

American Impact on Turkish Social Life (1945-1965)

Aylin Yalçın

It is with nations as with men
One must be first

War Song, John *Davidson*

The term relation, in its most generalized definition refers to an interaction between at least two forces; to the intersection of wants, interests and needs - that is to say to the appearance of reciprocity. While a generalized definition originates from such simple principles, a more distinctive one proves to be more complex, for the intersection of wants, interests and needs is not always guaranteed to result in perfect reciprocity. This reciprocity requires an exact equality of relationship which - as the above quotation might suggest - is impossible with nations as with people.

Even though the atmosphere after 1945 seemed perfect for cooperation, the fact that the USA was often self-interested, while Turkey required economic help meant that the cultural relationship was unequal, based on the pervert relation between the powerful and the weak, the dominant and the passive. The relationship originated as a result of the competition between the USA and the USSR for world domination at a time when the USA were preoccupied with stemming the tide of communism. The USA considered Turkey important because of her strategic importance, while Turkey sought US help not only because of the close proximity of the USSR but also through the desire for economic assistance. This alliance was further strengthened with the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Aid and Turkey's entrance into NATO.

The unequal nature of the relationship was not only visible in the political sphere: during this period US popular culture successfully infiltrated into Turkish social life and became a mirror through which Turkish people viewed themselves and the world. This article will try to trace some of the factors that were responsible for this change.

The beginning of this cultural alteration coincided with the battleship USS *Missouri*'s arrival in Istanbul on April 5, 1946. It docked in front of the Dolmabahçe Palace, at the time an ornate symbol of Turkish culture and tradition. Anchored alongside the battleship was the Turkish ship *Yavuz* - a symbol of strength for the Turkish people, but far less advanced technologically than the *Missouri*. This in a sense summed up the great cultural difference between the two nations. Perhaps the Turkish people understood this also - even before the *Missouri* arrived, all the houses and shops in Istanbul had been repainted and all the buses, trolleys and cabs had been washed. The brothels had been inspected by doctors so that the GIs would not encounter anything unpleasant if they wanted to have a little bit of fun. The police were told to warn the shopkeepers not to charge any GI for anything: any expenses would be compensated by the Turkish government. Istanbul was getting ready to meet the

USS *Missouri*, but more than that, she was getting ready for the future which was hidden somewhere in that ship among the canned food and milk powder.

When the great day arrived the feeling in the air resembled that of a carnival. Banners with the phrase "Welcome *Missouri*" (in English) were suspended between the minarets of mosques. Hundreds and thousands of people had worn their best clothes for this special day. Men, women and children, street hawkers and prostitutes, pickpockets and police officers filled the harbor. When the ship anchored, applause, shouts and songs of the crowd revealed their enthusiasm and joy. The real purpose of the USS *Missouri*'s arrival had already been forgotten. The same day, Alexander Weddel, President Truman's special envoy, went to Ankara after leaving the feast prepared in his honor in Dolmabahçe Palace. He was welcomed by Prime Minister İnönü, to whom he revealed the real purpose of the USS *Missouri*'s arrival: to democratize Turkey. These words would be repeated thousands of times in the two main daily newspapers *Cumhuriyet* and *Vatan*; the word became so popular that many people who heard it for the first time would sometimes think of it as a new product or an important person. This is perhaps why, it was often mispronounced as *demirkrat* (democrat) rather than democracy.

Even this *lapsus lingua* demonstrates the great difference between two cultures. But adaptation quickly followed. Within two days of the *Missouri*'s arrival most of the high-school students in Istanbul became aware of American parties with dance, music and food. High society families competed with one another in providing feasts for American visitors. Drunken soldiers filled the streets of Istanbul; and their speech was mimicked by legions of shopkeepers, prostitutes and young girls who continuously said "Yes! Yes! Yes!" as proof of their friendliness and hospitality. Newspapers devoted not only their headlines but most of their inside pages to stories about the USS *Missouri*'s arrival. When the ship departed on April 9, 1946, together with dollars, cigarettes and many cases of venereal disease, it left behind a group of people transfixed by American power, culture and way of life. Following the Truman Doctrine's and the Marshall Plan's stipulations that American policies should be widely publicized in Turkey, this admiration would become a nation-wide infatuation. This bias towards Americanization would render Turkish people *plus royaliste que le roi*, and within fifteen years time would encourage them to create a mini-America (as the President Adnan Menderes had desired). This desire would relegate Atatürk's speech to the American public (*CNN Türk 32. Gün 17.01.2002*) to the pages of history; as he treated the person he was addressing, the American ambassador, as his equal, not his master.

The painful transformation of the relationship between the USA and Turkey from Atatürk's time, to the immediate post-1945 period, can be understood through popular culture. Richard Maltby defines popular culture as the culture that derives from the people (Herbert et al, 1987: 60). If popular culture originates from the people, then it covers everything that takes its roots from the people. It constructs the everyday fabric and surrounds people just like the clothes they wear. So when one refers to popular culture, he or she is describing the ingredients of everyday life, such as food, music, dance, clothes, cinema and magazines. However, it can also be a means of manipulating people. Antonio Gramsci claims that popular culture is the total sum of the dominant culture's efforts to control the majority: "Dominant groups in society through an intellectual and moral leadership win the consent of the subordinate groups in society" (Herbert et al, 1987: 103). This is precisely what happened in post-1945 Turkey, as the government which was manipulated by the US manipulated the Turkish public in return. The urgent need for revenue and a supportive friend in the international arena caused the Turkish government to advertise the US in any way that they could find.

However they did not face much opposition from the Turkish people, who already had an admiration for the West dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. At that time the focus of

attention was more on Europe rather than the USA; but with Turkey's entry into NATO the people's understanding of Americans and the American way of life expanded dramatically. In 1952 more than 240,000 Americans came to Turkey - most of whom were military personnel; within two years that number had increased threefold (Adanır, Personal Interview, February, 2002). Hundreds and thousands of Turkish families became neighbors with American families and their children began to play with American children. More than anything else it was this interaction that instigated the Americanization of Turkish social life.

Traditionally most Turkish neighborhoods were tight knit communities, wherein meals were eaten together and children went to school with the same bus. Most of the houses were two-storied and inhabited by white collar workers. But in the 1950s Americans suddenly penetrated this community - for example in Izmir, where there was an airforce base, around five houses in Alsancak (in the center of the city) were rented by Americans. By the end of the decade this number had reached twenty. When these houses proved insufficient in meeting the demands of the incoming American families, it became necessary to build apartment blocks. These new structures were actually the highest - as well as the first - apartments constructed in most cities (Adanır, Personal Interview, February, 2002). When the Americans moved in they not only brought their luggage, but also a brand new life style which would devour Turkish people's century-long traditions and customs in a very short time.

This cultural shock continued with the importation of new American products and services, including food and music. Oğuz Adanır, who has personal experience of the period, recalls that:

My friends and I were amazed by the soft drinks in small cans called Coca Cola and Seven Up. The most interesting thing we had ever tasted had been fizzy lemonade. And these small cans were a brand new attraction for all of us (Personal Interview, February 2, 2002).

Many Turkish children also ate American food - not only in American families' houses, but also in newly-opened fast food outlets. A cartoon published in the magazine *Akbaba* on April 18, 1959 (Fig. 1) criticizes this development, as we see two men eating hamburgers while standing up. Eating a meal in this way is in complete contradiction to Turkish eating traditions, where people often spend hours at the table. One of the men in the cartoon says "I have heard that Americans are going to publicize Turkish food", while the other replies "They better publicize it for us too". Clearly the cartoonist believes that the Turkish people's fondness for American food has caused them to forget their own customs.

Besides food, Turkish children who visited their American neighbors would also play with American toys and games. Adanır recalls that he used to discover a completely new world in his friend's room: "We passed hours in their magnificent rooms full of magnificent toys" (Personal Interview, February, 2002). Moreover many children would be exposed to American sports such as baseball and football. The popularity of these games extended across the nation, and people filled stadiums to watch Americans play football (*CNN Türk 32. Gün* 17.01.2003). Also crazes like the hula hoop gained popularity in this period.

American culture also penetrated Turkey through music. In Izmir the American service personnel opened their own radio station in the early 50s, while Turkish people had already begun to listen to American pop music, jazz and blues in their homes through the *Voice of America* which began broadcasting in Turkey at the same time. This fondness for America music is especially apparent in a popular magazine *Hayat*, which regularly published a page of music news. For the most part this was exclusively devoted to American musicians, while American song lyrics were translated into Turkish. This attitude was harshly criticized by a cartoon published in the magazine *Akbaba* on August 13, 1953 (Fig. 2), where the buildings

which seem to dance in tune with the music form a harsh contrast to the mosque in the background. This stresses the fundamental incompatibility between the two cultures. The writing below the cartoon says that "the Voice of America is a paranomasia (pun)" which not only refers to the radio station but to this group of people who with their life-styles have become the voice of America in Turkey. During this period many Turkish songs talked about the US, praising its beauty and power. One such song, written by Celal Ince, was distributed as a record to the Turkish public freely in 1954 during the Izmir International Fair. The song lyrics are:

Amerika, Amerika
Türkler dünya durdukça
Beraberdür seninle
Hürriyet savaşında

Bu bir dostluk şarkısıdır
Kardeşliğin yankısıdır
Kore'de olduk kan kardeşi
Sönmez bu dostluğun ateşi

Azmimizdir hür yaşamak
Dünyada sulhü sağlamak
Kavgalar hep bu uğurda
İstiklal aşkı ruhumuzda

Senin New York'un
Yükselir göklere
Benim İstanbul'um
Destandır dillere

Ankara ile Vaşington
İzmirim San Fransiskon
Benzer derler birbirine
Doyulmaz güzelliklerine

O muhteşem beldelerin
Pınarların nehirlerin
Ünlü şelalen Niagara
Türkler dünya durdukça
Beraberdür seninle
Amerika, Amerika
(Oran 493)

America, America
Turks are with you
In your war for Independence
Till the end of the world

This is a song of friendship
A call to brotherhood
We have been bonded by blood in Korea

And this friendship will never end
Our major aim is to be independent
To provide peace for the world
All the wars are for peace
And the love of independence runs in our blood

Your New York
Reaches the sky
My Istanbul
Has become a myth

Ankara and Washington
My Izmir and your San Francisco
Are said to resemble one another
In their beauty

All the beautiful places
Your brooks and rivers
Your famous Niagara Falls
Turks are with you
Till the end of the world
America, America
(Oran 493)

Many books played a large part in putting the US on the Turkish agenda. As well as the immense number of translations of American detective stories and dime-novels, there was a proliferation of children's books. Thousands of children went to sleep listening to *Polyanna* or *Little Women*. They grew up dreaming to follow in the footsteps of political heroes such as Abraham Lincoln or poor children who became famous such as Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller. Comic books such as *Tom Mix, Texas* or *Pekos Bill* (which were actually created by European artists) talked about American frontier history and sold in record numbers, teaching Turkish children to love the white Americans and hate the Indians.

Other books specially prepared in Turkish projected the image of a powerful United States. One book prepared by Ahmet Cevat for 4th grade students was full of stories that talked about Washington, the discovery of new lands, and the heroic deeds of Americans. Another text, Pakize İçel's *Reading Book for Girls* used pictures that were taken from American reading books. Sabiha Sertel who had completed her own education in the US prepared books for primary school students which depicted the Thorndike method of education as the most effective teaching strategy (Arslan, 2000: 68).

Given this concentration on American life, it is not surprising to find that many children called one another Peter, Huck, Bill, or John when they played Cowboys and Indians, and sang songs or rhymes like the following :

Bir-ki-üçler yaşasın Türkler	One-two-three! Bravo Turkey
Dört-beş-altı Polonya battı	Four-five-six Poland has gone amiss
Yedi-sekiz-dokuz Ruslar domuz	Seven-eight-nine Russians are swine
On-onbir-oniki Amerika birinci	Ten-eleven-twelveAmericais number 1

The journal *Türk-Anglo-Amerikan Postası* ^[1](Turkish-Anglo-American Post) proves to be an exceptional text for anyone interested in analyzing the impact of the US on Turkish social

life. Published in Istanbul between 1947 and February 1954 by Hidayet and Kemal Erkan, it contained articles in Turkish and English on a variety of topics including American history, schools, colleges, press, fashion and sports. The periodical also contained articles that were translated from American journals such as the *New York Times*, *Harper's Bazaar*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *American Vocational Journal*. The main aim of the journal was broaden awareness of western life amongst the Turkish people; by doing so they helped to perpetuate the government's foreign policy goals. On the other hand, they also believed that they were introducing Turkish culture to an American audience:

...we have many original and good qualities. Our folklore is one of the richest in the world. After they get to know Turkish folklore, Turkish music and dances, our American friends will see new horizons of pleasure opening up before their eyes (January 1949: 5).

However, the periodical's main focus of attention was to portray the US as the best model for Turkey. Hidayet Erkan, in his article "Let's Represent Our Country To The World of Civilization" proclaimed that:

Every Turkish child has to try to perpetuate and deepen his [*sic*] knowledge about the USA's unquestionable political, industrial, economic, and scientific maturity and her citizen's love and care for TurkeyOnly the blind or the deaf can reject our efforts to strengthen relations with the US (April 1947: 5).

Erkan does not only show American friendship as something very precious but also as a national heritage that should be passed from one generation to another. If Turks managed to gain the friendship of the USA they might become equally great and civilized. The periodical also quite often insisted that American friendship was indispensable for Turkey if Turkey really wanted to deal with her economic problems. In an article titled "One of our Reporters from American Office Goes to South America" it was claimed that the reporter's aim in traveling to the US was to search for new markets for Turkish products and to develop Turkish commerce, which was seen as essential for Turkish survival. Readers were invited to assume that the US was the only country that could resolve Turkey's economic problems. After the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan became effective, the attitude of TAAP shifted to an open pledge for money and its writers did not refrain from warning their readers to be kind to the US so that US would pledge aid to Turkey. In an article entitled "The Turk's Enduring Characteristic is Fidelity" K. N. Duru, the editor, proclaimed that

To speak the truth, we are not only poorer than the Anglo-Saxons but also broke.....We are in profound need of economic aid from our American friendsYes, we are in great need of roads, railroad products, and agricultural vehicles, but what about other needs? Neither 30 million dollars, nor 100 million dollars can be sufficient to meet these needs ... In order to receive this aid, we have to give USA and her friendship the value it deserves (October 1948: 14).

This inclination towards praising the USA, which had begun with economic concerns, soon became a habit. In an article entitled "The Turkish-Anglo-American Friendship" Duru asserted that

We Turks feel a pride in our honest and sincere friendship with the USA. The pages of our national, even international history fully justifies this pride the Turkish nation has (September 1948: 10).

After justifying Turkey's credibility by making reference to her history, the writer underlines the importance of cultural acquaintance in ensuring this friendship: Friendship begins with acquaintance (September 1948: 10).

J.M. Edmunds Brown, the only American writer of *TAAP*, likewise expressed strong opinions about this cultural acquaintance. In his article "Towards a Closer Turkish-American Friendship" he proclaimed that:

In a world of chaos and uncertainty this firm Turkish-American friendship is like a bridge between two worlds. This bridge will even stand in the most troubled days of the future.... Mutual interests and mutual acquaintances form the basis of international friendship.... Thus, the first duty of every person who believes in Turkish-American friendship is to find ways to bring about a closer acquaintance and strengthen this friendship (February 1948: 9).

Perhaps the most remarkable article that focused on the idea of cultural acquaintance was "Our Propaganda", in which Duru underlined the American success in reaching the Turkish public:

Every day we see all kinds of American books and magazines in the hands of young people. It is possible to say that we, Turks, are learning about Anglo-Saxon nations and their culture with great willingness. American films are rendering considerable service in this matter (January 1949: 1).

The word "willingness" suggests that Turkish people had already begun to assume the US as the ideal model for themselves and their country by early 1949. But a second reading of the article makes it clear that Duru was frankly admitting that American cultural elements had successfully infiltrated Turkish culture and what Duru meant by American films was American propaganda films which played an important role in presenting the US as a cultural Eden. It was naively confessed by the writer that what they thought as mutual cultural acquaintance was just one way American influence. As such, there was little justification for publishing the periodical in two languages. *TAAP* had failed to introduce Turkish culture to the Americans and ironically served American interests. This is underlined by Duru's final words in the 1949 article quoted above:

Here we are! During the last two years we have worked, through our publication to facilitate mutual acquaintance between Turkish people and their Anglo-Saxon friends, but the number of our American readers is very few. We may say that we are in despair (January 1949: 1).

Aside from its goal of strengthening Turkish-American relations through cultural acquaintance, *TAAP* also seemed to idealize American cultural, political, economic and social characteristics, in order to create a model for its Turkish readers. Duru's article "About Anglo-American Culture" proclaimed that

There are certain resemblances between national characteristics. Therefore those who wish to reorganize their national characteristics must know well which nation they will take as their model. They must compare the characters of the model nation with the characters of their own nation to find the resemblances..... In recent years as the Anglo-Saxon culture has become widely spread in our country there have been certain things that gave us new

inspiration ...Thus we should be content to have the Anglo-Saxon literature and arts being read by our youth (November 1948: 1).

Another article that did more or less the same thing was written by French writer André Maurois entitled "What I Learned about the USA". In his article, Maurois claimed that the USA was a country where everyone is more or less a citizen due to democracy, equality, unity and intellectualism. He praised the governmental system, presidents, and the public, all of which gave the message that the USA was a superior nation. He also said that these American characteristics highly resembled Turkish ones and therefore no other country could be a better model for Turkey. Other articles spent a lot of time and energy praising US heads of state; one entitled "Harry S. Truman: The President of the USA" had a subtitle - "Man of the Day". The article not only gives detailed information about Truman's childhood and birthplace but also about his physical characteristics:

He is.... 5 feet, 10 inches in length (1.78 m) and 85 kgs in weight.... sporting everyday, Mr. Truman owns a body that enables him to wear his WWI uniform, even today (October 1947: 12).

Truman is subsequently described as an efficient figure in international affairs who successfully plays the ambassadorial role. In another article "George Washington" published in November 1949, the USA's first president is described as a man who preferred to be ordinary, even though he was offered a crown -and likened him very much to the Turkish national leader Atatürk. The article drew further parallels between the American and Turkish Wars of Independence.

TAAP also praised American institutions, particularly the American economy. In one article, Lewis Galantiene defended the capitalist system. He proclaimed that

In the States there is no class struggle for our employees have no reason to be jealous of their employers. In our country not only employers, but also employees have automobiles, telephones, bathrooms and kitchens in their houses and a lot of spare time. Both the employees and employers eat almost the same food, and are cured by doctors and dentists that graduate from same faculties (December 1952: 16).

The article openly defends capitalism as the best system in the world, by showing it as one of the prerequisites for a peaceful and egalitarian society.

Other material focused on the American educational system. One such article, translated from the *Christian Science Monitor* is titled "Educational Standards in the USA", and gave specific information about primary and secondary classes, lessons and textbooks. Another piece focused on major American universities - Harvard, for example, was described thus: "Supporting independence more than any political, religious or social perspective, Harvard has become a culture and science research center in the world" (May 1951: 11). To encourage Turkish youth to apply to such institutions, frequently examples of students already in the US were given. In an article entitled "The University of Southern California", one learned that "among the students that came from all parts of the world to study at this university is Captain Bahtiyar Vural. He is a former official of Turkish Air Corps...." (September 1947: 5).

To achieve its aim of strengthening Turkish-American friendship by cultural acquaintance, *TAAP* almost invariably showed the US as the best model for Turkey and praised her institutions, frequently published news about the US and tried to create a powerful image of the US, mixing and blending its own goals with those of Turkish foreign policy goals and thereby helping to create a Miniature America in Turkey. The USA must have been

pleased; in 1947 the government made the stipulation that their policies be widely publicized in Turkey (Sander, 1980: 26). From then on America was not only a foreign friend, but a neighbor that lived next door - a sweet voice on the radio, an adventure in cowboy books, the pleasant face of a famous actor that smiled out from the magazines. As time passed the hands that held the magazines, read the books, listened to the radio, and sampled the food became Americanized. Turkey herself became a small, tiny America in which fidelity to a political marriage proved to be the best ideal of many who lived with the sweet memories of a political honeymoon.

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^[1] Henceforth it will be referred to as *TAAP*.