

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology
Department 'Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia'

Nur Yalman

**On Cultural Revolutions:
observations on myth and history in Turkey**

Goody Lecture 2017



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

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Jack Goody (1919–2015)

Sir John Rankine Goody was brought up near London and initially studied English at Cambridge. Formative experiences during the Second World War led him to switch to social anthropology. He undertook fieldwork in Northern Ghana during the last decade of British colonial rule and taught anthropology at Cambridge University alongside Meyer Fortes and Edmund Leach. After succeeding Fortes as William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology in 1973, he began to explore long-term historical contrasts between sub-Saharan African societies and those of Europe and Asia. Following V. Gordon Childe, Goody emphasized commonalities across the Eurasian landmass since the urban revolution of the Bronze Age. In numerous publications he highlighted developments in East Asia and criticised the eurocentric bias of Western historians and social theorists. Core themes include productive systems, the transmission of property and class inequality in global history; kinship, marriage and the “domestic domain”; technologies of communication, especially writing, the transmission of myth, and of knowledge generally; and consumption, including cuisine and flowers. These topics are not approached in isolation but in their interconnections. Ethnographic insights are essential, but they form just one component of Goody’s comparative vision. His best known works include *Death, Property and the Ancestors* (1962); *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (1971); *Production and Reproduction* (1976); *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977); *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (1983); *The Oriental, The Ancient and the Primitive* (1990); *The East in the West* (1996); *The Theft of History* (2006); *Renaissances: the one or the many?* (2010); *The Eurasian Miracle* (2010); *Metals, Culture and Capitalism: an essay on the origins of the modern world* (2012).

Goody’s agenda is one which the Department ‘Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia’ at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology seeks to continue. In an annual lecture series, a distinguished scholar addresses pertinent themes for anthropology and related fields:

Goody Lecture 2011: Keith Hart, “Jack Goody’s Vision of World History and African Development Today”.

Goody Lecture 2012: Peter Burke, “A Case of Cultural Hybridity: the European Renaissance”.

Goody Lecture 2013: Martha Mundy, “The Solace of the Past in the Unspeakable Present: the historical anthropology of the ‘Near East’”.

Goody Lecture 2014: Francesca Bray, “Rice as Self: food, history and nation-building in Japan and Malaysia”.

Goody Lecture 2015: David Wengrow, “Cities before the State in Early Eurasia”.

Goody Lecture 2016: Martine Segalen, “On *Papies* and *Mammies*: the invention of a new relative in contemporary European kinship”.

The seventh Goody Lecture was given by Nur Yalman on 11th May 2017.

Nur Yalman

On Cultural Revolutions: observations on myth and history in Turkey

It is a special pleasure for me to be speaking at the Max Planck Institute here in Halle. My first visit to Germany was in 1950 on my way to Cambridge. I had always spoken German as a child in Istanbul. I was stunned by the destruction of the war that I witnessed at the time. Since then I have had only rare occasions to return. The experience of a united and free Germany, and the rekindled vitality of German humanism as well as science, despite many challenges, are matters of profound personal satisfaction.

Jack Goody and I go back a long time. I arrived in Cambridge as an undergraduate fresh from Istanbul in September 1950. Istanbul had been lovely in the late summer. I had just graduated from a superb school, Robert College, and was full of curiosity to study anthropology, in order to understand mankind. Little did I know what a heady adventure this would turn out to be. Jack had just returned from fieldwork in Ghana. He was working on his PhD with Meyer Fortes, newly appointed as William Wyse Professor of Anthropology. We also had Kathleen Gough, who had returned from South India, full of the most exotic information on marriage systems among the Nayar and the Nambudiri Brahman castes. Jack Goody and Kathleen Gough were among my early supervisors at Cambridge.¹ I eventually went on to follow their lead and do two years of very intensive field work in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Since those early experiences I have maintained a deep interest in the enticing civilization of greater India.

¹ Others I recall well from my years in Cambridge include Derrick Stenning (Fulani), Raymond Smith (Caribbean), Derek Freeman (Borneo), all back from field work, and younger research students, Jean La Fontaine, Fredrik Barth, Anthony Forge, Ralph Bulmer, Malcolm Ruel, John Blacking, Martin Southwold, Maurice Bloch, Marilyn Strathern and Andrew Strathern, all of whom went on to distinguished careers.

Two things impressed me about Jack Goody. He was greatly interested in myth, and also in African history. He had been working on the LoDagaa myths in Northern Ghana. He was also very open to other cultures, with a genuine sense of empathy – the essential trait of an anthropologist. I was able to talk to him extensively about my home country, Turkey. Turkey had undergone an extraordinary cultural revolution in the years when I was growing up. Its full significance as a historical phenomenon had not dawned on me at the time. I first discussed matters of culture change with Jack at a time when Western post-colonial attitudes towards other cultures, including India, China, Africa, and their uneven interaction throughout history, were already beginning to engage him.²

Cambridge was a stable and charmed oasis with traditions reaching back into the Middle Ages. Istanbul, where I had come from, was seething with momentous ideas – as it still is. The ancient Ottoman Empire had been destroyed in the great bonfire of empires in 1918. A new dynamic republic was established, and a single party regime gave way to open democratic elections in 1950. A new party, the Democratic Party, was in power. The future was full of hope. Turkey had taken her place among the progressive countries of Western Europe. Nothing could stop ambitious young Turks now that democracy and freedom were in place. My heady Cambridge adventure had begun. I would stay at Cambridge for the next ten years in various capacities.

Appiah and the Case of Turkey

The changing relations between East and West that so engaged Goody in his later years were recently the subject of a brilliant series of lectures by Kwame Anthony Appiah on the BBC. It is surely fitting that an intellectual from the Royal House of Ashanti in Ghana, so close to the regions where Jack Goody worked, now a distinguished professor at New York University, should con-

² Goody, Jack. 1996. *The East in the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Goody, Jack. 2000. *The power of the written tradition*. London: The Smithsonian Institution Press; Goody, Jack. 2003. *Islam in Europe*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Goody, Jack. 2006. *The theft of history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Goody, Jack. 2010. *Renaissances: the one or the many*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

tribute searching ideas to the subject of relations between cultures.³ Appiah has highly original, very anthropological, views on the perennial subjects of mistaken identities: creed, country, colour, and culture. *The Guardian* announced his lecture with some flourish under the headline: “There is no such thing as Western Civilization”. You may think that this is rather simple and unsurprising coming from an African likely to have very ambivalent feelings towards the long centuries of European oppression in Africa. But you would be mistaken. Appiah approaches the subject of Western Civilization with engaging subtlety. He traces the origin of the concept of the West, that hardly made any sense until recent times. One could not speak of the high ideals of human rights, democracy, liberty, and the rule of law in a Western Civilization in which European powers were slaughtering each other with incalculable savagery, during the many wars on the continent. So, when does it make sense to speak of Western Civilization at all? It could be argued that it only makes sense in very recent times, with the establishment of the European Union and the great hopes raised for human rights, for personal freedom of expression and association, and for the European Court of Justice.

Appiah’s conclusion is that these lofty ideas are hopes shared by many persons from utterly different backgrounds. They do not simply belong to the West. For Appiah, these traditions of the West are only ours if we care about them: “A culture of liberty, tolerance and rational inquiry: that would be a good idea. But these values represent choices to make, not tracks laid down by a western destiny.” My own experience, both European and Asian, bears out Appiah. The desire for open political systems is a very potent current that is being challenged and hampered by well entrenched conservative ideologies. The political struggle for rights is familiar all around the world.

These political yearnings resonate very powerfully with the recent experience of explosive cultural discord in Turkey. There is a huge desire for personal democratic liberties, just as Appiah describes them. These are frustrated by an increasingly intolerant authoritarian regime with very ambivalent attitudes towards the West. This great frustration has now found its most precise public expression in the recent referendum for a new constitution in Turkey. Participa-

³ Appiah, Kwame Anthony Nkrumah. There is no such thing as Western Civilization. *Guardian Weekly*. November 18, 2016. On the BBC: Reith Lectures, November 8, 2016.

tion was 86% and the President only just achieved a majority (disputed by some opponents). This referendum was an expression of deep polarization around the question of cultural identity: is Turkey the secular, democratic, liberal, western oriented powerful Republic that the founders, Atatürk and İnönü, had in mind? Or was that only a brief – 80 year – interlude, to be followed by a bittersweet nostalgic return to the Imperial traditions of the 700 Ottoman years? Should Turkey, a member of the Council of Europe and of NATO, continue its quest for membership of the European Union, or are there beguiling alternative destinies, such as Turan, the family of Turkic speaking peoples all the way to China, or the *Lebensraum* of the Ottoman Empire, including Syria and Iraq, and perhaps others? The Balkans? North Africa?⁴

Myth, Culture and Revolution

From the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 until recently, the country operated with a self-conscious Western vocation. The roots of this vocation had been laid down in the 19th century with the great Tanzimat Reforms, undertaken by brilliant Ottoman statesmen immediately after the French revolution. The changes in the direction of Western institutions were constant, extensive and deliberate.⁵

At this point we encounter the problems of myth and history. History provides us with a series of incidents and their dates. These only become intelligible when they are “totalized” into convincing narratives, that is, different interpretations of events which have all the makings of myth.⁶ Is there a tide of historical inevitability that leads countries to progress in the direction of democratic open societies, as Francis Fukuyama seemed to argue?⁷ Or are we

⁴ Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt were all part of the Ottoman Empire until the 19th century.

⁵ Lewis, Bernard. 1968. *The emergence of modern Turkey*. London: Oxford University Press; Berkes, Niyazi. 1998. *The development of secularism in Turkey*. New York: Routledge; Hanioglu, Sukru. 2008. *A brief history of the late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Mardin, Serif. 1962. *The genesis of Young Ottoman thought: a study in the modernization of Turkish political ideas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Meeker, Michael E. 2002 *A nation of empire: the Ottoman legacy of Turkish modernity*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

⁶ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1962. *La pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon.

⁷ Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The end of history and the last man*. New York: Free Press.

in the realm of various myths, flights of imagination in the form of beguiling narratives that draw both individuals and entire societies towards very different destinies? Much turns around the persuasive effectiveness of small cadres and leaders.

For the traditionalists on the Ottoman side there exists the myth of a Platonic just Empire in which every social element has its appropriate place under the watch of a benevolent ruler. This Platonic myth has been discussed among Islamic thinkers ever since the earliest translations of texts from ancient Greek (or Syriac?) into Arabic became available in the Abbasid period. There was a search for rational legitimacy early in Islamic intellectual history. One important source was Farabi (d. 950), who commented on the virtuous city (*Medine-ul fazila*). In the 1200s – the Seljuk period – a tomb was attributed to “Eflatun” (i.e. Plato) in Konya, the city of the legendary Sufi mystic Rumi. Later, the empire of the Ottomans was thought of as the contemporary representation of this ancient model of the “ideal” state. It was referred to as *Devlet-i Ali* (“the Sublime State” as it was referred to in western accounts).⁸

The alternative myth is that of a “modern” country that has shed these outdated “Sultanic” encumbrances, and embraced a vision that allows the nation to “progress” in the direction of a prosperous, egalitarian, free, democratic and just, Western society. This hope was inspired by Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and his law of the three stages of intellectual history: from fetishism to religion, on to rationality. Comte’s formula “*ordre et progrès*” became the doctrine for a clandestine political party. They succeeded in dethroning the Sultan in 1908, and thereby changed the course of history for many nations. They too had been hoping to rid themselves from the “fettters” of religious obscurantism just like their French predecessors.

The concept of “culture” as a coherent whole was the working assumption at the heart of anthropology from the very beginning. But in cultural revolution, culture becomes a field of battle for political domination. This is felicitously expressed by the German term *Kulturkampf*. In every *Kulturkampf*, myths are propagated by ambitious leaders seeking political power. Cultural revolutions,

⁸ Gibb, H.A.R. and Harold Bowen. 1957. *Islamic society and the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; but see also Finley, Moses. 1972. *Aspects of antiquity: discoveries and controversies*. London: Pelican Books, see Chapter 6 “Plato and practical politics”, for a discussion of Plato’s disastrous career in Sicily.

as we know from France, from Russia, China, and elsewhere, are therefore deadly serious matters.⁹ Countries that have never experienced such disruptions can hardly imagine the drama, the personal hardships, the suspicions created, the paranoia about being “progressive” or being “backward” that such conditions engender. Turkey had been living through a *Kulturkampf* of this kind since the early 19th century. It had much to do with the push and pull of joining the major European powers at the head table of diplomacy. It can be said without exaggeration that Westernization was considered a matter of survival for the Ottoman Empire by her “enlightened” elites, while recalcitrant conservatives were resolutely opposed to this “enlightenment” project.

Cultural revolutions are about the replacement of certain ideas about cultural forms and personal identity with others. I have described them previously as almost a kind of conversion.¹⁰ In the 19th century, the immense power and prestige of the West – seen primarily as comprising England, France and Germany – encouraged many countries, from Russia and Turkey to Iran and China, feeling that they were “backward” in comparison, to attempt vast changes as a kind of cultural housecleaning: in short, to become progressive.

Times have changed. Now in the year 2017 it is perfectly obvious that the ancient civilizations of the world can no longer be dismissed cavalierly in terms of “inferiority”. They will have to come to terms with each other, just as Jack Goody predicted. As anthropology has always maintained, understanding and respect for the “other” has now become an absolute necessity. However, even if that is the case, we may still wish to ask ourselves where and when do those ideas that Appiah considers “universal” become relevant. Under what conditions can we expect those great civilizations to turn towards “culture(s) of liberty, tolerance and rational inquiry” that appear superficially to be external to their own traditions?

⁹ Cf. Edward Luttwak, writing on the role of Napoleon in Europe, on tradition and rationality: Luttwak, Edward. 2014. A damned nice thing. *London Review of Books* 36(24): 15–16.

¹⁰ Yalman, Nur. 1973. Some observations on secularism in Islam: or the cultural revolution in Turkey. *Daedalus* 102(1): 139–168. Reprinted as: Yalman, Nur. 1972. Some observations on secularism in Islam: or the cultural revolution in Turkey. In: Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.). *Post-traditional societies*. New York: Norton; see also Yalman, Nur. 1991. On secularism and its critics: notes on Turkey, India and Iran. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.) 25(2): 233–266; also Yalman, Nur. 2007. Islam and secularism – Plato and Khomeini: questions concerning the open society and its enemies. In: T.N. Srinivasan (ed.). *The future of secularism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 257–279.

Catching up with the West

The sense of inferiority towards Europe was contagious in the rest of the world, at least until the World Wars of the 20th century. Those few countries which were not thoroughly colonized, such as Japan and Turkey, made every effort to emulate the powerful countries of the West. One only has to observe the costumes of the high officials of the two states: the dominance of Western fashion is striking. For all their immense differences, the modernization of Japan and Turkey suggests intriguing comparisons. Japan was able in the long run to shake off the sense of inferiority by her extraordinary transformation into a military-industrial-cultural powerhouse – and this in spite of her very dark experiences and major wars in the 20th century. In the 1930s there were even attempts to emulate Atatürk’s revolution in Turkey and Westernize in similar radical terms. Ideas were floated to change written Japanese into the Latin script, but these were short lived.

In Turkey the enterprise of “catching up with the West” (*Batıllaşma*) was taken up with enormous enthusiasm. Matters came to a head with the defeat of the Empire in 1918. The modernist party that held the reins of power, and aligned the empire with Germany in the First World War was called *İttihat ve Terakki* (Union and Progress). This derived from the formula of Auguste Comte mentioned above, which had deeply influenced the radical *jeunes turcs* in Paris escaping from the oppression of the Sultan in Constantinople. Comte’s theories of positivism were appealing. In a letter addressed to the Ottoman Grand Vizier he wrote that, since Ottoman society and Islam were essentially more “rational” than France, they would progress in the direction of positivism faster than other European countries. Comte’s universal formula of “*Ordre et progrès*” still flutters on the Brazilian flag as “*Ordem e Progresso*”.

“*Ordre et progrès*”: a rational and modernist future. This greatly appealed to the radical young Ottomans as a way forward for the empire. Their party, initially clandestine, but in power from 1908, entered the war in 1914 led by a colourful and very ambitious young officer, Enver Pasha, who had become the son-in-law of the Sultan. Trains carrying military supplies from Germany to the

eastern front were marked not “Osmanisches Reich” but “Enverland”. German officers were deeply engaged with the Ottoman military in the battles of the First World War. German soldiers fought and perished during the great Gallipoli campaign, a battle that figures prominently in the nationalist mythology created around Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk).¹¹

This Western orientation survived the bitter experiences of the final disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the victorious allies, mainly the French and the British. Right wing Islamist ultra nationalist groups have never quite forgotten this aspect of the formation of the new Republic. The Enver Pasha myth lives on among right wing nationalists to this day. His tomb in Central Asia, where he died fighting against Red Russian forces, was ceremoniously transferred back to Turkey quite recently.

It is very striking that the leaders of the new Republic, Atatürk and İnönü, patriots though they were, never turned their backs on their “Western” orientation during the years in which they held power (1923–1950). They were firm about the need to close the book on the long experience of the Ottomans. Their moves in the direction of western values were simply stunning: the legal systems of Turkey were brought into line with Europe; German commercial codes, the French civil code and the Italian penal codes all added up to a decisive break with Islamic tradition. But the most significant of the changes undertaken was that of the script. The ancient Arabic script (referred to as *eski Türkçe* – Old Turkish) had been in use ever since the establishment of the Seljuk Empire in Iran and Anatolia around the year 1000 CE. For the educated elite of the late Ottoman Empire, the change was an extraordinary experience. Imagine being told by Angela Merkel that from next week on all written materials in Germany will be in the beautiful *devanagari* script of India. I still recall my dear grandmother, a well educated and very literate woman, struggling desperately to read the new newspapers in the modern script.

Building on the great efforts of the 19th century, followed by the modernism of the Kemalist revolution, the synthesis of Western liberal ideals and a moderate Islamic culture has proceeded very far in Turkey. Modern Turkish literature from Nazim Hikmet to Orhan Pamuk, from Halide Edib to Yaşar Kemal, and more recently with Elif Shafak and Ayşe Kulin, is witness to that amazing pro-

¹¹ Ayhan Aktar, in *Taraf*, March 18, 2014. Available at “hertaraf@taraf.com”.

cess. This elaborate synthesis is now also fully in evidence in all aspects of modern Turkish life, in popular TV programs, brilliant films, theatre, painting, music, opera, fashion, architecture, education and social experience as a whole.

Under Atatürk and İnönü forceful attempts were made to change popular culture at its roots. Classical Turkish music was discouraged. Béla Bartok and Paul Hindemith were invited to introduce the masses to modern European music. President İnönü was a constant presence in the Bauhaus style Concert Hall in Ankara.¹² Against all the odds, and despite the continuing interest in elegant Ottoman Court music, interest in classical European music still remains very strong, as attested by the immense popularity of superb symphony orchestras and many brilliant musical prodigies.

As is well known, a very large contingent of German and Austrian academics, writers, and architects took up residence in Turkey in the 1930s. Erich Auerbach was teaching at the University of Istanbul as he was writing *Mimesis*, against the background of these astonishing westernizing changes.¹³

To this day, the top universities in Turkey are all Western oriented. Most respected scholars have degrees from the best western universities. Koç University, with brilliant academics, is sometimes classified alongside institutions such as Caltech and the École normale supérieure.¹⁴ Many of these universities have been resisting the recent heavy-handed populist authoritarian actions of the Erdoğan administration. The dismissal of 330 professors was a heavy blow against the principle of freedom of thought, which led to major demonstrations, notably in the elite universities of Istanbul and Ankara. Freedom of thought has also been critically threatened in the field of journalism. Young cadres of journalists have long been in the forefront of liberal western ideals. Some have laid down their lives for these ideals. Many are still in jail on trumped-up political charges, and the struggle goes on. All of this became evident for all to see during the Gezi demonstrations in 2013.

If the literate and informed classes of Turkey were and are overwhelmingly beholden to a Western lifestyle and the values of secularism, democracy, equal-

¹² Personal communication: İdil Biret (Sabancı Üniversitesi Mezuniyet Töreni Konuşması – 20 June 2014) speaking on the subject of music and modernity.

¹³ Konuk, Kader. 2010. *East West mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹⁴ Times Higher Education World University Rankings: World's Best Small Universities. *The Times*, March 7, 2017. Koç University is number 11.

ity, and liberty, then how and why is it possible that the country finds itself in weird contortions with an imagined mythological “Ottoman” style straitjacket being imposed on her from Ankara?

There are two aspects that need to be considered: one has to do with the internal dynamics of political mobilization and the other concerns external circumstances, the role of the EU and that of the US. I shall consider each in turn.

The Reina Night Club attack and the Diyanet

The murderous incident at the Reina nightclub in Istanbul (New Year’s Eve, 2016–2017) is like a beacon which illuminates the dimensions of the current Turkish *Kulturkampf*. The Directorate for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) is a bureaucratic arm of the Turkish government. It is an enormous institution with a huge budget. It employs vast numbers of functionaries at mosques all over Turkey and abroad. It is supposed to provide “true” reliable instruction on religious subjects for the entire country, transcending all diversity.¹⁵ In fact, many other organizations in Turkey provide a more intimate sense of religious community (*cemaat*) to ordinary citizens. Their leaders are often called *sheyhs*, and they would consider themselves more authentic representatives of the community than the *Diyanet* state bureaucrats. Large numbers of followers of Alevi *sheyhs* refuse the authority of the Directorate entirely.¹⁶

The AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) government has found it very convenient to support the *Diyanet* type organization as an effective way to reach pious mosque communities all over Turkey. Politically infused sermons are disseminated straight from the Directorate, which has served many previous administrations as a kind of propaganda arm.¹⁷ A few days before the horrendous attack on the Reina night club, the *Diyanet* sent out a public message stating that celebrating New Year and Father Christmas was not an integral part

¹⁵ For analysis of how this Islamic truth is established see Ahmed, Shahab. 2016. *What is Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁶ Yalman, Nur. 1969. Islamic reform and the mystic tradition in Eastern Turkey. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* X: 41–60.

¹⁷ We may note that *Diyanet* activities among the Turkish diaspora in Germany have recently led to disputes with German authorities on this sensitive subject.

of Turkish traditions. These holidays were an “aping of Western ways”, and a waste of precious resources. The message was clearly intended to appeal to the most conservative supporters of the AKP. After the horrendous attack, in which 39 lives were lost, and under heavy criticism, the Directorate changed its tune. This time they released a declaration that the many varieties of cultural experience in Turkey should be a matter of pride for the country. This was desperate damage control after the gruesome incident.

The perpetrator of the Reina night club attack, Abdulgadir Masharipov, a young recent immigrant of Central Asian origin, was apprehended after days of anxious searches in a safe home where he had been hiding. A well indoctrinated member of the ISIS group in Syria, his public statements to the press are noteworthy. He was widely reported as saying that he felt no remorse for his murders. On the contrary, he was looking forward to being executed. He wanted his four year old son to continue the struggle of “vengeance” as a suicide bomber. His murders were, he claimed, an act of vengeance against Christians who had destroyed Islam. He had not intended to act against Turkey in particular, but had been told by his ISIS minders that “Christians were celebrating New Year’s Eve” (actually, many Muslims from India, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere were among the dead). His orders came from his ISIS handlers in Syria.

It is important to note the vehemence of the sense of vengeance in this dreadful instance. It derives from the long and bitter experiences, not so much of Turkey, but of a deplorably long list of Islamic “peoples” including Russia (e.g. Circassians), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Sudan, Somalia, and Bosnia, at the hand of Christians. Even the miserable history of Palestine can be traced back to the pogroms suffered in Christian Europe. The makings of a “war of civilizations” are not far to seek. This is fertile material for the propagandists of ISIS, who have convinced Masharipov and many thousands of other unhappy gullible young men and women of the justice of their cause. It also provides a background for the unfortunate directives of the Directorate.¹⁸

¹⁸ The US commandos have killed Abdurakhmon Uzbeki, who, they claimed, was responsible for ordering the Reina attack. He too was believed to be from Uzbekistan and a close associate of the IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. (BBC, April 22, 2017 – www.bbc.co.uk).

In 2017 we have also witnessed bomb attacks against Coptic churches in Egypt, for which ISIS claimed responsibility. An attack on St Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai in Egypt had identical motivations (April 19, 2017). From Central Asia to Morocco, there are abundant indications of a massive movement among poor and disenfranchised populations brimming with bitterly negative sentiments towards the hostile policies of the imagined Western powers and Israel. Members and sympathisers with this movement clearly regard the “War on Terror” as a “War on Islam”.¹⁹

It is instructive to look a little more closely at the Directorate, which under the AKP government been enlarged into a monster organization with officials whose reach extends into small villages all over the country. Its loudspeakers were effectively used to mobilize the AKP cadres and other followers against the failed *coup d’état* of the Gülen organization on July 15, 2016. Gönül Saray, a female former Member of Parliament published an open letter to the Director of the *Diyanet* in which she described her experiences with an institution that, in earlier years, had been in the forefront of the quest for modern liberal ideas in Islam.²⁰ These included the equality of women, their access to public prayers in mosques, attention to the progressive education of girls, and attempts to move away from a “primitive” patriarchal understanding of Islam in the direction of a more open minded spiritual community. What had changed? Why had there been a backsliding in the modernist interpretation of official Islam? The implied answer was that it served the short term purposes of the party in power to envenom relations with liberal, secularist, western oriented sections of the population, in order to close the ranks of AKP supporters in the vicious struggle for power.

These retrograde changes in public life in Turkey follow long years of a more open interpretation of Islamic experience. In this connection, I wish to pay tribute to the memory of a most exceptional German academic, Professor Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003), who was a dear friend and close colleague at Harvard for many years. She was a great expert on the history of Sufi thought from 12th century onwards, especially on Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi and Yunus Emre. All the greatest poets and writers in the Sufi tradition represented the

¹⁹ Why China’s Uighurs are joining jihadists in Afghanistan – *Deutsche Welle*, December 18, 2016 (www.dw.com).

²⁰ Reported by Zeynep Oral, *Cumhuriyet*, January 8, 2017.

open, inviting and liberal religious spirit. The names of Rumi, Yunus, Hafez, Saadi, Omar Khayyam are legendary. They represent a fulsome humanist understanding of spiritual yearning.

Annemarie Schimmel spent several years (1954–1959) as Professor of Religion at the Faculty of Divinity in the University of Ankara. The contrast between her open minded teachings and the intolerant narrow mindedness of new movements in public religious experience encouraged by the AKP is evidently part of a shrewd political strategy. We can but hope that the honoured memory of Professor Schimmel will continue to inspire generations of young people in the direction of an open, humane, progressive, sophisticated and enriching spiritual experience.²¹

Fake News and Western Myopia

I may now return to the major question: how do these complex internal and external conditions affect political life? Why is it that Turkey finds herself in such a reactionary mode? How has she moved from Comtean “positivism” to Ottoman inspired religious revivalism?

It is true that the general social upheaval of recent years has been momentous: the vast Anatolian countryside has been transformed by fast roads, airports, local universities, hospitals and other new developments. Young people have moved to the cities in ever greater numbers, so that the population has become predominantly urban and industrial in the last 20 years. This has been a period of widespread prosperity, despite the challenge of an irredentist Kurdish movement known as the PKK (*Parti Kommunist Kurd*). But these internal dynamics are only part of the picture. In order to answer the critical question we have to look abroad, beyond the internal struggles of political culture in Turkey.

There are two powerful external forces, one emanating from the EU and the other from the US. The EU has seriously mishandled its relations with Turkey.

²¹ I am aware that criticism has been leveled at Schimmel in Germany for not speaking out concerning political abuses in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world. I believe that she was concerned about being misunderstood on both sides, and this is why she preferred to steer away from the politics of the day.

Its constant reservations have diminished the attraction of the vital common enterprise. At the same time the US has greatly underestimated the cultural poison that has been seeping out from the great American “crusade” of the “War on Terror” in all Islamic countries.

Ever since the Khomeini revolution in Iran (1979), the fall of the Shah and the ensuing hostage crisis, the tide of sentiment in the US, followed especially in France, has been running in the direction of a serious anxiety regarding a malevolent Islamic enemy. The character of the perceived enemy changed from time to time, but the stereotype obscured the facts that, first, no “unified” Islam existed across the Muslim world, and, second, that most Islamic States – and there are many of them – were actually friendly or indeed already formal allies. These facts, however, could not prevent the media frenzy of a perceived enemy totalized as Islam.²² In one notorious French case of what we now call “fake news”, rumours concerning a child murderer were eventually shown to be baseless, the product of a collective phobia.²³

The general mood of suspicion in the US was succinctly expressed in a popular study entitled *The Clash of Civilizations*, by my colleague Samuel Huntington at Harvard. At the time, I and many other observers of the Middle East thought that the alleged clash was highly exaggerated. The Islam Huntington imagined was a caricature. We observed that there was no unity among Islamic countries. Each one was opposed to its neighbours. We also thought that liberal Islamic traditions were too strong to support such a nihilistic thesis as the “clash

²² The exasperated chief of intelligence of Saudi Arabia, Prince Abdul Aziz is reported to have exclaimed, “Some days you say you want to attack Iraq, some days Somalia, some days Lebanon, some days Syria (. . .). Whom do you want to attack? All the Arab world? And you want us to support that? It’s impossible. It’s impossible.” (reported in *The New York Times*, January 27, 2002).

²³ In 1992 a story swept the town of Calais that a dark skinned stranger, had been kidnapping, raping, torturing and killing children from one of the local schools for some infernal purpose. As the rumour spread, anxious parents converged on the school to save their children. The principal was called out to meet the parents. He denied that any such incident had taken place at his school. No one believed him and the story was taken up by nationwide TV. A swarthy, ex-drug addict, partly Algerian, whose French mother lived in Calais, was “discovered”. He was accused of committing the heinous crimes. He barely escaped with his life. After considerable commotion, it was clearly established that no child was missing, no murder had taken place, and that there was no basis at all for the panic. The “Algerian” could not be accused of any tangible misdeed. Residents remained unsure: some dark act had to have taken place, which was being covered up by the authorities as usual. Eventually, the “Algerian” escaped to the safety of Paris. Calais calmed down. By way of explanation, *The New York Times* (October 30, 1992) suggested that unemployment and frustration with the economic situation were particularly high in this neglected northeastern corner of France.

of civilizations”.²⁴

Turkey in particular did not wish to be seen in those terms. On a critical occasion when Samuel Huntington spoke in Istanbul, his idea that Turkey should drop its “constitutional secularism” and lead the Islamic world as in the past Ottoman days, was met with hostility. The secular audience did not wish to see Turkey as a pawn in the “clash of civilizations” game. Many commentators were extremely skeptical of the suggestion that a “soft Islamic Green belt” should be created, under US auspices, to confront the evident rise of increasingly “radical” Islamic movements elsewhere.²⁵

Francis Fukuyama drew attention to an even more invidious aspect of Huntington’s thesis. This was the extraordinary admission that the US, as a profoundly diversified country harboring many contradictory elements, actually needed external enemies as a threat to accomplish a semblance of political cohesion within its own borders. The subtext was: Islamophobia would prove useful for “white” elements to maintain political order in the diversity of American society.²⁶ Fukuyama, very presciently, critiqued this implication:

“The Declaration of Independence stated not that Westerners are created equal but that all men are created equal, and that this is a ‘self-evident’ truth rather than a prejudice of Anglo-Saxon culture (...). If we take Mr. Huntington too seriously, the clash of civilizations may start at home.”²⁷

Today some of these subterranean themes are being openly expressed in the rhetoric of Donald Trump and his supporters. White supremacist talk is now commonplace. It seems that Huntington may have been right all along.²⁸

²⁴ See e.g. Mottahedeh, Roy P. 1996. The Clash of Civilizations: an Islamist’s critique. *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 2(2): 1–26; Yalman, Nur. Creating the 21st century in the Clash of Civilizations: new enemies among strange tales of arrogance. *Asahi Shimbun* (Japanese), July 27, 1997 and *The Asahi Evening News* (English), same date.

²⁵ See Filkins, Dexter. 2016. Turkey’s thirty-year coup. *The New Yorker*, October 17, 2016. This soft Islamic Green Belt from Turkey, through Azerbaijan and Central Asia to Afghanistan, was evidently a favorite project for the US.

²⁶ See also Yalman, Nur. 2009. Deadly theories and the limits of cultural rationality: the “Clash of Civilizations” revisited. Soka University, Tokyo Peace Conference, November 2009.

²⁷ Fukuyama, Francis. 1996. Still a dangerous place. *The Wall Street Journal*. November 7, 1996.

²⁸ See “Steve Bannon, gone but not forgotten.” *The Economist*. August 26, 2017, pp. 21–22.

For quite a long time Turkey, as an aspiring member of the European Union, tried to resist the tide of Islamophobia, rising strongly both in Europe and in the US. An effort was made with Spain to develop a Dialogue of Civilizations. But these well-intentioned efforts ran into heavy headwinds. The US instigated ill-judged military engagements both in Afghanistan and in Iraq in a period when the political atmosphere was still seething with anger towards the culprits of 9/11. The wounds of the Iran hostage crisis had still not healed. What made matters even worse for Turkey were the increasingly hostile attitudes taken in the EU. Giscard d'Estaing, former President of France, declared categorically that Turkey did not belong in Europe. When the British Prime Minister David Cameron, in desperation during heated debates concerning the Brexit referendum, claimed that Turkey would not become a member of the EU "in a hundred years"(!), he was simply voicing similar sentiments.

On the other hand, sane voices such as that of William Hague, former foreign minister of the UK, expressed a far more pragmatic view:

"A Europe that could have held on to Britain and accommodated Turkey in its ranks would have contained crucial gateways to both the transatlantic world of the West and the Muslim and Asian worlds of the East. Indeed, the great vision of a fully democratic Muslim nation becoming permanently anchored in Europe was what motivated British politicians to support EU membership for Turkey. This was a great strategic prize – the answer to any 'clash of civilisations', the proof that Islam and Christian democracies could join together, and a way of forcing the EU to be broad and decentralised at the same time."²⁹

The mysterious Gülen affair, culminating in the attempted *coup d'état* of July 15, 2016, fits into this very dark picture. It seems more or less clear that the creation of a "Green and soft Islamic belt" – just like the notorious Gülen Organization itself – was an integral part of strategic planning in security and defense circles in the US, and perhaps also in Britain. The Gülen organizations with their international outreach of some 3000 schools were evidently attractive as a propaganda arm. They were also a useful vehicle in enabling the rise of

²⁹ Reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, April 19, 2017.

the “soft Islamist” AKP. However, once challenged, the AKP turned against its midwife. The present debates about governance can be compared with the great debates around the Constitution of 1960, or even with those of 1924 or 1876. What is in play here, however, is not some innocuous change in local civic culture. The unintended consequences of the failed *coup d'état* of July 15 could result in severely undermining relations with NATO and even the dismantling of the elaborate edifice of international arrangements around Turkey so carefully nurtured by far sighted statesmen since World War II.

Anthropology and Freedom

What has all this turmoil in Turkey to do with anthropology? Anthropology has had much to say about culture, myth, and history. When we turn our attention from small communities to the larger questions of culture and of civilization, can we avert our eyes from the burning issues of our day in connection with freedom? When Edmund Leach and I were working in the small villages of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), we were so taken with the fascination of the culture at the local level that we were entirely unprepared for the tidal wave of political change that overwhelmed that country. Now, after many brilliant interventions by the likes of S.J. Tambiah, G. Obeyesekere and H.L. Seneviratne, we have a much more balanced view of how political freedom has fared in Sri Lanka. We are also much chastened regarding the challenges of the Buddhist monks to the political process in other Theravada Buddhist countries.

James Laidlaw has recently written about the need for anthropologists to engage with moral philosophy concerning the idea of freedom. He writes:

“There cannot be a developed and sustained anthropology of ethics without there being also an ethnographic and theoretical interest – hitherto largely absent from anthropology – in freedom. A possible way of studying ethics and freedom comparatively and ethnographically is suggested, and illustrated using some brief comments on Jainism.”³⁰

³⁰ Laidlaw, James. 2002. For an anthropology of ethics and freedom. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8(2): 311–332.

However Laidlaw, writing about “freedom” in connection with the Jains is mainly concerned with the moral judgments of the individual person in relation to the demands of the great religious tradition within which he or she exists. There are references to “tyranny” and the “proletariat” but the central issues of political freedom in India at this time are not engaged.³¹

This points to a very important difference between the Jain and Buddhist traditions of freedom and Islam. It is clear from Laidlaw’s extensive writings that freedom for the Jain (and this certainly true for the Buddhist person as well) is concerned with the noble quest of meditation and nirvana.³² In other words, the search for freedom is an individual effort for enlightenment. It entails emancipation from spiritual bonds.³³ This involves turning away from ordinary life as well as the intimate ties of the family, just like the powerful metaphor of Prince Siddhartha abandoning his wife Suddhodana and son Rahula, as well as his beloved horse Chantaka, at the very beginning of his legendary quest. In the Buddhist case this central interest in the individual quest for nirvana does not necessarily deny the public role of the Sangha in relation to the state. Quite the contrary, the Sangha becomes an important pillar of the royal order or the state in the Theravada traditions.³⁴

These searching traditions of consciousness do not engage the problem of political freedom that is the order of the day in much of the world. Nor does Laidlaw in his brilliant article about the moral dimensions of Jain consciousness. He is mostly concerned with “the attainment of spiritual perfection”. He does return to the question of freedom in a recent wide ranging work.³⁵ The philosophical engagement is important, especially when Laidlaw draws attention to the influential views of Isaiah Berlin. At one point he draws attention to

³¹ See, e.g. Anderson, Perry. 2013. *Indian ideology*. London: Verso.

³² Laidlaw, James. 1995. *Riches and renunciation: religion, economy and society among the Jains*. Oxford: Clarendon Press,

³³ Laidlaw, James. 2005. A life worth leaving: fasting to death as telos of Jain religious life. *Economy and Society* 34: 178–199.

³⁴ Tambiah, S.J. 1992. *Buddhism betrayed? Religion, politics and violence in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: Chicago University Press; Tambiah, S.J. 1986. *Sri Lanka: ethnic fratricide and the dismantling of democracy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press; Tambiah, S.J. 1976. *World conqueror & world renouncer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Seneviratne, H.L. 1999. *The work of kings: the new Buddhism in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

³⁵ Laidlaw, James. 2014. *The subject of virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

the Soviet context as described by Caroline Humphrey.³⁶ She reports a pervasive sense of fear as an aspect of the social unity that is created by the Soviet State in its handling of its citizens. We know this well. This comes closer to an engagement with the role of the state, but Laidlaw is more concerned with philosophical explanations of personal states, with freedom as it emanates from individual experience (as in the Jain case) rather than the problems of power and domination.

These problems are by no means absent from Buddhist societies. We still need to pay critical attention to the political activities of Buddhist monks, as indicated by Tambiah and Seneviratne. That problem is posed in unmistakable fashion by the unfolding tragedy of Myanmar, where the Buddhist Sangha has apparently been in the forefront of the attacks on a vulnerable minority.

The problem of political freedom in the form of different individual interpretations of how to live a virtuous life has always been at the heart of the creed of Islam. Lévi-Strauss has observed, with his usual perspicacity, that Islam has developed an extraordinary system of control whereby the individual is fully embraced by revered traditions tying him/her into a communal group exhibiting great solidarity. The regular daily, weekly and annual communal prayers, particularly for men, powerfully emphasize the unity of the self with the community.³⁷ In fully functioning *sunni* and *shi'a* systems, supported by the state apparatus, the pressure to conform becomes overwhelming. This is somewhat similar to the Soviet situation as discussed by Laidlaw and Humphrey. We may see in this instance the workings of Durkheim's *conscience collective* that leaves no breathing space for dissidents.³⁸ On the other hand, because Islam has no priesthood of comparable stature to the Buddhist Sangha, the quest for escape from the oppression of the group can take many ingenious forms, such as the famous Tarikats of the Sufi tradition, small intimate communities that encourage the great traditions of individual mysticism. I have written elsewhere that the quest for the mystics of Islam from time immemorial has been the exploration of thought beyond the communally expected forms of worship. It is

³⁶ Humphrey, Caroline. 2005. Alternative freedoms. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 151(1): 1–10.

³⁷ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1952. *Race and history*. Paris: UNESCO, p.27.

³⁸ Mardin, Şerif. 1989. *Religion and social change in modern Turkey*. Albany: State University of New York Press. Şerif Mardin has also written about this communal pressure as “*mahalle baskısı*”.

expressed as a love for God, but it also underlines the nobility of the individual and the quest for personal illumination. As such it has always been regarded by Islamic states as a dangerous form of irredentism and a threat to public order. Individual mystics have all too often been treated as dangerous dissidents and dealt with severely. Suhrawardy,³⁹ al Hallaj⁴⁰ and a myriad others come to mind. In other words, Islam is open to individual interpretation and individual consciousness. Hence the long tradition of mystical poetry – from Omar Khayyam to this day.⁴¹ This should be the starting point for a consideration of the role of the state regarding the individual, and therefore of freedom in Islam.⁴²

Condorcet

The issues raised by Kwame Anthony Nkrumah Appiah about freedom are not only European or Western matters. They may flourish most prominently in particular Western countries at this time, but the issues are unavoidable for anthropologists dealing with many other cultures.

Turkey could have escaped this poisonous conundrum. It is to be regretted that it has instead been thrown into the irresistible vortex of this vast international “clash of civilizations”. The cultural revolution has now tilted against the secularist liberal elements in favour of the reactionaries. It behooves us to turn back this tide. Now that the US under Trump has taken a clearly anti-Muslim attitude that feeds heavily into mutual suspicions, Europe, and especially Germany, must become aware of the dangers ahead. An effort must be made to counter the drift towards alienation and further violence in the disastrous mismanagement of public attitudes on both sides.

³⁹ Ziai, Hossein. 1992. The source and nature of authority: a study of al-Suhrawardi’s illuminationist political doctrine. In: C.H. Butterworth (ed.). *Political aspects of Islamic philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 304–344.

⁴⁰ Massignon, Louis. 1982. *The Passion of al-Hallaj: mystic and martyr of Islam*. Vol. XCVIII. Translated by Herbert Mason. Bollingen Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁴¹ Attar, Farid al-din. 1966. *Muslim saints and mystics*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

⁴² Ahmed, Shahab. 2016. *What is Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Germany, with her dark previous history that she has so resolutely and impressively surmounted, has much to teach anthropologists. Her vivid example of accepting one million or more refugees from Syria is a public admonishment to all those nervous countries who pay only lip service to human values. Germany's long familiarity with the key Islamic countries in the Middle East, which I have noted tonight, provides her with a more hopeful perspective to build a more peaceful future for all concerned.

I began with the effects of the French Revolution on the Ottoman Empire. I shall end with the ideas of Marquis de Condorcet. Condorcet was condemned to death during the great terror of Thermidor. While hiding from Robespierre in a garret in Paris, he was hastily trying to complete his masterpiece on *The Progress of Human Reason* before being arrested. It has been said that Condorcet was only whistling in the dark under the shadow of the guillotine.

But this is what he wrote:

“The moment will come, then, when the sun will shine only on free men on this earth, on men who will recognize no master but their reason; when tyrants and slaves, priests and their stupid or hypocritical instruments will exist only in history or on the stage; when men will study the efforts and sufferings that characterized the past only to guard vigilantly against any recurrence of superstition and tyranny and stifle them under the weight of reason should they ever dare to reappear.

Moral, political, and above all social science will progress and point the way to happiness: the colonies will be freed, the slaves will be emancipated, women will at last become the equals of men, barbarous nations will civilize themselves.”⁴³

Those are hopes for a more humane future that Jack Goody might well have fervently supported.

⁴³ Condorcet. *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*. In: *Oeuvres IV*, p. 244. Cited by Gay, Peter. 1977. *The Enlightenment: the science of freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton, p. 120.

IMPRESSUM:

© Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology
P.O. Box 11 03 51
D-06017 Halle/Saale
Germany

Printed by IMPRESS Druckerei, Halle/Saale