

Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization by Ziya Gökalp Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization by Ziya Gökalp Review by: Barbara Celarent *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 117, No. 5 (March 2012), pp. 1556-1563 Published by: The University of Chicago Press Stable URL: <u>http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/665614</u> Accessed: 01/06/2012 13:11

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ganizing Frauds: Unpacking Research on Networks and Organization," *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 8 [2008]: 389–420), others, such as Nigerian and other fraud networks, e-criminals or small Madoff-type Ponzi schemers, are predatory, span broad geographies, and may not need or be susceptible to the sort of extended community control that Varese's Mafias require. So his analysis, fascinating as it is, leaves plenty of room for accounts of criminal networking of a Mafialess kind (see Carlo Morselli, *Inside Criminal Networks* [Springer, 2009]). However, it was not his aim to cover that broader spectrum of what I would term "organized-enough crime." The main focus of *Mafias on the Move* is sociological, but it offers public-policy-oriented readers insights into the importance of ill-designed property rights legislation and poor legal implementation and some familiar warnings about the risks of repressive moral prohibitionism. This excellent book well merits the high praise from John le Carré, Timothy Frye, and Susan Rose-Ackermann that appears on its cover.

Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization. By Ziya Gökalp. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959.

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Universal knowledge claims to apply in any place or time. Yet it is the universal property of humans to be particular: to inhabit a place, a moment, a society, a culture. While this particularity does not forbid the project of universal knowledge, it complicates that project almost beyond possibility. How can there be a universal knowledge of the particular? And given that all knowledge lives in particular humans and their institutions, how could such a universal knowledge actually be known and communicated?

One family of solutions for this conundrum descends from the great rationalists. It universalizes by formalizing, by trading substantive content for structural form. From it come mathematics and contractarianism, econometrics and public opinion polling: all the apparatuses of abstract explanation. Within it, the syntax of reality is stripped of content and inspected in the abstract.

Another family of answers descends from the great cosmopolitans. It universalizes by collecting diverse content and then juxtaposing it, deriving new meaning from combination and translation. It does not presume to reduce all things to one but offers to each particular knowledge some regular modes of connection to others. From this approach come anthropology and feminism, ethnography and oral history. Not syntax but semantics is its game. Its way is translation.

Our discipline of rereading past works from diverse cultures follows this second way, and translation is indeed doubly central in the book before us. It is central first because we are reading not an author's original work, but a short collection of translations into one language of his very considerable writings in another. It is central second because its author's project was to translate the concepts of yet a third culture into his own. Both of these centralities call for comment.

As for the first matter, that of reading translated excerpts: That it lies within the power of your reviewer to reinvent herself so as to read and grasp any work in its original language is beside the point. The universal human problem of translation would thereby disappear in the seeming magic of reinvention. So your reviewer constrains herself to the more usual human condition of knowing two living languages, learning a third to undertake further reviews, and wondering why she bothered with the two dead languages that haunt the back rooms of her mind. As for the second matter, of the translation and borrowing of concepts: The book before us is a translation into English of some of the hundreds of short essays written in Turkish by the founder of Turkish sociology, Ziya Gökalp. Gökalp was in turn overwhelmingly influenced by French thought in general and by Émile Durkheim in particular. So we see here the English traces of a Turk's reading of French sources.

Mehmet Ziya was born around 1875 in Diyarbakir in eastern Anatolia. The name Ziya Gökalp—a combination of blue (gök) and hero (alp)—is one of his many pseudonyms and the one by which he came to be known. Gökalp's origins and ethnicity are contested, not least of all by himself. In a celebrated piece of autobiography (included in the volume under review), he claims to be Turkish because he spoke Turkish and thought of himself as a Turk, two of the criteria that he himself thought central to national identity. But another long line of scholarship has called him Kurdish, although, of course, not necessarily making clear what is (or could be) the criterion by which one could distinguish Kurds and Turks in eastern Anatolia in the late 19th century.

Locally educated by his father (who died early) and his uncle, Gökalp learned Arabic, Persian, and French in addition to his native Turkish. After an adolescent depression led him to a suicide attempt at 17, his concerned brother brought him to Istanbul, where he joined the college of veterinary medicine (because it was inexpensive) and pursued radical politics, then in a ferment in the last years of the repressive Sultan 'Abd al Hamid. Imprisoned for a year around 1900, he imbibed more radicalism in captivity, but he eventually returned to Diyarbakir and the round of family life, marriage having brought him financial independence. He was active against a local Kurdish military group, whose mix of quasi-governmental status and banditti behavior was characteristic of these chaotic times.

When the Young Turks took power in 1908, Gökalp left Diyarbakir for Salonika, where he was to serve as the representative to their core organization, the Committee on Union and Progress. Salonika was then the westernmost metropolis of the Ottoman world—both literally and

figuratively—and there Gökalp began the first of many periodicals he would publish. He also read extensively in French sociology and philosophy: Alfred Fouillée, Gabriel Tarde, and Gustave Le Bon, but above all, Durkheim. He began a normal school in social science and energetically preached his new Durkheimian gospel. When the European lands of the Ottoman empire were lost in the Balkan Wars, Gökalp joined the rest of the committee in its retreat to Istanbul. Here he continued teaching, started more reviews, and laid the intellectual foundations of Turkish national identity.

The First World War destroyed the Young Turk government. But by then its last-ditch decision to control what it thought to be fifth column activity on the eastern frontier had evolved—whether on purpose or by accident has never been agreed—into the death of hundreds of thousands of Armenians. Although most Young Turks fled Turkey before the Allies took over, Gökalp remained and was found guilty of war crimes by a military tribunal. After three years' exile to Malta, he returned to Diyarbakir. Founding yet another set of periodicals, he eventually moved to Ankara and achieved some minor positions in the Kemalist government. But his health failed, and he died in 1924.

Gökalp is instructively compared with Ali Shari'ati, our preceding author. Both were Muslims. Both had studied Western culture in general and French culture in particular. Both aimed to create an effective identity for those whom they envisioned to be their countrymen. Yet there were crucial differences, too. Gökalp was an almost secular Sunni, Shari'ati a much more religious Shi'i. Gökalp's France was Durkheim and Bergson. Shari'ati's France was Sartre and Fanon. Gökalp's homeland was the Turkey he invented out of the wreckage of Ottomanism; his ideological invention would underpin Atatürk's long dictatorship. Shari'ati's homeland was the Iran that resulted from just such a dictatorship, founded by Atatürk's Iranian contemporary and equivalent, Reza Shah Pahlavi; Shari'ati's ideological invention would help undermine and overthrow that dictatorship. Finally, while both Gökalp and Shari'ati asserted a single ultimate solidarity, for Gökalp it was the Turkish nation and for Shari'ati the nonnational *umma*. Gökalp was the ideologist of the most ruthlessly secularizing government in Muslim history. Shari'ati was the harbinger of the return of the Iranian *ulama*.

But these differences obscure the similarities between the two writers. Both set themselves the project of constructing and legitimating a difference. In each case, that difference was a substantive one rather than a mere formality. This is obvious in the case of Shari'ati, whose turn toward religion seemed obviously to contravene the (supposed) secularizing trend of the 20th century. But Gökalp was no less a prophet of substantive difference. For the "old view" that he rejected was the cosmopolitanism of the Young Ottomans, the mid-19th-century attempt to make an ideal of the loose tolerance—or was it simply the lack of active repression?—of the multiethnic and multireligious Ottoman empire. Gökalp's attitude toward the non-Muslim minorities of the empire is deeply mixed; he admires their concentration in the mercantile and educated occupations but cannot decide whether to attribute it to the Turkish disinclination for such work, to a cultural connection with the West, or to the independent achievements of the minorities involved. And he seems unwilling to admire their success in the midst of an alien society. Moreover, he ultimately rejects such cosmopolitanism because in his view it has no content. It is mere toleration.

Like Shari'ati, then, Gökalp is not a true liberal. Although he accepts Durkheim's notion that the collective conscience is only a small part of the individual in modern society, he worries lest that part be too small and too indeterminate. His oeuvre takes its main task to be the filling of the collective conscience with content: Turkish folk tales, Turkish heroes, Turkish homelands, Turkish culture.

Above all, he favors the Turkish language, which he views as the heart of Turkish identity. Gökalp was one of the originators of the project to purify Turkish of its Arab and Persian borrowings, a project whose equivalent French incarnation in the *Académie française* he must have known well. Indeed, Gökalp at times sounds like a politician who has read Benjamin Lee Whorf, telling us that if Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) learn Turkish, they will become Turks, and so on. (For him, to be sure, this argument rests on the broader Tardean notion that language brings ideas and culture in its train.) But Gökalp forgets that the natural state of much of humankind was multilingual until the emergence and triumph of the nation-state, which was, to some extent, simply the idea that a state ought to be unilingual. Before Gökalp many—or perhaps even most—Ottomans had been multilingual and quite happy in that capacity.

Where did Gökalp's passionate nationalism come from? An obvious interpretation would attribute it to growing up Turkish on the eastern marchlands of a decaying empire, surrounded by warring Kurds, and overawed by the Arabic and Persian cultures to the south and the east. But perhaps an individual explanation is unnecessary. Nationalism was in the very air of the late 19th century: Durkheim's version was only one of many. By the end of the First World War, nationalism may quite literally have become the only way for a government to be visible to an international community obsessed with and organized around nationhood. But there was a residual explanation, too. The loss of Rumelia and the death of much of the Armenian population left the remains of the Ottoman empire largely Turkish speaking in any case. It is thus little surprising that Turkishness was reconstructed to have a positive meaning.

At the same time, the word "reconstructed" is incorrect. It is more proper to say that Turkishness was simply created from whole cloth: the word "Turk" meant nothing more than "peasant" or "countryman" at the turn of the 20th century. There was, of course, an alternative basis for state building within the remains of the Ottoman empire—Islam. But Gökalp's refusal to turn to Islam reflected the fact that, unlike Iran, where Twelver

Shi^cism was a more or less unique local tradition, Turkey was part of a much larger Sunni *umma* that included many former imperial territories, none of which desired any form of connection with a renewed (Ottoman? Turkish?) state centered in Anatolia.

This problem of finding and maintaining an identity within a larger whole was central to Gökalp. That the major solidarities are concentric is one of his fixed ideas. Family, clan, community, nation, and civilization are so many Chinese boxes, one within the other. Religion, for Gökalp, comes under the last of these headings. It is a "civilizational unit": large and amorphous and hence not as firm a basis for society as is the linguistic and cultural unit—what Gökalp defines as the nation. As in Durkheim, trade corporations appear from time to time as solidarities, but they are less important for Gökalp than they are for his French master. Gökalp focuses rather on the processes of convergence by which the "smaller" solidarities (family, clan, community) agglomerate into larger ones and on the processes of divergence by which cultures and language units separate themselves from each other within the larger "civilizational units." The nation is thus for Gökalp the proper box; big enough to embrace the lesser solidarities, definite enough to overcome the weak nature of "civilization." Indeed, it cannot have escaped Gökalp, in his first years in Salonika, that European "civilization" was itself drifting toward Armageddon precisely because of such divergences. To take one's place in that world necessitated drawing sharp lines.

But there are inconsistencies in Gökalp's arguments. Islam did turn out to be central to Turkism, although as some have pointed out, Gökalp's is a very deistic Islam indeed—"without popes, synods, or religious councils" as he puts it. (And without the sheriat, which Gökalp regards as perpetually changing with the evolution of society.) His occasional invocation of the great Turkish homeland of Turan (the area east of the ancient Oxus River) seems mere ancestral window dressing. Perhaps more important, Gökalp pays no attention to the many crosscutting solidarities that make of modern social life not a series of Chinese boxes but a web of conflicting interconnections. Occupation plays little role in Gökalp other than in the discussion of non-Muslim predominance in the commercial sector. Nor does class make any appearance, although Ottoman society was as class ridden as any. And of the important future solidarities gender, for example—there is no hint, although as a resolute secularist Gökalp voiced opinions on women's freedom that made him popular with later generations seeking politically correct ancestors. But true pluralismor any other alternative approach to the classical problems of factious liberalism—is invisible in Gökalp's writing.

As with Durkheim, there is some question whether Gökalp's works conduce to fascism, a question made more pressing in his case by the Armenian disaster and the Atatürk dictatorship. Certainly there is a line of references within Gökalp to texts and writers often identified with fascism. He speaks of Nietzsche and underscores the importance of heroes and great events. But alongside such remarks he invokes Fouillée's *idées-forces*, Henri Bergson's *élan vital*, and William James's pragmatist psychology. These are quite different things, and only a teleological anachronism born of later history could make of them a simple genealogy inevitably leading to "the triumph of the will." But we are nonetheless reminded how short a step it is from the principled argument that liberalism is empty and vacuous to policies like ethnic cleansing, forced migration, and cultural reeducation. Here too Gökalp reminds one of Shari'ati, but with a nationalist rather than a religious substance.

In this regard it is striking that Gökalp emphasizes the sociologist's role as educator and moralist, an argument he borrows directly from Durkheim. Thus Gökalp tells us

the sociologist may influence the evolution of society only by knowing its laws and obeying them. His function is not to impose and institute, but to discover elements of the national conscience in the unconscious level and to being them up to conscious level. (P. 165)

Yet a few pages later he tells us

Social disciplines are always national, because their subject-matter is the institutions of a nation. They are, however, objective disciplines at the same time because they are interested in observing and discovering the institutions existing in a nation. They will show not "what it should be" but "how it is." They are, however, normative disciplines also, because once the rules of national institutions are discovered and become known, they assume an obligatory character for the members of the nation. We do not learn the grammatical rules of our language with only a theoretical interest, but we make the rules we have learned norms in our speech and writing. (P. 169)

The sociologist must thus do research on Turkishness, although of course in saying that, Gökalp takes for granted the idea that there is a Turkey. But while the sociologist thinks he is rationally discovering it by the laws of science, he is actually to a considerable extent simply making it up. One wonders if Gökalp really thought that the national consciousness could be discovered by a great public opinion poll, whose results would then become obligatory. But his comparison with language is much more subtle: it does arise from actual speech, and must be discovered by research on speech, but it must nonetheless be taught as a system of known and fixed rules.

The Gökalpian sociologist is thus not only the discoverer but also the creator of the nation. The normal next step would be to ask "in whose interest?" But that question makes no sense in Gökalp's view, for he does not discern groups within Turkish society. Gökalp's master Durkheim, however, did try to address this question, in some tortured pages of his Civic Morals lectures, and it is no accident that it was Gökalp's heirs at the Faculty of Law of the University of Istanbul who saw to the first publication of these Durkheimian lectures, which were eventually translated into English and published in 1957 as *Professional Ethics and Civic*

Morals (Routledge Kegan Paul). In these lectures Durkheim for once discusses not only the individual and society, but also the various "secondary groups" in which individuals are participants. He claims that the state is the referee that keeps any such secondary groups from becoming too independent ("a small society with the greater"; *PECM*, p. 61) for they would thereby return us to the state of anti-individualistic mechanical solidarity. Thus the state has the "duty of representing the overall collectivity, its rights and its interests, vis à vis these individual collectivities" (*PECM*, p. 62). But then Durkheim, frightened by the power he has created, argues that the secondary groups equally serve as a check on the state, and so individualism is able to grow. Interestingly, he assumes for the most part that the secondary groups don't overlap, thus missing the arguments that would later sustain pluralism.

But the conscientious Durkheim then moves his argument up another level, to reflect on individual nations as the "secondary groups" to a world society. Here he simply assumes the problem away:

There is a means of reconciling the two ideas [of nationalism and international society]. That is for the national to merge with the human ideal, for the individual states to become, each in their own way, the agencies by which this general idea is carried into effect. If each state had as its chief aim, not to expand, or to lengthen its borders, but to set its own house in order and to make the widest appeal to its members for a moral life on an ever higher level, then all discrepancy between national and human morals would be excluded. (*PECM*, p. 74)

Like his student Gökalp, Durkheim seems to assume that interstate rivalry will abate if each state becomes a humanely best version of itself: optimistic words indeed in the decade of the great naval arms race.

We are confronted here again with the question of universalism with which we began. One can resolve the problem of universal political society by creating an abstraction called universal citizenship and endowing that abstraction with the Gökalpian/Durkheimian quality of collective conscience. But Gökalp saw clearly the weakness—as Durkheim would have said, the "progressive indeterminacy"—of such a collective conscience. That was his argument against cosmopolitanism. But if one builds and strengthens the lesser solidarity of nationhood, whether Turkish or otherwise, one must expect inevitable conflict. Durkheim simply assumes this away by hoping each nation will devote itself indepedendently to pursuing its own version of the project of humanity in a way that doesn't harm others. However fine a vision that might be, the history of Europe after 1910 shows that it wasn't a practicable reality in Durkheim's day.

As for Gökalp, perhaps simply envisioning the nation was enough to attempt. The task of creating Turkey from the ruins of the Ottoman empire was surely a more desperate one than Durkheim's task of undertaking another Gallican joust with the Vatican *ulama* and avenging the slights of 1870. But we are nonetheless left with the horror of the Armenian events. It would be presumptuous to claim that Gökalp foresaw and

approved the sometimes baleful consequences of his creation of Turkish nationalism. But he tells us only how to be proud and fulfilled in our own identities, not how to avoid doing so at the expense of others. Translation requires both.