

State in Terms of Structure and Function: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This study deals with the concept of the state in terms of structure and function and aims to comparatively analyze the perception of the state in the Turkish thought. In the literature on the state today, there is a tendency to reject a universal state theory. It is argued that there can be a conception of the state for each country in their own context. The type of organization and conditions of each state can cause the formation of different structures and functions, and hence to insist on a universal approach would not be appropriate. However, to understand the conception of state in terms of structure and function in our political culture, the dominant Western thought on the state constitutes an important criterion.

1 Introduction

A literal comparative analysis of state as a broad concept in terms of structure and function would be too bold a claim to make; hence, what we aim to do here is to conceive of the structures and functions of the state brought about by Western and Turkish thoughts, each with its own tradition and cultural climate. To go beyond this would be an exaggerated claim and such an attitude would not be justifiable on subjective and objective grounds.

To begin with, we have no such knowledge of any literature that would enable us to define state objectively and explain it in terms of structure and function. Despite some studies with such titles as “universal history” and “world history,” it is obvious that they are all loaded with subjective judgement: they intrinsically reflect the mindsets of their authors, elaborating a thought extensively and ignoring or despising the others. This perspective, based on the notion that non-western world has societies with “no history”, deeply seated in western world approaches the concept of state with a Westernist attitude. Clearly, this is a myopic view that disregards the rest of the world. Secondly, there is little research into the history of the non-western world. As a result, the current writer has no claim that the paper comprehensively analyzes the concept of state from all points of views. Rather, the attempt is restricted to conceiving of the state emergent as in two different worldviews, for the formation of an understanding of state is caused by such factors as living conditions, geographical location, beliefs and values held, civilization and culture, the relationships with other societies, and the problems faced. Therefore, we disagree with the conception of universal theory of state and highlight that every country has their own conception of state within their political circumstances.

2 A General Outlook on the Concept of State in Western Thought

We need to understand the basic dynamics of the western societies and western thought to understand what state and politics come to mean on a world scale because western thought is dominant globally.

The historical conditions of the capitalist state, the nature of class struggle or the structure of production all play a central role in defining and analyzing the structures and functions of the contemporary states. However, western thought has followed a changing course in different periods of history in terms of the conception of state, its structure, and function. In the beginning, the liberal form of the bourgeois government was largely shaped by the distribution of ownership, and the exercise power was represented by a small of group of citizens, while, in later periods, the political power started to represent a wide range of groups, and wealth and income was controlled by free market (Eroğul, 2002:125). Emerging to control the desires and interests of the people, the liberal theory of state based on individual rights and the notion of “common good” had undergone a set of substantial changes in the direction of the fact that the best service for the country and the world was possible through civil society and free market economy. Those changes were caused mostly by the political struggles capitalism lived through in Britain and France (Carnoy, 2014: 18). In fact, having witnessed the rise of the interest groups and the decline of liberal democracy in the political realm, the scholars of the 19th and 20th century brought up the need for a new social and political order which was to be based on operational autonomous socio-economic organizations cooperating with the state in the sectoral and national decision-making bodies for class harmony and social unity in the civil society. That new system was corporate statism. Unlike the liberal conception of state, the new perspective held that the common good was represented by the state. Further, the common good as the ultimate aim of the state was the source of legitimacy and moral authority of the state. Consequently, in addition to symbolizing the public values and norms, the state stood for morality and ideology for the public. In other words, corporate statism was regarded to be a way to resolve the conflicts of interests without resorting to violence in a political system in which only one higher good was thought to exist, aiming in such a manner to get rid of the limits the liberal understanding of state placed on the economic role of the state. However, in contrast to the liberal one, the corporatist state strengthened the position of the independent bureaucratic power in the political structure

rather than weakening it, for corporate statism gave a central role to the state to play in capitalist development. Thus, democratic form of government could straightforwardly be delayed for the sake of economic growth and national order. The state, in such a climate, was not regarded as an organization intervening in the efficiency of free market economy but an integral part of the body that rationalized free market economy. Clearly, the efforts to solve the problem caused by the conflicts of interests in the society paved the way for a state with new functions in a different form of organization, resulting in a new type of state.

In addition to corporate statism, social welfare state emerged in a way to protect democratic values, to eliminate the problems brought about by liberal state. The driving force of the capitalist state was based on private enterprise. The private sector was like the center for social change until 1930s. However, social welfare state gained significance during the period from 1930s to 1970s, with the result that the role played by the state in economy was increased to balance it through the public sector. Social welfare state, popular in the West until 1970s, was replaced by neoliberal state, indicating a return to the liberal values adopted in the circumstances of the time. With neoliberalism, the structure and functions of the state were reshaped according to the new conditions.

Another development was the Marxist understanding of state. This understanding was different for the previous ones in that the state was defined as a tool for hegemony building of one group over another as an expression of class relationships. Thus, the state in the Marxist view was considered to be both the product and shape-giver of this hegemonic relationships (Oppenheimer, 1984:61). Influenced by Marx, Lenin defined the state as an agency of class dominance. To him, the state was a special organization of force, an organization of violence for the suppression of some class, weakening the class conflict, legitimizing and continuing this suppression. Hence, it was thought to be necessary to eliminate the state which was regarded as the armed force of the bourgeoisie. In Marx's, Engels', and Lenin's terms, the state was structure required to suppress the oppressed classes and to regenerate class relationships. If, they claimed, there was no such a situation, that is, in case of the existence of classless societies, then the state would be redundant and would fade away. Though these theories based on class were initially shaped by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, they came a long way, afterwards. In fact, the Marxist view of the state pursued an orthodox approach until 1950s, when it started to change its direction as discussed among the western Marxists. Being the turning point for Marxist ideology, the 1950s witnessed the end of Stalinism and the beginning of the Cold War. As the Leninist theory of state was indisputably dominant in the Marxist thought after the success of the Russian Revolution, it was dictated until the early 1960s, and the other theoretical and practical efforts were deliberately ostracized.

To sum up, state was examined in two perspectives in the western thought, excluding the classical Marxist view, which opposed the presence of the state. The first view holds that state is "autonomous and irrational" and thus the solution is to minimize the state in all areas of social life. The second view puts forward that the irrationality of the state is not caused by its autonomous nature but by its sensitivity to "irrational" masses and thus the solution is to increase the role of the state and take the state away from the control of the masses. Consequently, these two views provide us with a good amount of information about the state in the western sense: on the one hand, there is state that represents the general will independent of the economic power relationships or completely autonomous from civil society; on the other, state that operates independently neither of the general will nor of the capitalists.

3 A General Outlook on the Concept of State in Turkish Thought

The living conditions, geographical location, historical circumstances and the sociocultural values have formed a different conception of state in Turks from the one in the west. The historical political legacy in the Turkish society, living under the rule of state based on western values for over two hundred years, has always experienced problems with the state of westernist nature. Therefore, with no reference to this legacy would it be unreasonable to try to understand and provide solutions to the problems involved with the structure of the state based on western values (Sezer, 1979:2).

The Turks have formed an authentic state culture and conception of state due to a number of factors. First, the Turks have had to move from one place to another due mostly to the socio-political circumstances from the early periods of history. Second, they have lived in organized tribes, with no classes based on land ownership or clergy. Third, they have always lived under the rule of a state, with their own conception of history. Historically, then, the central position of the state in Turkish culture has had a hold over the cultural and social realms. In this respect, the conception of the state by the Turks is authentic.

The Turkish conception of state is of sacred origin and the view that a similar, unshakable, indefectible, perfect order as in the universe should be established on earth has always been the emblem in the course of history. Just as the heavens surround the earth like a marquee, so Hakan's marquee should rein over the world as a whole as "the World Government." In other words, it was believed that the heavens is for God's rule, and the world should be under the rule of only one government controlled by Hakan. Hence, the world government vision articulated in the Legend of Oghuz Khagan and the Orkhon Inscriptions laid the foundation for the Turkish conception of state. To this view, the state is a grant offered by God to Khagan, representing the unification of the social order with universal order.

Present in the pre-Islamic period, this view has continued to exist in the Islamic period (with no ownership in a classless society). As a matter of fact, a social structure consisting of classes based on land ownership did not emerge in the Ottoman times, the closest era to the Republican period, and because there was no aristocracy originating from land ownership, the distinction between the state and the public as in Western Europe was out of question here. Consequently, the public did not regard the state as enemy as in societies consisting of classes but saw it as father. In this period, the state was not the state of a certain class but a structure made up of divine dynasty members and civil servants of the public (Sezer, 1981:149). Due to the superior position of the state over the society, maintaining social order and promoting justice were among the functional priorities of the state. At this point comes out a fundamentally different attitude towards accumulation of wealth from the western approach: Accumulation of wealth was regarded to be one of the sources of injustice and thus must be inhibited. In the pre-Islamic period, there were common practices to prevent any unjust structure to emerge, such as Hakan's order to sack the possessions, confiscation of property by the state and using it for pious foundations, restraining ways for the individuals to get rich, and violation of human rights being among the biggest sins in Islam.

It is clear that status-oriented values rather than market-oriented ones dominated the Turkish tradition of state. The relationships between the economic realm and the political power were far more different than those in Western Europe. Rather than the economic power paving the way for political power as in Western Europe, it was political power (higher positions in bureaucracy) that took one to the biggest material wealth. Still, accumulation of wealth was not allowed to take the form of permanent fortune in the hands of the few. For this reason, on the whole, the power of the state elites was never seriously challenged by the public. Neither the bourgeoisie of commerce nor landowners had ever reached such a position as to control or restrict the power of the state. As a result, the ultimate social division did not rest on economic foundations but on political criteria. As a matter of course, the central role carved out for the state was to take the responsibility of social and world orders, which was expressed as Order of the World (Nizam-i Alem) in classical Ottoman period and New Order (Nizam-i Cedid) in the period of modernization. The act of establishing a worldly state was conceived of through the concepts that come to mean establishing a state on the whole world similar to that of God all over the universe. Actually, the state was thought to be eternal (ebed müddet), meaning that the state is a never-ending sacred organization, which is an indication of the continuation of the historical legacy of the conception.

These developments occurring at the beginning of the modernization period in a process of adaptation with the historical legacy entered a new era and followed a different path afterwards, resulting in a state primarily based on European / Western values. In other words, the Western conception of state, based on a market-oriented organization, was of a far more different character than that in the western experience. In the early period of Turkish modernization, the Ottoman intellectuals were seeking to save a state which was about to collapse through a new legal system, unlike their counterparts in the west who were concerned about such problems as inequality caused by the domination of the church and social class structure. In fact, the Ottoman intellectuals were not convinced that the solution to their problem was a social contract as in Europe. Rather, they intended to benefit from the ideas of the thinkers of the Enlightenment, wanting to understand and use those ideas as explanatory models. However, the method adopted in the shaping of the new civilization was traditional in nature and thus no change was allowed without the permission of the state and it was believed that for a change to be legitimate it should be introduced only by the state. Explicitly, it was thought that change must start from the state and spread to the society from it. As a matter of fact, the last century of the Ottoman State, having realized the need for change in the early 1800s and the Republican Period, which cannot be thought independently of the Ottoman State, witnessed this type of changes. Consequently, even in the modernization period, the state was defined as the only authorized political agent to design and modernize the society.

4 A Comparative Analysis

As the Turkish state tradition was not based on social classes as in the West, the state in the course of Turkish history did not act upon the interests of a social class and thus politics was thought to be not a matter of the public but a matter of bureaucrats. As a result, the state affairs were considered as relationships not concerned with the public, and the political events, as they occurred, were watched by the public from a certain distance. To put it another way, the fact that the state did not represent the economic structure of the society brought about the existence of the state hierarchically over the public. The presence of a society having no classes and private property, the lack of an organized religion with hierarchy hindered the emergence of the social grassroots with internal conflicts experienced in societies that have classes, private property and an organized religion. Thus, in the course of the Turkish history, the public had to adopt a solution produced out of the limits of its structure and power. As the essence of the state was far from the conflicts of interests among the people, the public was not able to influence the state using their conflicts. Each person in the society was considered to be equal to one another, for the value system neither required the people to exploit each other nor allowed one to claim superiority over others. As a result, each of the principles that helped maintain the social order was valid for the whole society and thus the state was responsible for creating the conditions ripe for living accordingly. In this way, the state, with its

structure different from that of the West, occupied a central position in the Turkish political history as the social and individual existence required.

In the Western history of political thought, the walks of life and organizations in the society which were the result of the historical legacy were thought to be autonomous, whilst in the Turkish history of political thought, a spirit of community and identification among the social institutions were so common that an identification was always required between “the state” and “the people,” or “the state” and “the public.” In other words, the integrative processes with the state were designed not by a process of negotiation between and among the autonomous social fields but by a holistic approach. Due to its superior and sacred characteristics, the state was privileged; accordingly, the political behavior differed from the one in the west, which is still the same. Although the modernization process started quite a long time ago, and Western values and the pursuit of democratic ideals have long been extensively discussed in both the political and social spheres, the idea that the state has a superior position continues to exist in our political culture. As a matter of fact, the Constitution of 1961 states “the constitution was prepared by the Turkish Nation, who fomented the Revolution of May 27, 1960 using its right to withstand the government which lost its legitimacy by acting against the constitution and the law.” The Turkish Nation “declares that it accepts this constitution, prepared by the Founding Assembly of the Republic of Turkey.” In fact, however, it was National Unity Council directed by the 38 military staff of the Coup of 27 May 1960 that prepared the constitution of 1961. The procedure followed was far from the principles of free elections, general vote and representation of parties. Originally, the coup had the “Chamber of Representatives” prepare the constitution. Far from having such characteristics as being elected, representative, and deputy, National Unity Council played a big part in shaping the resulting script of the constitution. In other words, the preamble of the Constitution of 1961 created a “fiction” identifying the will and act of the military coup with those of the public, paving the way for legitimizing military interventions and constitutions prepared by coups in the Turkish political life.

Normally, the movement leading to the coup in 1960 did have the economic, social, and political elements of “revolutions” and conditions for the “right to resist.” Likewise, the 1982 Constitution states “the constitution was brought about by the military action of 12 September 1980 inspired by the call by the Turkish public for intervention to the inseparable part of the Turkish Nation, the Turkish Military Forces. It was prepared by the Advisory Council, the legitimate representative body of the Turkish Nation, shaped by National Security Council, and instituted and endorsed directly by the Turkish Nation.” A constitution of five people was presented as the constitution of the public. As the members of Advisory Council were all appointed by the military, it is a baseless argument to claim that they were the “legitimate representatives of the Turkish Nation.” As stated in the constitution, the final form of it was given by National Security Council, which has nothing to do with representation. Therefore, it is a groundless statement to say that “the constitution was instituted and endorsed directly by the Turkish Nation” (Parla, 2002:32-33).

In the preamble of the current constitution of 1982, “...to the unity of the eternal Turkish Nation and land and the presence of the Holy Turkish State” was replaced in 1995 with “the eternal presence of the Turkish land and nation and the indivisible unity of the Supreme Turkish State,” which means that “sacred” is excluded; “eternal” is maintained, and “supreme” is added. Despite this, the same mentality has been maintained as reflected in “the Supreme Turkish State” in the place of “the Holy Turkish State” (Parla, 2002:151). Such phrases as “the moral values and the history of the Turks,” “the material and moral happiness of the Republic of Turkey...,” and “for each Turkish citizen to develop morally and economically” have cosmic connotations directly in opposition with the Kemalist conception of laicism. These phrases go far beyond the phrases like “sharing the same fate, honor, and concern,” “the spirit of national unity,” (1961 Constitution) “sharing national pride, joy, and sorrow,” and “filled with feelings of mutual love and brotherhood” (1982 Constitution) (Parla, 2002:36). Exalting the state as such has always been supported by the education system and the bureaucratic elites (e.g., the military) to maintain the gained dominance within the system. Although a political reconstruction in the western sense was adopted with the political power taken from the heavens and granted to the public, the political practice has shown that such an ideal has never been internalized, even though the Republican State formally follows a western structure, which indicates that the traditional understanding of the state is still powerful in the governmental structure even in the modern times. In fact, the bureaucrats have always felt suspicious about other groups or organizations, or political parties exalting the state, and they still regard themselves as the guard of the state and public interests. Anyway, the structuring of the emerging political parties in the period of modernization was not like the ones in the West but was formed by our own political culture. Even when a political party of western character was needed, it was required that the new party must comply with the criterion: the supremacy of the state. To put it more clearly, the political parties of western character were allowed; however, what is expected of the political parties has been to represent the public interests, considering the central position of the state, without resorting to the interests of certain groups. The Turkish political life has witnessed this kind of a procedure the political parties have followed. When a political party tried the opposite, it could not continue to exist. In other words, though the structure of the state in the period of modernization has been influenced by the West, the political elite’s responsible attitude have helped the conception of state peculiar to their own state tradition survive up until now. The centuries-old

submissive attitude of the public towards the state has made it difficult for democracy to flourish in the society. Further, this has been hindered by the conscious efforts of the state officials, alongside with the distinction between the state and the public.

In brief, the traditional conception of state as holy and supreme has been regarded significant in the Republican period in terms of national unity and the power of the state with the public. Thus, representing the centuries-old governmental experience, this conception of state should not be destroyed for the sake of “becoming modern.” On the other hand, the political or bureaucratic authorities should not act highhandedly, exploiting the holiness or supremacy of the state. In this respect, if the supremacy of law is reflected in practical situations, then the historical advantages of the political culture could be put to good use. Otherwise, the political system may become corrupt due to such irresponsible behavior for the sake of “holiness” or “supremacy.”

5 Conclusion

The organization of the state in Turkish history cannot be truly understood with reference to the material needs or economic interests of the crowds or individuals in the society, as in the West, where the state has no supreme or holy position. However, the Turkish conception of state stipulates that the state encompasses all the public, is over them, and is not an area for showdown about social conflicts. Therefore, what we need is to greatly benefit from the Turkish state tradition, instead of losing it in the way for western politics.

There have been ongoing discussions about state, despite a good amount of literature about the state, and the discussions take many different shapes and contents in different historical and cultural environments. Though there are a wide variety of topics covered in these discussions, two questions still remain significant: “Does the state refer to a holy place or an area for showdown?” and “Is the state for order or the public?”

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