

## Review

# Basic concepts with Erol Gungor: Nationalism, culture-civilization, cultural shift and intellectual

Ensar Yilmaz

Department of Political Sciences and Public Administration, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Bartın University, Turkey. E-mail: ensaryilmaz24@gmail.com.

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**Erol Gungor is one of the important persons in Turkish Sociology. It is well known that, in spite of having a short life time, he had a great influence on sociologists after his time. He reconsidered argumentive concepts in the Turkish sociology which began with Ziya Gokalp, and eliminated confusions and difficulties over thethe concepts and made them much more clear and distinct.**

**Key words:** Nationalism, culture civilization, change of culture, intellectual, Erol Gungor.

## INTRODUCTION

The industrialization and democratization process in Turkey between the years 1960 and 1980 caused social and political crisis to emerge. Erol Gungor laid emphasis on the necessity of considering the cultural and historical respect of these problems. A technical formula or a substantial structure contributed to clarify and simplify the concepts that we use in discussing social problems, even though they did not offer a system.

Gungor is one of the most important representatives of nationalist ideology in the level of Ziya Gokalp (1876 - 1924) and Mumtaz Turhan (1908 - 1969). He also states that his thoughts parallels with Gokalp's and Turhan's. But he criticizes Gokalp. Turhan is his teacher actually and Gungor respects him. However, it is regarded as he surpasses his teacher with his researches of Turkish history and Islam (Akyol, 2006: 95).

Erol Gungor was born in Kirşehir 1939. His family was known as Hacıhafızlar. He entered to Istanbul University Faculty of Law after he finished primary and high school. One year later, he transferred to Philosophy Department of Faculty of Arts leaving second class of Faculty of Law by suggestion and recommendation of Professor Mumtaz Turhan. He graduated in the year 1961. In the same year, he started to work as experimental psychology assistant on Prof. Turhan. He attended to PhD program in the year 1965. He studied specialization and research in the US Colorado University and then became associate professor in 1971 Istanbul Faculty of Arts Experimental Psychology chair (Gungor, 1994: 417). He was awarded Professor Title in the year 1978. Erol Gungor who instructed Social Psychology in I.U. Faculty of Arts until the year 1982 was appointed as rector to Selçuk Univer-

sity in July, 1982. Erol Gungor who is married and father of one child was died on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1983 (Gungor, 1994: back cover).

He wrote many articles and elements in encyclopedias relevant to its area and in cardinal conceptual and literature magazines and newspapers as of the year 1959. His published performances are as follows: "Turk Kulturu ve Milliyetçilik" (Turkish culture and Nationalism), "İslamın Bugunku Meselesi" (Recent Matters of Islam), "İslam Tasavvufunun Meseleleri" (Matters of Sufism in Islam), "Kultur Değişmesi ve Milliyetçilik" (Change of Culture and Nationalisme), "Dunden Bugunden" (From Yesterday and today), "Tarihte Turkler" (Turks in the history), "Ahlak Psikolojisi ve Sosyal Ahlak" (Psychology of ethics and social ethics), "Sosyal Meseleler ve Aydınlar" (Social Matters and Intellectuals) in which his articles are collected. Furthermore, he translated many literatures too (Gungor, 1994: back cover).

When Turkey was changing rapidly, Gungor expressed the purpose of his studies as the necessity of founding a "modern Turkish national culture" and searching the ways to do that (Yilmaz, 2006: 160).

## BASIC CONCEPTS WITH EROL GUNGOR

### Nationalism

The nationalism of Gungor is a nationalism that brings Islamic and democratic elements to the forefront, subjects the historical continuity of nation to a modernist interpretation, suggests reproduction of indigenoussness

against the standardization effect of globalization, but nonetheless points out the necessity of supporting global dynamics with indigenous national resources.

Gungor interprets nationalism as a world view that will create spiritual ties between history of people and their future as a modernization ideology by discussing the relations established between indigenous cultural elements and modernization process in the context of nationalism. In this respect, the relationship between democracy and nationalism is not cyclical but historical and sociological associations for Gungor (Bilgin, 2006: 130).

Nationalism is not a dogmatic system with Erol Gungor (Gungor, 1994: 51). Nationalism is development of national culture through modern facilities (Gungor, 1995: 11). He takes nationalism as a populism problem first of all. But the populism hereof doesn't have the same meaning as populism which Marxists understand. Gungor states following on the issue: "We take nationalism as a populism subject and this emphasize a point which should be required to pay attention mainly in terms of Turkey. Definitely, nationalism quiet value provisions to various layers of social layers and rejects to take a stand near one of these layers. But public is neither a social class like a proletariat concept of Marxists nor a side to the class struggle. We emphasize public mainly for two reasons. First, because nationalism bases on the national sovereignty doctrine, we accept political governing capacity to be belonging to the majority of the nation. Second reason appears as an indispensable result of cultural chaos which threaten national unity in Turkey" (Gungor, 1995: 10). "Because nationalism considers the whole nation, nationalist policy also is regulated to prevent groups, economical classes; social classes which are thought to distort this integrity (Gungor, 1994: 37).

Today nationalism is understood more like fascism or Nazism for Western world. However, according to Gungor, as a cultural movement, nationalism rejects racism and authoritarian government systems as a political movement based on people (Yildiz, 2006: 168).

Nationalism as a movement based on people, "must be democratic, in other words, must recognize that the maximum freedom of national will." Democracy is an essential part of nationalism." As Gokalp reached to democracy from "equality of races" Gungor, reaches to democracy from populism and infers to necessity of free idea from this democratic understanding (Bolay, 2006: 152).

His teacher Mumtaz Turhan was an elitist. He thought of reaching to elites, not people, and uprising society through elites. Gungor, on the other hand, declared potentiated populism as the essence of nationalism (Turkone, 2006: 108).

According to Gungor, in fact nationalism is the name of such colored set of cultural and political movements so as not to be expressed in sociological or philosophical forms. In each country, nationalism was developed in specific conditions of the country and has been appeared as a conflict or contrast to the same in other countries.

For example, Arabic socialism is one of the essential elements of Arabic nationalism; Turkish Socialism is antithesis against Turkish nationalism (Gungor, 1995: 9).

Nationalism is actually is an interpretation of history and practices proposed depending on this interpretation. Nationalists claim the nation to be formed in a certain historical process. A society's specific features have been developed and conformed in a long historical process. Since histories of other nations are different, their experiences would also be different. Therefore, societies of which history and historical experience different but corresponding inside forms a nation (Gungor, 1992: 78).

Erol Gungor interprets Kemalism as follows: Kemalism represents surviving efforts of young republic aging fifty years. Because the left is a trial of death and right creates some doubts on other issues leave Turkish state Kemalist nationalism as a single way out for now. We said for now, because we don't have a Turkish Nationalism view which is already processed and prepared" (Gungor, 1995: 7). "Whereas Kemalist Nationalism has been put forth by governors after March 12 measures taken against Marxist insurrection trials" (Gungor, 1995: 20).

Erol Gungor tells following on the target of nationalism: "In fact real target of the nationalism is an independent administration based on the will of mass and to achieve a national culture in this political integrity" (Gungor, 1995: 23). In other words, nationalism must be built on an understanding based on nationalist culture.

### **Culture- civilization**

In fact, the starting point of Gungor is to create an understanding of society based on culture, which afterwards became more common in social sciences (Bilgin, 2006: 118).

Gungor, believes in the necessity of the protection of national culture, but he does not want this with an epic and sloganic effort but with his capacity of social scientist and because he is aware of the importance of national culture for humanity. In a world where technological developments capture people and communities, if the societies become similar, this will mean the destruction of national cultures. This means that creation of a colorless, odorless, monotonous and featureless world (Bolay, 2006: 134).

Erol Gungor says that "culture-civilization diversity is not only a sociological concept problem for us -Turks-, it is also an effort to find objective or scientific support to our desires on the subject how we conduct nation's life" (Gungor, 1992: 9). According to Gungor "Culture and Civilization are not different concepts. National cultures consist of various appearances of a civilization. Common civilization elements which are subject of traffic between nations gets specific identity in specific conditions or each nation and therefore each nation adapts civilization in its

own style. The thing we called culture is the way civilization adapted by societies. How individuals and groups of the same society do not accept similar values of that culture, elements of the same culture becomes different shapes and contents in various societies too. No civilization is a product of one culture/nation; it can not be (Yildiz, 2006: 178). In Europe, there is no unique culture and civilization; there are national cultures representing modern civilization in various degrees. If the values which Europe defenders want to get is belong to this civilization, Europeanization thesis does not require national culture to be rejected" (Gungor, 1995: 101).

Nevertheless "changes coming from inside of the society may bring strong, continuous and real solution styles compared to adapting other cultures" (Gungor, 1995: 31). Because he understood cultural crisis different than Ziya Gokalp. He had a definite stance on cultural change.

Culture is a composition of all kind of action systems and tangible means used and adapted as a solution style to the problems (Gungor, 1995: 31). But groups which has nationalist point of view should accept that none of the cultures could be pure and insisting pure culture could cause Turkish nation to have come to a standstill. Whereas, cultural elements or components thereof are pure and national how majority of that nation adapted and developed (Gungor, 1995: 104).

Erol Gungor evaluates change of civilization as required for Turkish society; he tells following on this subject: "As our values which expresses a high level in such condition of the world and remain in the possession of our life became not to suit new conditions of the world; we should try to reach basic values of the western civilization which could make us alive as a nation. But, in the event we obtain objective values thereof far from local colors, we could become a modern nation and provide the values of this nation to be consciousness in new generations. In the event we could not get this mentality, unnecessary disputes between ingenuous patriots who remember valor epics when national consciousness is told and stupid beaus who thinks themselves western" (Gungor, 1994: 261).

### **Cultural shift**

Gungor, as his teacher Mümtaz Turhan, is opposed to "mandatory cultural changes" and revolution, and argues that voluntary cultural changes and evolution would provide a more reliable modernization. He is clearer than his teacher Turhan on criticizing Jacobean thought and "mandatory cultural changes" during the one-party regime. He does not criticize the modernization goal of practices in this period but the way and the method of these (Akyol, 2006: 99).

Cultural shift is a selective event according to Erol Gungor. Whereas a culture receives something from

another culture as elective not an automatic order (Gungor, 1992: 16). While tangible and general elements of a culture are examined in anthropology literature, it is discussed which of them could be transmitted from one culture to the other culture easier during cultural shift. It is accepted that material culture elements namely rather than beliefs, concrete appearances thereof could be adapted by another culture easier generally. In fact this is a learning process; learning concrete things easier than abstract things is the reality which psychologists know time of mind (Gungor, 1992: 15) actually, core of the culture changes very slowly and very few, behavior models are the things changing faster and easier in all cultural elements. Culture shift starts from this point (Gungor, 1992: 54).

Erol Gungor features technological change in cultural shifts. Gungor told following in this subject: "Technological change is indispensable, rather it is irreversible; main problem is how to direct technological change by general change. West is trying to find out this direction (Gungor, 1994: 82). We always argue that technical change distorted our culture, but this argument is wrong. The thing which distorts our life is not technical elements but no attendant general elements (Gungor, 1994: 81). Turkey is in a continuous change process for years; classical values are given up, but new values have not been determined yet (Gungor 1993: 64). The discussion on which values of the west to be transferred and which not to be transferred has been started by the discussion of the idea to transfer something from Europe and to be transferred at the earliest convenience. We are two centuries away from this starting point now. We should evaluate what we transferred from west and what we didn't transfer rather than what to be transferred or not (Gungor, 1992: 40). We are in a difficult condition; on one side there are things dominating us and actually we could not give up and on the other hand we are trying to protect our identity against all these changes. Only thing we could say is that it would be more convenient to find out solutions when we conceive this difficulty (Gungor, 1994: 83).

Gungor thinks that the culture has a realm of existence that can not be substituted. Therefore, what we receive from other cultures is meaningless if your culture does not have the conditions to recreate itself with another expression that will transform these. Sometimes it may bring contrary results, set aside achieving the goals of receivers. This understanding denotes that cultures are not realms to interfere. The project of "changing" Turkish culture is not what should be done in Turkey. It is a matter of renewal of Turkish culture on its own dynamics and creating its own modernity (Bilgin, 2006: 122).

Although there are a variety of cultural elements, what brings integrity and cohesiveness to culture is the civilization in which that culture arose. Gungor here makes an important observation: While our intellectuals connect unconditionally to Western civilization as the

source of their own culture, people persist not to drift apart from Islamic civilization (Bolay, 2006: 135).

### Intellectual

One of the specific characteristics of Gökalp-Turan schools is to strongly emphasize the role of intellectuals which they should have in the society. Gungor, just as his teacher, attaches great importance to the education and intellectuals in terms of social development; he complains about the distance between people and intellectuals (Beriş, 2006 188).

The conflict between people and intellectuals that goes on since Gökalp is an issue which Gungor emphasizes. Intellectuals in Turkey appeared in front of their society as the representatives of west. It is not only a political issue but also a serious social and cultural issue that Turkish intellectuals approaching their culture as a colony which is unaware of their own culture. Focus of intellectuals turning towards other cultural assets will result in their loss of ability to introduce creative ideas for their society. It will cause them to stay in a position transferor. In this respect, the primary problem in Turkey is the problem of having intellectuals who comprehends their own problems theoretically (Bilgin, 2006: 122-123).

According to Erol Gungor one of the features of "intellectual" is culture creating property of him. Turkey must create a modern culture, but we don't have a group of intellectuals who are qualified to lead this change. Masses have never seen to create culture (Gungor, 1994: 192).

"Nationalists constitute an intellectual minority which has certain views for development in developing countries. One of the basic problems thereof is to enforce masses to adapt their views and to obtain active and voluntary support thereof. Nationalists' things that they could easily obtain support –political and economical- they desired to have and they could merge with the public because they developed a local formula and they represent national culture. Because they are devoted and exited, they overlook a point mostly. Nationalists represent modernism as a distinguished group against a society which was not modernized yet. Irrespective of how they feel themselves close to or same as the public, they represent a life style and value system which public feel itself out of for now. Nationalist intellectual never thinks about this difference in his daily acts, because the difference between themselves and the public is accumulated rather in private life points. Their face which they never show public because they thought it was not important, cause disappointment for those who believe them. Public mass who never thought that they would adapt the same lifestyle in a different atmosphere may blame these people with formality"

(Gungor, 1992: 53).

"The difference between an intellectual and 'the man in the street' appears in the point of views to the events and the relations thereof. Ordinary man tries to understand surrounding people and events by the information he got by the life experience and feelings based on this information. Characteristic properties of people always get understandings based on their old life on the qualifications of natural, political and social events, therefore they may adapt to the environment within the flow of life. These understandings he got always depend on the visible results of the events after they occurred. What would be stand in the background or which events caused other event is neither his duty nor he is able to understand it. Therefore, world of public constituted a meaningful integrity constructed sensorial organs and naked intelligence but this meaning doesn't have a value other than facilitating his daily life" (Gungor, 1994: 23).

Because Islamic world has recessed for a long time, an intellectual group which was required for development could not be growth. Like all underdeveloped and developing countries; Islamic countries suffer from not having high level intellectuals, science and art men. Another point which makes the situation more difficult is these countries must use all their intellectual power for the economical development. Thus, those people who represent Islamic ideology in political and intellectual area are second class intellectuals of their own countries (Gungor, 1996: 169).

There are some small intellectual group who never consider Islam or who see Islam as an obstacle as thinking development, modernization, wealth, happiness in Islamic countries today. If we put aside all these, we may handle intellectuals in two groups such as modernists and conciliatory. Both group are not representatives of a continuous tradition, but they are samples of two different reaction type appeared against the shock from western civilization. Those which we called radical conservatives are actually standpat rather than being conservatives, whereas these want to "revive" some traditions forgotten in the past not to conserve a current tradition. Modernists, intends to evaluate, reinterpret Islam with principles of Western civilization and to reach a harmonization between Islam and West instead of looking world in point of view of Islam. Main resources of the both are interruptions in Islamic thought since it contacted to the West. For today's Islamist Philosophers, Islam is also far away and foreign as well as Western civilization; Muslim philosopher of today tries to understand Islam in the way how he tries to understand Western civilization (Gungor, 1996: 179).

Intellectual education centers in Islamic countries are two types: Some of them appeared in westernization

process and the main purpose thereof is to train intellectuals who can transfer western civilization, people educated by these institutions are generally secular and tend to see civilization and diverging tradition like twins.

In those countries in which revolution realized, this situation is more marked. On the other hand, there are some other institutions which were opened to educate people who serve Islamic community and education is planned in accordance with this target. In this second group, secular education is not disinterested and hostile, however they could be jealous of first group because of social estimation diversity and it is natural to give forth their insurrection to the behavior from the upper layer to themselves. The main important point here is; this disintegration in the education would not allow youth in representing Islamic philosophy and to develop thereof. As this separation between two kinds of intellectuals is continued, they will disinterest and hostility will continue and increase (Gungor, 1996: 169).

The intellectuals of less developed countries seek the power and recognition in the state. They contempt economic, technical and scientific professions and prefer official duty and politics. Because of their statist and bureaucratic mindset, they accept socialist ideologies so easily (Yilmaz, 2006: 163).

Gungor accuses intellectuals with turning away from their national cultural values and degrading them. In fact the target of accusations is all intellectuals who dominated the intellectual and cultural life of country in the time period since Tanzimat; however, for the intellectuals who were in the "left wing" while Gungor was alive, these criticisms become substantial. In this respect, while Gungor criticizes distance of the left to the national cultural values, he did not hesitate to do so for the right wing in which he is included. The criticisms of Gungor for the rightists are most focused on inadequate intellectual background. (Beriş, 2006: 190).

In all works of Gungor in which he discusses the problems in the process of modernization, the role on intellectuals in the context of social development has a central place. Moreover, for spiritual problems that the society faced with during this process, Gungor hold the intellectuals responsible for a large extent. Under this approach, lies the importance attached to intellectuals and the special meaning that intellectuals have for society (Beriş, 2006: 189).

## CONCLUSION

Gungor, who extends social psychology towards sociology and who brings a deep historical dimension to social psychology with his works (Turinay, 2006: 223) aimed to offer a systematic, consistent and original perspective for Turkey's social and political issues (Beriş, 2006: 193).

By considering the intellectual and economic gains that he obtained in Turkey since mid 1970s, Gungor discussed the concepts which are used most by social

sciences in Turkey and in order to understand the problems of Turkish society, he redefined these concepts by making reference to Turkish culture and civilization.

Especially his works which discusses nationalism as a matter of civilization are interpreted as a legacy which will make a great influence on intellectual life in Turkey (Bilgin, 2006: 130-131). Instead of spreading nationalism in political arena, he provided national cultural indoctrination and advocacy in the face of socio-cultural changes (Alkan, 2005: 42).

In a period when nationalist right did not provide any doctrinaire initiative and stayed in an anti-communist course, Gungor's ability to combine his views that are fed liberal, conservative and Islamic resources with cultural nationalism, resulted for him to emerge as a theorist and intellectual in a nationalist – conservative community (Tursucu, 2006 199).

It is not possible to place Gungor in a sole conservative community. Indeed, sometimes it is possible to see nationalist themes and sometimes liberal, conservative and Islamic themes in Gungor who was also living on the same things as Turkish right did. If it is needed to describe him with one adjective, it would probably be appropriate to describe him as cultural-nationalist and conservative (Turşucu, 2006: 200).

Gungor is the person, who carried on the tradition of Ziya Gökalp and Mumtaz Turhan within the Turkish nationalism and who reestablished this tradition as a democratic and also conservative and liberal in a way that is in peace with Islamic and Ottoman culture. As he carried on Gökalp and Turhan tradition and he criticizes Gokalp's views that are anti-Ottoman and dependent on politics, he was distinguished with his speech that is deep from Islamic culture and away from Turhan's positivist views. He does not agree with Gokalp on his negative views on Ottoman. He supports modernization more radically than his teacher Turhan. Gungor, contrary to Turhan, was not afraid of industrialization and he thought industrialization will weaken the bureaucracy that imposes mandatory cultural changes. Turkey, thus, can create a modern Turkish nation in a democratic environment, with the support of social sciences and through free cultural changes (Yilmaz, 2006: 167).

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