

Special Issue: “Turkish Perspectives on Social Problems” – Afterword

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Having just engaged the six sociological studies presented in this special issue on “Turkish Perspectives on Social Problems,” it seems apropos to offer some considerations on the origins and development of the sociological discipline in Turkey. Though perhaps not widely known outside of the Turkish context, the field of sociology in Turkey goes back to the earliest days when the discipline first appeared in European contexts (specifically in England, France, and Germany) during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This context is essential, because it clarifies that Turkish sociology has long been concerned with the problems of society and their solution. Thus, the studies in this special issue do not emerge spontaneously, but rather are grounded in a long-standing intellectual tradition within the discipline.

Sociology, born in France in the first half of the 19th century with Auguste Comte (see Swingewood, 1984) and Le Play (see Brooke, 2017) found its reflection in Europe and America, and soon after in the Ottoman Empire (Sanay, 2014). In the years following the declaration of the Tanzimat Edict¹, some thinkers who had been in contact with Western social scientists had begun to produce the first sociological studies on the Ottoman society. By the early 1900s, we witness the establishment of the first chair of sociology. We see that the first sociology lessons were given by Ziya Gökalp (see Shaw & Shaw, 1977) in Dar’ül-Fünûn², even though there are different opinions on this subject, together with the first chair of sociology founded in 1914. Since the establishment of the new Turkish state in 1923, sociology has been integrated into the high school curriculum since the first years of the republic, at the same time as instruction in sociology began within post-secondary institutions (Kaçmazoğlu, 1999). Thus, it is noteworthy

¹ The Tanzimat Edict is the published declaration of the new sultan Abdülmecid in front of the notables of the Muslim and non-Muslim peoples on 3 November 1839, five months after the death of the Sultan II. Mahmut (Berkes, 1973). According to the declaration, Christian nationals and Muslims were made equal before the law. No one would be punished without trial in courts. Thus, the rights of non-Muslim nationals were guaranteed by the Sultan. The Tanzimat Edict also stated that new laws will be introduced in order to prevent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the direction of Westernization of the administration (Kongar, 2003).

² Dar’ül Fün’un, which was originally decided to be established in 1846, was opened only in 1863. With the opening of this institution, it was aimed that all Ottoman subjects, Muslim and Non-Muslim, to be educated side by side, to ensure that the state, which was on the way of Westernization, was included in public services and to conduct a modern university education outside religious schools and influences. However, due to some problems, Dar’ül Fün’un was opened in 1863. Having been opened several times under various names until 1933 (Darülfünun-i Şahane, Darülfünun-i Osmani, etc.), it took its name as İstanbul University on 1 August 1933, and started its education life as being the first and only university in Turkey (Akyüz, 2001: 154-157, 325-328).

that the new Turkish state was one of the leading countries where sociology was taught in educational institutions.

The first sociological researches in the Ottoman Empire were carried out by Ahmet Şuayp and colleagues (see Doğan & Alkan, 2016). These thinkers brought the understanding of biological sociology to the country with the translations they made. In the same period, Celal Nuri (see Aydın, 2007) and Abdullah Cevdet (see Gündüz, 2009) are seen to try to bring in Turkey the concept known as spiritual sociology in the West (Sanay, 2014).

Social studies initially carried out in Turkey were built within the perspectives of Western sociology and the approach to events and phenomena were produced within the framework of the concepts developed in the West. In this regard, taking into account the current situation of the Turkish society, sociology actually entered into the Turkish context to function as a solution to social problems which were expected to develop from the dissolution of Ottoman social orders.

It is accepted that in the beginning of the early 20th century in Turkey, real sociological activities started by Ziya Gökalp, the representative of the sociology of Comte and Durkheim, and Prince Sabahattin (Akşin, 2007), the representative of the Le Play school (İçli, 2012). Until the 1930s, sociology was taught in both high schools and universities. In this period, there was little development in the social science research apart from articles published by thinkers such as Mehmet Servet Bey (see Dinçşahin, 2015) and İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (see Dinçşahin, 2015; Sanay, 2014).

By the 1930s, historical developments in Turkey and beyond drove studies that changed sociological perspectives, generally in translations (Kayalı, 1994). The scholars who became prominent in these years were Hilmi Ziya Ülken (see Leaman, 2015) and Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu (see Brice, 1981). Ülken is one of the most important thinkers in Turkey's further work in this field, and his ability to analyze the works of Western thinkers and his research on Turkish intellectual history are from main efforts to be mentioned for this period. Another thinker whose name should be mentioned in these years is Fındıkoğlu, who is influenced by Gökalp's understanding of sociology and is known for being a versatile thinker in the history of Turkish sociology, has made important contributions to the development of Turkish sociology with his monographs, copyright and translation studies as well as his interest in applied sociology (Sanay, 2014). Especially in the mid-1930s, the effects of the German School of Sociology were strong (see İçli, 2012; Vandenberghe, 2009), although in the 1940s, it is seen that in some sociology departments, applied sociology courses have been given in line with the Le Play school, and the interest in monographic studies has increased in this period (see Brooke, 2017).

In the 1950's, with the effect of the "Science Sociale" school in Turkish sociology, scholars focused on producing monographic field studies carried out especially in villages (Şahin, 2017). These were also the years in which the ideological standpoint of the Turkish sociology also differs depending on the changing political conjuncture in Turkey. The changes that emerged in the Turkish society in the 1950s and afterwards are the problems caused by the internal dynamics of the society. Since it was understood that these problems could not be solved with theoretical studies, sociologists of this period turned to applied studies. Therefore, it is observed that studies based on empirical thought and application were adopted more in the sociology of this period.

In the 1960s, Turkish sociology entirely came under the influence of American sociology bedecked with Marxism. The sociology of this period seems to have lost focus, and may

be characterized as non-hypothetical and without emphasis on real social problems. Without a theoretical basis, Turkish sociology in this period also jumped from a philosophically weighted theoretical point to an extremely experimental one where only field research and the survey method were regarded as valid. In M. B. Kıray's words, "ambiguous" studies have completely influenced the sociology of this period (as cited in Kaçmazoğlu, 1999). While the basic assumptions of American sociology in Turkey has become the dominant paradigm, there has been an increase in sociology studies focusing on historical research by the 1960's. Thus, 1960's has been the years in which two deep-rooted sociological tradition based on different assumptions progressed in Turkey. The first is the American structural-functionalist sociology school, and the second is the historical understanding of sociology that focuses on historical research (Şahin, 2017).

After the 1980s, when viewed in the work of sociologists working in major sociology departments in Turkey, these sociologists are seen to have argued that the solutions to the problems of Turkish society should be sought in the society's own history and structure in one hand, and on the other hand in the dimension of inter-communal relations in Eastern-Western line. Therefore, the studies carried out in this context were predominantly in a theoretical style. Considering the last three decades in Western sociology, many new issues have emerged, such as globalization, the rise of the European Union, multinational society, postmodernism, ethnicity, micro nationalism, women's studies, environment, political economy, nation state, locality and identity. These fields have also gained traction in Turkish sociology, and many studies, mostly theoretical, have been written by sociologists. Today sociologists in Turkey are examining the issues by sociologists of America or Continental Europe both on an inter-societal and national basis (Şahin, 2017).

As a result, the fact is that Turkish sociology has become more diverse in theoretical perspectives, with multiple focal points in modernization theory, positivism, nationalism studies, secularism, can cultural studies. Thusly, these emphases define the boundaries of the field of study of sociology in Turkey (Kaçmazoğlu, 2001). This special issue on "Turkish Perspectives on Social Problems" is a valuable work that reflects the diversity of topics that Turkish sociology has today. I believe that this special issue, which contains valuable studies that will make important contributions to the Turkish sociology literature and beyond, will guide new studies and reveal different perspectives on the basis of each subject. In addition to this, I think it is very auspicious for the sociology world that such important works have been produced in the growing sociology community in terms of quality and quantity.

As a colleague in the sociological endeavor, I wish like to thank all my academician friends and respected editors who contributed to this project work with their devoted work. I am indeed proud to be a part of this exemplary work team. Best wishes to all my colleagues, in Turkey and also worldwide, who research in the field of sociology and who continue to engage with the understanding and solution of social problems everywhere.

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