

Change and continuity in the relationship between the state and the university in Turkey
Three stages: nationalisation, massification, and polarisation

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ABSTRACT

The nation-state and the university are both products of modernisation. The university can be defined as a place where ideologies, beliefs, social relations and values are produced and reproduced to serve the needs of the society and the state. This paper investigates the relationship between the state and the university in Anatolia, where the modern Turkish Republic founded, focusing on the Cold War period. This study conceptualises this historically fundamental transition in three stages: the nationalisation (1920s–1940s), massification (1950s) and polarisation (1960s–1970s) of the University.

Keywords: university, state, Turkey, USA, Cold War, nationalisation, massification, polarisation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the last three years, almost 70,000 university students and 8,500 academics have been dismissed or/and arrested (Karakaş, 2018). Between 2002 and 2018, the number of universities has increased from 76 to 196, and the number of students has dramatically risen to 6,000,000 from 1,500,000 (YÖK, 2018). These statistics are not meaningless numbers: they raise a fundamental question about the nature of the state and how it uses the university in contemporary times. This paper asks why does the Turkish state harass students, academics and universities, while simultaneously boosting their numbers?

2. NATIONALISATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

2.1 Ideological base of Turkish higher education

After Turkey's War of Independence (1919–1922), Atatürk built a nation-state based on six pillars: republicanism, populism, revolutionism, nationalism and statism (Tekinalp, 1944, p. 255). Some argue that these principles could be summarised as nationalism and modernisation. Atatürk's modernisation meant transitioning from a traditional, religious-based society to a secular society: authority that had rested with God was given to the public (Keyman, 1997, p. 91), which was a pure ideological break from the Ottoman Empire (Kaplan, 2013, p. 305).

For the transition and transformation into the Turkish Republic to succeed, society needed to be united. The reforms might have been successful, but they also caused social chaos. In effect, the reforms created a society caught between the past and the present. A traditional way of life, thousands of years old, was rapidly changed by higher decree, and the population of Turkey stumbled. The state not only applied judicial reforms; it also needed to spread Atatürk's principles throughout society. Bureaucracy played a crucial role in spreading the reforms and controlling society at different levels. With the aim of controlling and transforming society, the state prioritised education and the university. According to Turkish republican elites, the university was best placed to produce more young republican elites. As such, it was an apparatus with which to transform society. (Heper, 1974, p. 99).

The new nation-state was based on Turkish national identity, a Sunni interpretation of Islam and modernisation/westernisation. To achieve such a nation-state, education became one of the most useful and crucial ideological tools. In the early 1920s, intellectuals focused on education and its practise. (Basgöz-Wilson, 1968, p. 24). Ziya Gökalp argues education is a two-sided institution, producing both divisions and unity, or it can resolve divisions (Akyuz, 1985, pp. 15–16).

Atatürk believed education was essential to rebuild the nation after the bloody civil war. Atatürk spoke about the necessity of resisting external forces and opposing ideas (Yücel, 1994, p. 20). İsmet İnönü supported having a nationalist education system, instead of religious and international alternatives (Kaplan, 2013, p. 315). Yücel agreed with both Atatürk and İnönü, and remarked “everything which is out of the Kemalism and Atatürk's principles is dangerous for us and we will not allow the dangerous ideas in our education and our nation.” (Yücel, 1993, p. 235).

2.2 1933 university reform

The Darülfünun's attitude to the Turkish Revolution had been a fundamental concern of the Turkish state. In 1924, the Darülfünun grounded was granted autonomy but was not considered independent from the state. In fact, it was autonomous under the state's wings. The abolition of the Arabic alphabet became a debate in Darülfünun. Furthermore, in the Turkish History Congress of 1932, the scholars of Darülfünun disagreed on

the Turkish history thesis. Considering the weight of history and language to build the Turkish nation, this disagreement presented a significant opposition to the state (Basgöz-Wilson I Milli Eğitim ve Atatürk 1178). The Grand National Assembly voted to abolish the Darülfünun, in favour of calling it a “university” for the first time. The nominal transition from Darülfünun to university is much more than a simple name change: it shows another break from the Ottoman legacy and the defeat of religious education. (Asaf, 1933, p. 252).

The reform did not bring freedom to the university: instead, the Turkish state reclaimed the so-called autonomy, which was given in 1919 (Oktik, 1995, p. 129). More than half of the lecturers were fired from the university and replaced with European lecturers who agreed on the Turkish history thesis (Maarif Vekaleti Arsivi Kultur Bakanligi, 16.02.1937). Furthermore, the dean was appointed by the head of the government, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Education. Under the same law, the language of instruction became Turkish written in Latin script (Asaf, 1933, p. 252).

One of the major objectives of the university reform was ending the ideological differences between state and the Darülfünun. The staff of the Darülfünun were more liberal and suspicious about the modernisation of the state (Aydemir, 1933, p. 6). The liberal standing of the Darülfünun was one of the main reasons for the reform. Zeki Mesut claimed that the Darülfünun had lost its function to keep the reforms alive and disseminate them to the people (Hakimiyet-i Milliye 10 aralık 1932). According to Ismail Husrev, the academics could not be neutral; each of them had to be on the side of the state (Husrev, 1933, p. 25). It can be deduced that the purge of the academics after 1933 was not based on academic ability: it was the cleansing of believers and non-believers of the Turkish Republic's principles.

The reform put higher education under the strict control of the state. The government had the right to decide who could work or what could be thought. The university became an apparatus of the new Turkish regime. It was no place for criticism.

3. MASSIFICATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

3.1 The multi-party System and universities

During the 1940s and 1950s, the changes in Turkey could be understood within the framework of the

international conjuncture, which had a fundamental impact on Turkish economic and political life. Thanks to Marshall Aid, the Democrat Party had the opportunity to bring new farming equipment and launch small industries across the country (Lewis, 1974, p. 138). With the building of roads and farming equipment, the villagers could interact with the cities more quickly, and the need for manpower decreased. Technology made life more comfortable for villagers, yet it took something from them too. People who lost their jobs had to leave their villages on those very same new roads (Lewis, 1974, pp. 138-141).

The population of the cities increased daily. The situation was fed by the Democrat Party's populist policies. Suburbs became visible around the towns, helped by the government. Education was not Turkish government's the priority during this period. Nonetheless, the national and international political developments increased the number of students and universities after the Second World War. Besides the predominant universities of Ankara and Istanbul, new universities were founded in different provinces of Turkey. In the capital of Turkey, Hacettepe University and Middle East Technical University (METU) opened (Oktik, 1995, p. 138). The foundation of the METU dates back to 1945 and was helped by United Nations organisations. The aim was to educate architects and engineers to rebuild or modernise the Middle East, beginning in Turkey (Szyliowicz, 1973, p. 378). It also shows the relationship between Turkey and the West. In this environment, the number of students increased, and the Grand National Assembly passed a new Higher Education Law 1946 (Umunç 1986, p. 445). The primary goal of the new law was to solve the University's problems and to increase the productivity of the universities (Umunç 1986, p. 445). The increase in the number of students and universities are what I call the massification of students and university.

Officially, the universities were autonomous. Nonetheless, the understanding and definition of their autonomy remained rooted in the nation-state's interests. According to the law, the university was supposed to give priority to the nation-state's interests based on Kemalist principles. The students who were educated at university were supposed to be loyal to republican reforms. Universities were also expected to work to eliminate patriarchal mindsets and produce research to help build the young republic (Umunç 1986, pp.445–447). There were three main features of the regulation that defied the definition of university autonomy: autonomy was defined by the state; the Ministry of Education was the head of the universities; and the

university was supposed to educate students to be loyal to Kemalist principles.

Between 1950 and 1960, the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes's conservative and pro-America politics caused riots in Turkish universities, particularly in Ankara and Istanbul (Dodd, 1983, p. 13). After the new constitution in 1961, universities became more politicised. Students demanded civil liberties and defined themselves as anti-American. In the 1960s, Turkish universities became the war zone between left and right ideologies (Dodd, 1983, p. 13). Students who studied in the new buildings started to believe that politics was no longer the preserve of republican elites, and they had something to say too. This involvement of students in politics is what I describe as the massification of politics.

4. POLARISATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

4.1 The 1961 constitution

The Democrat Party stayed in power for almost ten years, before ending with the first coup in modern Turkish history on 27 May 1960. At that time, the academics and students supported the military. The main concerns of the academics were the party's religious regulations and the relationship with the USA. The military council passed a new constitution which brought the freedom to unionise and other social freedoms. Article 120 states:

the universities may be founded only by the Turkish state. The universities [will be] supervised and administered by a group of academics. Any other force will not dismiss the executive trustees but the universities themselves. The academics have [the] right to join a political party, but they cannot hold any executive duties. (Lewis, 1974, p. 165)

The right of to unionise, the effects of village institutes and problems stemming from urbanisation led to the rise of leftist ideology in the 1960s. The Turkish Labour Party won fifteen seats in the parliament, four years after its foundation in 1965. It was backed by the universities, intellectuals, and the graduates of the village institutes and workers. The institutionalisation of the left led to the foundation of the Revolutionary Trades Unions in 1967. The left wing included students and intellectuals, but the right wing was backed by the state and its ideology. The chief objective of the student movements was economic

development and a better future. This unequal battle finished with a coup and the arrest of thousands of leftist academics, writers and students (Lewis, 1974, p. 165).

4.2 The universities law 1973

On 12 March 1971, a second coup took place in Turkey. Nihat Erim's government revised the university law and took administrative autonomy of the universities but left academic autonomy (Oktik, 1995, p. 147).

Under this new law, the police had the right to enter the university and conduct any sort of investigation. The academics, students and politicians who were imprisoned after the coup were mostly leftist. The right of academics to join political parties, which had been given in 1961, was revoked, and the Ministry of National Education had the right to control them (Kaya, 1984, p. 246). It is apparent that the coup was against the Turkish leftist movement. During this period, dozens of universities were founded (Oktik, 1995, p. 150).

The new constitution handed the reins of the university to the state; indeed, academics could be fired with university senate approval. Moreover, the government launched the Higher Education Council headed by the Ministry of National Education, with membership divided equally between university and government representatives. Each university was supposed to choose a professor as a representative for two years (Akyüz, 1985, pp. 334–335). The council was organised as though it were a ministry, but it was controlled by another ministry, which might show a relationship between the state and the university that I call *the lack of institutional trust*. Consequently, the university lost its autonomy and was shaped by the state.

The main objectives of this law were both instrumental and administrative. The instrumental objective was to produce and reproduce the nation based on Kemalist principles, and to educate students on the Turkish language and history. Accordingly, Atatürk's principles, Turkish history and language were taught as mandatory courses in all universities. The administrative objective gave universities the responsibility of setting rules on the duration of study and tuition fees. The and senate of the university could be elected by the academics of the university. These rights allowed universities to develop their own administrative policies, individual to each institution.

Turkish socio-political life reached its peak of violence and polarisation in 1979. People started to talk

about a military coup; a military coup was desired and seen as a means of salvation. However, some politicians were against military control and refused martial law over some problematic cities (Cumhuriyet, 1978). The universities were one of the battlegrounds of the conflict. The academics and students were polarised to the left or right. The turmoil ended up with the 12 September coup in 1980, which took the disturbance into a new phase by deepening the economic and social problems.

5. CONCLUSION: The university: hegemonic apparatus

The relationship between the Turkish state and the university has been mostly shaped by the nationalisation stage. Industrialisation and democratisation supported by one of the Cold War superpowers, the USA, led to the increase in the number of students and universities. Such an increase might be seen to evince republican values; on the contrary, as this research suggests, it could also be seen as the side effects of industrialisation. The last stage refers to an ideological and class-based polarisation among politicians, students, universities and the people during the 1960s and 1970s. This period had begun in 1960, was interrupted in 1971, and ended in 1980 with a military coup, while the polarisation was fed by the first two stages and the Cold War environment. These stages were not independent from each other. Rather, they shaped, fed and caused one another.

The university serves the state. I argue that the university is a hegemonic apparatus of the state which can be defined as follows: it is bound by the national constitution and controlled by the state or its institutions; building and rebuilding the state's ideology are its mission. Hegemonic apparatuses work as ideological, cultural, economic and sometimes psychological tools of the state, cultural elite, or ruling class. The apparatus is used by those in power as a tool of both force and legitimacy to protect and strengthen its hegemony over society generally, and younger generations in particular.

The dismissal and/or arrests of academics and students in 1947, 1971, 1980 and 2015 are evidence that universities have been used by the Turkish government as instruments of state force. The state has been in control of the promotion of the academics and set the curriculum. The state directly and indirectly

monitors the research area of academics. Additionally, to build legitimacy using the university, the Turkish state launches new universities across the country to encourage youth participation. It gives loans or non-recourse loans to almost every university student. Having a university degree halves one's compulsory military service from a year to six months (Askerlik Kanunu, 1927). It creates the illusion that attending university increases social mobility, and satisfies social and cultural needs.

In summary, the three stages – nationalisation, massification and polarisation – are the changes in the use of the hegemonic apparatus by the state. The short periods that could be perceived as changes have been tactics of the state. When the state feels threatened or weak, it uses tactics (Scott, 1985) such as investigations, arrests and dismissal, which do not show the strength of the state; on the contrary, it illustrates the state's weakness. Looking at the continuity, the three stages are not independent from each other; in fact, nationalisation remains at the core of higher education, while the other stages form the basis of the conflict between the youth and the state. Such a continuity is the strategy (de Certeau, 2008, p. 114) of the state, which is spreading its ideology, building, shaping and controlling the youth. Though the university was given autonomy, in practice it has been used as an instrument of the state. The relationship between the state and the university is one of hegemonic apparatus.

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