

## The impacts of nation state ideology in the early republican period of Turkey (1923-1938) on culture and art policies

**Gulsen G.Erdal\***, State Conservatory, Kocaeli University, Kocaeli, 41300, Turkey.

### Suggested Citation:

Erdal, G., G. (2016). The impacts of nation state ideology in the early republican period of Turkey (1923-1938) on culture and art policies, *Global Journal on Humanities & Social Sciences*. [Online]. 03, pp 275-281. Available from: <http://sproc.org/ojs/index.php/pntsbs>

Received January 10, 2015; revised March 03, 2015; accepted April 23, 2015.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Milan Matijevic.

©2016 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved.

---

### Abstract

The rapid change and transition process experienced through the Modernization / Westernization period entered with the Republic, which was founded in Turkey in 1923, includes intense constructions of culture and art media. All these constructions desired to be realized involve provision of a secular platform for political and ideal life, integration of culture into all parts of the society using the national history as a basis in culture, structuring high cultural institutions and bringing them into force. Due to the conditions of the period, educational administration is centralized. The objective of the elementary education is to train citizens for the new republic and raise the awareness of citizenship. Educational policies and programs rising national consciousness with a universal-humanist-secular approach is the principal feature of the republican education system.

Keywords: Early Reepublic period.

---

\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Gülşen G. Erdal**, State Conservatory, Kocaeli University, P.O. Box 41300, Turkey.  
E-mail address: [ggoksel@kocaeli.edu.tr](mailto:ggoksel@kocaeli.edu.tr) / Tel.: +090-555 323-9672

## 1. Introduction

The period of 1923-1938, which is called “The Early Republican Period” of the Turkish Republic, founded in 1923, constitutes the construction period. Among the concepts which were tried to be established with the Republic, “nation state” ideology comes first (Lewis, 1998). The most important point which distinguishes Ataturk’s civilization effort from the Ottoman reforms is its revolutionary characteristic. Ataturk, who performed his revolutions in accordance with the sense of culture, evaluated the needs of the society he lived in and the conditions of the world with a scientific approach (Torun, 2006). The essence of Ataturk’s reforms lies in fighting for the nationalization of the Turkish culture and its achievement of universal dimensions (Kongar, 1994). He became successful by turning his Republican period modernization initiative into a series of actions including all the cultural institutions. The most important cultural process in the Turkish Republic is the Turkish Revolutions (Kafkas, 2008).

### 1.1. *The Role of Nation-State Ideology and Principles of Ataturk in the Construction of Culture and Art Policies*

National society formation and dominance of national ideology which builds a common and widespread cultural ground for the society and provides a common philosophy within the framework of this we-phenomenon are possible with the functionalization of the national state (Kaplan, 2005). It can be said that Ataturk used contemporary principles as a basis in order to establish a new nation state with a sense of culture and aimed an entire cultural change for this purpose (Torun, 2006). These principles are considered as the determinant of the Turkish Cultural Revolution. The most important principle is nationalism. In Ataturk’s understanding of nation, cultural unity is dominant. Ataturk, who thought that the universal culture could not be reached without establishing nationalism in culture, achieved his modernization purpose by building a bridge between the national and the universal cultures. According to culturalists, Populism principle of Ataturk is a scientific principle which supplements cultural change and modernization and takes the cultural values and attitudes of the society and group psychology into account in the realization of the revolution. According to the populist approach, the duty of the state is to take the precautions to raise the culture and consciousness of the society for self-government in the fastest way. The principle of Revolutionism is synonymous with the cultural change in the cultural anthropological science. The principle of Statism constitutes the economic dimension of Ataturk’s understanding of culture. The principle of Secularism is the most important step in the Cultural Revolution. Ataturk established secularism in the social life in the fields of management, law, education and art through the revolutions he performed and put an end to the theocratic structure of the state. Religion, education, social life, law and art constitute the infrastructure of Ataturk’s Cultural Revolution (Torun, 2006).

### 2. *Content and Bases of Culture and Art Policies*

Cultural policies of countries can be said to consist of all the decisions taken to improve the social life. An art policy can be considered as the projection of these decisions in the field of art. When the factors determining the Art and Culture policy are specified as Religious beliefs, Limitations in political decisions, Wars, and Revolutions (Erbay et al.; 2004), all these factors can be seen to be effective in the determination of the culture and art policy in the newly established Republic of Turkey. As there was no possibility for art to be supported by the rich communities in the early years of the republic, this field was aimed to be supported by the state and it was intended to pave the way for cultural change with the adoption of the newly established nation state ideology by the society through art. It is possible to see the infrastructure of the art policy of the early republican period between 1923 and 1938 in the statements and practices of Ataturk. The main theme of the studies carried out in the field of art and culture in this period can be explained with the role of Ataturk’s art policy in the democratic construction. These construction studies can be listed as follows:

*-Considering the development of art and culture as the priority duty of the state*

(The state took the responsibility for art and protection of it in the foundation years full of great economic difficulties. Having a national identity in cultural policies and dissemination of art throughout the country were at the forefront (Germaner, 1999).

*-Establishment of the concept of national integrity and country consciousness* (In Ataturk's revolution of art and culture as a whole, education and art are important components of this whole. All the studies were carried out in this axis in order to reach the contemporary civilization.)

*-Raising the international image of the state* (The purpose of certification of the promotion of the state with artistic and cultural superiority by supporting art)

*-Provision of the Public-Artist-State cooperation* (Young artists being sent abroad and supported despite the limited state facilities and their being trained by the state)

*-Spreading the consciousness of the protection of cultural and artistic values* (the state's taking charge of the preservation of works with cultural and artistic values and transference of them to next generations, etc.

*-Use of art as a promotion and communication means* (It involves the national struggle during the establishment of the republic and the state's purpose of introducing itself to the public. The purpose is that art is considered as a support by the state, which is in a sense in an effort to make itself and its ideology accepted by the public.)

*-Institutionalization of art education* (It is the provision of education for young people at home and abroad and the implementation of art policy for national interests through education and raising artists for national interests.)

In the Republican period, all art occupations were supported in order to instill art consciousness. In these initiatives, national art policy and cultural policy were considered nested and this idea was supported with the prepared education policies and programs (Erbay, et al.; 2004, p.78).

### *3. Prominent Branches of Art and the Perception of Art Created by the National Ideology in the Early Republican Period*

The art branches established and institutionalized in Turkey during the republican period can be considered as the reflection of the efforts made in the late periods of the Ottoman Empire. Some of the fields where the national ideology revealed itself and took both supportive and supervisory roles were tried to be listed below.

#### *3.1. Architecture*

The founders of the Republic started an intense reconstruction activity, which was considered as the success criterion and indicator of the regime, throughout the country, the capital Ankara being in the first place, as of 1920s. The founders of the Republic attached particular importance to the construction of Ankara as it was considered as the success criterion of the new state. Reformation of

the city and the nature during the identity acquisition process is the visualization of the public sphere parallel with the ideology. In this aspect, Ankara has been a pilot scheme of the republican architecture through architectural understandings from 1920s to the present. The impact of the statutes erected in Ankara on the people of that period was great. The change of Ulus and Kızılay Squares in Ankara, which were built in accordance with the modernization project of the republic, coincides with the period of 1923-1930, when the republican ideology was tried to be popularized in the society. The squares where various ceremonies and celebrations were performed were the areas the ideology came into existence in open spaces (Bayraktar, 2013).

### *3.2. Painting/Drawing*

In this period, artists were tasked with explaining the state policy to the society. Two descriptions of social identity are found in their works. With the republican ideology, Anatolian peasants were used as a theme in the paintings/drawings of this period with their producer-worker identity as the origin of Turkish identity and upper class citizens were imaged as an indicator of modernization (Papila, 2012). Revolution exhibitions, which started to be organized in 1933, were the expression of the request of the state through its own exhibition activities. The paintings bearing the names “Cephane taşıyan koyluler” by Halil İbrahim, “Kuvayi Milliye “ by Arif Bedii, “Anadolu” by Eşref-Gazi, “Karagunler” by Fahrettin, “Buyuk Taarruz” by Hamit Necdet reflect this situation. Revolution exhibitions show the understanding of the state to orient the artists in line with the expectations. The exhibited paintings were bought in line with the activity of “painters travelling around the country” and so the role of the state in orienting and supporting the art came into view (Germaner, 1999).

### *3.3. Music*

With the foundation of the Republic, important efforts were also made in Western music field such as opera and ballet with the desire and ideal of being involved in Western music. Rey, Akses, Saygun, Alnar and Erkin, who were the pioneers of in the republican period, were called “Turkish Fives”. It was tried to create polyphonic Turkish music using the Anatolian folk music resources and Classical Turkish Music. The state ideology determining the national cultural policies supported the development of western music. Students were sent to Europe for music education, celebrated composers were invited to the country, and the idea of adoption of this music with the opinion that western music represented modern music was dominant between 1923 and 1938 (Erbay, 2006). Musical institutions such as Music Teaching School and Ankara State Conservatory were tried to be institutionalized.

### *3.4. Literature*

The field of literature “became one of the primary means of creating a human model in accordance with this process and its results during the state building process” (Aycan, 2012). It is seen that majority of the novels written in this period were in compliance with the discourses of the political power and in this environment, literature held a function with a power for social change. In other words, the early Republican period novelists approaching literature as a branch of art which had an effective role in the society rather than an aesthetic pleasure took the task of social engineering with their works. R.Nuri Guntekin, M.Cemal Kuntay, Aka Gunduz can be counted among the novelists and story writers who carried the moral, social and political patriotism to a statist-nationalist aspect in the establishment period (Unlu, 1998).

### 3.5. Theater

The Law on the National Music and Performance Academy (later; State Conservatory) numbered 2541 dated 1934 became an important driving force for the future developments of the Turkish theater. General discourse of the republican ideology depends on the radical difference between the old and the new. For example; that the plays satirizing the late Ottoman juridical functioning were written and performed in parallel with the revolution of law performed in 1929 is related to the adoption of the new legal system by the society (Donmez, 2011). After the establishment of the Republic, the state showed close interest in theater and made serious efforts for the institutionalization of it. In 1940, the State Conservatory Law was enacted, Tatbikat Sahnesi theatre was opened and the State Theater was established on 16 June 1949. The majority of the plays written in the early years of the republic took their plots from the recent history. The main themes were the War of Independence, bravery of the Anatolian people and Ataturk's Reforms. The sense of history in the plays was parallel with the history approach of the republican period. Numerous plays in compliance with the history ideology of the new regime were written by the republican writers. "İstiklal" by Reşat Nuri Guntekin, "Kahraman" by Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel, "Yolcu" by Nazım Hikmet and "Gazi Mustafa Kemal" by Hayri Muhittin can be listed as sample works (Başkan, 2012).

### 3.6. Sculpture

Sculpture is a more effective means in the adoption of the state ideology by the masses compared to the other branches of art such as art painting/drawing, literature and music (Sert, 2008). During the process of the War of Independence, which constituted the Republic and its base, the desire to hand the experiences down the next generations revealed the need for monuments. With the proclamation of the republic, large scale statues representing Ataturk and the War of Independence were made. Due to technical difficulties, the first of the megalithic monuments started by foreign artists was erected in Sarayburnu on 3 October 1926 and the second in Konya on 26 October 1926. These statues of Ataturk were made by the Austrian sculpture Heinrich Krippel (1883-1945). They were followed by Ulus Ataturk Monument (1927), Samsun Ataturk Monument (1931), Afyon Victory Monument (1936) by Krippel (Başkan, 2012). Ataturk statues were erected in the most important squares of İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Konya, Bursa and some other important cities. Ataturk statues were the examples demonstrating the relationship between the square and urban identity and the practice, exhibition and visualization of its power by the political power of the period. Another feature of the Ataturk statues was that these statues visualized the Turkish nationalism and the formation of the new subject of the new nation. Turkish modernization was in a sense symbolized in Ataturk statues and monument (Sert, 2008 ). The first monument performed by a Turkish artist in the republican period was İzmit Ataturk Statue (1929) by Nijat Sirel (Başkan, 2012).

### 3.7. Photography

Ataturk period photographers took his photos when M. Kemal became the president. Ataturk was introduced to the world with the photographs of Etem Ten, Cemal Işıksel, Nedim Tengizman and J.Weinberg. The General Directorate of the Press appointed the photographer Othmar Pferschy of Austrian origin living in Turkey on contract in 1935.

Pferschy travelled in Turkey and made his album called "Turkey" which was published in Germany in English, German, French and Turkish. The album included images of all the industrial enterprises established by the state, roads and dams built urbanization in the new sense, agriculture, art, youth and working population. It was the first album which Turkey introduced itself to the world with. The photographs in the album were remarkable in terms of the change which occurred in such a short time as 10 years. Photography came to the fore as a state policy. Photograph exhibitions and courses opened in community centers enabled to raise new artists (Ozdenes, 1999).

#### 4. Conclusion

The republican history is the history of Turkish Revolution which started and was accomplished with the national war of independence. The period between 1923 and 1938 is a period when the foundations in the fields of education and culture were laid and all the renovation movements in this period are considered as **cultural revolution** (Katoglu, 1989). With Turkish revolution, the cultural values and institutions to form its own social-political-economic structure were established as progressive enterprises open for innovation and improvement in all the branches of science, art and culture and steps to enroot and socialize the revolution were taken (Katoglu, 1989). In this process, culture, which was considered as the basis of the Republican ideology, was addressed as a source including all the items to reach the contemporary civilization level. Suggesting that many fields needed to be restructured with a modern approach, education, art and economy being in the first place, it was tried to reach the target through a national consciousness. In due course, this approach turned into a concrete identity with the interventions of the political power in many fields, culture and art being in the first place. The public was told to gather under common values and it was aimed to communicate the reforms performed in line with the dominant ideology to the public through the same channel.

#### References

- Akşin, S. (1989). *Modern Age History of Turkey*. Milliyet Library.
- Arpacı, M., & Duzcan, B. (2014). Westernization-culture and resistance: sociology of music revolution. Received September 31, 2014 from: <http://meseledergisi.com/2014/08/batililasma-kultur-ve-direnc-musiki-inkilabinin-sosyolojisi/erisim>
- Ayas, G. (2014). *Sociology of Music Revolution*. Dogu Bookstore. Istanbul.
- Aycan, A., G. (2012). Literature Perception in the Early Republican Period Turkish Novels and an Overview on the Periods of Turkish Literature” Turkish Studies - International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic Volume 7/3, Summer 2012, p.173-181, ANKARA.
- Başkan, S. (2014). Art in the Republican Period.
- Bayraktar, N. (2013). Concurrent testimony to history: The Process of Change in Ulus and Kızılay Squares. *Journal of Ankara Researches*, 1(1), 20-25.
- Donmez, H. (2011). *Ideological Function in the Early Republican Period Theatrical Productions*. Ataturk University (2), 51-68
- Durgun, Ş. (2005). *Music in Statist Tradition*. Alter publishing. Ankara.
- Erbay, F., & Erbay, M. (2006). *Republican Period (1923-1938) Ataturk’s Art Policy*. Bogaziçi University Publications. Istanbul.
- Erbay, F., Erbay, M., & Erbay, N.O. (2006). *Reflection of Republican Period Artistic Change on Publications*. Bogaziçi University Publications. Istanbul.
- Germaner, A. (1999). An overview on the Sculpture Phonemenon in our Country in the Seventy-fifth Year of the Republic. Colours and forms of the Republic. *History Foundation Publications*. Istanbul.
- Germaner, S. (1999). The Art of Painting in the Republican Period. Colors and forms of the Republic. *History Foundation Publications*, Istanbul
- Guner, K. (2014). The Birth of Modern Turkish Art/Culture and Ideology in the Constructivist Turkish Republic. *Kaynak Publications*. Istanbul.
- Kaplan, A. (2005). *Cultural Musicology*. Baglam Publications. Istanbul
- Katoglu, M. (1989). *Culture and Art in Turkey in the Republican Period*, Contemporary History of Turkey. Prepared for publication by: Sina Akşin. Milliyet Library.
- Kafkas, G., İ. (2008). *Village Institutions Again*. Trend Press. Istanbul.
- Karpat, K. (2014). *Turkey and Central Asia*. Timaş Publications. Istanbul
- Kaya, Y. (2012). The Music Revolution as Signs of Radical Modernization in the Early Turkish Republic. *History Studies*, 4(1).

Erdal, G., G. (2016). The impacts of nation state ideology in the early republican period of Turkey (1923-1938) on culture and art policies, *Global Journal on Humanites & Social Sciences*. [Online]. 03, pp 275-281. Available from: <http://sproc.org/ojs/index.php/pntsbs>

- Kaygusuz, O. (????). Early Pioneers of the Modern Turkish citizenship concept: Establishment of National Citizenship during the War of Independence. *Ankara University Journal of Social Sciences Faculty*. 60-2.
- Keskin, C. (2012). Artists Travelling around the Country. Suleyman Demirel University. *Faculty of Science and Literature. Journal of Social Sciences*, 27, 141-151
- Kılıç, M. (2007). Typology of the Early Republican Period Turkish Nationalism SDU Faculty of Science and Literature. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 16, 113-140.
- Kongar, E. (1994). *On Culture*. Remzi Bookstore. Istanbul.
- Kuçukkapan, U. (2013). *Arabesque/A Social and Musical Analysis*. Ayrıntı Publications. İstanbul
- Ozandes, E. (1999). 75 Years of the Republic in Photos. Colors and forms of the Republic. *History Foundation Publications*.
- Lewis, B. (1998). *The birth of Modern Turkey*. Turkish Historical Society Press. Ankara.
- Unlu, M., & Ozcan, O. (1998). *20th Century Turkish Literature*. Inkilap Bookstore. Istanbul.
- Ustunipek, M. (1999). *Art Sector in the First Fifty Years of the Republic*. Colors and forms of the Republic. History Foundation Publications. Istanbul
- Unal, F. (2010). 1923-1950. *Examination of the Art of Sculpture in the Republican Period in the Framework of Ideology and Art Relationship*. Anadolu University, Institute of Fine Arts, Unpublished Master's Thesis.
- Papila, A. (2012). Analysis of the Republican Period Turkish Identity through the Photos Produced by the Republican Ideology between the Years of 1923 and 1950. Ataturk University, *Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, 16(1), 151-168.
- Sert, D, M. (2008). *An Overview on the Representative Slogan Statues from the Perspective of Social Gender Non-thesis Master's Term Project*. Ankara
- Sun, M., & Katoglu, M. (1993). *Culture and Art Problems of Turkey*. Music Encyclopedia Publications. Ankara
- Torun, E. (2006). *Cultural Changes in Turkey After the First World War. Anatolia and Rumelia Again*. Mudafai Hukuk Publications. Antalya.
- Zengin, A.Y. (2010). *The Statesmanship of Ataturk*. Truva Publications. Istanbul.