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## Construction of the child question in early republican Turkey and social services as an art of government

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the child question in Turkey through an inquiry into social services as an art of government. The ideological reference in the formation of the ‘social’ in the early Republican period was solidarism, which was planned to function as the pattern for new social relations of the new society because the problem was not to provide social assistance, but rather to make human beings productive individuals. Children were seen both as the symbols of modernism and western Turkey, and the carriers of nationalistic values as the owners of the future. Therefore, the education and protection of children was a ‘national’ matter; child care was of the quality of a national service. The goal was to create a healthy, sportive, smart and industrious new generation. In accordance with the solidarist ideals of the state, making orphans who are protected by a paternalist attitude into useful and productive individuals marked the earlier periods as a technique of government of the new regime.

**Keywords:** *Child question, art of government, solidarism*

### Social policies and social work practices as an art of government

According to Driver (1993, pp. 6–7), the concept of social policy assumes different social realms constituted by populations which are the objects of ‘policy’, and is based on the idea that these realms could be governed and policed, requiring some idea of norms, patterns of conduct, health and welfare. This implies, on one hand, the need to collect information about the population, and on the other hand the capacity to prepare regulations. Hence, it could be argued that the emergence of social policy is closely linked and simultaneous with the development of modernity and the modern nation state.

The emergence of social policies should be related to the emergence of the ‘social’ and the appearance of the social followed a parallel route with the development of the modern nation state. The central and bureaucratic modern state defines the ‘social’ as a sector. Therefore, citizens in a modern state are defined and categorized by the political will. Consequently, a ‘sector’ emerges being constituted by certain institutions and qualified experts (Deleuze, 1997, pp. ix–xvii) [‘experts’ are the professionals who usually work in

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the field of human sciences and determine their expertise in terms of the distinction between the normal and abnormal (i.e. social workers, psychologists, etc.)). These qualified personnel of experts try to educate, rehabilitate and civilize the 'abnormal', such as beggars, criminals, prostitutes and addicted people (Goral, 2003, pp. 11–12). Driver argues that the state exploits the social, and in this way governs and controls its development (1993, p. 8).

Orphans or children who live on the streets constitute one of the most important components of the social sector. As a result of the sectorization of the social, these children would be defined as the 'children in need of protection', because their survival without state protection would be a serious threat to society. Therefore, these children should be kept under protection and/or be controlled by the experts. This process also represents the replacement of charitable activities with modern and more effective techniques (Donzelot, 1997, pp. 2–47). Furthermore, the concept of 'children in need of protection' seems ironically congruent with the charity perspective. Deconstruction of the concept puts forth a deep and hidden stigma: these children should be kept under protection of the (paternalist) state not because this is their 'right', but in fact they are in 'need'. [This perspective determined the formation of the Act of the Institution of Social Services and Child Protection (item 2828) which has been providing an important legal frame for the delivery of social services in Turkey since 1983.]

Reconstruction of the social as a sector and creation of a duality between public and private spheres facilitated state intervention into the private sphere. The discourse created by social and political powers to legitimize this intervention claims that the social as a sector is constituted by reliable experts. According to Parton (1991, pp. 3–5), discourse implies the importance of language in the formation of social reality. Discourses are the knowledge structures which help us to understand, explain and determine the facts and things. They are impersonal forms; they transcend individuals and relate to social, economic and political factors. In this context, the social question constitutes a discursive realm in which the relationship between public and private and work and family life is defined and reconstructed (Canning, 1996, p. 216).

Foucault argues that the strategies of the political and economic sites is to enter and control society within the framework of 'governmentality'. According to Foucault (1991, pp. 102–103), this new governmentality is composed of the institutions, procedures, analyses and tactics which are the reflections of power in practice; the target of this power is the population, its main knowledge form is political economy, and its essential technical means are security apparatuses. The new knowledge forms of power and the new forms of regulating society are new disciplines which challenge classical political dominance (Parton, 1991, p. 5). New disciplines, such as psychiatry, psychology, criminology, social work, etc., have established new power regimes which transform practice through disciplinary mechanisms. These disciplines have defined the 'normal' family, healthy children, perfect spouse and appropriate human beings. They define normality for both the everyday use of people and goals such as surveillance and discipline. Hence, vital decisions will no longer be taken in courts according to the rule of law, but in hospitals, clinics or welfare agencies according to the criterion of 'normalization' (Parton, 1991, p. 5).

Such a transformation, Ignatieff argues (1983, pp. 79–83), has caused some formal differences in the regulation of society. The tendency to inflict physical pain on the criminal has decreased; prisons have emerged as a more sophisticated means of punishment for criminals, and have come to mean hope for the reformist to rehabilitate criminals. In this new situation, control has become diffused and extended; as a result of this, welfare and punishment have begun to overlap. Hence, power relinquished the authoritarian style and, armed with knowledge, took new forms. Knowledge (of the new disciplines) is now linked directly with power and its implementation. According to Burchell (1991, p. 119), ordinary people are governed

by the person or people who know how to achieve this. When we are governed and our behaviours are managed or led by others, we do not become passive objects of a physical will; on the contrary, governing assumes the participation of the governed.

Specifically, aiming at improving the psychological as well as the economic and social conditions of deprived populations, social work is also an important means of social policy as a new technology of government (Gobelez, 2001, p. 153). Within the above theoretical framework, 'scientific' leaders of the emerging society determine the definition of normality and develop techniques to normalize those outside the borders of normality. On this point, what comes to the fore is the skeleton of social work practice: 'adaptation'. According to Kut's (1988) social work definition:

The profession of social work is a profession which is equipped with the knowledge, methods, skills and even the authority to intervene in order to create the required change for making the individual conscious enough to use the freedom of decision in favour of himself and being a productive component of the society as adapting to the changing socio-economic conditions and the normative system of the environment.

Social work assumes the very important function of bringing clients and their families into the field of government. It will not do this by pressure, but by investing in the lives and subjectivities of individuals (Parton, 1991, p. 11). Referring to Foucault's 'governmentality', what social work does is indeed the 'conduct of conduct', that is to say, shaping, influencing and leading human behaviour (Gordon, 1991, p. 2). According to Kut, it also has the right to intervene in the process of conducting the conduct.

Considering the clients of the social work profession, it appears that one of the biggest threats for the new social sphere concerns poverty and poverty-related problems (the homeless, beggars, gangs, etc.). From the second part of the 18th century, central governments in the West began to take part directly in assistance to the poor; for instance, institutions were established for the rehabilitation of vagabond youngsters who did not conform with the norms. This direct intervention of the state changed completely the perception of welfare. According to Cavallo (1995, pp. 225–227), the goal was no longer pure assistance, but disciplining labour of the poor. At the same time, this caused a distinction among the poor themselves: those who are deserving and those who are not. For example, during the formation of modern Egypt, Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasha described the beggars in the streets of Cairo as 'lazy' villagers and produced policies concerning poor itinerants: those who migrated from rural areas would either be imprisoned or sent back; the 'deserving' poor, on the other hand, could stay in the shelters (Ener, 1999, p. 321).

At this point, it could be argued that there is a linear relationship between charitable activities and professional social welfare practices; therefore, implementation in different periods could not form an anachronistic frame of reference. There should be another perspective, leaving aside the linear explanation which foresees a replacement of one with another. As Barry and Jones argue (1991, p. 3), the story of charitable policies can never be understood clearly without relation to welfare policies. While some argue that the motives behind charity are protection, social conflict and prestige (Cavallo, 1989, p. 95), some may see modern rehabilitation centres where the 'abnormal' are rehabilitated as the mechanisms of governing and policing society in a perfect manner (Foucault, 1986, p. 62).

Poverty and begging in the newly emerging social sphere constitute a serious threat for the modern state. According to Procacci (1991, pp. 158–159), the poor and beggars are a mixed and dangerous population and encompass the social order from the inside; this resembles a magma in which all the threats surrounding the social order are melted and which follow unpredictable paths.

As the future ideal citizens of the modern nation state, children can never be allowed find their way 'randomly' through the middle of this magma; therefore, the modern state aims to make use of all the scientific techniques in order to include them in society. At this point, the emergence of the 'social' becomes more understandable. According to Parton (1991, p. 14), child courts have begun to focus increasingly upon the characteristics of the parents and living conditions, rather than detailing the child's crime. Social work essentially comprises the space between the respectful and the deviant, and those who hold political rights and those who are excluded.

### **The social as a means of social control in the process of modernization in Turkey**

The ideological reference in the formation of the 'social' in the early Republican period was solidarism, which was planned to function as the pattern for the new social relations of the new society because the problem was not to provide social assistance, but rather to make human beings into productive individuals. The basic principle of solidarism is to make every single citizen become a useful individual for society as a *sine qua non* (Gobelez, 2003, p. 90).

Turkish solidarism is inspired, to a great extent, by the French Enlightenment and particularly by the French sociologist Durkheim. According to Durkheim, morality does not take its source from the individual, but society as a power which transcends the former. We depend upon each other not through our individualities, but through a social bond which transcends individualities and means more than the aggregate of each individuality.

According to Aydin (2003, pp. 179–180), solidarist ideas began to gain a central place in the early 1930s and provided a base and legitimacy for the regime. Solidarism was the means of creating a classless, homogeneous and disciplined social order. Moreover, solidarism was to provide the stability and 'scientific' power needed to transform traditional society into a modern nation similar to the civilized western nations (Koker, 2004, pp. 225–229). In this sense, solidarism gave the state the opportunity to intervene in institutions such as family and private entrepreneurship (Donzelot, 1991, p. 173).

Solidarist ideology, as attributing great importance to each individual's contribution to society, aims to keep society under control. The state ensures that each individual becomes useful and productive for society. In this context, there is a discursive meaning in the binary opposition of those who are useful to society and those who are not. Those who cannot provide use and productivity for the nation are classified as abnormal and become a potential threat:

As a result of the big war and various fires in Istanbul, there are children who live near the fire places, sleep and grow there. If we do not save them they will become harmful elements for the society. If we leave these children alone who make a living by either begging or pick pocketing in their twelve years of age, tomorrow we will witness bigger events like murder (*Cumhuriyet Newspaper*, 1931).

In the early Republican period, street children who seemed by their appearance and attitudes to be a potential danger were perceived as a threat to urban life (Oztamur, 2002, p. 186); orphans and poor children and children who lived or worked on the streets were seen as a threat to society. In other words, these children were a threat to the integrity and harmony of society. According to the general discourse of the period, these children should have been educated not to have a better future, but to be rescued from being a threat to society. Control, rather than tolerance or compassion, was needed. Perhaps they could work, as a means of rehabilitation (Muhiddin, 1929). The lawyers and politicians of the

1930s prepared a naive and comprehensive literature on the subject of child criminality (Goral, 2003); it was naive because it ignored social conditions and social conflicts. Child criminality was discussed as a ‘technical’ and ‘moral’ problem, ignoring social conditions; the care and rehabilitation of these children should have been realized through nationalistic values. Child criminals were represented as ill, ambitious and unsatisfied children, and their only need was a process of ‘normalization’. In fact, the normalization process of the child begins at birth, because they need this due to their nature:

[The] human being is a social creature and peculiar to the society. Because of this, mothers, fathers, teachers and masters intervene in order to make the child adopt the neighbourhood. They both protect the weak body of the child and procure his wild spirit. They both raise and tame (Baltacioglu, 1931, p. 10).

### Early Republican period discourse of childhood: ‘Children as the future of the nation’

The symbolic figure concerning the ‘child question’ during the early Republican period was Kazim Karabekir Pasha, who formed a ‘children’s army’. Karabekir’s work about the child question is important in terms of the fact that it shows the ideological perceptions of the era. He defines the child question as follows:

Equipping the poor and neglected children with material and intellectual education and manners that will make them successful and powerful in [the] life struggle by taking them under the state protection has always been a cause I have sought. I call this ‘Our Child Cause’ (1995, p. 9).

The child question showed the Republican elite that the basis of the political system was somewhat naive. Children wandering around the streets away from their homes were a sign of a great danger and represented a lost future. Through comparison with modern European nations, a modern childhood policy was needed in order to shape healthy, strong, productive and useful citizens of the future (Oztamur, 2003, p. 41). ‘Kemalism was to solve this issue by giving the Turkish children new characteristics which we lacked’ (Cevat, 1931, pp. 1–5). As a result, in the final analysis, protection and empowerment of the children would strengthen and reproduce the Republican regime.

Children were seen both as symbols of modernism and western Turkey and carriers of the nationalistic values as owners of the future. Therefore, the education and protection of children was a ‘national’ matter; child care was of the quality of a national service. The goal was to create a healthy, sportive, smart and industrious new generation (Goral, 2003, p. 47).

As part of socialization, the fundamental perspective of children’s education was to give them *terbiye* (good manners). The most important quality of *terbiye* is to make the individual adapt to the environment. According to one of the ideologues of the Republic, who specialized in pedagogy, İsmail Hakki Baltacioglu (1931, p. 7), ‘a bee has its own hive, a fox has a forest, and a human being has his own society. Live beings have to adapt to their environment in order to survive’. In this sense, it is necessary to provide children with various ideas, feelings and actions about social life in order to prepare them for the life of their nation. Such a process can never be coincidental. The fate of *terbiye* is the fate of society; when *terbiye* breaks, so does society (Baltacioglu, 1931, pp. 17–28).

What made child education so important was the need to activate the productive energy of the population, which had decreased rapidly after long years of war. In order to create a new type of human being, the new Republic created ‘citizens’ instead of ‘subjects’;

maximum attention should be given to children's education. Within this framework, children were seen as the 'future of the nation' and the new social sphere was redesigned in a way to protect and educate the 'future of the nation' in a perfect manner. According to Ozbek (1999/2000, p. 112), the field of social assistance, like similar other fields, gave the new political elite the opportunity to set their own social identity.

The new Republican elite preferred 'civil' organizations in order to reconstruct childhood within the social sphere. What makes them 'civil' is the fact that they acted as associations, but it was undeniable in terms of their functioning that they were affiliated with the new political elite, and particularly the Republican People's Party. The most popular associations were the Child Protection Institution and Village Institutes. Moreover, several 'local' works arose in order to realize the ideals of the new political regime. In all these activities, education and protection of all children as the 'future of the nation' were taken into consideration within the framework of the redesigned understanding of childhood, but the real actors of the 'social' were the orphans and the children living on the streets. In this context, the main focus of the works was to 'rehabilitate', 'normalize' and 'civilize' these children, who constituted a threat in terms of Republican ideals as having been marginalized. *Terbiye*, in this sense, goes beyond simply making propaganda of the principles of the new political regime and aims at 'civilizing' everyday life. For example, Karabekir Pasha illustrates such an endeavour in plays for the 'children's army':

The rules of conduct such as getting on well, speaking good, walking well and eating well, etc. are taught as being applied. I also wrote a play about this issue. . . eating good and bad are shown in two scenes. Disgusting situation of eating and drinking from the same cup and licking the fingers, and polite manner of eating, attitudes and behaviours were all shown to the people and the army as applied (1995, pp. 18–19, 40).

In the Kazim Karabekir Pasha case, apart from disciplining orphans as actors of the social sphere by mechanisms of social control, a kind of militarist perspective is suggested:

In the 24th of May, 1919, I employed two corps constituted by the children above the age 12 from the Erzurum Orphanage in the teams of industry. I began to fill the staff after the discharge by placing here the newcomers from Bayburt and Erzurum. I began to feed, dress and train them as soldiers within my general energy. They began to read and write until the mid-day, and in the afternoon, work as a tailor, shoemaker, and saddler apprentice according to the branch of industry they belong. . . hundreds of children without care in the East were wandering around the cities as miserable and as though waiting for death (1995, p. 16).

In accordance with the solidarist ideals of the state, making orphans who are protected by a paternalist attitude into useful and productive individuals marked earlier periods as a technique of government of the new regime. Gramsci claims that political power functions not through pressure, but 'naturalization'. According to this, power develops discursive practices to make hegemony immanent in the ordinary, therefore pressure becomes invisible through everyday practices and hegemony reproduces itself. The key point here is the 'normalization' of the pressure (Mouffe, 1981, pp. 167–186). With regard to the child question, the 'paternalist' character of the state provides legitimacy in the social through more 'traditional' channels.

## Conclusion

Social work as an art of government still prevails today, sometimes in the form of social engineering and sometimes as a means of normalizing the everyday life of 'citizens', but the idea behind the delivery of social services should be to seek and advocate for social justice

for all. Similarly, the issue of child welfare is still perceived as the means of reconstructing society by ‘normalizing’ agents. Civilizing and aestheticizing the children who are potential threats to the wellbeing of society, if they remain uncared for, is the basic motive behind the delivery of services in this field. What we should acquire is a new understanding based on the idea of advocating for human rights. Only then, perhaps, can Republican paranoia end and society can include all the ‘abnormal’ of its own.

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