Journal of American Studies of Turkey
15 (2002) :23-31

"The Fulbright Difference": The Future of Visiting Academics in Turkey and Elsewhere

Laurence Raw

Let me begin this article with two provisos; it will *not* seek to analyze the work of the Fulbright Commission in any great detail; nor will it comment on the effectiveness of that work. My title was inspired by a 1992 book of the same name, which contained the reminiscences of forty American academics of their experiences in foreign countries, with the express purpose of demonstrating the effectiveness of the Fulbright program in promoting "the spirit of the Fulbright idea", which involves increasing awareness of the meaning of freedom and its most successful political construct Democracy (Arndt and Rubin, 1993: 1-3). For the editors of this volume, the "difference" involves changing certain "habits of the heart and mind", both in the Fulbright academics themselves, and in the people whom they associated with on their foreign trips (Arndt and Rubin, 1993: 2). But clearly there are other types of difference involved in these types of exchange, which have more to do with cultural differences encountered by academics when working in a foreign context; and it is these types of difference that I shall examine here. In other words, what I want to do is to focus on the question of whether such differences encountered by academics working abroad can be successfully engaged with (if not necessarily overcome), and thereby promote a "difference" - or a change - in people's ways of thinking.

To do this, I want to conduct a case-study of the experiences of foreign academics who have lived and worked in the Turkish context. This not only includes Fulbright academics - Americans visiting Turkey and Turks visiting America - but also other foreign academics who have been directly employed in Turkish universities. There is a certain amount of personal interest involved in this; I was employed for several years as a British Council-sponsored academic in Turkish universities, with the express purpose of effecting change in people's ways of thinking (like the Fulbright Commission, one of the Council's main objectives was to promote "mutual understanding" between people through the idea of "good government"). However I shall limit my focus of attention to those academics who have worked in departments of American Literature and Culture, whether in Turkey or America (which is where I am based now). Ultimately what I want to suggest is that it is probably unrealistic to assume that any foreign academic's visit will lead to any permanent "difference" in people's ways of thinking; on the contrary, such visits only serve to emphasize cultural differences. It is by means of the ways in which people deal with such differences that the "success" of any foreign academic presence can be measured.

Let me begin by examining the achievements of early Fulbright academics, as outlined by Necla Aytür, formerly head of the Department of American Culture and Literature at Ankara University. In her view, many academics who came in the 1960s and 1970s made a significant difference to academic life in Turkey, in that they "had everything to do with the awakening of an interest in American literature among the faculty and the students." Moreover, they were heavily involved "in training the American Literature and Studies staff at Turkish universities" (Aytür 1996). At its best, this kind of training generated the kind of academic atmosphere described by David Landrey, who came to Hacettepe University, Department of American Literature as a Fulbright professor in 1992-3, having previously spent one year as a non-Fulbrighter at Bilkent):

> [F]rom the day I first discussed the question [of poetry and politics] …, I witnessed the kind of excitement which generates the best of exchanges, the richest human dialogue. Rarely did a day pass without some discussion of the issue; ideas circulated in the corridors as do glasses of tea. Eighteen responses resulted, [which were eventually published] as diverse as humanity itself. Although there are profound disagreements in the work, if this kind of argument prevailed in Bosnia-Herzegovina or South Africa or Northern Ireland, etc., perhaps politics itself would be poetry. (Landrey and Mutluay, 1993: 1)

Another Fulbrighter, David Espey, came to Hacettepe University for the 1990-1 academic year. Even before coming to Turkey, he admitted that he "traveled it in [his] mind; the experience took me back to the childhood memories of reading about far-away places and visiting them in the imagination" (Espey, 1999: 153). His image of Turkey had been shaped as a child during the Korean War by stories of "the Turkish soldiers, our allies, who resisted brainwashing. In my mind I could see it happening. The genie on the Turkish taffy, Punjab in the comic strip - those Turks were tough. No brainwashing for them. And as a schoolboy, I was glad they were on our side" (162). After a year at Hacettepe, Espey viewed Turkey as "home", something characterized "by friendship, by family feeling, by memory seasoned by the passage of time." After a year abroad, the country appeared "simultaneously … foreign and familiar, exotic and domestic" (163). Clearly the Turkish experience had not only influenced his way of thinking about other countries, but had prompted him to reconsider exactly what constituted "home".

Let us go further forward in time to look at the experiences of a non-Fulbrighter, Randall Ward, who came to Başkent University's American Culture and Literature department for the 1996-7 academic year. He claims that he introduced philosophy into the curriculum, in an attempt to present "a fair and balanced view of … [American] culture" by encouraging the study of "the dominant conceptual models of that culture at the time of the formation of its government". By doing so, he endeavored to "tell the whole story" about American culture, "especially the stories of the oppressed" (Ward, 1998: 30).

From these accounts, it may be concluded that the presence of foreign academics in American Culture departments has wrought considerable changes in the way the subject is taught, and in the outlook of the academics themselves. But let us now consider some alternative views, expressed by Turkish colleagues. While paying tribute to the work of early Fulbright academics, Necla Aytür nonetheless suggests that to study American civilization at an advanced level and yet take over the ideas of American academics while not being able to see the subject from a Turkish vantage point will not be very useful for Turkey. Also, more narrowly specialized topics, such as period courses in particular regions, or theme courses on popular architecture or demographic movements, dealt with at American universities, are not perhaps very useful and should better be avoided in Turkey. To address larger issues like the "American experience" and the "historical approach to culture" would be more useful. Above all, these things need to be discussed among Turkish academics of American Studies (Aytür 1996).

But do these discussions actually take place? In a recent paper on the state of American Studies in Turkey, Gönül Pultar indicates that perhaps they do not:

> [Many] academics have found it difficult to switch from the study of American literature as traditionally conceptualized to the present practice and methodology of American studies. Therefore, there is a very felt resistance to the recent growth in Cultural Studies and "Theory with a big T." These older, traditional academics find such interests totally irrelevant to their discipline. Put in another way, academics within departments of English who had been doing Emily Dickinson rather than John Keats or William Faulkner rather than Charles Dickens moved to American departments. They were literature people and to this day have remained so, fixated on literature and oblivious and immune to all other developments (Pultar, 1999: 13)

Moreover, do American Culture and Literature departments actually take the needs of their students into consideration? In a recent survey, published as an MA thesis at Bilkent University, Ankara, Esra Özogül surveyed two groups of students - those who had been to America for research purposes, and those who either were about to go to America, or who considered going to America for work or further education. The first group, quite naturally, concluded that the American education system had changed their outlook on life, particularly the emphases on rules and requirements rather than personal associations, critical thinking rather than memorization, and time management (Özogül, 1998: 123). Despite the fact that the second group professed admiration for the American education system, they believed that their only problems of cultural adjustment would arise when they had to undergo formal academic procedures, such as applying to university (131). It is therefore imperative that students should receive some intercultural training, to acquaint them with American "socio-cultural values", as well as helping them to undertake more mundane tasks such as ordering food and drink or speaking on the telephone (128). If Aytür's and Pultar's comments are taken into account, it would appear that this is often disregarded in favor of a literature or humanities-based curriculum.

While these observations may not do justice to some American Culture and Literature departments, they nonetheless suggest that the question of the effectiveness of foreign faculty should be considered from various perspectives. David Espey's sojourn in Ankara certainly altered his outlook on Turkey, but did his presence make a difference to the way in which American Studies was taught in the classroom? If Pultar's comments are taken into account, the answer might be no. Randall Ward might have adopted a philosophical perspective on American Culture, but how useful was it for students brought up in a completely different academic tradition, encouraging memorization rather than critical thinking? These questions are not restricted to American Culture departments: seven years at the British Council provided ample evidence that many humanities departments in Turkey experience similar doubts about the usefulness of foreign academics who come to work on short-term or part-time contracts.

It is not my purpose in this paper to criticize the contributions made by foreign faculty members to the development of American Studies in the Turkish Republic. What I can offer is some thoughts as to why they might encounter cross-cultural difficulties. Some of them have already been referred to: many departments restrict their focus of attention to literature (even though they call themselves "Culture and Literature" departments); and apparently resist new developments in critical and/or cultural theory, which the foreign academic may have either taught or studied elsewhere. But perhaps we need to dig deeper, to find out why such traditionalism (as perceived from a western perspective) still persists.

Until the early 1970s, it was only possible to study American Culture and Literature within an *English* Literature curriculum: Lyle Glazier spent two years as a Fulbright Professor of English in Turkey - during his second visit in 1968, he gave graduate seminars on texts such as *Of Mice and Men*, *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Catcher in the Rye* (Glazier 1971). Many lecturers, who currently occupy senior positions in American Culture and Literature departments, are in fact graduates of English Literature, and have thus been exposed to a pedagogic tradition which emphasizes literature's humanizing powers. Such comments provide a classic restatement of what might be called the New Critical view of the importance of literary study, as a way of creating what Matthew Arnold described as "a class of the educated - a class that could be definable and thought of as essentially and unequivocally that" (Leavis 1969, 44). The English critic F.R.Leavis (1895-1978) believed that an ideal "English School" should train under- and postgraduates in the "most independent and responsible exercise of intelligence and judgment". The curriculum should concentrate on the "literary-critical discipline" which, "in its peculiar preoccupation with the concrete [can] provide an incomparably inward and subtle initiation into the nature and significance of tradition" (Leavis 1943: 34-5). Students should be exposed both to "collaborative exchange, a corrective and creative interplay of judgments", and practical criticism of selected texts, which can be more precisely described as "a re-creation in which, by a continuing attentiveness, we ensure a more than ordinary faithfulness and fulness [to the poet's words]" (Leavis 1969: 47-8). Having studied such texts, and taken additional courses on "The rise of capitalism", "The new science", "The development of Augustanism", or "The significance of the history of the Theatre" (in order to understand England's cultural traditions), a graduate should have acquired an energetic and resourceful mind, "that will apply itself to the problems of civilization, and eagerly continue to improve its equipment and explore fresh approaches" (Leavis 1943: 59).

Given that many American Culture and Literature departments were established by English Literature graduates, it is not surprising to find Leavisite ideas influencing departmental practice. Several Turkish universities require their freshmen to take survey courses in American literature and history, as a way of preparing them for the "advanced study" of poems, plays and novels, including *The Scarlet Letter* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* - texts that Lyle Glazier lectured on when he visited Turkey in 1968 (Glazier 1971). Yet such apparent "traditionalism" in some Turkish departments of English and/or American Literature should not appear unfamiliar to any foreign academic. Leavis is still regularly included in undergraduate curricula in English Literature at British universities - according to a 1992 survey, he was the second most popular critic after Roland Barthes ("Antithesis", 1992). Moreover, the Leavisite emphasis on detailed analysis of a text is very similar to that of New Criticism, in spite of the fact that Leavis sought to dissociate himself from American academe: in a review originally published in 1953, he observed that, unlike Britain, education in America was too "democratic"; to maintain "a high intellectual standard" (Leavis, 1982: 161).

What is more interesting, however, is to examine *why* some Turkish departments of American Literature continue to sustain such traditions. Many English departments, which began life half a century ago as Philology departments, focusing mostly on language teaching rather than literary study, have been transformed into Language and Literature Departments, while American Culture and Literature Departments offer an alternative to anyone interested in studying western literature in English. Despite these developments there remains a commitment to what might be described as the modernist project outlined by Mary Louise Hill in the previous article, which consists of engaging with American and/or European values, and subsequently utilizing those values in what are perceived as the best interests of the national culture. By studying foreign literatures for four years, students can be transformed into informed, responsible individuals who can deal capably and efficiently with the multicultural complexities of the new century. They may learn something about America - past and present - but such knowledge is significant only insofar as it contributes to the development of the national culture (e.g., if graduates go to work for foreign companies based in Turkey).

This commitment should encourage lecturers to reconsider *what* they teach and *how* it is taught. If they choose to expose their students to the theoretical movements in the west, which have either challenged or discredited modernism - especially postmodernism - they should not look at such movements from what some describe as new orientalist perspectives. Such a stance also helps to justify Necla Aytür's observation, quoted earlier, on the necessity for Turkish lecturers in American Literature to decide whether an historical approach to American culture would be more suitable than a cultural studies-based course on demographic movements.

In practice, what has happened is that cultural studies, postmodern theory, film and media studies have been seamlessly accommodated into academic curricula, on the premise that such courses can help to create a new generation of graduates who can contribute to the development of the national culture. The modernist project is still alive and well - something which should remind us that any challenge to established notions of modernity "can also be experienced as a threat and a force of disintegration of traditions from which new and alternative possibilities might otherwise have been expected to emerge" (Jameson, 1998: xv). To criticize some Turkish academics for their apparent reluctance to reject New Critical/Leavisite notions of the cultural value of studying literature is to assume that western notions of postmodernism, cultural studies, film and media studies occupy the center of the world system might be entirely contrary to the spirit of Turkish modernism.

As Mary Louise Hill's article suggests, anyone coming from America or elsewhere to teach in Turkish institutions should try to work out exactly why American Studies is taught. It's not simply a matter of trying to "copy" the west; as this paper has sought to suggest, such departments might exist to promote the national interest (I wonder how much of this knowledge is imparted to Fulbright or British Council-sponsored professors, before they leave their home countries). Secondly, foreign academics should revise their notions of what constitutes a "successful" program of academic study, to accommodate the differing expectations of Turkish students. This may involve a radical revision of one's teaching or grading technique. This was brought home very forcibly to me when I collaborated with several experienced colleagues involved in training Turkish teachers of English Language. Rather than concentrating on more general issues, such as the theme, plot or character of a literary text, it might be more profitable - for academics and students alike - to analyze its language or explore its cultural content. Similarly, a history-based course might be more profitable for students if it were taught from an inter- or cross-cultural perspective. Thirdly, and more contentiously, one has to realize that "success" is a relative term. At an institutional level, it may be measured by the creation of new, forward-looking initiatives based on western models, staffed by foreign academics (something particularly attractive to government-funded agencies, or by universities endeavoring to establish or consolidate their public image by attracting the most gifted students). In those terms, it can be said that the Fulbright program has certainly made a "difference" to academic life - not only in Turkey. At the departmental, or the classroom level, however, "success" is a far more difficult concept to measure. New programs might be introduced, but they can just as easily be dispensed with. Moreover, how can anyone actually know whether a student has *benefited* from their classroom teaching? The answer to that last question is probably obvious; there *is* no answer. Perhaps the best course a foreign academic can pursue is to engage in what Leavis once described as "a collaborative exchange, a corrective and creative interplay of judgments:"

> For though my judgment asks to be confirmed and appeals for agreement that the thing is so; the response I expect at best will be of the form, 'Yes, but -', the 'but' standing for qualifications, corrections, shifts of emphasis, additions, refinements (Leavis 1969: 47).

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