

The Ottoman Legacy and Turkish Politics

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"The absence of civil society in Turkey was an inheritance from the Ottoman Empire, where political, economic and social power coalesced in the center."

Continuity rather than change characterizes Turkish political culture. Ottoman political norms emerged and developed during the many centuries of the Empire. They persist today, affecting numerous aspects of contemporary Turkish politics. This article first presents an overview of the important milestones in Turkish history, from the foundation of the Ottoman Empire to the present. Second, it points out several lines of continuity in the Ottoman and the Republican political cultures. Third, it examines the impact of the Ottoman legacy on Turkish democracy. Finally, it addresses the question of why, until recently, continuity rather than change has characterized Turkish politics.

The Ottoman Empire was founded at the end of the 14th century and reached its zenith in the 15th century. At the time, it was one of the greatest empires of the world, stretching from the Caucasus to the Balkans to North Africa. From the second half of the 16th century until the end of the 19th century, the Empire slowly lost momentum, during what is now referred to as the Period of Decline. First, the territorial expansion of the Empire came to an end. Then, the Empire began to lose territory steadily. During this second period, the ruling institutions underwent changes as well. Among other things, the palace, at the apex of which stood the sultan, showed signs of losing its dominant position in the polity. Meanwhile, religious institutions and the military gained ground.

In this second period, the Ottomans remained oblivious to the intellectual, economic and technological transformations that were

taking place in Europe. Great efforts were made to revive the governmental structure of earlier centuries. Not surprisingly, this strategy did not prevent the Empire from losing further ground, literally and metaphorically, to its adversaries in Europe. Because of this decline, from the end of the 18th century onward, the Ottomans tried to reform first their public bureaucracy and then their military, the Janissary Corps, by emulating their counterparts in Europe. The Westernizing reformers faced stiff opposition from the Islamist traditionalists, and they were only partially successful.

With the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Westernizing reformers gained control over the country. Consequently, in the 1920s and 1930s, the founders of the Republic instigated a far-reaching cultural transformation to substitute enlightened reasoning for Islamic dogma. This period was followed by political transformations in the mid-1940s with the introduction of a multi-party democracy. The third important transformation in Republican Turkey came in the early 1980s, when the import-substitution economy was replaced with an export-oriented economy.¹

SOME DIMENSIONS OF THE OTTOMAN POLITICAL CULTURE

The Ottoman state was formed by warriors who were opposed by eclectic popular culture, heterodox religious sects and threatening rival principalities.² Under such circumstances, keeping the realm together became the governing institutions' most critical concern, leading them to emphasize eternal vigilance against foreign enemies and the maintenance of law and order within the country. Tursun Beg, Ottoman statesman and historian of the late 15th century, reiterated an Ottoman maxim: "Harmony among men living in society is achieved by statecraft."³ It was with this concern in mind that the ruling institution in the Ottoman Empire was called *Askeriye* (the military).⁴

¹ On these three important transformations, I draw upon Dankwart A. Rustow, "Turkey's Liberal Revolution," *Middle Eastern Review*, 12 (1985) pp. 5-11.

² Halil İnalcik, "The Rise of the Ottoman Empire," in M. A. Cook, ed., *A History of the Ottoman Empire to 1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 17; Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) p. 53.

³ Halil İnalcik, "The Nature of Traditional Society," in Robert E. Ward and Dankwart A. Rustow, eds., *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) p. 42.

⁴ Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Luzac, 1965) pp. 3-4.

This imperative led the Ottomans to concentrate power in the hands of the sultan. Consequently, in the early Ottoman centuries, the Empire's political organization was marked by personal rule by the sultan. As a result, laws propounded by individual sultans were not considered permanent.⁵ As a corollary to this, in the Ottoman Empire, the sultan's will determined a man's status in society. The sultan had the patriarch's duty of *hisba*; that is, he was considered personally responsible for the welfare of his subjects.⁶

A counter-trend was also present, however. As early as the second part of the 14th century,⁷ the state began to separate itself from the sultan. During the Grand Vizierate of Kara Halil Pasha, who ruled from 1368 to 1373, the state treasury was separated from that of the sultan.⁸ This was followed by the emergence of the so-called *adab* tradition, which identified the state with established values, not with the reigning ruler.⁹ For instance, in the Decree of Alliance (*Sened-i Ittifak*) of 1808, the "state," not the sultan, was mentioned as a party to the pact between the central government and local notables.¹⁰

Despite the emergence of the *adab* tradition, during the *Tanzimat* (Reform) Period from 1839 to 1876, the modernizing upper-level bureaucrats resorted to personal rule, personally making all critical decisions.¹¹ At the end of the 19th century, Sultan Abdülhamit II exercised strong personal rule even while setting up modern schools to train bureaucrats and officers. In his close entourage, he rewarded loyalty rather than merit.¹²

Although the Ottomans could not completely separate the state from the sultan, the state always constituted an important dimension of the Ottoman political culture. In the Ottoman view,

⁵ İnalcik, "The Traditional Society," pp. 42-43.

⁶ Şerif Mardin, "Power, Civil Society and Culture in the Ottoman Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 11 (June 1969) p. 260.

⁷ The Ottoman Empire is generally assumed to have been established in 1299.

⁸ Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume I: Empire of the Gazis—The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 119.

⁹ Carter Findley, *The Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 9.

¹⁰ İnalcik, "The Nature of Traditional Society," pp. 52-53.

¹¹ Şerif Mardin, "Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2 (1971) p. 208.

¹² Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) p. 122.

the welfare of society depended upon the well-being of the state. Thus, the Ottomans adopted a circular notion of justice according to which just rule contributed to the public welfare which in turn provided the state with the resources necessary to maintain power.¹³

The Ottomans were constantly concerned with the critical question: "How can this state be maintained?" While earlier the locus of the state was the sultan, in the early part of the 19th century the civilian bureaucratic elite, which was by now almost solely guided by the notion of the state's interests, took over much of this role.¹⁴ In the public bureaucracy, the Office of Important Affairs (*Mühimme Odasi*) was set up. The name of the office was a technical term referring to matters closely related to interests of the state.¹⁵

This preoccupation with the significance and welfare of the state led to the emergence of a center-periphery cleavage along cultural lines. Those who belonged to the Ruling Institutions—a collective term denoting the palace, the civilian bureaucracy and the military—differed from the rest of the population in their cultural orientation. In addition to their familiarity with the *adab* tradition, the members of this elite group had a good grasp of the complicated system of customs, behavior and language forming the "Ottoman way."¹⁶

This Ottoman way included the "Great Culture" of the elite, such as teachings of orthodox Islam and the use of a language permeated with Arabic and Persian words or difficult to understand neologisms. The "Little Culture" of the people was characterized by allegiance to various heterodox Islamic groups and the use of Turkish vernacular.¹⁷ From the 19th century onward, the cultural distance between the elite and ordinary people increased as the elite became increasingly familiar with Western culture. Earlier, despite the fact that the elite and commoners subscribed to different versions of their religion, Islam

¹³ Inalcik, "The Traditional Society," p. 43.

¹⁴ Metin Heker, *The State Tradition in Turkey* (Walkington, UK: Eothen Press, 1985) pp. 44-46.

¹⁵ Findley, pp. 57, 64.

¹⁶ Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume I*, p. 113; Joseph S Szyliowicz, "The Ottoman Empire," in C.A.D. van Nieuwenhuijze, ed., *Communism, Climbers, and Notables: A Sampler of Studies on Social Ranking in the Middle East* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977) p. 107.

¹⁷ Mardin, "Power, Civil Society and Culture in the Ottoman Empire," p. 270

had served as a vital link between them. In the 19th century, many in the elite secularized and increasingly adopted high European, frequently French, culture while the people maintained their Islamic customs and norms. In the process, the elites came to see the general population as unsophisticated.¹⁸ Because of this, beginning in the 19th century, members of the central elite perceived themselves as far superior to the people.

During the Period of Decline, which lasted from the second part of the 16th century to the 19th century, the Janissary Corps attempted to establish its supremacy in all branches of the Ruling Institutions.¹⁹ In the later stages of that period, the Scribal Corps tried to do the same.²⁰ Thus, the self-proclaimed supremacy of the elites in the 19th century was not without precedent. With the advent of Westernization, those members of the elite who came to have knowledge about the West considered themselves better able to rule the country than others. They equated their newly acquired knowledge with political legitimacy.²¹ Thus, in the early part of the 19th century, the civilian bureaucratic elite—the Old Ottomans—and the modernizing Sultan Mahmud II could push the members of the Religious Institution and the traditional Janissary Corps to the sidelines. In the second part of the century, the Young Ottomans (mostly journalists and mid-level bureaucrats) neutralized the Old Ottomans, as well as the non-modernizing Sultan Abdülaziz, and initiated the First Constitutional Period, which lasted from 1876 to 1909. For the Young Ottomans, parliament was not a venue for popular representation, but a venue for elite debate, where the clash of enlightened opinions led to the formulation of the best policy.²²

The Young Turks, a group that consisted primarily of members of the bureaucratic and military elites, carried on the political elitism of the Old and Young Ottomans. The Young Turks dominated Ottoman politics from 1912 to 1918. They adopted the views elaborated by Ahmed Riza, an Ottoman intellectual and politician. The Young Turks took Riza's positivist sociology

¹⁸ Serif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" *Duodatus*, 102 (December 1973) p. 179.

¹⁹ Inalcik, "The Nature of Traditional Society," p. 53.

²⁰ Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume I*, pp. 280-81; Norman Itzkowitz, "Eighteenth Century Ottoman Realities," *Studia Islamica*, 16 (1962) p. 86.

²¹ Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations," p. 179.

²² Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) p. 231.

as a source of quasi-revealed authority on social, religious, moral and political problems.²³ They thought that this new knowledge alone provided political legitimacy, finding in the social engineering aspect of Auguste Comte's sociology in particular the legitimization of their own elitist outlook.²⁴ Yet, they still attributed primary significance to maintaining the unity of the state and believed that the salvation of society resided in the welfare of the state. This faith in the importance of the state led them to support the utopian project of legislating social change. Entrenched in the dominant center, the Young Turks did not see the importance of peripheral structures to members of the periphery.²⁵

Another consequence of the center-periphery conflict in the Ottoman Empire was that politico-cultural problems took precedence over socio-economic issues in the agenda of the state. For instance, the Ottoman elite had no interest in mercantilism and did not even use tariffs to collect revenue.²⁶ In the view of the ruling elite, peace and prosperity depended on keeping the members of each class in their respective places. Old norms prevented the elite from understanding the logic of a capitalist economy.²⁷ Even during the first decade of the 20th century, they were still preoccupied with such socio-political issues as the advantages and disadvantages of employing Westernization, Islamism and Turkism for the salvation of the state. The significance of socio-economic issues escaped them.

THE OTTOMAN LEGACY AND THE REPUBLICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

In the Republican period, the memory of the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire revived and reinforced concern for national unity as well as for law and order. In the early years of the Republic, the founders were afraid that the country could be torn apart along primordial lines at any moment.²⁸ In recent

²³ *ibid.*, p. 231.

²⁴ Mardin, "Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution," p. 201.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁶ Şerif Mardin, "Turkey: The Transformation of an Economic Code," in Ergun Özbudun and Aydın Ulusan, eds., *The Political Economy of Income Distribution in Turkey* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980) pp. 29-37.

²⁷ Halil İnalcık, "The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy," in M. A. Cook, ed., *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 218.

²⁸ Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations," p. 177.

decades as well there has been a constant emphasis on the need for being "one and together" (*birlik ve beraberlik*). More often than not, consensus was not reached by agreeing on some basic principles but by forcing unanimity regarding each issue. This over-emphasis on harmony constituted a serious barrier to the emergence of adversarial politics in Republican Turkey.²⁹

In the Republican period, as in the Ottoman period, personal rule characterized politics. In the late 1920s and the 1930s, despite Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's efforts to bureaucratize the government,³⁰ President Atatürk ignored formal procedures and demanded that cabinet ministers report directly to him.³¹ Early in his term of office as president, İnönü seized the locus of power in the state by designating himself as the National Chief (*Millî Şef*), because he thought this was the only way to safeguard Republican reforms.³² Even during the multi-party period after 1945, political leaders continued to have inordinate power.

In the 1950s, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was virtually the sole spokesperson for the Democrat Party.³³ Süleyman Demirel played a similar role when he led the Justice Party from 1965 to 1980 and the True Path Party from 1987 to 1993.³⁴ Other political leaders followed suit. Virtually all political leaders in Turkey invariably relegated the parties they headed to secondary positions compared to themselves. Thus, it was not possible to remove them from their well-entrenched positions through intra-party competition unless the leaders were prepared to leave office. Not surprisingly, the leaders' personal characteristics and the way they conducted themselves in politics attracted more attention than party platforms. Voters tended to give their votes to leaders rather than political parties.

Moreover, some leaders, such as Süleyman Demirel, were father

²⁹ Metin Heger, "The Strong State as a Problem for the Consolidation of Democracy: Turkey and Germany Compared," *Comparative Political Studies*, 25 (July 1992) pp. 169-94.

³⁰ Heger, *The State Tradition in Turkey*, pp. 68-9.

³¹ Falih Rifki Atay, *Çankaya: Atatürk'ün Doğumundan Ölümüne Kadar* (Istanbul: Doğan Kardeş, 1969) p. 289.

³² Metin Heger, *İsmet İnönü: The Making of a Turkish Statesman* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1998) pp. 181-82.

³³ Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy, 1950-1975* (London: C. Hurst, 1977) pp. 76-102.

³⁴ Feride Acar, "The True Path Party, 1983-1989," in Metin Heger and Jacob Landau, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991) p. 188-201.

figures to the people.³⁵ Before he became president in 1993, Demirel projected the image of a ruler personally responsible for the people's welfare. When he was prime minister, like a true sultan holding a weekly audience with his subjects, Demirel once declared, "Those who are in need of anything can call on me."

At the other extreme, there were such leaders as İnönü for whom particularistic interests were anathema. İnönü occupied himself with what he considered the long-term interests of the country. He believed in the strong state, isolated from and not responsive to societal groups. This idea of a "strong state" harkened back to the Ottoman *adab* tradition, which was a state-oriented political philosophy.³⁶

Only recently has Turkey had political leaders who acted both responsively and responsibly. Early in the Republican period, the foremost guardian of the state was İsmet İnönü. Prime minister from 1925 to 1937, president from 1938 to 1950 and again prime minister from 1961 to 1965, he was a "man of the people," but not a "people's man."³⁷ Those who followed in the footsteps of İnönü considered themselves guardians of Republican principles such as secularism and civic-cum-cultural nationalism. In the post-1980 period, military officers began to assume that supervisory role.³⁸ Between 1983 and 1987, Prime Minister Turgut Özal fought cheap populism and political patronage. The post-April 1999 coalition government led by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit of the Democratic Left Party, Deputy Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli of the Nationalist Action Party and Mesut Yılmaz of the Motherland Party was responsible and responsive regarding both Republican principles and the economy. During his presidency from 1993 to 1999, a mature Demirel acted in a similar manner.

Even though they belonged to the state elite, all of the post-1980 leadership have been moderately elitist. By contrast, but similar to the Ottoman elite of the 19th century, the so-called intellectual-bureaucratic elite from 1945 to 1980 (consisting mostly of university staff members, higher civil servants and leading journalists) looked down on the rest of the country. These intellectuals took education as the hallmark of the higher socio-

³⁵ For an insider's view, see Kamran İnan, *Siyasetin İçinden* (Istanbul: Milliyet, 1995).

³⁶ Findley, p. 11.

³⁷ Heper, *İsmet İnönü*, p. 99.

³⁸ Metin Heper and Aylin Güneş, "The Military and Democracy in the Third Turkish Republic," *Armed Forces and Society*, 22 (Summer 1996) pp. 619-42.

economic class.³⁹ They belittled the Democrat parliamentarians of the 1950s, many of whom did not have a college education. Believing that Republican reforms could not be protected by regular political means, the intellectual elite even made overtures to the military and consequently was partly responsible for the military intervention in 1971.⁴⁰

Not unlike their predecessors in the Ottoman Empire, the state elite in the Republican period was preoccupied with "high politics" and paid relatively little attention to socio-economic issues. During the single-party period from 1923 to 1945, the extent and pace of Westernization dominated the political agenda. From 1945 to 1980, this particular issue continued to be salient. However, added to it was the clash between "state logic" and "political logic," that is the confrontation between those who emphasized Republican values and those who stressed the "national will." The former considered themselves guardians of secularism and cultural nationalism; the latter saw themselves as defenders of the particularistic interests of the people. It was difficult to compromise on the cultural and political issues, which led to the frequent polarization of political life and, on three separate occasions, to military interventions.

In the post-1980 period, economic and social issues, on which compromise could be reached more easily, took precedence over political and cultural issues such as Westernization, Islam and nationalism. This is why, following the 1999 general elections, the Democratic Left Party and the Nationalist Action Party, which differ in their political stance, could form a coalition government, which not only contributed to political stability, but also displayed a delicate combination of political prudence and political responsiveness.

THE OTTOMAN LEGACY AND THE REPUBLICAN RATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The Ottoman desire for a strong state that would regulate the polity and society from above left a particular imprint on democracy in Turkey. The so-called Turkish Revolution targeted

³⁹ Frederick W. Frey, *The Turkish Political Elite* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965) Ch. 3.

⁴⁰ Hikmet Özdemir, *1960'lar Türkiye'sinde Sol Kemalizm: Yön Hareketi* (Istanbul: İz, 1993) particularly pp. 170-99; Hasan Cemal, *Kimse Kimsenin Kendimi Yazdım* (Istanbul: Doğan, 1999) particularly p. 103.

the values of the *ancien régime*, in particular Ottoman Islam, which was perceived as an obstacle to progress. This revolution aimed to transform values without significantly changing other parts of society.⁴¹ In 1930, Atatürk initiated the formation of a second political party, the Free Republican Party, whose aim was to improve the quality of policymaking through educated debate. However, when those opposing the Republican secular reforms rushed to the new party, Atatürk was obliged to have the party closed by the party's founder, Fethi Okyar. In the same spirit, before approving the formation of the Democrat Party in 1946, İnönü asked Celal Bayar, the leader of the party, whether they would safeguard Republican reforms. Bayar said they would, and İnönü gave his approval to the party's founding.

The Republican founders hoped Turkey would have a rational democracy, where the long-term interests of the community would not be sacrificed to narrow political interests. This vision was a consequence of the elitism and utopianism that the Republic inherited from the Ottoman Empire; it also reflected the values of the Republic's own modernization project. The project's ultimate goal was to enable Turkey to catch up with the West. The elites thought this would be possible to achieve by creating a new kind of Turk "who would think logically."⁴² A new set of elites socialized in Republican values was to be raised.⁴³ In turn, this elite would help the people attain a higher level of rationality through education. Thus, first in 1930 and then in 1945, the governing Republican elite partially opened up the regime in order to foster debate among the "knowledgeable." Through intelligent debate, the political class was to find the "one best way" while safeguarding the Republican reforms against the masses "who had not yet attained a higher level of rationality."⁴⁴

What actually transpired was the bifurcation of the elite. On the one side stood the state elite (Atatürk, İnönü, the intellectual-bureaucratic elite and, increasingly, military officers), who acted as guardians of the secular-democratic state and believed in rational democracy. On the other side was the political elite—until the early 1970s, the leadership cadres of political parties

⁴¹ Rustow, "Turkey's Liberal Revolution."

⁴² Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to Multi-Party Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959) p. 54.

⁴³ Frey, Ch. 3.

⁴⁴ Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey*, Ch. 3.

other than the Republican People's Party, and after 1975, those of the Republican People's Party as well—which tried to render the Republican modernization project more palatable to the masses. The political elite subscribed to popular democracy and placed narrow political interests over the general public interest. For the state elite, the Republic came first and democracy second. For the political elite, the reverse held true.

As could be expected, two sides with opposing stands on vital issues could not arrive at a dynamic consensus. Each side believed in the basic truth of its position and would not consider compromise. This zero-sum mode of thinking was typical of Ottoman politics. Following the Democrat Party's accession to power in 1950, the intellectual-bureaucratic elite resisted them and attempted to retain political control.

Professor Bahri Savci of Ankara University has made a distinction between "active dynamic politics" on one hand and "politics in its widest sense" on the other. "Active dynamic politics" refers to activities carried out to capture and maintain political office. "Politics in its widest sense" means the determination of public policy through rational analysis, while attempting to address the preferences of the electorate. According to Professor Savci, the intellectuals were responsible for "politics in its widest sense."⁴⁵ The Democrats responded by restricting the academic autonomy of the universities. They also introduced compulsory retirement at the government's discretion after 25 years of service in the civil bureaucracy.⁴⁶

Afraid that the Democrats would do away with the Republican reforms altogether, the military intervened in 1960. The 1961 constitution introduced a "mixed government," with political power divided between the elected parliament and non-elected bureaucratic agencies. According to this constitution, the newly created National Security Council,⁴⁷ the Constitutional Court, the Council of State, autonomous universities and the Turkish Radio and Television Agency were to act as watchdogs over parliament. As a reaction to this effort to circumscribe their

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

⁴⁷ This Council was made up of the prime minister, minister of defense, minister of foreign affairs, minister of interior, chief of the General Staff, commander of the army, commander of the navy, commander of the air force and general commander of the gendarmerie, and was chaired by the president of the Republic.

powers, political leaders gave short shrift to the 1961 constitution. The military intervened two more times, in 1971 and in 1980. With the 1982 constitution, the non-partisan president and the National Security Council were granted additional powers.⁴⁸

This "rational democracy" was a mixed blessing for Turkey. Although the tug-of-war between political leaders and the military-bureaucratic elite led to three military interventions, none of those interventions ended up in a long-term authoritarian regime. This was because the military officers perceived democracy not as a means (popular representation), but as an end (rational policymaking). Thus, the military and its allies found the politicians and not democracy itself to be responsible for the "ills of the political regime."⁴⁹ Consequently, the goal of the military's interventions was to re-equilibrate politics by writing a new constitution or amending the existing one. Then, the officers returned to their barracks. Significantly, the officers subscribed to the Westernization project (another late Ottoman legacy) and considered democracy to be an integral part of Westernization. Amazingly, even with the resurgence of Islam and the continuing "Kurdish problem," Turkey has not drifted back to an authoritarian one-party regime or a long-term military dictatorship. This is because despite their seriousness, neither Islam nor the Kurds posed a realistic threat to Turkey's national unity and territorial integrity.

This success can be partly attributed to Turkey's Ottoman legacy. Islam was not an autonomous force in the Ottoman Empire. The *adab* tradition was not only a state-oriented but also a secularly oriented political philosophy.⁵⁰ The Religious Institution was dependent upon the sultan, who appointed and dismissed its members.⁵¹ During the *Tanzimat* Period, a department of the Chief Mufti was created, which was the first step toward the bureaucratization of religion.⁵² Alongside the religious Canon Law (*Shari'a*), secular statutes (*örf-i sultani*) were formulated by the sultan based on "necessity and reason." In sum, the version of

⁴⁸ Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey*, Ch. 6.

⁴⁹ Metin Heper, "The 'Strong State' and Democracy: The Turkish Case" in S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., "Comparative and Historical Perspective," *Democracy and Modernity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

⁵⁰ Findley, p. 11.

⁵¹ Shaw, p. 119.

⁵² Lewis, p. 97.

Islam the Ottomans adopted recognized the ruler's absolute authority.

In the Republican period, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was affiliated with the Prime Ministry and supervised the religious life of the Turks, who were subjected to intense socialization into secular values in school and at various public ceremonies.⁵³ Consequently, in the 1990s, those who voted for religiously oriented parties out of religious considerations and not as a protest vote constituted only about 7 percent of the vote; not more than 1 percent of these considered a state based on Islam to be desirable.⁵⁴ This is not surprising. It is true that a 1999 nationwide survey found that a majority of Turkish citizens practiced their religion regularly: 91 percent fasted during the month of Ramadan and 46 percent prayed five times a day, as required by the Qur'an. However, according to the same survey, Turks did not desire a state based on Islam. For instance, only 1.4 percent thought that adultery should be punished according to the *Shari'a*.⁵⁵

Turning to the "Kurdish issue," ethnicity was an alien concept to the Ottomans. The only line of demarcation among the subjects of the Ottoman Empire was between Muslims and non-Muslims. Jews and Christians, considered "People of the Book" by Ottomans, were protected, granted cultural rights and allowed to organize within their own *millet* systems. As Muslims, Kurds constituted part of the backbone of Ottoman society and polity. They often even climbed to the highest echelons of government.

The Republic adopted civic nationalism as a way to structure national identity: those who professed loyalty to the state were considered Turks. For the founders of the Republic, the Turkish nation was the secular counterpart of the Ottoman Muslim community. The term "Turkish" did not denote ethnicity. According to Atatürk, "Turk" was a nominal term, subsuming all ethnic and religious groups that considered themselves to be citizens of Turkey. Atatürk explained that he had used the word "Turk" because "at the time it was the most well-known term."⁵⁶

⁵³ Metin Heper, "Islam, Polity and Society in Turkey: A Middle Eastern Perspective," *Middle East Journal*, 35 (Summer 1981) p. 355.

⁵⁴ Metin Heper, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Reconciliation?" *Middle East Journal*, 51 (January 1997) pp. 32-45.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Nokta*, Istanbul, 16-22 January 2000.

⁵⁶ Atatürk, quoted in *Atatürk'ün Yazdığı Yurttaşlık Bilgileri*, compiled by Nuran Tezcan (Istanbul: Çağdas, 1989) pp. 23-24.

Later, Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin made their choice with their feet. Many of them re-settled in the more prosperous western and northwestern parts of Turkey. They took their place in all walks of life alongside other Turkish citizens. They occupied the highest political offices of the Republic. When the Kurdish rebellions erupted in Turkey, the government perceived them as religiously incited incidents, triggered by the secularist and centralizing policies of the Republic and caused by relative underdevelopment. The government believed that more education and socioeconomic development was the solution.

Not all Kurds have supported the post-1984 armed struggle of the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) against the government, which is one of the reasons why this struggle has been successfully contained since 1998 without an adverse impact on multi-party politics. Residents of the heavily Kurdish southeastern Turkey, when asked in a 1998 survey conducted by the Family Study Group of the Prime Ministry, "What would you have done to solve the problems of the region if you were the prime minister," divided the answers in the following way: while 5.6 percent of the respondents said they would introduce education in Kurdish and 0.6 percent indicated they would exercise democracy fully, 5.1 percent mentioned better education, 7.1 percent mentioned unemployment, 7.2 percent answered putting an end to the terror and a full 60.2 percent said more investment in the region.⁵⁷ A 1999 nationwide survey has found that only 1.4 percent of Turkish citizens identified themselves as Kurds.⁵⁸

WHY CONTINUITY RATHER THAN CHANGE?

One basic question that remains is why democracy in Turkey has still not become satisfactorily entrenched. Put another way, why does Turkey still have a mixed government? Why do some influential members of the intelligentsia in general, and of the officer corps, in particular, continue to subscribe to the concept of rational democracy? If, in fact, neither the resurgence of Islam nor the division of Turkey along ethnic lines is plausible, why is

⁵⁷ The full results of the poll were reported in *Milliyet*, Istanbul, 25 January 2000. For 0.5 percent of the respondents religious education had priority, 2.6 percent suggested other projects and 11.1 percent did not respond.

⁵⁸ Assessments of the percentage of Turkish citizens of Kurdish descent vary between 12.0 to 20.0 percent.

the military so sensitive to these two issues, and why does it see itself as the ultimate guarantor of a secular and democratic Turkey?

The answer to the last query seems obvious: the state elite still does not trust the political elite. The state elite thinks that some in the political elite place political party or even personal interests above the long-term interests of the nation. Indeed, until recently, military officers, similar to the leading statesmen of the Ottoman period and the single-party years of the Republic, placed much more emphasis on the needs of the state as a whole, rather than on the needs of individual groups. For instance, a faction in the *junta* that orchestrated the 1960 intervention toyed with the idea of not returning power to civilians quickly and instead carrying out the "structural reforms the country needed."⁵⁹

This situation has changed in the post-1980 period. The military increasingly accepts the legitimacy of particularistic interests and is less disturbed by civilian politics. Furthermore, the officer corps has realized that military intervention is not a cure for political ills.⁶⁰ For some time, the military has opposed seizing power directly. Nevertheless, if in the military's opinion the vital interests of the country are at stake, it could intervene, according to provisions in the 1982 constitution and the bylaws of the military that entrust the officer corps with the duty of defending the country against internal as well as external enemies. In 1996, when the military began to perceive political Islam as a serious threat, it recommended through the National Security Council that the government take certain measures. When the Welfare Party-True Path Party coalition government showed reluctance to adopt those measures, the military began to mobilize public opinion by briefing journalists, businessmen, university presidents and high-level bureaucrats. Under such quasi-democratic pressure, the coalition government was obliged to resign.⁶¹

Is the military power hungry or overly inclined to interfere in the political process? More and more members of the intelligentsia in Turkey who had been critical of the military now believe that the military is not driven by power. For instance, such leading

⁵⁹ Walter F. Weiker, *The Turkish Revolution, 1960-1961: Aspects of Military Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1963).

⁶⁰ Heper and Güney, pp. 619-42.

⁶¹ Metin Heper and Aylin Güney, "The Military and the Consolidation of Democracy: The Turkish Case," *Armed Forces and Society*, 26 (Spring 2000) pp. 625-47.

journalists as Ertugrul Özkök, Hasan Cemal and Ali Sirmen now think that politicians rather than military officers should be blamed for the problems democracy still faces in Turkey. They agree with the military that with some exceptions such as the post-April 1999 Democratic Left Party-Nationalist Action Party-Motherland Party coalition government, party interests, and possibly personal gain, play a significant role in the current political system.

Why has this been the case? Above, I suggested that rational democracy was a mixed blessing for Turkey. While rational democracy played a critical role in preventing a long-term hiatus in multi-party politics, it has also prevented political parties from arriving at a consensus through conflict. The state logic that emphasized the general interest and the political logic that stressed the particularistic interests can not easily be reconciled.

I have already discussed at length why the state elite has traditionally placed such a strong emphasis on the general interest by indicating the Ottoman antecedents of this approach and its causes in the Republican period. I have also pointed out that one reason why the political elite has increasingly placed undue emphasis on particularistic interests was their attempt to capture power from the state elite *in toto* and, in the process, challenge everything that the state elite stood for. This leaves one question to complete the picture: Why has the political elite placed nearly all its emphasis on the particularistic interests and tried to capture all power instead of sharing power with the state elite?

I would like to suggest that this was because the transition to democracy in Turkey was effected by the state elite, not by civil society. The absence of civil society in Turkey was an inheritance from the Ottoman Empire, where political, economic and social power coalesced in the center. Within the upper strata, status and wealth were attached to offices, and not to lineages or families.⁶² Bureaucratic position, thus, had the greatest weight in determining policy.⁶³ As noted, the elite justified its appropriation of policymaking based on its presumed cultural preeminence and superior knowledge.

As bureaucratic power was the path to wealth in the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of an entrepreneurial middle class was

⁶² Szyliowicz, pp. 103, 107.

⁶³ Mardin, "Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution," p. 202.

restricted. The Ottoman notables preferred tax-farming to farming. They also illegally obtained control of state lands and transformed them into private property.⁶⁴ In brief, they amassed wealth by abusing or usurping state powers.⁶⁵ Their interests were not served by efficient and effective government that upheld the rule of law, as the interests of an entrepreneurial middle class would have been.⁶⁶ For instance, Sultan Selim III's initial efforts to introduce Westernizing reforms did not find support among the bureaucratic elites.⁶⁷

The loosening of central control generally led to local irresponsibility in the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁸ The Ottoman notable has been aptly described as an "oppressor of his kin when he wore the mantle of the state, one of the oppressed when he lost it."⁶⁹ This state of affairs reinforced the already noted suspicion of the center toward the periphery. When the center was obliged to delegate powers to the periphery (as in the case of the tax-farming system), it considered it a stopgap measure. The center did not favor extending recognition to corporate bodies; whenever possible, it deprived members of the periphery of the privileges of the center.⁷⁰

The center could adopt such a cavalier attitude toward the periphery because of the periphery's dependence on the center. Furthermore, the members of the periphery sought vertical relations with the center on an individual basis; they did not try to develop serious horizontal relations among themselves.⁷¹ Local elites thought that obtaining special privileges from the state was more desirable and feasible than resorting to joint action with other members of the periphery toward the center.⁷²

Under these circumstances, the middle classes in the Ottoman Empire could not establish their independence from the center

⁶⁴ Shaw, p. 187.

⁶⁵ Lewis, p. 33.

⁶⁶ Roderic Davison, *The Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) p. 64.

⁶⁷ Inalcik, "The Nature of Traditional Society," p. 50.

⁶⁸ Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations," p. 175.

⁶⁹ Mardin, "Power, Civil Society and Culture in the Ottoman Empire," p. 269.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 274.

⁷¹ Metin Heper, "Center and Periphery in the Ottoman Empire," *International Political Science Review*, 1 (1980) p. 88.

⁷² Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994) p. 232.

even when they produced for the world market in the 19th century.⁷³ What passed as the Ottoman "bourgeoisie" was in fact a segmented sub-class, comprised of minority merchants and Muslim traders with bureaucratic backgrounds. These two components of the "bourgeoisie" were bogged down in a religious-cum-ethnic conflict between themselves and, as such, could not present a united front against the central authority. Because of this, people with different economic occupations appeared as undifferentiated individuals.⁷⁴ They could not develop an independent set of values, or culture, as a substitute for the center's *adab* tradition. The Ottoman rebellions were primarily attempts to obtain concessions from the state, not ideologically guided movements. And, the periphery could not consolidate even its modest victories precisely because the benefits it managed at times to obtain were always *de facto*, not *de jure*.⁷⁵ The center remained reluctant to grant legitimacy for the periphery to exercise authority.

A weak periphery that lacked legitimacy could not be the moving force for liberal political change. Given the lack of organized and effective pressure from the periphery, certain elements of the center played the role of reformers.⁷⁶ Consequently, political change in the Ottoman Empire was not based on a theory of natural rights of man but on the practical necessity of holding the state together.⁷⁷ It is not surprising that even the most "liberal" member of the Commission that prepared the draft of the Ottoman 1876 constitution did not suggest the establishment of a republic or any substantial diminution in the sovereign rights of the sultan.⁷⁸ The Imperial Rescript of Gülhane that initiated the *Tanzimat* Period enunciated such goals as the protection of life, property and honor of all subject peoples of the Empire, but not the natural rights of man.⁷⁹ The rationale behind the Rescript

⁷³ Ali Kazancigil, "The Ottoman-Turkish State and Kemalism," in Ali Kazancigil and Ergun Özbudun, eds., *Atatürk: Founder of Modern State* (London: C. Hurst, 1981) p. 45.

⁷⁴ Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp. 134, 139-40.

⁷⁵ Heper, "Center and Periphery in the Ottoman Empire," p. 89.

⁷⁶ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 64.

⁷⁷ Inalcik, "The Nature of Traditional Society," p. 57.

⁷⁸ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic, Volume II: Reform, Revolution, and the Republic—The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 175.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 61.

was to appease the Great Powers that wanted to act as the guardians of the non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire; the Rescript did not introduce basic rights and liberties for their own sake. Furthermore, the Rescript guaranteed the life and property of only the Ottoman-modernizing bureaucratic elite against the sultan.⁸⁰ For similar reasons, the 1876 Ottoman experiment with constitutional monarchy could not produce a truly constitutional government.⁸¹

In the Republican period as well, the impetus for reform did not come from civil society. Almost single handedly, Atatürk brought about a cultural revolution, İnönü a democratic revolution and Turgut Özal an economic one. The state and political elites acted independently of the weak civil society groups to accomplish these revolutions.⁸² In recent decades, Ankara has even looked down upon the views offered on the state of the economy by leading interest groups.⁸³

That civil society did not become politically effective was a mixed blessing for Turkish democracy. On the one hand, in such crucial areas as secularism (a *sine qua non* of democracy) a cultural revolution could be carried out without societal protest. A gradual transition to electoral democracy (critical for the prevention of a backlash from those who opposed the Republican reforms) could be accomplished. The shift to a market-oriented economy (important for rolling back the frontiers of the state and clearing the way for the development of a politically effective civil society) could be initiated. And, Turkey was able to deal with whatever challenges political Islam and the Kurdish separatist movement posed for Turkish democracy.

On the other hand, rational democracy was at times too dogmatic. For several decades, state logic could not be tempered with political logic, let alone civil society. The state elite found it too difficult to shift to adversarial politics, and it was also unable to shift from sole emphasis on the long-term interests of the community to recognizing the need to reconcile the state, group

⁸⁰ Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, p. 448.

⁸¹ Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963) p. 253.

⁸² Metin Heper, "The State, Political Party and Society in post-1983 Turkey," *Government and Opposition*, 25 (1990) pp. 312-33.

⁸³ Metin Heper, ed., *Strong State and Economic Interest Groups: The Post-1980 Turkish Experience* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991).

and individual interests. For this reason, societal imperatives could not have their moderating effect on political maneuvering. At the same time, the political elite was too preoccupied with their own struggle against the state elite, as well as with intra-political elite conflict, to pay attention to the needs of society. Politics had priority over policy, and personal loyalty over merit. The state and political elite could adopt polar views and cause political instability that was inimical to society's need for harmony and predictability.

Consequently, it has taken Turkish democracy a long time to free itself from its Ottoman shackles. It is possible to argue that the favorable turn of events particularly in the post-April 1999 general elections period has been due to two basic factors. The first factor was the ability of such political leaders as Demirel and Ecevit to develop into mature and prudent statesmen. These leaders seemed to have learned from Turkey's trials and tribulations in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, Turkish politics was overly fragmented and polarized, a situation that gave rise to regular political crises. That such leaders as Demirel and Ecevit always nurtured lofty goals for Turkey played a crucial role in its development. The second factor was Turkey's wish to become a full member of the EU and, consequently, its efforts to upgrade its democracy to the level of the EU members. The recent designation of Turkey as a candidate for full membership in the European Union provided new impetus for Turkey to democratize further. Thus, although the Ottoman legacy continues to influence Turkey's political culture and practice, the overall direction is toward greater democracy and enhanced responsiveness of the government to the wishes and demands of the population at large, not only the ruling elites. ♣

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