

A REVIEW OF WEBERIAN STUDIES ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the secondary literature on Max Weber's (1864-1920) writings on Islam and the Ottoman Empire. It demarcates approaches prevalent in the secondary literature. Three basic themes are apparent:

- Section a) concentrates on authors who applied Weber's concepts of patrimonialism and bureaucracy to non-Ottoman countries, such as Maslovski (on the Soviet bureaucracy) and Eisenberg (on China).

- Section b) focuses on authors who studied the Ottoman Empire utilizing non-Weberian-above all Durkheimian and Marxian theories and methods. The studies by Immanuel Wallerstein (world systems theory) and his Turkish colleagues on the Ottoman Empire, as well as the neo-Marxian writings of Perry Anderson and Barrington Moore, will be evaluated. Studies on the Ottoman Empire and its socio-political transformation indebted to Durkheim (S. N. Eisendadt, Ziya Gökalp, and Niyazi Berkes) will be discussed.

- Section c) concentrates on authors who studied the Ottoman Empire using Weber's terminology and concepts, such as Haim Gerber, Halil Inalcik, and Şerif Mardin.

Key Words: Max Weber, Ottoman Empire, Ottoman Studies, patrimonialism, bureaucracy

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OSMANLI İMPARATORLUĞU ÜZERİNE YAPILAN WEBERYAN ÇALIŞMALARIN GENEL BİR DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

ÖZET

Bu makale Max Weber'in (1864-1920) İslam ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu üzerine yaptığı çalışmalar hakkındaki ikincil yazını konu almaktadır. İkincil yazın içerisinde yaygın olan yaklaşımları analiz etmektedir. Bu temel yaklaşımlar şunlardır:

Bölüm a) Max Weber'in patrimoniyalizm ve bürokrasi gibi kavramlarını Osmanlı dışındaki ülkelere uygulayan yazarlara odaklanmaktadır, örneğin Sovyet bürokrasisi üzerine yazan Maslovski ve Çin üzerine yazan Eisenberg gibi.

Bölüm b) Weberci olmayan-özellikle Durkheim ve Marx eğilimli kuram ve yöntemleri kullanarak Osmanlı İmparatorluğunu çalışan yazarlara odaklanmaktadır. Immanuel Wallerstein'in (dünya sistemleri kuramı) ve onun Türkiye'den çalışma arkadaşlarının Osmanlı İmparatorluğu üzerine çalışmaları ve Perry Anderson ve Barrington Moore'un neo-Marxian yazıları değerlendirilecektir. Emile Durkheim'dan esinlenerek Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun sosyo-politik dönüşümü üzerine yapılan (S. N. Eisenstadt, Ziya Gökalp ve Niyazi Berkes) çalışmalar tartışılacaktır.

Bölüm c) Weber'in terminoloji ve kavramlarını kullanarak Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nu çalışan, örneğin Haim Gerber, Halil İnalçık ve Şerif Mardin gibi yazarlara odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Max Weber, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Osmanlı çalışmaları, patrimoniyalizm, bürokrasi.*

Introduction

Writing important works like *Economy and Society* (1968) and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002) Max Weber left an important legacy in social sciences as well as Oriental and Islamic Studies. Weber essentially worked on the comparison of institutional differences in the European and non-European countries. For him, institutional differences based authority relations (especially in his *Economy and Society*) as well as world-view differences based on meaning attributions of individual subjects (especially in his *Protestant Ethic*) paved way for these differences. In this regard, Weber's writings inspired many academic works in terms of Oriental and Islamic studies.

a) Weber's Concept of Patrimonialism: its Application to non-Ottoman

Countries

Maslovski (1996) applied the Weberian concept of patrimonialism to the Soviet bureaucracy. He criticizes Weber for refusing to distinguish between an administrative staff and a bureaucratic rational-legal type of domination. He states that:

What distinguishes patrimonial bureaucracy is not its irrational character but rather its location in a patrimonial power structure....The decisive difference between these two types¹ is the absence of a legal component in an administration which is based either on tradition or on arbitrary power of the ruler. (Maslovski: 1996: 299)

In Maslovski's analysis under the Stalinist regime, the Soviet bureaucracy, although it looked like a rational bureaucracy, turned into a loyal administrative system for the Soviet leadership (Maslovski: 1996: 303-306). Hardy observes the same type of "consensual community" existed under Mughal India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and finds it similar to Weber's idea of patrimonialism (Hardy, 1999: 188).

In researching the applicability of Weber's idea of patrimonialism, Eisenberg discusses Hamilton's criticism of Weber (Hamilton, 1984). For Hamilton, Weber's concept of patrimonialism is not valid in China. He proposed that "the ritual-legal concept of "xiao," or "filial duty," brought about "an impersonal role" unlike Weber's emphasis on personalism in patrimonial domination (Eisenberg, 1998: 91). On the other hand, Eisenberg argues that "neither the Roman emperors nor the Chinese emperors would tolerate autonomous clan or lineage leaders

1 1 patrimonial bureaucracy and legal bureaucracy

dictating imperial policy,” as the rulers had absolute authority in these two cases (Eisenberg, 1998: 92). Hamilton’s argument is similar to Inalcik’s thesis that Muslim scholars in the Ottoman Empire representing the Islamic law-*Shari’a* were resisting the absolute authority of the Sultan. For Inalcik, in the case of the Ottoman Empire, the sultan’s authority was never unchecked and absolute, as the Ottoman bureaucratic professionalism and *‘Ulama*, Islamic scholars restricted and opposed the sultan’s arbitrary and absolute authority (Inalcik, 1992: 60).

Another author, Richard Eaton, in his article on the Islamization of Late Medieval Bengal, applied Weber’s idea of patrimonialism to the rule of the Mughals in the East Indian subcontinent. He argues that there are three Weberian notions relevant to understand his case: a) the patrimonial state, b) the routinization of charismatic authority, and c) the rationalization of the sacred (that is, “the triumph of Allah at the expense of lesser superhuman beings”; Eaton, 1999: 164). Eaton investigates Islam in Bengal within a social context inspired by Weber:

...the growth of Islam was one aspect of a larger societal transformation that took place in the late medieval Bengal. This suggests that we do a disservice to our understanding of religion if we treat it as an isolate, an entity detached from larger social, economic, and even ecological processes. (Eaton, 1999: 178)

This study attempts to address the Ottoman Empire as a historical case and investigates the transformation of its socio-political jurisdictional systems. We must now examine briefly studies outside the Weberian tradition on the Ottoman Empire.

b) Non-Weberian Ottoman Studies

Non-Weberian Ottoman studies have been generally Marxian and Durkheimian in orientation. The theoretical perspective utilized in this study, which is indebted to Weber, can be in part isolated through a comparison to Marxian and Durkheimian modes of analysis. Marxian and Durkheimian oriented methodologies were also applied to the Ottoman Empire by Western, as well as Turkish, sociologists. The Durkheimian school, which emphasizes that ideas and moral codes have certain functions in society, inspired and influenced Ziya Gökalp, the founder of Turkish sociology and ideologue of Turkish nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century. In his studies, such as *The Principles of Turkism*, he utilized Durkheim in his analysis of Turkish culture and nationality. He emphasized the significance of morality and the division of labor in the late Ottoman Empire, a modernizing society (Gökalp: 1968: 51-52).

Niyazi Berkes, a later Turkish sociologist, inspired by Gökalp and Durkheim, stressed institutional reformation in terms of the need for Turkish modernization and change. Analyzing the Kemalist nationalist reformations in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s, he argued that Kemalist institutional reformation was motivated by the ideas of the secularization of religion and replacement of the role of religion with nationalist morality (Berkes: 1964, Chapter 17).

Eisenstadt, in *The Political Systems of the Empires*, applied the structural-functional method in his chapters on the Ottoman Empire (Eisenstadt, 1963). His Durkheimian perspective considers bureaucracy in terms of its service to accomplish certain goals:

Thus, the bureaucratic administrations, in order to fulfil their functions for the rulers, had to take care of some needs of the leading and most active strata. The bureaucracy had to provide them continuously with various services, and to regulate somewhat their relations with the rulers. In conjunction with these different demands and pressures, the bureaucratic administrations (especially their higher echelons) evolved many of their specific organizational characteristics, particularly their organizational and professional autonomy. (Eisenstadt, 1963: 274)

Eisenstadt explains the fall of the Ottoman Empire by reference to the “decline in bureaucratic efficiency during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries”; the shrinking economy and permanent wars did not support the financial needs of the Ottoman bureaucratic administration (Eisenstadt, 1963: 348). Likewise, his analysis of Islam depends on Durkheim’s duality of the sacred and the profane. He argues that Islam creates a sacred space vis-à-vis the profane area and renders the social arena orderly. For him, Islam “[emphasizes] overcoming the tension inherent in the chasm between [the] transcendental realm and the mundane one by total submission to God” (Eisenstadt, 1999: 284). This study, unlike the Durkheimian approach, does not take the social order as pre-given and essential; nor does it view religious doctrines as in the service of social harmony.

Western scholarship has utilized more the Marxian historical method than the Durkheimian method for the study of Ottoman history. This is also the case at Turkish universities. Immanuel Wallerstein’s neo-Marxist world systems theory has been applied to the study of the Ottoman Empire by himself and his students (Islamoglu, 1987).

World system theory emphasizes the emergence of the capitalist economy in the West and the coercive integration of the world economy into it. Wallerstein utilizes the concepts “core,” “periphery,” “peripherization,” and “incorporation” in order to demonstrate how this has occurred:

What changed c. 1500 is that there grew up in Europe a new world-economy which, for the first time in history, was able to consolidate itself, and develop fully the capitalist mode of production and the inner-state system which is the structural correlate of a world-economy. This meant that, suddenly, this world economy had become the ‘strong’ form. From then on, it would be the capitalist world-economy that would expand by virtue of its internal dynamic. As it expanded, regularly but discontinuously, it incorporated the world-empires and mini-systems it found at its edges...” (Wallerstein, Decdeli, Kasaba, 1987: 88)

The aim to understand the “main tendency” according to a theoretical core, and particular cases in terms of unity, constitutes one of the major themes in the Marxian perspective. Wallerstein and his Turkish colleagues use “the world system perspective” to explain “the differential development of Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire in terms of the historical development of the European world economy beginning in the sixteenth century” (Islamoglu, 1987: 7). Islamoglu, from this perspective, criticizes orthodox Marxist views and Orientalist perspectives as being ahistorical and ideological (Islamoglu, 1987: 7). She offers a wider perspective that evaluates economic development by a) specific and unique lines and b) their “history” of interaction with the world economy rather than by reference to a reductionist method (Islamoglu, 1987: 3-8).

Deviating from world systems theory, this study concentrates on Weber’s types of domination in respect to political, juridical, and jurisdictional history. It also emphasizes how types of relationships between the state and the people (jurisdictional), in connection with administrative and juridical systems, took different forms and have been transformed through history (in this case, in the history of the Ottoman Empire). Therefore, this study follows Weber’s emphasis on socio-political history and his efforts to avoid reduction to economic lines and modes of production.

Perry Anderson applied Marxian historical theory and method from another perspective in his *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1979) and *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1996). His holistic historical method emphasizes the universalistic understanding of Marx in historical evolution. He outlines the general tendencies of historical lineages by examining how different societies have become transformed into Absolutist States at once governed by Western Parliamentary systems, yet under the domination of the capitalist economy. Anderson states that:

It is necessary to recall one of the axioms of historical materialism: that secular struggle between classes is ultimately resolved at the political-

not at the economic or cultural-level of society. In other words, it is the construction and destruction of States which seal the basic shifts in the relations of production, so long as classes subsist. (Anderson, 1979: 11)

For Anderson, this political struggle between classes ends up with the absolutist state dominated by the bourgeoisie. His method attempts to decipher the history of this victory in different countries. On the other hand, Anderson's evaluation of history according to the "unavoidable end" makes his analysis "evolutionist."

Anderson's universalist and holistic theoretical perspective leads him to see the Ottoman Empire's "progress" to a "destined end" as necessity. This study, on the other hand, adheres to multi-causal and non-evolutionary presuppositions. Moreover, endowing the Ottoman subjects with "juridical status" and regulating state-subject relations through written regulations established a legal public and prepared the Empire to transform itself into a constitutional regime.

Barrington Moore, in the *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, attempts to determine the causes of different paths to democracy, fascism and communism by utilizing comparative procedures (Moore, 1966). To Moore:

This book endeavors to explain the varied political roles played by the landed upper classes and the peasantry in the transformation from agrarian societies (defined simply as states where a large majority of the population lives off the land) to modern industrial ones. Somewhat more specifically, it is an attempt to discover the range of historical conditions under which either or both of these rural groups have become important forces behind the emergence of Western parliamentary versions of democracy, and dictatorships of the right and the left, that is, fascist and communist regimes. (Moore, 1966: xi)

He explains the success (democracy) or failure (fascism, communism) of different nations by reference to the strength of the bourgeois class and its class alliances. To Skocpol, Moore "remains within the Marxist theoretical tradition, for he retains the fundamental Marxist propensity to explain political struggles and structures as functions of class structures and struggles" (Skocpol, 1984: 6).

Michael Mann, in *The Sources of Social Power* (1986, 1993), also concentrated on the emergence of economic classes and their class struggles in the process of the emergence of the modern state. In his analysis of the Roman Empire, he analyzes the emergence of the Roman economic classes and their struggle to turn the Empire into an imperial power (Mann, 1986: 257). His approach, as other Marxist approaches, presents this "turning point" as historical necessity. According to the Marxist idea, the economic interests of this dominant class are

realized in the state, of which the main purpose is to protect the rights of private property.

This study differs also from Moore and Mann's historical sociology. The struggle for power, it will be argued, cannot be conceptualized only as involving access to economic resources; in addition formal juridical procedures must be apparent. The endowing of the Ottoman subjects under the Ottoman Empire with a juridical status, as will be noted below, institutionalized their interests in autonomous juridical systems. The Marxian understanding disregards the juridical representation of interests as "false consciousness."

e) Weberian Studies on the Ottoman Empire

Authors inspired by Weber's analyses on the Ottoman Empire mostly considered the Empire a bureaucratic state; they refer to its well-developed bureaucratic-administrative system. Haim Gerber, in his *State, Society, and Law in Islam* (Gerber, 1994), mainly accepts Weber's method; he discovers bureaucracy and rationality in the Ottoman juridical system. However, he opposes Weber's notion (and Turner's; see 1974) that the Ottoman justice system was under the control of a patrimonial Ottoman State. Moreover, utilizing archival research, he argues that "contrary to Weber's suggestion, *kadi* justice in the area under study was characterized by a great deal of predictability and internal consistency" (Gerber, 1994: 42). Finally, finding the same kind of predictability in the Ottoman bureaucracy, Gerber argues that the Ottoman State was not patrimonial, as Weber proposed: "Predictability, meritocracy, and professionalization are important, and it is highly significant that they did exist in the Ottoman administration" (Gerber, 1994: 145). In sum, even though Gerber uses Weberian terminology, he disagrees with Weber and proposes that the Ottoman Empire was a bureaucratic state.

A great deal of research implies that the Ottoman justice system was resistant to external interferences. However, whether this autonomy implies that the Ottoman State was a bureaucratic state needs to be investigated. Bureaucratic characteristics developed during Mehmed II's state centralization policies in the mid-fifteenth century and Kanuni Suleyman's bureaucratization efforts in the sixteenth century.

The research of Halil Inalcik, a renowned Ottoman historian, is similar to Gerber's. In his analysis, he basically uses Weberian terminology and methods to criticize Weber. He proposes that the Ottoman State had a well-established bureaucratic-administrative system and that Islamic scholars possessed adequate power to restrain the Sultan's arbitrary authority (Inalcik, 1992: 65). To Inalcik:

In its developed form in the sixteenth century...the Ottoman bureaucratic apparatus displayed a number of features that do not permit us to subscribe completely to Weber's description. Under Suleyman the Lawmaker (1520-66) the Ottoman bureaucracy cannot be viewed purely as part of the ruler's household, nor were its offices based purely upon personal relation and absolute subordination to the ruler. Empirical research suggests that the Ottoman bureaucracy evolved from a pure "patrimonial" structure and increasingly self-conscious and autonomous organization that functions with a relatively "rational" system of fixed rules and training. (Inalcik, 1992: 63)

For Inalcik, the professional ethic of the Ottoman bureaucrats and the increasing degree of bureaucratic autonomy limited the Sultan's patrimonial authority. Further, the Ottoman bureaucratic organization prevented the sultan's patrimonial authority over the social estates because its "ranks were determined by a set of rules (*kānūn*)" (Inalcik, 1992: 56). Like Gerber, Inalcik confuses the bureaucratic type of domination with the bureaucratic administrative regulations.

Şerif Mardin, a Turkish sociologist, applied in his studies a Weberian methodology to the Ottoman Empire. In his study on the development of Young Ottoman thought and its impact on Ottoman politics, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, he analyzed the intellectual atmosphere of the late Ottoman Empire and how it influenced the Young Turk Intellectual Movement, including their ideologies and activities. Further, in his *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, he studied the Late Ottoman Empire's changing intellectual environment and, specifically, the education system and its impact on the mentality and consciousness of the young Ottoman generation. Inspired by the Weberian idea of the partial autonomy of ideas and their ability to influence social life and change society, Mardin concentrated on the history of ideas and ideologies in the transformation of the late Ottoman Empire.

Unlike Mardin and his Weberian colleagues who have focused on ideology, this study -as mentioned earlier- will concentrate on Weber's ideas on domination and legitimacy rather than the impact of ideologies and world views on societies. It will try to examine the validity and applicability of Weber's ideal types of bureaucracy and patrimonialism by dealing with the jurisdictional, juridical, and administrative institutions of the Ottoman Empire.

CONCLUSION

This study has reviewed Weberian and non-Weberian studies in the field of Ottoman studies. First, we have looked at how Max Weber's concept of Patrimonialism has

been used in non-Ottoman countries. In this regard, the concept of Patrimonialism supplied many authors a fruitful conceptual framework when they were studying countries from Soviet Russia to Mughal India. Secondly, we have dealt with non-Weberian studies on the Ottoman Empire. Many authors especially used Emile Durkheim's structuralist perspective or Karl Marx class-conflict perspective to analyze social and economic institutions in the Ottoman Empire.

Thirdly, we have been concerned with Max Weber's work on the Ottoman Empire. Max Weber, especially using his concepts of Patrimonialism and Sultanism, attempted to analyze the nature and roots of Islamic as well as Ottoman political institutions. For him, Islam's and Islamic laws' ambiguous regulations failed to create a specific and definite public area where it spread and was not able to avoid authoritarian political institutions. In addition, these authoritarian relations brought forth ab solutist type of state or what Weber called sultanic type state in Islamic countries.

Max Weber as well as other authors always becomes the target of many criticisms. They can be criticized for example through "theorization" of the subjects they are concerned with. In terms of Islam and Oriental studies, especially, their deficiency regarding social processes and political institutions in the context of a civilization in general they deal with delimits their capacity to handle these subjects and social-political relations they bounded with.

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