, but also a subject having an effect on the course of the history and shaping and transforming. These cities, which play the role of an axis determining the direction of historical flow and function as a compass for us in understanding and making sense of this flow, are the axis cities of civilization. Purpose of the author is to understand and make sense of how civilizations and cities, which were decked with the principle of Oneness, the most fundamental tenet of monotheistic religions, and the traditions of ancient thought (Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Mesopotamian and Greek), interacted with each other.

Ahmet Davutoğlu is an academician as well as a political figure known for the posts he undertook in the Turkish political life. Davutoğlu completed his PhD thesis on the philosophy of contemporary politics in Boğaziçi University. In 1994, he published it under the title of “Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory.”¹ He worked as a lecturer in Malaysia Islamic University in 1990, between 1990-1999 in Marmara University, and between 1999-2004 in Beykent University. In

addition, he officiated as an ambassador of Turkey and advisor to the Turkish Prime Minister between 2002-2009, as Turkish Foreign Minister between May 2009-2014 and as the Turkish Prime Minister between 2014-2016. Besides all these, his most important publications include “Civilizational Transformation and Muslim World”² and “Stratejik Derinlik”³ (Strategic Depth). In 2006, Davutoğlu published his book named as “Medeniyetler ve Şehirler” (Civilizations and Cities).

* Ahmet Davutoğlu (2016), İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 272 pp., ISBN: 9786059125383

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The contribution of Davutoğlu introduced a new perspective into the notions of civilization and city by taking into account the book “*Medeniyetler ve Şehirler*”. This book was built on the research questions of “what is the role of city construct in the history of civilizations” and of “whether city is the object or subject in the history.” (p. 75). Accordingly, the answer of the book to the questions and its argument are as follows; as a matter of fact, “city is not only an object that is determined and shaped/transformed, but also a subject having an effect on the course of the history and shaping/transforming it.” (p. 76). Furthermore, a single city dissection is inadequate, and so the influences and positions of the cities in the history include differences. According to Davutoğlu, there are the *axis cities* of civilization in the history. They are different from the other cities because of the fact that these cities play the subject/main role on determining the direction of historical flow and function as a compass for us in understanding and making sense of this flow.

The book is formed of introduction and three parts. In introduction, Davutoğlu analyses his own three perceptions which are “existence, historical, and eco-political perception.” (p. 10). This book was dealt with within the framework of historical perception. In this part, the author criticizes Europe-oriented historiography by giving a reference Arnold Toynbee’s book *A Study of History*. The fundamental of his understanding of history is over how civilizations and cities which were constructed by monotheistic religions, and which were decked with the traditions of ancient thought affected each other throughout history (p. 12-16). The first part of the study is over Davutoğlu’s first acquaintance with cities and over his gaining first experiences about them. The experiences he gained by seeing the cities will each be a datum for his *axis cities* argument (p. 25). The second part of the study is devoted to criticism made to Max Weber’s definition of city. According to Weber’s city description in the book, “just as the people of West is the subject in the history of humanity, so the Western cities, which have been continually developing since the ancient Greeks and Middle Age, accumulating capital, involved in capitalist relationships, and improving property and citizenship right, are the subject in the history.”⁴. The Eastern cities, on the other hand, are closed constructions away from dynamism. Davutoğlu criticizes Weber’s occidental and oriental city description. In the third part, Davutoğlu begins to answer the fundamental question of the study, clarifies the relationship of city-civilization under seven titles.

- (i) The cities precursor/constitutive for a civilization: Pataliputra, Athens, Rome and Medina
- (ii) The cities established by a civilization: Baghdad, Cordoba, Esfahan, Delhi, Paris, London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Moscow, St. Petersburg
- (iii) The cities transferred/moved thanks to creation of civilizations: Alexandria, Konya, Bursa, Sarajevo
- (iv) The city of ghosts losing their importance due to shift of political power and transformation of civilization: Cordoba, Granada, Thessaloniki, Bahçesaray
- (v) The cities discharged together with a civilization: Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Persepolis, Otrar and Tenochtitlan
- (vi) The cities on the geo-cultural/geo-economic line of interaction
 - Mesopotamia-Anatolia-Levant Line: Mosul, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Urfa, Aleppo, Damascus

- The Central Asia-Iran-India Line: Samarkand, Bukhara, Hiva, Balkh
- The Central Asia-Steppes Line: Bulgarian, Kazan, Bahçesaray
- Andalusia-North Africa-Sahara Line: Marrakesh, Timbuktu
- (vii) The cities bringing together/transforming/ transformed into the different civilizations: Jerusalem (p. 165), Cairo (p. 189), Istanbul (p. 201).

The first criticism that can be voiced for the book is that it lacks a conclusion to summarize it. The second criticism is related to the language used. When the book is examined as a whole, it will be noticed that a plain language was used in the first part, but in the third part extremely theoretical and bombastic language was used. The disproportionate use of language observed in the chapters is such as to preventing the readers from focusing on the book. In my opinion, the author wills to inform the readers rather than impressing them. The third criticism is that the author gave excessive number of cities as examples. The effort to explain too many cities in one book leads to bulk of knowledge and is likely to disrupt the content of integrity of it. In addition, the fact that the page ranges between the sub-titles are disproportionate disrupts the content integrity again. The last criticism is that the author didn’t flesh out about description of axis city which is the fundamental term in the book, so it is not understood by the readers what the axis city is.

Notes

- ¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994)
- ² Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Civilization Transformation and the Muslim World* (Kuala Lumpur: Quill, 1994)
- ³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (İstanbul Küre Yayınları, 2001)
- ⁴ Max Weber, *The City*, ed. Don Martindale, translated by Gertrud Neuwirth (New York: The Free Press, 1958)

Appendix 1. The book cover

