*mevzu*
*sosyal bilimler dergisi | journal of social sciences*
e-ISSN 2667-8772
*mevzu*, Eylül/September 2019, s.2: 363-368

Kitap Değerlendirmesi / Book Review

# Eurocentrism at the Margins: Encounters, Critics and Going Beyond Ed. Lutfi Sunar, New York: Routledge 2016.

**Erdem SARIAYDIN**
Doktora öğrencisi, Milli Savunma Üniversitesi, Atatürk Stratejik Araştırmalar Enstitüsü, Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı
PhD Student, National Defense University, Atatürk Strategic Research Institute, Department of International Relations
İstanbul / TURKEY
erdemsaraydn@gmail.com
**ORCID ID:** orcid.org/0000-0001-7948-1019

**DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3463939**

**Makale Bilgisi | Article Information**
**Makale Türü / Article Type:** Kitap Değerlendirmesi / Book Review
**Geliş Tarihi / Date Received:** 14 Ağustos / August 2019
**Kabul Tarihi / Date Accepted:** 18 Eylül / September 2019
**Yayın Tarihi / Date Published:** 30 Eylül / September 2019
**Yayın Sezonu / Pub Date Season:** Eylül / September

**Atıf / Citation:** SARIAYDIN, E. (2019). Eurocentrism at The Margins: Encounters, Critics and Going Beyond Ed. Lutfi Sunar, New York: Routledge 2016. *Mevzu: Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2 (Eylül 2019): 363-368.

**İntihal:** Bu makale, iThenticate yazılımınca taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.
**Plagiarism:** This article has been scanned by iThenticate. No plagiarism detected.
web: http://dergipark.gov.tr/mevzu | mailto: mevzusbd@gmail.com

To begin with, consisting of five different parts and eleven chapters, the edited book handles an unheeded issue, Eurocentrism, in social sciences. The book was constituted by several articles which touch upon the subject matter from diverse angles and are written by various authors. In introductory chapter 1 Lütfi Sunar and Firdevs Bulut offer brief references to all chapter one by one after touching upon contemporary critics toward Eurocentrism. At the end of the chapter, they point out possibility of going beyond Eurocentrism by attributing it to the final chapter of the book.

In chapter 2, Lutfi Sunar discusses how Europeans' perception of East, has been transformed ever since the 15th century. Until the 18th century, Westerns' image of East included true judgements although it had some exaggerations. However, in the 18th and 19th centuries the intense marginalization about East had been initiated, going hand in hand with 'gradual displacement of reality with imagination' (p. 23). Referring to the prominent exponents of the Enlightenment such Hume and Helvetius, Sunar in the second section of the chapter shows how their conjectural history was bound up with idea of progress or progressivism created a basis for and reinforced Eurocentrism. In this regard, Europeans claimed a superiority over non-Europeans via modernity they sought to associate with natural and progressive history. Additionally, referring to Montesquieu and Hume, Sunar purports that it is easy to grasp how the transformation of the concept of despot about East paved the way for the universality claim of later European socio-political system. In this sense, Europeans thinkers' efforts to establish a link between absence of private property in Eastern empires lands and their despotic characters, attributing it to their geographical reasons or climate and religion. Accordingly, 'abstraction of the East' as other representing backwardness has started to come to the fore in 18th century.

In chapter 3, Mustafa Demirci seeks to find out the place of the history of Islam amongst prevailing Eurocentric historical approaches. For him, although Europe superiority has taken place within the last two centuries, Eurocentric thinking was imprinted on brains via (1) categorization of history into unrealistic periods such as ancient, middle and new ages; (2) conceptualizations such as oriental despotism; and (3) theorization of history with the idea of progress. Referring mainly to Hodgson, Demirci argues that Islam should be

at the central place of world history since it had undeniable impact on the other world civilizations in order to get rid of troubled Eurocentric history paradigm. However, for him 'absolute definitions like "regression", "collapse", or "rise" should be avoided' (p. 60). He also mentions three issues for such an alternative paradigm; (1) new periodization of Islamic history, which is based on its own developmental dynamics as a distinct civilization, (2) a new conceptual framework compatible with Islamic world view, (3) a new theory of history based on 'sunnetullah' understanding of Islam (p. 60-61).

In chapter 4, Yasir Yılmaz emphasizes on the setbacks of Eurocentrism in its own home, Europe, taking the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Tsardom in the 18th century as examples. Referring to many historians, progressive and outcome-focused approaches of histographies distort not only non-European's histography but also that of Europe itself. For example, the Eurocentric attitude of many historians is obvious in evaluating Habsburg's reforms only 'in line with Western European Enlightenment values' 'for the sake of a progressive narrative' (p. 74).

In chapter 5, Syed Farid Alatas argues that Christianization of concepts such as religion in human sciences is easy to see whereas the attempts to universalize concepts from other religions are insufficient to overcome it. He basically argues that the religions of India, truthfully called '*dharma*' by al-Biruni, was inaccurately turned into Hinduism during the colonial period by Orientalist whose perception of religion has been based on Christianity (p. 91). The cultural or intellectual Christianization of religion through a hidden conceptual deflation as well as an inflation played a key role in this process. For Alatas, what is unreasonable is to put forward the conceptual vocabulary of one religion while excluding that of the others (p. 98).

In chapter 6, Rigas Arvanitis and Sari Hanafi examine 'the question of institutionalization and professionalization of the scientific community in the Arab world and Latin America and how globalization has affected these processes' (p. 104). Bringing precarious center-periphery theory in knowledge production into question, they cite both the idea of the "Third World" in the sense that it became widespread only after being published in a French maga-

zine and 'dependency theory' in the sense that it has been seen as an ideology although many intellectual efforts and works on it are available.

In chapter 7, using textual analysis method, Taştan, Gür and Çelik embark on an empirical test to reveal whether the textbooks of social sciences in Turkey are based on Eurocentric assumptions. At the end the authors conclude that *The Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis*, co-authored by J. H. Ballantine and F. M. Hammack is not under the thumb of Eurocentrism, being receptive to non-European perspectives whereas *Eğitim Sosyolojisi [The Sociology of Education]*, written in Turkish by Mahmut Tezcan, is filled with Eurocentric biases, being based upon binary oppositions such as underdeveloped/developed.

In chapter 8, Hasan Basri Yalçın tries to show how the theories of international relations are based on Eurocentrism. In this sense, he argues that historicist approaches in theorizing not only lead to false explanation but also discrimination creating superiority-inferiority relations between international actors. The first great debate between Liberalism and Realism, and the second great debate between Behaviorism and English School are mainly based on the hypotheses derived from European history, Enlightenment philosophy and Christian belief. Even though this Eurocentric tendency has waned to certain extent with the third debate between neo-realism and neo-liberalism, both of which are ahistorical and structural-materialist in essence, the recent trend is 'historical turn' to earlier studies of international relation. For Yalçın, though not definite solution, theory-oriented approach, which is not under the illusion of historicism and culturalist assumptions, can be appropriate for going beyond Eurocentrism and in broader terms ethnocentrism (p.158-159).

In chapter 9, Khosrow Bagheri Noaparas remarks 'Eurodecentrism' as well as Eurocentrism in context of Seyed Hossein Nasr's idea of 'sacred science'. He criticises Nasr in three different contexts. Firstly, he argues that Nasr falls in negligence by ignoring the universal aspect of modern knowledge, which is ultimately leading to the rejection of modern science totally (p. 169-173). Secondly, Nasr is wrong in characterizing the Western science as profane while many modern scientists such as Galilei, Kant, Hegel attributes the name of God to science (p. 173-175). Thirdly, Nasr has tendency to make physical

science to mysticism with his idea of vertical 'great chain of being' (p. 175), namely he desires for conflation of 'ontological and epistemological aspects of hierarchical levels of the world' (p. 179). Noaparas also puts forward suggestions for each of critiques.

In chapter 10, Focusing on the Eurocentric approaches in Turkish modernization studies, İsmail Çağlar starts with the short analyses of book's titles on Turkish modernization, which shows a great deal of a genre of Eurocentric approaches. Later, dividing the paradigms in literature into two: 'the conflict' and 'the incorporation paradigm', and focusing firstly on the former, he pays attention to Bernard Lewis's famous work (*The Emergence of Modern Turkey)* and Niyazi Berkes's (*The Development of Secularism in Turkey)* and argues that both of them made a great deal of contributions to Eurocentric view of Turkish modernization as they focus only on exaggerated and false cleavages and oppositions between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic (p.185-189). As is stated in the book 'the Ottomans are always located at the receiving end, whereas Europeans are always active' (p.190), Çağlar secondly argues that Erik Jan Zürcher's book *Turkey: A Modern History* which focuses on affecting-affected relationship is vulnerable to Eurocentrism although it is seen in the incorporation paradigm that asserts a continuation between the past and the Turkish Republic rather than a conflict. Finally, he suggests a new social history perspective on the domains of periodization, geography, and agency to overcome Eurocentrism, referring to several penned works (p. 193).

In concluding chapter 11, Defne Karaosmanoğlu and Kerem Karaosmanoğlu shed light on the criticism of Eurocentrism, most of which are based on the same centrist agenda and East/West binary opposition. The authors offer a new research paradigm underlining 'historical change, the complexity of gazes, specificity of geography, and diversity of culture while avoiding centrist narratives, binary oppositions (Eat/West), absolute contrasts, and homogeneous perceptions' (p. 211-212).

All in all, throughout the book, the first salient thing coming in for criticism is that it lacks an article from the field of economics that is one of the social sciences in which Eurocentrism come to prevail. The presence of such an article may provide a more encompassing comprehension for Eurocentrism.

Secondly, In the third chapter, the comparative examples of the perception of history from the studies of earlier or late historiography may be given so that one can see the possibility of writing an alternative history narrative in tune with Muslim's own dynamics and to correct the historical reality distorted - as argued by the author - by 19th century Eurocentrism. Also, in the ninth chapter the fact that the author comes through only with Nasr's understanding of 'sacred knowledge' makes the argumentation poor as he does not analyse his system of thought enough deeply. The argumentation may be enriched by several other examples in that it remains superficial as it is. Yet, the edited book with fluent expression and a wide range of references is a helpful contribution for those studying in social sciences to comprehend Eurocentrism. Additionally, the book provides readers with index enabling to search easily for specific words.