

Clashes between or within civilizations? Meeting of cultures in Anatolia and Western Europe

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1. Samuel Huntington’s thesis of a clash of civilizations, formulated in the early 1990s, has gained renewed popularity in the wake of September 11 and America’s declaration of war on terror. This thesis came out of a research project that aimed to search for the likely sources of major conflict after the end of the Cold War and to identify America’s future enemies. Huntington argued that the major fault lines of the future, across which there are likely to be conflicts, are the boundaries between different civilizations. Civilizations — such as Western Christendom, Eastern Christendom, Islam, the Indic and ‘Confucian’ civilizations of Asia — have, in this view, a more lasting permanence and stability than individual states and political alliances. The great heterogeneity within each of these civilizations is ignored. The greatest threat is Islam, which, Huntington claims, ‘has bleeding borders;’ the worst nightmare is an alliance of Confucianism with Islam against the West. Years before Bush’ ‘axis of evil’ speech, Huntington hinted at North Korean arms deliveries to Iran as the beginning of this most threatening scenario.

One weakness of this model that divides the world up into civilizations is that it deliberately ignores the conflicts within the civilizations it recognizes. More blood has been shed in conflicts within the Muslim world — think of the Iraq-Iran war, the civil war in Afghanistan or the conflict between the FIS and Algeria’s military regime — than along its ‘bleeding borders.’ It may be easy to speak of Western Christianity and Islam as civilizations, but it is not at all so clear what their borders are and where they meet or clash.

Where would, to take one concrete example, Turkey belong in this model: to the civilization of Islam? Or should we, judging by its state tradition, consider Turkey the heir of the Eastern Roman empire and therefore count it as a (non-Christian) part of Eastern Christendom? There is much to say for the latter option. Turkey has, whether one likes it or not, many more things in common with Greece than with its Arab neighbours. This is,

incidentally, one historical and cultural reason why Turkey should be eligible for membership of the European Union. If Greece is a member, and countries like Bulgaria and Romania are candidate members, there is no good reason why Turkey should not be — when it fulfils the formal criteria of civilian rule, respect for human rights, etc. The fact that Turkey's population is Muslim (though much of its elite is post-Muslim, like West European elites are post-Christian) does not constitute a strong argument against Turkey's membership. The AK Party government, which is probably more representative of Anatolian Muslims than any other government in the country's recent past, has embraced the values with which the EU wishes to identify itself and is making greater efforts to bring Turkey into line with European norms than its more Kemalist predecessors.

2. Kemalism, like French Republicanism, represents one particular form of modernity; both are representative of the phase of high modernity, which was characterized by nation-states with sharp boundaries and homogeneous populations as the dominant type of polity. Globalization and transnationalism are subverting these sharp boundaries and giving a new emphasis to heterogeneity. National borders are rapidly losing their relevance to production processes, markets, and consumer tastes. But globalization has at the same time brought in its wake a strengthening of the local: the emergence of local, regional, ethnic and other particularisms is in itself a global process, closely linked to the growth of supranational structures.

Transnationalism, the movement of people, goods, ideas and money across state boundaries, has changed the face of the world. As a result of labour migration and refugee flows, all European countries have undergone remarkable demographic changes and what homogeneity there was has disappeared. In large European cities, up to half the population may be of recent immigrant origin, consisting of dozens of different ethnic and national groups. Migration also has a great impact on the 'home' countries, economic, political and cultural. New technologies such as satellite television, cellular telephones, and the Internet further broke down state borders and gave the diaspora a stronger influence on developments 'at home.' The most spectacular development perhaps was the Kurdish satellite television station, MED-TV (later Medya TV).

Globalization and transnationalism have resulted in other forms of modernity, which some would call 'post-modernity'. Heterogeneity, variety and difference are not just accepted as facts of life, but by many even celebrated as a positive value. To a greater or lesser extent, most European countries adopted 'multiculturalist' policies, accepting the existence of different cultures within their polities and recognizing the

right of people to keep their own cultures alive.

3. Not all Europeans have been happy with multiculturalism, whether as a policy or as a statement of fact. In the last few years there have been increasingly loud voices of protest against multiculturalism and its alleged cultural relativism. France has had its fight against the headscarf, Germany its call for the maintenance of a dominant German culture ('Leitkultur') against all the different immigrant cultures, and the Netherlands have had their debate on integration in which the earlier embrace of immigrant cultures is giving way to a call for a degree of assimilation.

However, for most of the 1980s and 1990s, immigrants in West European countries found that the principles of basic human rights and of equal rights allowed them to hold on to, and even develop their cultures and practice their religions with even greater freedom than in the countries of origin. Immigrants from Turkey were not only allowed but were given facilities (including state-sponsored teachers) to teach their children Turkish and basic knowledge of Turkish history. Ethnic and religious minorities — Armenians, Kurds, Sunni Islamists, Alevis, Syrian Christians, Yezidis — as well as political movements from the extreme left to the extreme right found the freedom to organize and publish and to develop their cultures. All gradually developed their networks of contacts and modest lobbies in European political circles, thereby exerting some influence on Turkey as well.

Two interesting cases are those of the Kurds and the Alevis (which in fact overlap). Following the 1980 military coup in Turkey, many young Kurdish intellectuals fled the country and ended up, after some time, as refugees in Sweden, Germany and other countries. While still in Turkey, these people had written, spoken, debated, and even thought in Turkish rather than Kurdish. The use of the Kurdish language was in Turkey largely restricted to matters of the family and village life. The modern world, science, politics, and modern culture were mediated by the Turkish language, and it was in debates with Turkish intellectuals that they developed their political ideas. Once they lived in Europe, the relevance of Turkish decreased. They learned the languages of the countries of residence but among themselves began speaking Kurdish rather than Turkish (especially in Sweden, where there was a strong concentration of highly educated Kurdish refugees). Financially supported by various European institutions, they also began publishing journals and later books in Kurdish. It was in European exile that a revival of Kurdish as a written language was engineered and a new Kurdish literature began to be written. This stimulated later, in the nineties, a similar revival of Kurdish among the Kurds of Istanbul and other large cities in Turkey.

Alevis started organizing themselves in Germany and other European countries as a reaction to the strengthening of Sunni Islam among immigrants from Turkey. To committed Muslims, Europe offered greater freedom of expression than Turkey; in the 1980s, mosque-based organizations became the strongest and best-organized representatives of migrants from Turkey, often claiming to speak on behalf of all Turks. In response, Alevis, many of whom had long kept their Alevi identity hidden or had considered it as irrelevant, established their own associations, emphasizing the difference between themselves and Sunni Muslims and demanding recognition as a distinct religious-cultural group. Parallel developments took place in Turkey itself, but again it was due to the freedom of organization in Europe – where no one objected to association on the basis of ethnic or religious identity – that the Alevis in Europe could act as pioneers of an identity movement that also became successful in Turkey itself.

4. A keyword in the debates engendered by the presence of large numbers of immigrants in Europe is *recognition*. This is perhaps the most important concept in multiculturalism. In classical immigration countries like the USA, Canada and Australia, the recognition of immigrant cultures and the recognition of equal rights to residents and citizens of different cultural backgrounds took place as a matter of course. European countries experienced a shift from homogeneity to heterogeneity, accompanied by heated debates on integration, assimilation and the right of difference. As Europe was moving to greater unity, the awareness spread that this would only be possible by mutual agreements on the recognition of the rights of minorities — be they immigrant communities of various regional / national origins, religious communities, indigenous ethnic communities or such cross-border communities as the German speakers in French Alsace.

Recognition of minorities — not only the recognition of their existence but also the recognition of the right to protect their cultures, to have access to education and communication media in their languages — became one of the central criteria for membership in the European Union (as well as other institutions such as the OSCE). A politician who understood this well was Turgut Özal. The abolishment of the legal ban on publishing in Kurdish and other vernacular languages in Turkey (in 1991) was inspired by his wish to take the country into the European Union. Further steps took a long time; the military, bureaucratic and political elites had to accustom themselves to the ideas of recognition and minority rights and to be persuaded that these would not harm Turkey's or their own interests. This process is likely to take more time, but it appears inevitable.

The European call for recognition of minority rights and Turkey's

frequent convictions by the European Human Rights Court for violations of the rights of, especially, Kurdish citizens resulted in anti-European reactions on the part of sections of the elites. While the recognition of Turkish immigrants' cultural rights by European states was generally seen as a friendly gesture, the extension of the same rights to the Kurds and other non-Turkish ethnic groups was often seen as a hostile act. The most radical voices accused Europe of pursuing an old imperialist project for breaking up Turkey (deliberately ignoring that the same or even more far-reaching degrees of minority recognition were demanded from other candidate members). More enlightened conservatives defended Turkey's imposition of cultural homogeneity with references to Enlightenment values and accused Europe of giving up its own modernity by allowing the expression of such backward phenomena as Islamism or Kurdish nationalism.

5. High modernity undeniably brought the world great achievements like the idea of popular sovereignty, the transformation of subjects into citizens, and the concept of equal rights for all citizens. Nation states, or rather states striving to become nation states, attempted to impose conformity and homogeneity in the name of equal rights. Cultural and religious minorities that were conspicuously different from the aspired 'national' identity were to be assimilated. Where groups resisted assimilation or were unacceptable to the majority, the ultimate consequence of the effort to create a real nation state has all too often been ethnic cleansing or, in extreme cases, genocide. Both ethnic cleansing and genocide existed also in the pre-modern period; in modern times, however, with the state's vastly increased powers of domination, they appear as an extreme consequence of modernization from above.

The nation states of high modernity were successors to a very different type of polity, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Empire (which usually had one dominant religion and language but never imposed these on subject populations). Eastern Europe and the Middle East had the large land-based Ottoman, Habsburg, Russian and Persian empires, Western Europe its colonial empires with large overseas possessions. In retrospect, these empires had much to deserve our appreciation. The Ottoman Empire was a remarkably successful in maintaining relatively harmonious relations between the various population groups and allowing their cultures to flourish. The break-up of these empires occurred in a few waves following the great wars of the 20th century (the Ottoman and Habsburg empires fell apart after the First World War, the colonial empires after the Second, and the Russian / Soviet empire at the end of the Cold War). Each of these waves saw genocidal violence, massive population transfers and ethnic cleansing; many of the new states engaged in systematic policies of assimilation as part of nation building.

6. Turkey represents one of the most systematic efforts at ‘high modernity’ nation building. The new Turkey was carved out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire in a war against two former subject communities (Armenian in the East and Greek in the West) who each claimed parts of Anatolia for their own national projects. Only secondarily the War of Independence was also waged against the British (who controlled Istanbul and the Straits) and the French (who claimed parts of the Southeast for Syria). Once new borders were established, the Republican regime imposed homogeneity on the population by various measures — from the unification of all education (*tevhid-i tedrisat*) to massive deportations and resettlement programs to linguistic engineering and a ban on other languages than Turkish — at a great cost in cultural capital.

Anatolia has one of the richest cultural histories of any region in the world. Numerous great civilizations had flourished there and left their traces in the civilizations succeeding them. Much of Ottoman and Islamic civilization was lost or was deliberately destroyed in the effort at rapid modernization. Kurdish civilization, which had flourished at the courts of the Kurdish emirates that enjoyed autonomy within the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries, had been in decline since the dismantlement of these emirates in the 19th century, a concomitant of the administrative modernization of the Empire. The Armenian, Syrian and Greek Christian communities, that were the heirs of great cultural traditions, were under suspicion because of the involvement of foreign missionaries and, in the case of the former, of radical nationalists. By the time the Republic was established, massacres, war, expulsions, flight and population exchange had decimated their numbers. In spite of formal guarantees (under the terms of the Lausanne Treaty), the last remaining Christian communities further dwindled during the Republic, their civilizations slowly dying in Turkey. (Diasporas in Europe and North America made efforts to keep traditions alive and even to revive them, however.)

This pattern of modernization, focussed on the ideal of a homogeneous nation-state and a narrow conception of modern civilization, resulted in a dramatic cultural impoverishment of Anatolia (not to mention the social and economic decline). Typical for the mindset of the high period of state-led modernization is the report that the journalist Na•it Ulu• wrote about one of the most violent episodes of Republican history, the brutal campaign to subdue the rebellious Kurdish district of Dersim (renamed Tunceli after the campaign). In the course of this campaign, around ten per cent of the population of the district, perhaps even more, were killed; many of the survivors were deported to other parts of the country. Ulu•, whose report is titled ‘*Tunceli is opened up to civilization*’, praises the

army for breaking the power of backward tribal and religious leaders; he mentions not a single killing but only saw the march of progress and civilization.

The campaign took place in 1937-38 and Ulu• wrote his book in 1939. It is only fair to note that this was a period when much of Europe was dominated by authoritarian modernizing regimes that made Kemalist Turkey pale by comparison. The suppression of ethnic cultures and minority religious groups in attempting to forge a modern nation were not unique to Turkey but occurred in very similar ways in its European neighbours. The 'ethnic cleansing' of Muslims in Southeastern Europe and denial of their history parallel that of Christians in Turkey.

7. The social and economic developments in Turkey since the 1980s have led to the emergence of new elites, who do not share the older elites' obsession with national unity, and to a greater awareness and acceptance of difference. Not too long ago a Kurdish poem or song could be considered as a threat to Turkey's territorial integrity, and even mentioning the Kurdish question could be considered as subversive. In the past decade, it has become common to mention Kurds and other ethnic groups, their languages are heard in the streets of all major cities, and there is a revived interest in regional and ethnic musical traditions. Legislation has been passed allowing in principle education and broadcasting in Kurdish and other minority languages (although the implementation of this legislation still appears to be sabotaged by bureaucrats at various levels).

In Western Europe, the past few years have seen an increasing resistance to cultural relativism and multiculturalism. Pressure on immigrants to adapt more completely to the culture of the country of residence is increasing, and there is a growing insistence on a hierarchy of cultures, in which only those elements of immigrants' cultures are considered as acceptable that are compatible with the dominant culture. Populist politicians attempt to capitalize on popular resentment of immigrants and speak of the 'backwardness' of Islam and immigrant cultures in general. September 11 has brought out xenophobic sentiments that previously remained hidden because they conflicted with the tolerance and acceptance of difference that was overtly part of most West Europeans' self-view. Other cultures are still accepted, but a show of loyalty to the 'dominant' culture is demanded, as shown by various policy measures of highly symbolic character, such as the ban on the headscarf in France, obligatory civics and language courses in the Netherlands, and demands of loyalty to the Constitution throughout Europe.

In Turkey, the acceptance of other cultures and sub-cultures besides the

official one, has by no means been an easy process but there is reason for optimism. The official denial and suppression of Kurdish, Laz and other ethnic cultures and the suppression of *medrese* learning and such religious currents as Alevism and the Sufi orders have given way to tolerance and, in intellectual circles, a renewed appreciation. The *existence* of these different cultures is no longer a matter of controversy, although their *expression* at times is. Besides the standardized *Türk halk müziği*, it is now possible to find authentic recordings of Kurdish, Zaza, Laz, Pomak, Türkmen, Greek, Armenian, Aramaic and Judeo-Spanish songs and music, and of the ritual music of the Alevi and the Bektashi and Mevlevi Sufi orders. Serious studies of the history and cultures of these various religious and ethnic communities have appeared in Turkey in the past decade, many of them challenging 'official' history. Public debate of these issues is, however, still often surrounded with controversy and occasionally silenced by the ban of publications.

Recognition, as said before, is central to the peaceful meeting and living together of cultures: recognition of the Other's existence, of communities' right to maintain and cultivate their culture, recognition of each individual's right to define his or her own identity. The hardest part of recognition concerns the Other's history, especially where this conflicts with official histories, and when it touches on traumatic memories that have long been suppressed. The experience of the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa has shown how liberating a process of truth seeking, without meting out punishment or even attributing guilt, can be for all parties concerned. Suffering, when recognized, has not been in vain and becomes part of the accumulated human experience from which all may — hopefully — learn. Once recognized, it will no longer stand between the communities concerned as an impenetrable barrier and source of enmity. Turkey will stand much to gain from a free and open discussion of what happened to the Ottoman Armenians, who were once considered as the Empire's most loyal subjects (the *millet-i sadıka*) but who were systematically uprooted and a high proportion of whom fell victim to deliberate massacres. The same is true of other, though lesser, taboo subjects such as the Dersim campaign, the 'dirty war' in the Kurdish conflict, and the persecution of anti-secularist Muslims in the 1920s and 1930s.

8. The various ethnic and religious communities of Anatolia have always been in communication and have shared and exchanged elements of their culture. Folktales and proverbs travelled across linguistic boundaries; musical instruments, modes and melodies were easily borrowed, and so did food. Even religious rituals and beliefs were passed on between different communities. Both Ottoman high culture and village folk culture show traces of the many communities that made up the population of the

empire. In spite of all borrowings, each community maintained its own distinctiveness as expressed in its oral tradition, its music, its cuisine.

There once was an intellectual current that seems to be more appropriate to our time than a nationalism based on the fiction of a homogeneous nation. Anadoluculuk — perhaps I am idealizing it, but please allow me — Anadoluculuk focussed on an awareness of Anatolia's long and varied history and was rooted in recognition of and pride in the rich traditions of all Anatolian cultures. Each of the civilizations of the past is a source of pride, and so should be all the different cultures that still exist there. The Anatolian cultures are not just a potential tourist attraction, they constitute bridges to Europe, where most of the ethnic and religious communities now have their diasporas. Depending on the attitude adopted by Turkey's politicians, these diasporas can be a threat or they can be an asset.

The meeting of cultures, Anatolian and European, is not taking place at the borders of countries but within them, both in Western Europe and in Turkey. While political interests may at times stand in the way of understanding and accommodation, it is in the arts — music, literature, film — that mutual respect, appreciation, and friendship are more easily achieved. Films have played an important role in fostering understanding between different cultures — the international success of Iranian post-revolutionary films constitutes a clear example. I feel honoured by the invitation to this film festival devoted to a meeting of cultures, and I wish it to be successful in contributing to understanding and friendship between European and Anatolian cultures.