

Comparison of the State and Nation-Building Processes in Germany and Turkey

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Abstract

The similarities between Germany and Turkey/Ottoman Empire in the state development are astonishingly more than the differences: Both are late empires. Empire in the state development are astonishingly more than the differences: Both are late empires. While the centralization of political power progressed continuously in the West European states after the 17th Century, an opposite development took place in both empires; in the direction of weakening and disintegration of the centers. Territorial losses and disintegration on the peripheries characterize the both empires.

The unification and the creation of a sovereign, national state could be accomplished under the leadership of the armies and by their military success both in Germany and in Turkey. The bourgeoisie of both countries was too weak to play a leading role. Therefore, in both empires all key positions were occupied by the military, which increased its domination and influence in the society and politics. One of the main differences between Turkey and Germany lies in their democratization processes.

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Almanya ve Türkiye’de Devlet ve Ulus İnşası Süreçlerinin Kıyaslanması

Öz

Almanya ve Türkiye/Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’ndaki devlet gelişim sürecindeki benzerlikler şaşırtacak kadar farklılıklardan fazladır. İkisi de geç imparatorluklardı. Merkezi bir siyasi otorite ve homojenleşmiş bir ulus, her ikisinde de diğer Batı Avrupa devletlerine kıyasla çok geç gelişti. 17. yüzyıldan sonra Batı Avrupa devletlerinde, merkezi siyasi güç gittikçe kuvvetlenirken iki imparatorlukta da merkezlerin güç kaybetmesi ve dağılması yönünde, yani tam ters yönde bir gelişme ortaya çıktı: Her iki imparatorluğu 18. yüzyıldan itibaren sınırlarda toprak kayıpları ve ufalanmalar karakterize eder.

Türkiye ve Almanya’da egemen bir ulusal devletin kurulması ancak orduların liderliğinde ve savaşta başarılarıyla mümkün oldu çünkü her iki ülke de burjuvanın liderliği üstlenebilmesi için çok güçsüzdü. Dolayısıyla bütün anahtar mevkiler, toplumda ve siyasette hâkimiyetini arttıran ordu tarafından tutuldu.

Türkiye ve Almanya arasındaki en büyük fark ise demokratikleşme süreçlerindedir: Almanya 1950’lerde oluşmakta olan Avrupa Ortak Pazarı’na entegre edilirken, bilindiği gibi Türkiye Avrupa Birliği üyeliğine halen kabul edilmemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: merkezileşme, ulus devlet, askeriye/ordu, otokrasi, siyasi güç

1. Introduction

The German sociologist Norbert Elias is still not very well known in Turkey although his remarkable synthesis of Freudian psychology, sociology and the theory of state would contribute substantially to our understanding of the Ottoman-Turkish history, in comparison to the historical development of other states. In this article I have tried to compare the state-and nation-building processes in Germany and in the Ottoman Empire and its descendant Turkey on the basis of the Civilizational Theory of Norbert Elias. I have concentrated on the similarities which have escaped the notice of scholars until now and not on the apparent differences. According to Norbert Elias civilizational processes are directly interrelated with state-building ones. His paradigm is universally applicable because he tries to determine the structural peculiarity of social transformational processes through the comparative method. Hence his method is not abstract or speculative as it is in most of the evolutionist models but both historically and empirically founded. This article concentrates on an application of the Civilization Sociology of N. Elias on the empirical cases of Germany and Turkey, focussing especially on the decivilizing effects of relations between states and of their interaction with the state-building processes in both countries.

2. The Theoretical Frame Work of This Work: On the Civilizational Theory of Norbert Elias¹

The state, which monopolizes the means of coercion (instruments of killing, soldiers, the police, e.g.) and therefore the right to exercise violence, prohibits violence between people, thus pacifying the society. The attained level of pacification of the society by the state corresponds to the level of development of the self-control/self-regulation of individuals, that is, to the controlling of the drive to exercise physical violence, the control of aggression.

¹ The theoretical framework of this article is based on Elias's works (see Elias, 1976, 1978, 1978, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1990; Elias & Scotson, 1965; Elias, Scotson, & Schröter, 1990).

“The stability of the psychic self-restraint apparatus, which appears in the habitus of every ‘civilized man’, stays in a very narrow relation with the development of the monopoly institutions of physical violence and with the stability of social central organizations. Only with the emergence of such stable monopoly entities and organizations, the social moulding and restraint-apparatus, which let the individual gain the capability of self-regulation, grows (Elias, 1976, pp. 327–328).”

Fear and the feeling of threat, whatever the source, that is, dangers posed by nature and dangers caused by the society, other humans or other states at the international level, hampers the process of civilization. This holds also, and especially, for the *unpredictability* of state violence -e.g. arbitrary- violence by the security agents or of violence by other states. Hunger, poverty, forced migration or flight, natural catastrophes, and threats caused by other states, all these cracks the “thin shell” of individual civilization.

In Elias’ theory of the interdependent processes of the monopolization of violence (state-building) and of the civilization of the psyche, that is the development of a continuous, regular self-control, there are two stages: The first stage is that of the emergence of a central monopoly of violence and the second one, that of *predictability* and the barracking of the specialists of violence (army and the police) so that they are not visible in the normal life of citizens. We can call this second stage the “*civilizing of the civilizing agents*”. The lessening of the fear of violence-exercising state agents depends on their withdrawal to their barracks so that they are only present and visible if an act against the laws takes place: That is to say, only when *the rule of law* dominates. But this impersonal continuous potential of coercion becomes ever present in the minds of citizens and the consistent pressure it exerts in the lives of people creates a consistent, continuously functioning self-restraint/self-control apparatus; shortly, the more civilized the state is, the more civilized and pacified is the society. The civilization of the civilizing agents as the later stage of the process of the civilization and of state-formation has a corresponding individual psychic process. This is the psychogenesis of state-building and of the civilizational process.

Vice versa, the weakening of the state through national or international causes and the decivilization of the agents of violence and coercion, of the so-called security agents, constitute a decivilizing momentum for the society or, in other words, the reversal of the process of civilization.

3. The Decisive Developments until the Fall of Both the Late Empires

Are there any similarities between these two seemingly different countries, states and histories, which would make a comparison possible? I dare make the statement that the historical developments of both these states reveal big structural similarities even when the comparable stages of development might have time lags. To begin with, my subject is the similarities and not the differences between the historical developments in Germany and Turkey/Ottoman Empire. Sociologically regarded, both Germany and Turkey were ruled by autocracy for a longer duration than that of other European states until the end of the second decade of the 19th century, although they both were formally constitutional monarchies (Elias, 1990). The weakness of the bourgeoisie characterized both societies and their political systems. If we take the civilizational theory of Norbert Elias as the foundation of our analysis in this article, one of his main findings is the correspondence between the level of state development and the psychic structure of people as well as the level of economic development as I have tried to summarize in the previous section. So, we can conclude that the personality structures of Germans and Turks/Ottomans were modelled after a long-lasting tradition of absolutism over the centuries. The model of an authoritarian state, command and submission, and sharply formed subordinate and superior relationships could be observed in the state hierarchy, the police, the army, but also in families in both states (Elias, 1978), because the authoritative structure of the state paralleled the authoritative family structure in Germany (and in the Ottoman Empire), which could only be broken in the 1970s through the student revolts, and their successful integration into the socio-political

structure transformed the dominant system considerably, whereas the over-spilled students' movement in Turkey was suppressed with cruelty by the Turkish state.

Germany and Turkey were both lately emerging nations (Kushner, 1977). In both societies the moving dynamics for the emergence of nationalism as a doctrine and as a system of belief came from the sphere of interstate relations, from external causes. Be it from the collective anxiety about the integrity and survival of their own society, be it from the ideal of regaining the lost power of their state and in the eyes of thus of the representatives of the states, or be it a desire for exalted status and prestige other states, and last but not least, a passion to strengthen the instruments of ruling – all these motives can be found in all late forthcoming nationalisms of the newly emerging states of the early 20th Century.

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In both societies, a form of integral nationalism (Arai, 1992; Elias, 1990) factually developed parallel to acceptance and recognition of violence (Kürşat-Ahlers, 1996). In both societies Darwinism became a dominant vision of the world. It is not by chance that the suppression or mass annihilation of ethnic-religious minorities took place in the territories of both states. Even if racism and its actual deeds (Holocaust in Germany) cannot be analyzed at the same ethical level- Holocaust was a unique genocide in the world history- politics, dominant collective opinions and convictions were dominated by the racist ideology in both societies (Gawrych, 1986).

The character of nationalist ideas cannot be deduced out of the analysis of the history of thoughts and ideas, that means, by the study of words of ideologues and thinkers. Decisive is the genesis of inner and interstate power relations. I point out only the important turning points in this respect:

Both states experienced for a long time a period of imperial grandiosity and power and then lost these superiorities. This loss of grandiosity was the constituent of a past-oriented ideal (Elias, Scotson, & Schröter, 1990, pp. 44–45, 147), which strived for the reinstallation of the lost power. Members or citizens of both states experienced the

loss of grandiosity, the highest rank in the global state hierarchy and so fear and inferiority characterized both the societies.

Again and again the representatives of both states were threatened from all sides of their state borders. In this process of disintegration on the margins of both states, new and autonomous states came into being, like Switzerland and the Netherlands as the early examples in German history, and DDR as the latest; these are all trauma-producing examples in a long process. In the case of the Ottoman Empire the territorial contraction which began in the 18th Century was the loss of the Balkans, which inflicted on the political elite and the Muslim population the most painful collective narcissistic wound: The majority of the political and military elites of the Ottoman Empire had been born in the Balkans.

This feeling of panic and the fright of an imminent fall can be sensed in the following quotation of Celal Nuri (as cited in Kürsat-Ahlers, 1996), one of the leading Young Turks: “I am incapable of explaining our anxiety. The whole world is our enemy, the whole world of Unbelievers...” This psychological mood has still not been overcome until now. The stereotyped phantasy of international relations continues still in the Turkish society, formulated as such: “There are no friends of Turkish people in the world other than Turks themselves.”

The process of state building in Germany and in the Ottoman Empire developed regressively in the opposite direction compared with the majority of other European states (Kürsat-Ahlers, 2003), that is, in the direction of the weakening of the central power and the strengthening of centrifugal powers. One of the factors was certainly the gigantic geographical expanse of both the empires. The age of empires had expired. While such European countries as England, Sweden or France developed from feudal Middle Age estate-states to more integrated and more centralized absolutist monarchies (Tilly, 1990), power rates shifted in the long run from the emperor who represented political integration to the local land aristocracy in Germany, and in the Ottoman Empire from the Sultan to the decentralized local land gentry which had gained more and more economic independence and, with respect to its military potential and as the result of that, also political independence from the

central Ottoman power, the Sultan (Kürsat-Ahlers, 2003). That means, contrary to the growing centralization in other European regions, the German Empire experienced a disintegration of the central power. Exactly the same regressive development is observed in the Ottoman Empire: Beginning with the 17th Century the monopoly of violence and of taxation increasingly slipped out of the grip of the central power although these two basic prerogatives of a centralized state had never been completely monopolized, even in the earlier times of the Ottoman Empire (Faroghi, 1993). Now the degree of centralized state existence decreased even more. Marauding armed groups, which fought against each other and against the central state, characterized the 17th and 18th Centuries in the Ottoman Empire while the West European States achieved a higher level of centralization and an increasing power rate of kings.

Germany also became a major war arena where the lords and their armies from other Catholic and Protestant countries carried out their power struggle and the armies from different regions fought against each other. In the Thirty-Years War Germany lost one-third of its population; the whole country was reduced to fire and ashes. Summa summarum, both societies remained backward on the level of pacification, civilization and the strength of central power -these three components are actually interdependent. Both lagged behind the European standards of state formation.

As the Ottoman Empire was called “the sick man on the Bosphorus” Germany almost sank, economically and socially, into the darkness of the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the 19th Century, as the queen of Prussia escaped from the Revolutionary Army of Napoleon when it marched into Germany, she became a symbol for German humiliation. Therefore an exaggerated, idealizing assessment of the military and its performance followed the successful Wars of Liberation (1812-1814). The political unification of Germany did not succeed by the rising power of the bourgeoisie but through her triumph over France under the leading military and aristocracy, in other words, by the triumph of the German aristocracy and the war canon over the German bourgeoisie.

The hegemony of the military, the status of the military- and of the bureaucratic aristocracy as the most powerful and formative stratum of the German society became reinforced. So, the Hohen Zollern state carried all the distinguishing marks of a military state. The expansion of the war canon in the whole society can be observed in the widening of the sphere of satisfaction demanding groups, the proliferation of duels and violent fraternities (Kürşat, 2004). The weak German bourgeoisie assimilated itself into the war canon and participated in the romanticizing of power and the glorification of violence: Brutalization and further depacification of the society characterized both the reigning time of the Emperor Wilhelm and the Weimar Republic after the defeat in the First World War.

A similar political structure of violence contemporaneously prevailed in the Ottoman Empire: The modernization and westernization of education began first in the army in order to transcend the inferiority of the military in comparison to the European powers, which had resulted in territorial losses (Davison, 1963; Kürşat, 2003). The Sultan and the Ottoman elite struggled to reverse this process. So, the military cemented its formative model-building function in the Ottoman Empire, which opened itself to Western technology and civilization beginning in the end of the 18th Century. Both the 1st Constitution of 1876, which was only of short duration and the 2nd Constitution which was the result of the Revolution of 1908 -actually the uprising of the Ottoman army against the Sultan- were enforced by the army and not by the weak Ottoman bourgeoisie.

The founders and leaders of the “Young Turks” and their organization “Union and Progress” came from the Balkan War and its guerrilla groups so that they created and legitimized a political culture of violence (Dabag, 1998). The instruments of killing like guns, pistols, rifles and bayonets were publicly glorified. Many provincial newspapers, which defended the ideology of Young Turks were named “Knife”, “Bomb”, “Bayonet”, “Gun” or “Bullet” (Gawrych, 1986, p. 309). Fighting is the only way to secure the existence of the nation and the Darwinian concepts projected onto the relationships between nations and states

dominated the public opinion because the cultural elite of the time adored violence and power, very much like in Germany Blood, war, retaliation, revenge on the internal and external enemies and killing were the most frequently used symbolic and political words and concepts. The ritual of acceptance as a member of the Organization for Union and Progress depicts the sanctification as well as the eroticization of violence very vividly: The candidate had to swear by a revolver and the Quran and give a kiss to his killing instrument (Kürşat-Ahlers, 1996).

The Weimar Republic and the reign of the Party CUP (Union and Progress) arising from the secret organization after the official Coup D'état in 1913 show striking structural similarities. The leading German military members followed also in the Weimar Republic their own political goals and interests and constituted a major power centre. The decay of the state's monopoly of violence, its erosion through terror acts in the Weimar Republic, which characterized itself as an epoch of armed associations, secret bands and violent fighting for power between non-parliamentary groups, was also a similar process during the reign of Young Turks (Akçam, 1993; Ramsaur, 1957). The experience of guerrilla war and the violence of the ruling cader of Young Turks within their secret underground-organization, which originated in Macedon during the Balkan Wars were transferred to the political regime in the following era. The method of publicly executing of opponents, rebels or deserters even in the war arena continued even after the takeover of political power through such practices as assassinating regime-detractors. Very much resembling the tradition of Balkan guerrillas during the Balkan Wars (1903-1914) paramilitary groups were formed for the execution of political murders.

4. In the Tradition of Autocracy

The way leading to the collective catastrophe of the First World War for both countries in alliance was paved by the megalomania and yearnings of the political elite in both countries for the retrieval of the lost supremacy and power at the international level. This revenge-seeking megalomania had its roots in both cases in international humiliations

and degradation: Germany suffered defeat in the First World War and the Ottoman Empire had been at the mercy of European powers all the time in the 2nd half of the 19th Century and was threatened with extinction at the end of the First World War, its ally Germany likewise defeated.

In the Ottoman Empire the military and civil bureaucracy, to which the states' modernization project had been assigned became the agent of westernization (garplılaşmak), civilization (medeniyet) and progress or development (terakki, tekâmül) and not the bourgeoisie or the intellectuals as in Europe. The degeneration of these concepts in an autocratic program under the ruling strata themselves in strong identification with the state, was inevitably to lead to the development of an elite ideology and attitude towards the "folk", which still can be perceived in the habitus of the state servants toward the citizens, especially toward the lower strata. The latter are considered as passive objects of the development and civilization project still pursued by the tradition of social engineering of Young Turks. The regime of the AKP today is actually a result of the same interrelationship which in turn aims to reverse it according to its program and propaganda. That the cadets in the closed educational institutions of Goltz Pasha, a Prussian officer serving in the Ottoman Empire, were ideologized in 1890s, that they were the select and the elite of the country is well documented.

The figuration between the Ottoman Empire as the last formally independent, not colonized, Islamic State in the 19th Century and the European powers corresponds to the theorem of the Established-and-Outsiders of Norbert Elias (Elias et al., 1990): The Ottoman elite had, since the beginning of modernization been bound to the European civilization in a psychological state of hate and love. The dominance of Europe and its state and civilizational of development -key concepts which were instrumentalized against the rest of the world by the big powers as instruments of domination- were hated on the one hand but on the other hand its symbols of civilization and power were accepted as standards, as an absolute model, as unquestionable goals. The ambivalent attitude of the Ottoman elite toward the "European

civilization”, even their feelings of threat which circled around this concept because the role model manifested itself as enemy and attacker, can be well depicted in the words of the statesman and historian Cevdet Pasha:

“Modern civilization does not have any pity on those who are not civilized. The law of evolution is a law without compassion and understanding. It condemns to oblivion the weak, the ignorant and the incompetent. Jean Jacques Rousseau said might does not make right. True, but to make might right is only possible again with might (Mardin, 1969, p. 15).”

Civilization and the law of progress are described here in a personified and power-crazy way. In another declaration after the conquest of Morocco in 1905, he wrote:

“The civilization of our times is a mighty flood which has forced a channel through Europe and utterly demolished every obstacle it finds in its way. The Moslem people must refrain from resisting this flood of civilization. They can preserve their national existence only by following this current (Mardin, 1969, p. 21).”

What is remarkable in this quotation is the metaphor of overflowing, of a natural catastrophe, which befell in an uncontrollable and unescapable manner. Civilization appears as an invincible and unstoppable force.

- 1) The stronger the radical change in the history of a nation and
- 2) The stronger the collective feeling of an existential external threat at the international level and
- 3) The more unavoidable the decline and the destruction of one’s own political integrity appear, the less is the tendency to explain this development as self-regulated, autonomous and self-determining. The less possible to realize the potential to observe and explain socio-political forces a disinterested manner. Anxiety, fright and threat set in motion an engaged, emotional system of thought, which searches for a guilty person an originator.

Such a collective psychic mode could not be overcome in Turkey or in other similarly underdeveloped societies at all, not even today. The anxiety-provoking, huge international disparity of power between the states in the 19th and 20th Centuries produced irrational, and highly emotionalized systems of thought in societies relatively powerless on the international scale. The description of civilization in the two quotations above shows exactly this cognitive capability at a lower level of collective security and a higher level of existential danger and threat to the existence of a political unit.

I am not going to deal with the apparent differences between both countries and states: Turkey was to be characterized as an underdeveloped society according to all criteria of development after the foundation of the Republic whereas Germany regained its place among the most powerful nations of the world soon after the Second World War, after a relatively short period of reconstruction. I regard the speed of the process of democratization as the most significant difference between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Turkish Republic:

The weakening of the military power and the denazification process under the pressure of the rest of the Western world as well as the demilitarization of the German society introduced an irreversible process, an incision in the socio-political power relations in Germany. The early integration with Europe during the progress of democratization constituted the most important guarantee for the continuity of this social and political change.

The state of affairs was completely a different in Turkey: At the beginning the foundation of a national state out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, that means gaining the national sovereignty, was achieved by the successful outcome of the war /triumph of the military so that all the important key positions, state functions and command posts were occupied by the military in the first decades of the new Republic. In contrast to the lost prestige and the defiled image of the military in Germany due to the catastrophe of the NS-Time and Second World War Turkish army enjoyed, right from the beginning until now, a high-power rate, both the respect and the gratitude of the Turkish society. It defines

itself as the guarantor of territorial integrity, of the reforms of Atatürk and therefore of the Western orientation and secularism. According to the public opinion surveys, the Turkish army enjoys today the first rank in the trustworthiness scale among all the other institutions.

The political parties and political institutions are placed quiet low in this scale, which indicates that the society favors more the military and a lot less democracy, exactly the opposite in Germany. Whereas in the Federal Republic of Germany no serious crises of state legitimacy or monopoly, of violence arose with the exception of Students' Revolts beginning in 1968, two decades of the history of Republic of Turkey, 1970s and 1980s, seemed to once more resemble the Weimar-Time in Germany: The violent polarization of the left and right groups in Turkey ended up in assassinations, street fights between the armed groups and 2-3 murdered persons a day. That the state terror also constituted one of the sources of violence is a general view of today's public opinion in Turkey. Perhaps as legitimization for a series of army coups and interruptions of democracy? (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997)

In Germany's democratization process the rest of the Western world played a positive central role, for which Germans have started to feel thankfulness after the initial hate of a part of the society toward the invaders after the collapse of the NS-Regime. The collective psychology constituted itself in the exactly opposite direction: The Turkish War of Independence and the foundation of the Turkish Republic were made possible by a military, warring and intrinsic opposition against the European powers, hostile to the Turkish nation. The collective memory of the national military triumph against the "European foes", of the War of Independence is still very much alive. In contrast to the experience of the Federal Republic of Germany, whose European integration process had started as early as the 1950s, Turkey has embarked on the initial stages of an institutional, economic and political integration process into EU and this process has been full of interruptions and rejections especially by the EU since 1963 Treaty of Ankara. The public-opinion surveys in Turkey indicate a continuous decline of public enthusiasm to become a member in the face of the hostile, rejecting attitude of the

EU. But as in the case of the Federal Republic of Germany, the process of democratization in Turkey, its progression and speed depend on continuous acceptance and economic, political and cultural integration into the sphere of Europe. Not exclusion but integration has always been the positive driving force of society and history.

5. Conclusion

Although Germany and Turkey or its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, had unsimilar cultural and geographic background, the similarity of the long-durational experience of violence and of the autocratic tradition and the resulting mentality created in both countries similar processes of state formation.

The threat for the existence of both states that came from outside political powers constituted a crucial factor in the perpetuation of violence inside in both societies and in their institutions.

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