

CULTURAL REVOLUTION OF ATATÜRK

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Abstract

The transformation of Turkey from a traditional to a secular state presents social psychology with a valuable case study on the topic of Cultural Change.

The dramatic turning point was reached in the Westernization process with the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey. A series of reforms was carried out by Atatürk to establish a Western type of state based on the principle that sovereignty belongs to the people. Secularism was the corner stone, and the reforms carried out by turn ranged from the area of religion to Civil Law to Education. The present paper analysed the reforms from a social psychological perspective in which reforms were seen as creating the social environment to induce changes in individuals' attitudes and behaviours to bring about permanent changes in the socio-cultural system in Turkey.

CULTURAL REVOLUTION OF ATATÜRK

In the early twentieth century in Turkey, the prominent thinker on reforms was Ziya Gökalp: As a sociologist he formulized Westernization within the framework of Turkism. His ideas however had some influence on the thoughts of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who utilized some of these ideas as groundwork for the reforms in the

process of the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Hence a brief examination of Ziya Gökalp's views at this point will shed some light on our understanding of the philosophical foundations of the reforms carried out by Atatürk.

Gökalp began his formulation with the definition of the concept of nation, and culture, and civilization dichotomy. To him a society consisted of people who speak the same language, have had the same education and are united in their religious, moral and aesthetic ideals; in short, those who have a common culture and religion (Gökalp 1970). It should be noted that a similar definition is given in the 1931 programme of the Republican peoples' party: the Party which was in power in modern Turkey then, with the exception that the element of religion has significantly been dropped.

Having found the basis of nationality to be in culture, Gökalp takes great pains to define this term. He was aware that every nation possesses material values which were not peculiar to it but were common to many nations. Such values were excluded from culture, and these he called as civilization. In Gökalp's definition spiritual values were entirely national, these he called as Culture (Hars). The distinction between these two terms, which play a major role in Gökalp's theory, is mainly formal. Gökalp regards as part of culture all feelings, judgements and ideals, while rational and scientific knowledge, methods and technology are considered as belonging to civilization. This definition has led him to give culture an emotional and subjective character. On the other hand, values of civilization have mainly an intellectual, objective, practical and often material character. Cultural values grow in the subconscious of society, while their counterparts in civilization are formed and developed consciously.

Having defined the concept of culture and civilization as separate entities Gökalp formulated how Turkey should approach Westernization. He demands the acceptance of Western civilization in full, but he warns not to borrow from Europe what is not civilization but belongs to the sphere of culture. Civilization, which is by nature international, covers only scientific methods, natural sciences and technical processes. All these should be adopted from Europe.

All spiritual values, however, are part of a culture which should not be borrowed from other nations but should be taken from the religious and national heritage (Gökalp 1970). Yet, he was well aware of several pitfalls in this process of acceptance of Western civilization. He observes that there exists a link between the spiritual culture of the West and its material achievements which he calls civilization in particular. He admits that cultivation of Western Civilization; technology and science requires appropriated cultural groundwork (Gökalp 1918). For this, new values need to be created but these should be the result of modifying old ones in order not to harm the national culture. According to him this way of bringing Western civilization to Turkey would be further than the mere imitation of it and it would allow itself to be molded into the national culture, which would in turn stimulate creativity. Without cultivation of Turkish culture into civilization there could be no genuine reform. From then on Gökalp as a sociologist devoted his entire efforts to the study of ethical, religious and aesthetic values as the search of their origin with the view in mind that they are social phenomena and their foundations could be found in the development of the Turkish society.

Triumph in the Independence War and the resultant national liberation under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk brought Turkey to the turning point in the Westernization process. Atatürk believed that for progress to occur in all spheres of national life requires a new political regime and the implementation of necessary reforms.

He observed that without breakdown of the traditional structure and attitudes modern economic and technological aid may produce little change conducive to growth. Modern economy itself is not merely isolated pieces of technology, but a part of the cultural complex. The existence of those cultural conditions; such as secularism in Western society was most important in making possible modern development.

His views, which have come to be called Kemalism, could be seen as carrying some elements of the past political movements, especially that of Turkism and in part Westernism. But a careful examination of Atatürk's reforms and his speeches proves that his

conception of Westernism and Turkish nationalism is distinct from them in a number of ways. Yet, through its struggle to convert a non-Western traditional society to a secular state, Kemalism illustrated that it is not more than a collection of pragmatic views and actions born out of real situations along the process (Berkes 1964; Steinhaus 1973).

In Atatürk's view, an underdeveloped nation has to strive to make itself equal to the developed nations if it does not want to continue to be exploited by them. The supreme problem is therefore to develop the country along the lines of Western civilization. «To reach the stage achieved by civilized nations!» That became the motif of the new Kemalist Ideology. The reforms to be undertaken would imply nothing but the transformation of the nation's institutions to the appropriation of Western civilization. A recurrent theme of his speech was the absolute determination to achieve an unconditional transformation to Western civilization and to overcome all obstacles faced along the path to this end. In one of his speeches Atatürk said (Türk Yurdu 1924) :

Surviving in the world of modern civilization depends upon changing ourselves. This is the sole law of any progress in the social, economic and scientific spheres of life. Changing the rules of life in accordance with the times is an absolute necessity. In our age when inventions and wonders of science are bringing change after change in the conditions of life, nations cannot maintain their existence by age old rotten mentalities and by traditional worshipping... supersitutions and nonsense have to be thrown out of our heads... A nation's life dominated by irrational, useless and harmful belief is doomed to paralysis. Therefore these should be purged from social life and the sole guide in political, social and educational life of nation must be science and scientific truths (Atatürk; 1923. pp. 103-26).

To reach to this end he implemented a series of reforms. In Atatürk's reforms the central concept was secularism and to his belief, Westernization could be achieved only under the secular state. To him secularism meant simply separating religion from the world. But the basic conflict in secularism is not necessarily between religion and the world as was the case in the Christian expe-

rience. The conflict is often between the forces of tradition which tend to promote the domination of religion and the sacred law, and the forces of change. Such a struggle can take place in a society where there is no organized church. Perhaps the best example is to be found in the Turkish case. As discussed earlier secularism was seen by Atatürk as the driving force behind the achievement of Western society in creating modern development in science and technology.

To him development very much depends upon freeing minds from traditional nonsense, thoughts and superstitions. Atay (1957), one of the leading propagandists of the new view expressed this :

We were not the victims of the material superiority of the West. We were the victims of that very moral superiority which had given material superiority to the West. The West is an institution, the institution of freedom of the mind.

Secularization of the Turkish state involved the abolition of the Sultanate followed by the abolition of the Caliphate and the establishment of a Republican form of Government based on the sovereignty of the people constituting a nation. In Mustafa Kemal's view the prime action to be taken was to establish the régime and government which was based on the idea that the sovereignty belongs unconditionally to the nation and the government is based on the principle of the people's direct rule over their own destiny. Accordingly, on the 23rd April, in 1920, the National Assembly was launched and members to the Assembly representing different regions of the country were appointed. A few months later Atatürk submitted a program called «Populism» that contained enumeration of the principles of the new régime on the Assembly. Then the new constitution was drafted and adopted on January 1921. It should be acted that Atatürk's or Kemalist's idea of the sovereignty of the people was conceived differently from both the liberal and communist doctrines. It took shape parallel with the struggle against Communism, Imperialism, Sultanate and Caliphate and was expressed in the principle of «Populism». This was well expressed in one of his speeches in 1923 as follows :

Our people is composed not of social classes with conflicting interests, but of classes whose co-existence is indispensable one

to the other. The aim is rather to mobilize the entire nation called people, by including all classes and excluding none, in common and united action towards genuine prosperity which is the common objective for all (Atatürk, 1923, pp. 34).

After abolition of Caliphate and Şeriat (Muslim religious law exercised in the old court) was followed by the secularization of court and law. The question faced was which legal provisions were most suitable and agreeable of both the philosophy of the new system and the social condition of the country. As a result, with few modifications, the Swiss Civil Code, the Italian Criminal Code, and the German Commercial Code were accepted and it was decided that the practices of courts and law should be under the unification of the new ministry of justice.

The most dramatic effect which followed this was the changing of the Turkish family statutes with regard to marriage and divorce, as well as the statute of women. Poligamy was prohibited and divorce should be according to law, and furthermore women were emancipated with the granting of full civil rights. It must be noted that as the implicit aim of the makers of Code was not to establish and regulate the civil relations of the people according to existing customs and mores or religious provisions. On the contrary, it was to shape these relations according to what the makers of the Code believed they should be. Here lies the revolutionary character of the Code. Its approach differed radically from the previous laws and family codes in that it was not codification bringing together different traditions for the purpose of their reconciliation but rather one establishing a new system to the exclusion of the provisions of religious and customary legal systems.

Among the various aspects of social life that felt with particular intensity the impact of secularization of government, of family institutions and certain cultural practices, was education. The guiding principle was, as in law, unification and consolidation throughout the entire educational structure. Educational institutions like Medreses that were incompatible with the basic principles of a secular state were abolished and in their place schools were opened to teach science subjects. It was included in the constitution that every Turkish citizen had the right to free primary education, and

the subsequent educational laws made secular primary education compulsory to the age of twelve which was to be administered by the Ministry of Education. However, opening religious schools or schools for the purpose of religious instruction was not prohibited but this right was not exercised until three decades ago (Daver, 1955).

Further, in effect Arabic characters and numerals were abolished though authorized schools could have used them and Latin Alphabet was adopted in their place. These were not the only institutions that were subject to reforms but some other cultural reforms were also carried out, such as the abolition of Fez and the adoption of hat, and the adoption of metric system.

Finally with regard to religion, the new policy aimed at providing an organization within which the believer could find ideal conditions for his religious expression, and that authorized no one to interfere with matters of individual conscience. Accordingly, the Department of Affairs of Piety was established. The Department was to be an agency of public service rather than the supreme spiritual body of a religious community. To some, Kemalist secularism gave impression that religion was under captivity by the laws of the state. But religion was guaranteed freedom and protection so long as it was not used to promote any social or political ideology. In such terms to understand the Kemalist secularism, as a matter of separating church and state is also erroneous and irrelevant. Kemalist secularism was nothing but rejection of the ideology of Islamic polity (Daver, 1955).

Examining the meaning of the concept of Westernization in Turkey at the turning of the 20th Century with reference to Ziya Gökalp — an eminent Turkish sociologist — the present paper focused on Atatürk's views on secularism and Westernization, reforms in the process of the establishment of the new Republic. It is clear that there are some differences between Atatürk's pragmatic approaches and Gökalp's formulization of Westernization, though these two views were fundamentally overlapping. Probably differences can largely be attributable to Atatürk's being a practitioner of reforms which developed according to demands of the social situations, and Gökalp's being merely a thinker. Not only did Atatürk

perceive reforms as a means of bringing the nation to the level his modern time necessitated but he wanted to ensure reforms would bring about enduring changes in the society. To him only making these changes at the institutional level would securely socialize the nation or individuals in the direction of reforms. In other words, the aim of the reforms was to create a social context which would induce changes in attitudes and behaviours of individuals towards this aim.

It was explicit in Atatürk's views and reforms that the political environment he intended to create was democracy or a Pluralist society and the compatible model of the individual with this system was «pluralist» person whose personality attributes included free-mindedness, rationality, seeking truth, only through scientific knowledge, and individuality. As was discussed earlier, his policy of Populism was the cornerstone and developed to mobilize all masses of the nation towards this end. He was well aware that Populism and Democracy as concepts were embedded in one another; and both were compatible with the characteristics of the social structure of Turkish society. In Turkish culture social classes in the sense of European cultures had not existed (Kafesoğlu, 1977). Evidence of this can still be found in our own times: A number of Prime Ministers and Presidents have had their origin in small towns and villages.

As pointed out, individuality was emphasized in reforms. However, the concept of individualism carried a special connotation than what universally has been understood. In both Gökalp's and Atatürk's terms it was perceived that society is a source of individuality, freedom and creativity for people. This notion however is in contradiction with the western concept of individuality in that men is conceived as a source of freedom and creative resources for the society (Gorer, 1967; Inkeles and Levinson, 1969).

This conceptualization of society and individual exist in the very nature of the Turkish culture, and was termed as a culture of relatedness (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1985) or as a culture of «We»ness (Sherif and Sherif : 1967) which opposes the concept of separateness observed in the West (Minuckin, 1974) or a culture of «I»ness (Sherif and

Sherif : 1967). An implicit expression of this type of individuality can be seen in the present Constitution of Turkish Republic.

Finally the below excerpt from a text book may illustrate well teaching in the schools on the nature of secularism in order to consolidate Westernization in Turkey :

No society of unbelievers ever existed . . . But in our age, there is an attitude taken to religion that did not exist previously; no one interferes in another's belief; he respects all faiths. The intolerance of previous ages has been replaced by the sentiment of tolerance.

Religious tolerance, as well as tolerance in science and politics, has become the most important feature of modern nations . . . With the transformation of societies into democracies, religion became separated from the state . . . The most important factor of state is the evolution of science, morals, and law autonomously from religious dogmas. And the consequences of this process is mankind's reaching toward freedom of thinking . . . A modern state is that one which does not interfere with beliefs . . . Equally, it does not allow anybody to interfere with the beliefs of others . . . It is evident that . . . the social factors in the secularization of the state are identical with those giving rise to democracy. A democratic Turkey necessarily means a secular Turkey. (Sadak, 1941, pp. 94-97).

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