Social Transformation in Turkey: An Example of a Relation Between Social Interaction and Social Space

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Introduction

WHEN ONE considers the present-day world-wide phenomenon of urban growth, it is difficult to accept explanations of this fact that are limited to historicisms which attempt to link together social and cultural change with distinctive and ordered stages of social and economic development. The relatively high rate of urban population increase that is occurring across the communities of the world appears to have placed in some doubt the theories of the past. The assumption had been generally accepted that underlying the capacity for rapid urban growth are factors of advanced technology and a developed industrialization [Bonne 1948:216]. Even in ancient times, however, city expansion patterns often exhibited revolutionary growth characteristics rather than rendered obedience to a slow and evolutionary principle of population accretion [Martindale 1964:80]. Furthermore, these communities did not rest upon an economic base of technology and industrialization.

Over the historical past, the natures of cities have seemed to show some characteristics in common. Perhaps the most apparent feature of the urban

"Just as physical bodies have length, width, and depth, so the social consciousness also has ... dimensions ...".

Ziya Gökalp

1 As quoted by Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 401. Gökalp, greatly influenced by the work of Durkheim, assisted in providing the philosophical foundation for the Ataturk Revolution and the building of the new Turkish State. For a detailed account of Gökalp's influence see Uriel Heyd, Foundations of Turkish Nationalism, London: Luzac and Co., 1950.
community is the peaking of populations in some geographical locality [Meier 1962:43]. Another characteristic which is often alluded to is that there is a heterogenous quality to the population, with this quality usually supplied by various forms of migration. A third manifestation of urban life is that segmentations usually occur within the physical and social structures of the community. Such segmentations include special quarters for residence and work, and in the sociological sense, role specialization, class lines, and qualitative variations among groups sometimes called differences in styles of life.

Generalizations have also been made about the urban community's ability to bring about changes, both material and non-material, in the lives of its inhabitants and of those in more distant places who feel the city's influences through processes of mass communication. We need not pursue here, in detail, the task of describing the distinguishing qualities of city life vis-a-vis the country. Many descriptions exist and most are in agreement that communities characterized by large population concentrations contain within them distinctive and compelling influences which are exercised upon those who interact within their boundaries. These generalizations, however, have also been called into question. Wirth [1957:93], who has been a proponent of the view that the city has a quality about it which transcends the distinction of population size, cautiously states the problem that accompanies an attempt to differentiate rural and urban life. He writes that:

To set up ideal-typical polar concepts ... has not proved that city and country are fundamentally and necessarily different. It does not justify mistaking the hypothetical characteristics attributed to the urban and rural modes of life for established facts, as has so often been done. Rather, it suggests certain hypotheses to be tested in the light of empirical evidence which we must assiduously gather. Unfortunately, this evidence has not been accumulated in such a fashion as to test critically any major hypothesis that has been proposed.

Other students, too, have taken exception to a concept of urban life which everywhere and in the same manner can be shown to differ from that of the countryside. In particular, descriptions of social organization in the Middle East have raised strong doubts as to the profundity of the differences that on the surface appear to separate the urbanite and the villager [Sjoberg 1955: 438–445].

Somewhat different from Max Weber’s [1958:81] description of the classical city, Von Grunebaum [1964:142] states that the traditional Islamic town was composed of persons related by functional rather than civic ties. A given town might or might not have enjoyed sovereignty or freedom and was open to all who would wish to join it. The traditional Muslim town was a settlement within which one could completely fulfill his religious duties and his social ideals; the essential requirements being that the settlement contain a jami (mosque), a per-

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1 While agreement generally exists concerning the influences that cities have exerted over their inhabitants, a note of caution is in order. Cities are an expression of a prevailing social order which encompasses them as well as those settlements that lie in the hinterlands. Therefore, all communities of large population concentrations do not necessarily exert a common quality or influence upon their subjects.