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Relations among Various Ethnicities in Today's Modern Turkey

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Abstract

The Ottoman State, the predecessor of Turkey, was a cosmopolitan society where many different people lived in total harmony until late nationalistic currents, mainly provoked from outside, had their impact. Along the course of history, Anatolia had been a melting pot and today's Turks resemble their ancestors in their immense tolerance of ethnical differences. Though such differences are admitted as reflected in children's puns and tongue-twisters, they are never ever horrified at. What gives the cohesion of the country is an esprit des corps based on a traditional culture, which in turn derives its solidity from the roots of a rich history as well as a common fate for all committed to live here.

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1. Introduction: A "Prologue" Deriving on History

Today's Turkish Republic is the continuation of the former Ottoman State. It can be said that the Ottoman Empire was the equivalent in the Old continents of what the United States are in the New World, as far as the cosmopolitan populations are concerned. For the Ottomans the driving force of expansion was Islam. Various ethnicities conglomerated around the Moslem-Turkish nucleus along the course of territorial conquests. In parallel to this development, the Protestant-Anglo-Saxon core in America attracted many people from different ethnical origins and even many different races (1) mainly due to economical reasons as well as democratic/liberal ideals.

The Ottoman mind was not preoccupied with racial/ethnic issues in the least. In fact, the Ottomans did not even differentiate Blacks (Negroes) from Arabs. (As Yagmur Atsiz once mentioned in an article); it is known that the Ottomans called blacks "Arabs" and they called genuine Arabs "White-Arabs" (Akarab).

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As Timur (November 1986: 117) puts it (by reference to Dumont); in late Ottomans, Turkishism currents only took the form of a political program and became the instrument of the par-Germen movement; while secret agents of German militarism like Parvus, became the advisors of Turkishists. In the end, the Ottoman Army was literally confined to German commanders (2).

Indeed, in his autobiographical novel *Close Surveillance* (Buyuk Gozalti), Cetin Altan talks about his own childhood and his Pasha grand father, who had been an Ottoman cavalry officer during the First World War. One day the grandpa's former German friends visit the house. The little boy watches the old man fascinated, as he speaks fluent German with his friends. He had been trained in Germany in his youth. Before the arrival of the guests, the grandfather searches for the tiny statue of the former German emperor, Kaiser, to reanimate the good old memories and to please the visitors. As he can not locate it, the whole family frenetically participate in the search to help him. Finally they find it somewhere in the big toilet-room. The pious grandma had dumped the ritually-unclean damned thing [a three-dimensional representation of a living being; moreover that of an unbeliever's!] in there and had forgotten all about it!

2. Islam as a Good Mixer and Equalizer

While the Ottomans distinguished their Christian subjects (reaya), they kind of “lumped together” all their Moslem subjects. Those were Albanians, Arabs, Persians (Acem), Bosnians, Laz, Pomaks, Circassians, Georgians, Chechens, “Gypsies” (Kiptis), Zazas, Kurds, Turkmens, Dadash, Yoruks (literally “Nomad”), Tahtaci (literally “wood-craftsman”), Dagli (literally “mountaineer”), Gacals, Nogays, Kazaks, Ozbeks, Azeris and so forth.

Even a former non-Moslem, upon embracing Islam, immediately accessed a level equal to the born Moslems. One might as well say that converts were praised more highly than the born Moslems. After all, inducing conversions into Islam was the driving force of the conquests, that is, the expansions in the beginnings.

For the Ottomans nationality played no role whatsoever. He who was a Moslem, was [in a sense] Turkish. Greeks and Slavs, once they became Moslems, could rise to the status of commandants. Viziers or other high dignitaries (Stuwe, 1974:131).

3. The Anatolian Peninsula, a Passageway for Many Tribes

Using a metaphor from Physics, the Turk of the Republic of today is like the resultant force of various component forces. Those component forces themselves are represented mainly by the above-mentioned Moslem ethnicities. The historical and cultural transactions between the Moslem and the non-Moslem Ottoman societies had also their play in this social formation process. The many contributions by the non-Moslem subjects of the Sultans can never be denied. Eminent artists, poets and composers of Turkish music are to be named among the non-Moslems of the Ottoman and Republican times.

Today's ethnical composition of Turkey more or less parallels the German Nation's “ingredients” like Prussians, Bavarians, Frank(en), Hes, Aleman, Fritz, Palatinates etc., all of whom are vestiges of very old tribes; as Atsız (March 3; 1999) registers.

Similarly; Iberians, Celts, Romans before Christ; Anglo-Saxons of Germanic origin and French-speaking-Norseman from Scandinavia later on came to England. There they all mixed up to form today's English nation. Chaucer was the first great writer to write in English instead of French or Latin or Saxon (paraphrased from Schindler and Goldman, 1964:96).

4. A Similar *Fate* in Near History

As the Ottoman State shrank in territory (3); the population got more and more homogenized, at least as far as religion and native tongue goes. Finally, migration waves, either voluntary or compelled by the prevailing conditions or in accordance with the signed armistices and treaties (4), further contributed to the homogenization of the population. (The sad story of all immigrants is interesting.

Let us listen to the female chronicle writer Kirikkanat (November 10, 1996): Years passed. The woman [she, the daughter of an officer and the granddaughter of an officer, she, who is the descendant of an all-military family]

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