

history, Middle Eastern history, African history, and the history of imperialism and colonialism.

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Necati Polat. *Regime Change in Contemporary Turkey: Politics, Rights, Mimesis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, x + 426 pages.

Necati Polat's *Regime Change in Contemporary Turkey* covers the political developments that preceded and followed the regime change in Turkey that, as argued by the author, occurred in 2011. In the book, Polat not only offers a detailed account of specific political events that occurred during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), but also relies on a stylistic narrative of Turkish political history.

In the introductory chapter, Polat explicates his conceptual framework, which relies on René Girard's anthropological insights, centered on the concept of mimesis. His argument on the transformation of the Turkish political regime under AKP rule runs as follows: "Briefly put, desire, such as that which drove the ruling AKP up to 2011 to put an end to the status quo, is notably mimetic, imitative, modeled on the other: that is, desire is to do more with simulation and reproduction of another desire, namely the desire of the other, which the subject looks up to" (p. 6). The model here, as further elaborated on by Polat, "is none other than the 'rival,' held subliminally in esteem, while being detested at the same time, by the desiring subject. Negating it for power, the desiring subject goes as far as perversely appropriating the very identity of the rival" (p. 8). Throughout the book, Polat loosely applies this framework, centered around the concept of mimetic continuity, to Turkish political history and, more significantly, to the political events occurring before and after the regime change in 2011. Indeed, this perspective allows the author to competently track the threads where features of the old regime persevered in new forms within the new authoritarian regime. For example, in the concluding chapter, after having studied these issues throughout the book, Polat points out the continuity between the anti-Semitic and anti-European sentiments of the groups opposing the regime change and the post-regime Islamnationalism of the AKP, as well as the way that Islamnationalist public opinion leaders

attempted to fashion a leadership cult very much like that around Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the republican era (pp. 324–325).

In terms of making sense of the new authoritarianism in Turkey, the author positions his framework as a contribution and complement to existing interpretations. According to Polat, the first existing interpretation—namely, the liberal one—claimed that it was too early to pass judgment on the direction of the political regime, and that the new regime was forced to resort to exceptional tools. The second interpretation, he argues, emphasized and excused the new regime's oppressiveness as a necessity forced by a process of decision-making that was oriented toward rapid economic growth. Finally, the third interpretation construes the new regime as a typical populist authoritarian rule (pp. 4–6). On this issue, it needs to be stated that, although these interpretations are broadly recognizable for a student of Turkish politics, the author's presentation refers to no academic or non-academic sources, thus making it challenging for readers to delve into the academic debate surrounding this issue and systematically evaluate variant interpretations, including the author's own.

The book is divided into two parts: the first part discusses several aspects of the process leading up to the regime change in Turkey, while the second part focuses on the nature of the AKP rule as well as on political developments after 2011. In the first part, composed of four chapters, the author begins with a description of his approach, based on the center-periphery concept, to Turkish political history, as well as of the institutional changes that occurred between 2007 and 2011. In fact, throughout the book the author utilizes the center-periphery approach and associated concepts—like the powerful bureaucracy, both civil and military, in control of politics and society, as well as the duality of state and government—to characterize the old regime. Although his narrative is always nuanced, there are still three issues with how he relies on this approach. First, he does not contrast the center-periphery approach with other approaches to Turkish political history. Second, at times, Polat's conceptualization presents the bureaucracy as if it were a fully autonomous and monolithic actor, which implicitly depicts the civilian governments—e.g., the right-wing conservative governments that ruled the country for the majority of its post-1950 political history—as too feeble. Third, instead of juxtaposing bureaucratic autonomy with the rule of the elected, the author's account places bureaucratic autonomy up against democratic politics. Considering that there is some degree of bureaucratic autonomy in all democracies, such a placement is potentially problematic insofar as it disregards the contribution of elected civilians to the authoritarianism of the previous regime, and it holds the danger of interpreting the development of majoritarianism as democratization, until it finally becomes fully established as an authoritarian regime.

Nevertheless, in the first two chapters, the author puts forth several elegantly and cogently articulated arguments and observations explicating the dynamics of regime change: e.g., the often overlooked fact that the center, over time, becomes linked to a “virtually indomitable social force” (p. 42); the way Europeanization is hijacked by “forces defiant of long-enduring bureaucratic rule” (p. 44); and the contraction in identity politics under the first phase of AKP rule, with this party distancing itself “from the matrix of identity claims” and as a result generating “irresolution and ambivalence” in the republican bureaucracy and the easing-in of regime change (p. 76). In Chapter 3, Polat studies the seismic political trials of the late 2000s, such as Ergenekon and Sledgehammer (*Balyoz*), demonstrating that these trials were instrumental in subduing the opposition to the regime change. The author’s detailed and competent account of these trials, as well as how he traces other legal debacles in other chapters (such as his treatment of the Hrant Dink case and hate crimes) not only strengthen his argument, but also offer a rare and welcome contribution to studies of Turkish politics. The author completes his discussion of the process of regime change with an analysis of resistance to regime change, specifically on the part of neo-nationalists (*ulusalcılar*), where he makes use of the term “liberation theology,” albeit in the perverse sense; that is, for the emancipation of the locals from themselves.

The second part of the book focuses on various different aspects of the AKP rule and provides a detailed account of the critical junctures that shaped the political regime after 2011. Here, Polat’s comprehensive and illuminating account of contemporary Turkish politics and society under AKP rule brings together under the broad conceptual framework of the book a plethora of seemingly disparate developments. Chapters 5 through 10 discuss a wide range of issues, skillfully making reference to court rulings when applicable. Following a broad chapter on the overall context, the author discusses, in turn, the Gezi Park protests (Chapter 6); media engineering, including an account of the transformation of the newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, Internet freedom, and social media (Chapter 7); financing politics, corruption allegations, and the transformation of the role of the military (Chapter 8); the transformation of the protection of religious values into an anti-blasphemy tool, Alevi rights, the Dink case, the Roboski massacre, and the discussion of possible international crimes committed by the regime (Chapter 9); and male violence, the slaughter of transgender women, hate crimes, abuses of sex workers, the rights of ailing prisoners, the moribund state of labor, and urban disfigurement (Chapter 10).

Overall, Polat not only skillfully and insightfully narrates the process of regime change in Turkey from a theoretical angle, but he also expertly and coherently discusses disparate legal and political issues in recent Turkish politics. Additionally, the author successfully, albeit unevenly, applies his

conceptual framework throughout book. Nevertheless, the book could at times be challenging for any reader looking for straightforward explanations or direct engagement with different political or academic literatures. As mentioned above, the book does not specify alternative interpretations of the AKP's authoritarian turn, not does it critically evaluate alternative approaches to Turkish political history. Additionally, and more importantly, the book does not refer to the specific literatures centering around the specific questions posed. For example, Polat several times utilizes the term "populist" to describe the AKP and asks, among others, the following question: "was the AKP rule a mere 'stage' in a long and secretly harbored Islamist project [...] or was it plain populism?" (p. 163). Yet he engages neither with the literature on populism nor with that on the relationship between populism and democracy. Similarly, even though the book's explicit subject is regime change, neither the literature on democratization nor that on the decay into authoritarianism form part of the narrative. Even so, these issues of orientation should not detract from the invaluable contribution the book makes to our overall understanding of recent Turkish politics.

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