

## THE ASSIMILATION OF OCCIDENTAL CIVILIZATION IN TURKEY

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The occidentalization of Turkey was not realized at once thirty or thirtyfive years ago with the revolution under Atatürk as we once believed. This reformation has a history of more than two centuries, a very long preparation period.

The tribe of Osman Bey constituted the nucleus of the Ottoman Empire which developed from a small principality (Beylik). Of course it was impossible for this tribe which was closely related to the customs and way of life of Central Asia and to Moslem civilization with its religion, to avoid the influence of its neighbor, Byzantium.

So, the Ottomans who were under the influence of Turkish, Islamic, and Byzantine culture met a new movement when they first settled in Europe. This is the Renaissance. In fact Fatih, conqueror of Istanbul (1453), founded the Ottoman Empire while the European people were trying to get rid of the mentality of the middle ages and to get used to the new thoughts of the Renaissance. It can not be said that he was indifferent to this new conception of the world. His palace had the style of the Renaissance. If only his successors had shown the same interest and sympathy towards this new idea, perhaps it would have been possible for us, the Turks, to understand the meaning of the Renaissance at that time. This indifference towards the Renaissance caused us a delay in Westernization of three or four centuries.

Briefly, the Ottoman Empire after Fatih, being proud of her power, stayed indifferent toward all these new Western movements. But because of her geographic situation, she did not cut entirely her relations with the Renaissance after Fatih. It may be said that in the XVIth and XVIIth

centuries, that is, in the period of prosperity under Soliman the Magnificent and in the stationary period of Turkey, the Ottoman Empire was like a passive observer face to face with the Europe where new movements were in progress. Finally in the end of XVIIth century, at the time of diminution of the Empire the movement of occidentalization appeared.

It is obvious that the beginning of the XVIIIth century marked a very important turning point in the history of the Ottoman Empire. The Empire made her first great step into European civilization.

Firstly, the movement of occidentalization, began by the Grand Vizir Ibrahim Pasha's (the son-in-law of Sultan Ahmet III) "Period of Tulip" (Lale Devri) and spread to the army and to the fleet towards the middle of the century. So two contrary mentalities, an oriental one represented by the Janissaries (Yeniçeri) and an occidental one represented by the «Nizamı Cedid», proceeded in a parallel march till 1826, the date of the suppression of janissaries.

This new movement was at first located only in the army. It was necessary to await the Tanzimat (Reformation in Turkey 1839) for it to spread to the other social institutions of the Empire. We must not forget that the characteristics of the Tanzimat was duality. That is, in all social institutions with the exception of the army, the civilizations of the East and West then began to melt together. In fact, after Tanzimat, the Empire could neither get rid of the oriental civilization which had penetrated into her blood, nor give up the newness of the West which was a matter of economic life and death. This dual position continued till the decline of the Empire (1923). With the exception of the resistance of some deeply rooted social values which still continues, complete rupture from the East and junction with the West were possible for Turkey only with the Republic after 1923.

We must also point out that as Occidentalization began to take moral institutions under its influence the resistance against the movement of occidentalization increased. For example, the old janissaries were able to resist the movement of occidentalization, which began in the army in the last half of the XVIIIth century, but only till 1826.

Since that time, that is, since thirteen years before the Turkish Tanzimat, the military organization has been affected by this movement of occidentalization. On the other side, in some of our values, such as music,

which are rooted in the depths of our conscience, it is impossible to be detached completely from the East and they keep their duality even today.

This short historical note shows that the movement of occidentalization which has a history of more than two hundred years was developed in three periods. In the first period, the anxiety of defence against external attacks was dominant. Therefore, in this period, we can see newness only in the military services. The second period began with Tanzimat, and during this period the newness has been generalized, spreading to all other social institutions and still keeping the duality of the East and West. In the third period, which began with the Republic (1923), the duality was ended by a precise decision and Western influence was chosen.

In short, if the first period is a superficial and unilateral imitation of Western civilization, the third is an organized and systematic conception of it. The second period is a bridge between these two.

Here, we will try to make a short analysis of this civilization which was developed systematically at last in the period of the Republic after a duration of more than two hundred years.

If we glance at occidental civilization we see that by the time of the Renaissance the idea of a nation and national institutions were developed; attention was detached from the other world and was fixed on the real world. As a result, natural science, which was based on experimental methods, progressed greatly. Finally there was the birth of Humanism which was founded upon original Greek sources detached from the customs of the Church.

We may ask, to what degree Turkish social constitution of today adapted these main characteristics of Western civilization.

In Turkey, nationalism started towards the end of the XIXth century with Ahmet Vefik pasha and Süleyman pasha. This current, which was developed and spread rapidly since that time, was systematized by Ziya Gökalp. Turkish nationalisation has two ideals; one near and the other far off. He calls the first Oguzistan. This ideal was born by a union of Turks of Turkey, of Azerbaijan of Iran, and of Harzem. The distant ideal, which was given the name of Turan by him, is a union of all Turkish countries. How much of these ideals have been realized today?

As we know, only the Turkish Republic exists today. Apart from it there is no nation which has this union and independence.

It is seen that Turkish nationalisation which began at the end of the XIXth century did not remain only as an ideal, but became a nation, by the Proclamation of the Republic.

It is evident that every period possesses its own ideal types.

As the mentality of the middle ages which directed its attention to the other world bore certain types of saints and anchorites, the Western civilization which has concentrated its attention on this world, created a new type called «scientific man», (scientist). The ideal types of the Middle ages lived in an environment which hoped for everything to take place in the other world and longed for death. But the scientist of Western Civilization comes out among the men who have clung to this world by the joys of life. I must at once point out that I do not take the artistic type into consideration because an artist is not a type, who appears and becomes popular in the stage of the nation or in a developed stage of mankind, like a scientist. Artists exist in all societies of mankind, developed or not, without exception.

Now, if we throw a glance at the society in which we are living we cannot deny that the youth have turned their attention from the other world to this world and have attached themselves to this universe with its joys of life. Their ideals are for the actual world.

In occidental civilization, particularly after the Renaissance, scientific man stood for three principles; to admit only the authority of experiment and reason: to be doubtful of everything at the beginning and to believe only after long experiments and observation; to accept not an eternal reality or a truth which is complete now, but a truth in evolution, a creative evolution of gradual development.

In science, based on these three above principles, it is impossible to agree entirely with the religious mentality. This point must be taken into consideration carefully by the Turkish authors. Indeed, the habit of religious education, which has been rooted for centuries, can lead us to faith without criticism. Fortunately, we possess a good weapon to defend us against this dangerous mentality. Briefly, science approaches philosophy as much as it goes away from religion.

Now let us see how religion is contrary to these three principles of

science which we have pointed out before. We have said that the scientist takes into consideration only the authority of experiment and of reason. But the man of Religion, on the contrary, believes in the authority of an unknown power which can not be experimented with.

The scientist is doubtful of everything at the beginning and believes only after a series of long experiments, whereas the man of Religion first believes and then makes his reasoning on the basis of this belief. Finally the scientist believes in a reality in gradual development, the man of religion believes in a reality which is complete, eternal, and immutable.

Philosophical thought, contrary to religion, is in perfect agreement with the three principles of science. Indeed, philosophical culture develops the critical sense, which is of prime importance in science, and in man. It is for that reason that a mind nourished with philosophical culture can not have absolute faith in any creed. A doubt, even small, makes him a sceptic because he knows very well that every problem has its own philosophy and that every philosophical problem has to be discussed.

He knows that science is based on certain principles like determinism, causality etc. and that all these principles lay claim to discussion.

In short, for a mind which has philosophical intellect, science, itself, is finally a kind of philosophy and not an idol.

To understand the scientific mentality which constitutes the axis of occidental civilization, it is necessary to try to construct science on the supple basis of philosophy and deprive it of the rather dogmatic mentality of Religion.

Until now we have considered only two characteristics of occidental civilization: nationality and science. We have asked to what extent they are adapted to our present society of Turkey.

Now for the current of Humanism in Turkey: If individual efforts which began about thirty or forty years ago were not considered this current took a systematic form through the translations of World Classics. This started twenty years ago under the direction of the Ministry of Education. Today approximately more than 1500 books have been translated. Certainly this is a very rapid development and, no doubt, we will very soon see the positive influence of this rich source for the intellectual.

This short analysis shows that Turkey, after an effort which has

lasted for centuries, is on the way of creation, leaving behind the way of imitation. Now, we have passed the period of blind admiration for the West and entered the period of conscious assimilation.

In summary, we conclude as follows from the experience of Westernized change of Turkish civilization which has gone on for more than two centuries.

a) The change of civilization realized in Turkey has helped us to pass from Near East civilization to Occidental civilization. This was not accomplished at once but took two and a half centuries.

b) This change of civilization was brought about by a movement which went from the material world to spiritual values. It started with different weapons such as guns, cannons, and the organization of the army. This was followed by changes in social institutions, or in how to dress, to sit down, to eat, to drink, and other various customs. It reached progressively up to the spiritual values such as morals, esthetic taste, and ways of thinking.

c) This change in the civilization met certain strong resistance when it touched the spiritual values.

For example: music, which represents one of the most profound values, continues to resist even now. This duality still exists. Even in radio which is a semi-official institution, oriental music has its place side by side with occidental music.

d) In Turkey we started by taking on certain elements of occidental civilization and it was only after the Republic that we conceived of Westernization as something wholly organic and systematic.

To generalize the results it would be necessary to review and to make comparative research on the nations which have passed before us over to occidental civilization. Illustrations are Russia and Japan. We should also study those which are on their way to pass over this same civilization after Turkey, as the near East, Far East, and African societies etc. This generalization would have had more foundations if we could have added to this comparative study also a historical data which concerns the general changes of civilization.

## Appendix : Some East-West Differences Examined

### I. Accurate and rough measurements

Every activity of the Oriental is done unprecisely and, of the Occidental, with precision and reckoning. Really, we Turks are not fond of using measurement tools like scales, meters, etc. in our daily life other than in business transactions. We are far from giving importance to grams and centimeters. We are delighted in doing business without any precision but merely approximately, five more or less.

For example, let us look at our kitchens. Who of us has a scale? Doesn't this simple example prove that even our intellectuals have not adopted the measurement system which is one of the foundation stones of Western civilization? Neither do we use mathematical and geometrical thought in our daily lives.

Then why are we astonished that our craftsmen are not greatly interested in measurement tools? Nevertheless, actually our craftsmen, under the pressure of our architects and engineers who have acquired occidental thought, are compelled to use measurement tools. But generally speaking this can not be considered a custom. When the pressure is relieved they turn on the first occasion to their rough way of working. A mason, in order to perform his job in the right way must be equipped with drop line and level. At the first opportunity many of them do not bother to use even these two primitive tools and at once apply their old rough measurement system. We, the Orientals, have been taught this unprecise business for centuries. We have been accustomed to such a manner of working. For instance do you know what measurements Evliya Celebi (a famous Turkish traveller of the XVIIth century) used when he wanted to give a strict and healthy knowledge about the length and width of an object? He used either the palm of his hand or the length of his stride.

The occidental, on the contrary, can do nothing without using precise measurements and accurate mathematical formulas. The story is well known. In order to learn to cook pilaw an occidental cook stayed just three months near our cook. He marked down everything from the quantity of water, rice, salt which are put into the pot, to the temperature of the fire and to the time of boiling, up to its small particularities. But the

problem was that he could not formulate mathematically the form of pilaw which was made by our cook. At last seeing that it was impossible he gave up and left.

How could they understand each other? They were representatives of two different viewpoints and understandings. One of them, the Oriental, finds the approximate truth which has a sufficient practical value. The other wants to realize the truth completely with a mathematical precision. Better to say, the Occidental cook tries to express the qualitative world view of our cook, in the mathematical language of his quantitative viewpoint. Both of these viewpoints have their own different methods. If the method of the Oriental is a mindless power called intuition, which is unmeasurable and unprecise, then that of the Occidental is a mental which always can be measured and precisely reckoned.

If one end of our worldly existence chain is matter the other end is consciousness. When we gradually ascend from the material world to the world of consciousness life, the quantitative viewpoint, losing its value little by little, gives place to a qualitative one. Therefore, if the mathematical thought of the Occidental which is based on measurement is suitable for understanding the outer world, — the world of the matter — the Oriental's intuition is inclined to catch the internal world, the world of consciousness.

In order to understand the facts of the world completely both civilizations instead of using their minds and intuitions in concert, have been one-sided. The Oriental attaches a greater importance to intuition and the occidental to logic. So that the Oriental tries to bring his intuition down to matter whereas the Occidental tries to raise measurements up to consciousness. For that reason, though the Oriental unified his jobs — both in the world of consciousness and of matter — by adding them a piece from his personality and a subjective element the occidental without adding anything from personality, performs all his jobs, just like a well regulated machine. In short, if inclination of the Oriental is towards human values that of the Occidental is towards mechanization.

But actually, both civilizations take their defects for granted. We, with all our power, try to reach measurement. They, on their side, try to reach intuition. Already, does not the «philosophy of intuition» proposed by Bergson, cope with such a demand of Western civilization?



## II. Tranquility and Comfort

Here are two words meaning ease: tranquility and comfort. One of them means the tranquility of soul or of our internal world and the other corporeal comfort.

It seems that Oriental civilization has given greater importance to tranquility of soul for centuries and has tried to have the satisfaction of soul which is called «Ataraksia» by the «Stoics». Occidental civilization has given all of its power incessantly to external tranquility and comfort.

Indeed, Orientals have concentrated their attention on their internal world. No importance is given by them to the external world. They care only for tranquility of soul. They don't care whether their clothes are ragged; their dwelling places are topsy-turvy and uncomfortable; their houses are built of logs or bricks; their roads are muddy, swampy or dirty; and their villages, towns, cities are ruined and miserable. It is sufficient that their hearts be joyful and gay.

Occidentals, on the contrary, have given all their attention to the external world. They do all in their power to relax their body, to give it ease, in one word to reach comfort. Domestic comforts like arm chairs, lounging chairs, showers, baths, water closets, and asphalt roads, all kinds of vehicles, ornate gardens, parks, distractions are found in profusion. Aren't all these for the comfort of their precious bodies. It seems strange that till now, the Occidental who is addicted to bodily comfort, enjoyed the disorder of his internal world. It is just like the enjoyment which the Oriental takes in his external world.

In short if the disorder of the Oriental concerns his outer world, then that of the Occidental concerns his internal world.

Which of these two feelings, anxiety or tranquility, is dominant in the internal world of every individual?

If we have a look at the chain of creatures from stone and soil to plants, animals, and human beings, we see that the anxiety and strain increases as their complexity progresses. Therefore, two choices are to be made by individuals: either the comfort which leads to the torpid stage of plants (death) or the anxiety which leads to a continuous strain and activity (to life and to creativeness).

Isn't the main source of anxiety and of uncomfortableness which

increases in the chain of creatures as time progresses and reaches in man their culminating point, the intellect? In fact, don't we see that, as we pass gradually from animals to men, intelligence develops in direct proportion to anxiety and uncomfortableness, at last reaching to the degree of wisdom in man and on the other hand, instincts decrease? Likewise individuals have in this case to choose two ways too. Either to relieve the conflict between the intellect and the instincts or to increase it extremely.

As it is known, the individual on one side leans to the bases of animality. Because of that he can not get rid of his instincts. On the other side, he is bound to his values and because of this, he can not give up his intellect. Therefore the human spirit vacillates between the conflict of these two powers.

The Oriental, while establishing his values which result from his intellect, tries to accommodate it to his instincts. I presume his tranquility comes from this. The Occidental, on the contrary, carries this conflict between these two powers to the utmost. This must be the source of the anxiety and anguish in his soul.

I think that the whole matter consists in regulating the dosage of this conflict in the human soul. In order to obtain a precise judgement we have to wait for the results of psychological and sociological investigations.

Only, there is something which we clearly know now. That is that both civilizations have only a single aim! The Orient has sacrificed comfort for the sake of tranquility of soul, whereas the Occident has done the contrary.

But actually, both civilizations have felt their defects. The Orient tries to get rid of material misery and to reach comfort as fast as possible whilst the Occident used all its power to attain tranquility of soul.

Really, isn't Western philosophy in search of the means for resolving this crisis which appears in the form of anguish in individuals and in the form of tension in societies?

### III. Difference in the Techniques

The term «technique» is used today in very varied meanings. For certain ones, this term has a rather vast significance. Thus by technique

one understands not only the manner of using various tools in practical life and in diverse crafts, but also understands the methods employed in the sciences. Technique even extends to principles of logic that govern thought. In sum, in this case, the term technique extends on one side to the practical life of the material world and on the other to logical thought. We shall take here the word technique in its narrow sense, in order to express the manner of using it in different tools, in art, in handicraft and in practical life.

One may ask what is the first tool in the history of humanity. I believe that the answer which is the simplest, the most reasonable, and perhaps the one that comes closest to the truth, is given by the French sociologist Marcel Mauss.

According to Mauss the first tool in the history used by man is his own body. Where there are tools, there are methods; or in other words «techniques» for using these tools. If we accept the theory of Marcel Mauss, the first «techniques» in the history of humanity must be those of our body.

Without doubt, the fingers, the hands, the arms, the legs — in a word — the different members of the body are the first tools used by man. Stones, and sticks are only prolongations of the fingers, the hands, and the arms.

From the simplest tools such as the hands, the arms, and sticks, to the most complicated tools of our day, all have their own manner of being used, in other words, their own techniques. The way of using these tools, the way of making use of them, varies not only with the aptitude and the constitution of the individual but also with each level of humanity, from one society to another. These vary even in each society according to the various periods of evolution; and these techniques are transmitted by tradition and routine from one generation to another, from masters to their apprentices.

Thus the techniques of construction such as houses, roads, bridges, and fountains, the techniques, of manufacture as the objects of luxury, of decoration, the techniques of nutrition and several other techniques of various crafts and arts vary according to different societies.

Indeed ways of using the fingers, hands, feet, legs, heads, and bodies,

of walking, of sitting; of resting; of sleeping; of running; of bathing and of eating varies according to several societies.

For example we, Turks, make the sign for «no» by shaking our heads vertically up and down. The American, the German, and the Frenchman shakes his head horizontally from right to left for «no» In order to show the number two. We, Turks, use the index and third fingers; while Europeans use the thumb and the index. One can cite many such examples. One notices great differences between their manners and ours of expressing joy, sadness, and astonishment. There are differences between their mimics and gestures and ours. Even the walk of an Englishmen, is different from that of a Frenchmen or an American.

One can also point out the difference that exists between the French and the Turks, as to the manner of washing or bathing. The French, under the influence of their technique of washing due to a tradition with origins certainly far in the past do not know how to make use of running water. Even in a city such as Paris, where water installations are quite modern, the Parisians still remain faithful to their tradition cleaning up in lavatories and plugging up the basins in order to still the running water. The English and the German have not given up this still water technique either. Thus it is that they arrange the installation of the faucet according to the same technique, basing this practice upon tradition and routine. Thus the faucets are placed so near the edge of the basin that is difficult to wash suitably one's head or even one's hands in running water.

On the other hand, we, Turks, also have our own way of washing which is deeply rooted. But it is just opposite to that of the French. We wash in running water. Just as their technique of washing resists all possibilities of change so do our techniques of washing in running water. In fact, even in the most backward villages of Anatolia one could never think of cleaning up in a wash basin. One would not place a faucet on the back of a lavatory. Even if one uses a sort of pitcher its use transforms the water of the recepticle into running water.

The same differences strike us in the techniques concerning manufacture of certain objects: for example bread is round in our country while it has the shape of a stick in France.

We also notice the same divergences among artisans. In our country the bootblack sits on a little stool, the customer remains standing and

places one foot after the other on the shoe-shine box. The English boot-blacks have no stools but they kneel while the customer stands. In Germany boot-blacks remain standing and do their work bending over, but without bending their knees. In northern countries the customer sits down on a high chair to which he climbs by means of a stairway while the bootblack stands and works without bending.

The techniques used in the different branches of art changed also according to epochs, civilizations and societies to which they belong. For example, in the art of the violin there exists different methods of holding the bow (German, Franco-Belgien, Russian etc.) The same differences are noted in the manner of holding the violin. One can multiply these examples in the plastic arts.

All these examples show us that in the different techniques the social factor influences at least as much as the physical, biological and psychological factors. Our techniques are the ensemble constituted by the physical, bio-physical and social elements. That is why that as soon as one neglects any one of these viewpoints all explanations made in this area are erroneous. Thus it is a necessity for the sociologist to study the social side of the very complex different techniques.