

Review - Turkey's Kurdish Question: Discourse and Politics Since 1990

Written by Özlem Kayhan Pusane

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ÖZLEM KAYHAN PUSANE, JUL 24 2016

Turkey's Kurdish Question: Discourse and Politics Since 1990

By H. Akin Unver

Routledge, 2015

Throughout the past few decades, there have been an increasing number of English-language studies on various aspects of Turkey's unresolved Kurdish question. However, Akin Unver's work is different in the sense that it provides a comprehensive, comparative, and rich analysis of the discursive construction of the Kurdish question within three legislatures, namely the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT), the American Congress, and the European Parliament. Unver's focus on these three legislative organs seems well-justified because it allows discourse analyses of different actors both from the government and the opposition.

The book starts with an introductory chapter where the author both lays out the book's main objectives as well as the questions it attempts to answer, and then discusses its methodology. Here, Unver provides a good discussion about the tension between the executives and the legislatures and why he focuses in his book on discursive constructions and perceptions within three different legislatures. However, a more detailed discussion about methodology, especially about what kind of steps he followed as he identified different discursive constructions and how he made use of these constructions in his content analysis would be very helpful for those who would like to hear and learn more about different applications of content analysis in different cases.

In the next three chapters, Unver presents his rich analysis of the discursive constructions of the Kurdish question within the GNAT, the American Congress, and the European Parliament. These three chapters provide the reader with a great analytical overview of various discursive arguments on the Kurdish question. In particular, the conclusion section at the end of every chapter offers the reader a great summary of the arguments and discussions. The organization of these chapters makes the main arguments of the book very easy to follow and comprehend.

In his analysis, Unver argues that within the three different legislatures it is possible to observe two major discursive constructions on Turkey's Kurdish question, one reflecting a statist understanding and focusing on security and terrorism, and the other more emancipatory with an emphasis on the importance of human rights (p. 140). Unver further demonstrates that while the issues of security and terrorism have been the main focus in the GNAT, discussions about the Kurdish question have revolved around "human rights, democratization and excessive force aspects of the conflict" in the American Congress as well as the European Parliament (p. 141). This is an important finding that shows how the Kurdish question is perceived differently in different contexts.

In chapter four, Unver provides a "Concluding Comparative Analysis" of the previous chapters. This section is also very helpful as a summary of the book's main arguments. Here, Unver discusses the discursive patterns that he observes in the GNAT, the American Congress, and the European Parliament and comes up with a number of interesting conclusions. However, it would have been great if the reader could have also gotten a similarly detailed analysis of the discursive constructions about the Kurdish question during the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) tenure. The book's focus is on the 1990s. That is why the JDP only appears in the Epilogue chapter, where the

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recent developments about Turkey's Kurdish question are summarized—and summarized well. Yet, a reference to the recent developments keeps the reader yearning for a similarly rich analysis of the discursive constructions and perceptions on the Kurdish question during the JDP's tenure. A comparison between the 1990s and the 2000s would surely present interesting findings in connection to the book's main arguments.

Both at the beginning of the book and in his conclusion, Unver argues that the failure to resolve the Kurdish question in Turkey is closely connected to the misdefinition/poor definition of the problem. Thus, a strong idea that he promotes is that once the Kurdish question is properly defined, the likelihood of resolving it will increase. Although this seems like a convincing argument, it is not sufficiently clear in the book how Unver's demonstration of a variety of different discourses and perceptions about the Kurdish question would contribute to the resolution of the issue. Since this is one of the most important arguments that Unver makes, it would have been much better if he had discussed this connection further.

All in all, this is a book with interesting data and rich analysis of the discursive constructions and perceptions of Turkey's Kurdish question. However, from time to time it leaves the reader wanting more in terms of data, method, and analysis.

About the author:

Özlem Kayhan Pusane was born in Ankara, Turkey in 1980. She graduated from the Middle East Technical University (METU) in 2002 with a B.Sc. degree in International Relations. She received her M.A. degree in Political Science from the University of Notre Dame in 2004, where she also received her Ph.D. degree in Political Science in 2009. She is currently an assistant professor at Işık University (Istanbul, Turkey). Özlem's broader research and teaching interests lie in the areas of security studies, civil-military relations, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism.