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CHAPTER 7 SOME REFLECTIONS ON SOCIOLOGY AND THE CONDITION OF BEING A SOCIOLOGIST IN PRESENT- DAY TURKEY

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These are some comments of the peculiar blend of cosmopolitanism and parochialism, or insularity, which has been, and continues to be, the hallmark of sociology in Turkey. To elaborate, I will begin with some reflections on the condition and practice of being a sociologist in Turkey. I will end by offering some remarks on a very significant ceremonial event, the Second National Congress of Turkish Sociological Association, which took place in 1996. In between, I hope to convey some of the ambiguities and dilemmas associated with the location(s) of the sociologist as a public figure in present day Turkey.

We sociologists in Turkey tend to be driven by the urge to diagnose "lived" events and propose solutions. (1) The push to bring a particular social reality into daylight, rendering it "understandable" in public, to the public and for the public, and proposing brave solutions often takes precedence over "understanding", analytical refinement, theoretical sophistication. Of the two sensibilities out of which sociology has been historically molded, one intellectual, the other "lived" and made of social commitment, it is the latter which dominates the field in Turkey.

The cultural imaginary and self-understanding of a sociologist in Turkey is neither that of a free floating, "disinterested intellectual" who searches for universals in the name of truth, nor quite that of "social engineer" who comes up with practical solutions to pressing problems of the moment. Rather, it is that of a "social diagnostician". We battle with recurring bouts of symptoms which Turkey seems to contract in its twisted historical trajectory. We tend to torment ourselves with continuing aspirations to an unachieved modernity. But we remain unrepentant in our attempts to affiliate to the modern via great national or Western narratives.

The major signposts in the career trajectories of sociologists working and living in Turkey are not influential books - which they have written or read - but the mesmerizing play of political events, wars, economic crises, military coups, liberalization's which usher moments of intense anxiety and of reappraisal, imparting sense of new departures and breaks with orthodoxy. And of course it is precisely such a momentous event, the birth of the Turkish nation out of

the remnants of a *millet*-ethnic empire, which marks the origins of sociology in Turkey.

Attempts to trace the genealogy of our discipline are divided on the question of who should be acknowledged as the founding father. One version begins with Prince Sabahaddin, a distant relative of the Ottoman dynasty, who spent most of his life in various European capitals trying to mobilize support against the absolutism of the Sultan. His main ideas were summarized in a thin monograph: "How can Turkey be Saved?" (*Türkiye Nasıl Kurtulabilir?*), published around 1905. The solution he espoused--fostering economic progress through private initiative and administrative decentralization--was initially relegated to the graveyard of ideas, along with his name, only to be resurrected and recycled under various discursive labels, most recently by advocates of Turkey's rapid integration into world markets. But to my mind, what immortalizes Prince Sabahaddin's name in the annals of the discipline is the question he posed rather than the solutions he provided. The entire heritage of sociology in Turkey could be narrated as variations along a single theme: "How can Turkey be saved?"

The second name which marks the origins of our discipline is of course the towering figure of Ziya Gökalp, the foremost ideologue of Turkish nationalism and the first professor of sociology to be appointed to the chair of sociology he helped establish at Istanbul University in 1912. Through his work, national identity became firmly identified with cultural modernity and progress. Among his numerous books are *Türkizm*, *Islamism*, *Modernism* (1912/1918) and *Principles of Turkism* (1923), which were definitive of Turkish nationalism. His influence as an engaged public intellectual and ideologue can hardly be exaggerated. He was actively involved in the momentous events which led to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and helped give meaning and shape to the birth of a new nation state. His writings and advice on a range of subjects from the family to the educational system were instrumental in shaping the initial organization and ideology of the single party regime. Even after his untimely death in 1924, he continued to exert immense influence through his works and indirectly through his numerous students and disciples who came to occupy important posts in the bureaucracy, in academia, and in the press during the inter-war period and beyond. Was Ziya Gökalp the most original and influential among Turkish writers of the twentieth century? Or did he prepare the intellectual background for a legacy of authoritarian nationalism and militant secularism which continues to haunt us? Unequivocal answers are obviously not possible. To this day, he remains the pride and also the nemesis of Turkish sociology.

Since then, successive generations of sociologists have struggled with the recurring fantasies of economic development and cultural modernity. For most, traveling abroad, to centers of excellence in the Western hemisphere, has been part of the ritual of stock-taking. Each cohort has produced, and

continues to produce, a new crop of dissertations which reconfigure the past and invest it with new meanings, in the light of the present. Fascinated by the drama of political events which give shape to (our) history, we persist in seeking to uncover the underlying logic which explains them, in the language of recent theory. This is why sociology in Turkey exhibits a peculiar blend of cosmopolitanism and parochialism or insularity. It is highly cosmopolitan in terms of its conceptual baggage, open to intellectual currents--the newest paradigms and methodologies--emanating from centers of cultural and political power across the world. But the prism through which these currents are filtered remains anchored in the play of events as they unfold in the national arena, and hence parochial.

Perhaps the point may be illustrated by focusing on the 1970s generation--a cohort whose achievements (monumental) and failings (dramatic) have been equally significant in shaping the present of sociology in Turkey. It is worth remembering the heady intellectual excitement of the 1970s, when a sense of participation in a radical process of revision swept across the discipline, everywhere. The post-1968 intellectual radicalism had spawned a rich profusion of Marxisms which had for the first time established a broad presence in the universities of the English speaking world. This was a moment when social determinations seemed axiomatic, when sociologists could confidently claim to compare processes of state-making, capitalist transitions or revolutions across historical time and cultural space. Historians had not, as yet, become their own theoreticians. So a new generation of Turkish sociologists, returning from British and American Universities in the 1970s, brought back an army of influential voices, ranging from Althusser and Poulantzas, to Milliband, Braverman, Frank and Wallerstein. They arrived as historical sociologists or political economists, confident in materialistic conceptions of social totality in its Marxist and non-Marxist forms. Thus the sweeping canvas of Ottoman-history became the battleground upon which differences of political inclination and ideological bent were fought out. To try to relate the broader contours and the finer distinctions of the controversies which unfolded--ranging from arguments on the nature of Ottoman social formation (feudal or Asiatic mode of production?), disputes over the timing of capitalist penetration (seventeenth or nineteenth century?), to the debates on the interpretation of Turkish "revolution" (is the bourgeois revolution over or yet to come?)--would tax the patience of the reader. What is significant, and must be recognized as a generational achievement, is that these debates served to wrench Ottoman-Turkish history out of the parochialism of official historiography into a more openly theorized mode of exchange. (2)

Until the 1970s, the cultural constructions of academic sociology in Turkey remained firmly grounded in the rural/urban binary opposition, the former representing tradition, the latter setting up the standards of cultural modernity. Social change was conceived and studied as the flow from one to the other,

i.e. migration. From the accumulation of village studies in the 1940s as part of the republic's "civilizing mission", to the large scale planning oriented rural surveys of 1960s, the homogeneous totality of the nation had remained comfortably divided between a rural part and an urban part. This relentless homogenization of "the rural" was broken, once and for all, in the 1970s during the heated debates on "agrarian class structures" and "capitalists transitions".

In retrospect, the confidence of Turkish sociologists in their materialistic assumptions of totality, does not seem remarkable in itself. This was a moment when the sweeping panorama of social history had everywhere been appropriated by sociologists, who were giving it coherence by conceptualizing its underlying principles of unity and momentum. Nor is it surprising perhaps, that third-worldism found broad resonance among sociologists in Turkish academia. Third-worldism offered the possibility of being a nationalist and a marxist, wrapped in one. Its powerful blend of radical struggle against oppression, with the ultimate promise of emancipation of 'our nation' from underdevelopment, cut across the crisscrossing intellectual debates of the moment and spoke to the hearts of Turkish sociologists.

What was parochial, with hindsight, was absence of any attempt to come to grips with the region--the Middle East or perhaps southern Europe--or of Turkey's position on the margins of Europe. In the profusion of social histories written at the time, which for the first time challenged the orthodoxies of national historiography, the Middle East continued to figure as vestiges of the Ottoman Empire, a past Turkey had left behind. In retrospect, it is the remarkable certainty of Turkish sociologists in their western-secularist future, and the ethnic singularity of their nation, which is surprising.

The burning political events of the present decade--political Islam and Kurdish nationalism--have revealed the extent to which academic writing has lagged behind the intellectual/political agenda in Turkey. Throughout the 1980s decade, conventional social scientific analysis centered on the political economy of Turkey's opening to world markets, researching the distributive impact of structural adjustment policies, and holding conferences on the implications of liberalization for mass politics and political parties. The increasing visibility of political Islam and Kurdish ethnicity appeared to be the worrisome symptoms of our most recent capitalist re-organization. Today, the sobering diagnosis has become inevitable: Turkey is in the midst of an epochal cultural transformation, one which necessitates a radical "deconstruction" of the secularist bases of Republican nationalism and the ethnic singularity of its "Turkishness".

Of course, it must be remembered that the broader shift from "relative autonomy" and "structural causality" (the hard won gains of the 1970s) to the "discursive character of all practices" (the post-modernist axiom of the 1980s) has been painful and uncertain everywhere. It has been less central to disciplinary discussion in sociology and the "harder" social sciences than, for

instance, in history and anthropology. It has given birth to a rough division between so-called "deconstructionists" and unrepentant materialist in most countries, more sharply drawn in some countries, say in Britain and France, than in others, say in Germany and the USA.

In few countries however, has conventional social analysis fallen so far behind the broader intellectual/political debates of the moment, as in the early 1990s conjuncture in Turkey. The most radical and influential debates on the transformation of Turkey's cultural landscape, issues of cultural identity, and the complexity of their articulations in the public arena have been occurring outside the academic establishment, in the press, on television, in numerous intellectual/political circles unconstrained by disciplinary traditions. Not by accident, all the radical and influential critiques of "modernity" as a political project, and debates on the "crisis of the nation-state" have flown across national borders to Turkey with dizzying rapidity. Currently, the shelves of commercial bookstores are replete with translations of Foucault and subsequent post-modernisms, which stand side by side with special sections devoted to Islam and Kurdish ethnicity.

The paucity of books written by sociologists, however, reveals the hiatus of accumulated research on the dynamics of ethnicity and religion in Turkey. With the notable exception of Serif Mardin's work (4), the only representative of a hermeneutic tradition in Turkish sociology, current best-sellers on the burning political/social issues of the moment in Turkey are by self-designated "journalist-researcher-writers".

Now, in the mid-1990s, when religion and ethnicity have become "lived" events of immediate political significance, Turkish sociologists have rushed in with their diagnostic tools, impatient with "intellectualism" and ready to offer dramatic solutions for "state action". But the urge to bring "stark facts" into daylight--the tragic situation of the Kurdish population (unquestionable) and the imminent collapse of Turkish secularism (more dubious)--continues to take precedence over intellectually coherent analysis, understanding, self reflection.

Nowhere was this more apparent than the Second National Congress of the Turkish Sociological Association which took place six months ago. The conference theme was "Migrancy and Migrants in Turkey". That this was more than a ritual-ceremonial gathering, was signified by the choice of location. The congress was held in the port-city of Mersin, located on the eastern part of the Mediterranean coast, and a major point of destination for mass migration from the war zones of South-Eastern provinces. More than 200 sociologists from different parts of the country attended. The prevailing mood in the meeting was one of commitment and concern, as a series of young researchers from such eastern provinces as Van and Diyarbakir brought into daylight the stark realities of Kurdish migrants' plight. But it seemed that there was neither time, nor patience with "excessive intellectualism" -such as trying to develop a deeper understanding of the genesis and transformation of Kurdish ethnicity;

or delving into the history and nature of Turkish nationalism. The meeting ended with a call for urgent measures on the part of state authorities and local governments to alleviate the sufferings of immigrants.

Needless to say perhaps, this is partly a generational problem. Current sociology dissertations, written abroad or in Turkey, are "deconstructing" the grand narratives of Turkish nationalism; reconfiguring the past to understand the complexity of cultural and ethnic identities in the present; and, in so doing, battling with the ghosts of their own future. (5) But for the moment, I would summarize the condition and practices of sociology in Turkey as follows. A small number of Turkish sociologists, mostly young, have moved all the way into the terrain of textuality, discourse and deconstruction. The majority of sociologists continue much as before, concerned with "lived" events, but impatient with intellectual debates which lend them meaning and shape. And then there is the rest of us, those who have discovered our dis-modernity in the era of post-modernism, and are curious to see where it goes.

Notes

(1) I use the first person plural, not because I wish to imply that sociologists in Turkey constitute one big community, but because I do not want to exclude myself and my own work from many of the criticisms I make.

(2) For a sophisticated book that is informed by these debates but moves beyond them, see Keyder, 1987.

(3) The work of Mubeccel Kiray, one of the foremost Turkish sociologists, must be cited as an important landmark and precursor of a new genre of comparative research on the complexities of agrarian change in Turkey. See M. Kiray, 1970.

(4) New editions of Serif Mardin's voluminous scholarship on questions of culture and Islam in Turkish society, published in the 1990s, have made his work more accessible to a broader reading public, and become contemporary classics. For his latest book in English, see S. Mardin, 1989.

(5) For some of the recent debates on the Kemalist legacy and the nation-building project of the Republican period, see, Sibel Bozdogan and Resat Kasaba (eds.), 1997.

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