Instrumentalist Use of Journalism in Imposing the Kemalist Hegemonic Worldview and Educating the Masses in the Early Republican Period

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Abstract
This paper analyses hegemonic use of the press in the process of top-down Kemalist modernization in the early periods of the Turkish Republic that is characterized by one party rule between early 1920s and 1950. In addition to helping Westernization attempts of the Kemalists, the press in this period also was hegemonically engaged in vilification of the past. Moreover, intolerant attitude towards pluralism and plurality of views was the discursive norm of the Turkish press at that time. The journalism and the press in the early years of the Republic had consistently supported the new regime which was committed to social engineering. This issue could unfortunately find little space in political science literature on Turkey. First of all, a theoretical framework concerning Gramscian theory of hegemony vis-à-vis media will be presented in this paper. Then, Turkish modernization history will be covered shortly, and lastly, in a more detailed way, the role of journalism and the press as an instrument in hegemonic modernization process in the early Republican period will be quested.

Keywords: Gramsci, Hegemony, Turkey, Media, Press, Journalism, Islam, Modernization

Introduction: The Media’s Role in Maintaining Hegemony

The biggest strength of hegemony theory is its sensitivity to how history, culture and ideology can give rise to forces that stabilize and legitimize authoritarian regimes (Sim 2004, 19). Gramsci (1971) recognized that the stability and cohesion of Western societies could not depend on only fear (Femia 1983, 347). The basic premise of the theory of hegemony is that man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas (Bates 1975, 351). Physical domination is not enough; there is a need for spiritual supremacy as well (Femia 1983, 346). The concept of hegemony means political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class (Bates 1975, 352).
Hegemony refers to the consensual basis of any given political regime within civil society, i.e., roughly what Weber meant by legitimation, though with a greater sensitivity to the interweaving of consent and culture (Adamson 1980, 627). Those who obey must, to some degree, share the values and standards of their 'superiors', and consent to their own subordination. Hegemony therefore signifies the control of social life (by a group or a class) through cultural, as opposed to physical, means (Femia 1983, 346). Elites attempt to secure consensus so that their rule would appear just and natural. The hegemonic group represents a theoretical self-perception, a ‘philosophy’ (Buckel and Fischer-Lescano 2009, 441). The state is no longer simple coercion, no longer the organized force of the ruling class used to maintain its supremacy over subordinate groups (Fontana 2002, 168).

In media studies, ‘hegemony’ refers to the ways in which the media influences individuals’ minds to consent to status quo power structures. Gramsci believed the media had a vital role in inculcating individuals to do things in their everyday lives that would support the establishment. Even though there are some disagreements over the precise nature of hegemony, it is widely perceived “that emphasis is on the cultural and ideological modes produced by the institutions dominated by ruling elites” (Altheide 1984, 477). Media helps perpetuating an economically, culturally and ideologically biased consciousness and all of society is thus effectively dominated by the false logic and consciousness through the instrumentalist use of media (Altheide 1984, 477).

The Gramscian sense of hegemony refers to moral and intellectual direction alone, and hegemonic rule should not be confused with rule by coercion (Femia 1979, 482). Hegemony is related to the mechanisms and processes by which knowledge and beliefs are first, produced, and second, disseminated in order to maintain the rule of the elite by gaining the consent of the masses (Fontana 2005, 98).

Hegemony is a permanent practice that concentrates on “ideological struggles for recognition, through which moral, political, and intellectual leadership is established” (Buckel and Fischer-Lescano 2009, 442). The ruling elite “is able to clutter the minds of the masses with mystifications and distortions (i.e., establish its hegemony) because it controls this apparatus of transmission” (Femia 1983, 348). From the hegemony theory’s perspective, culture is a site of continuous struggles that result in “no final, once-and-for-all victories and that cannot be reduced to economic determinations” (Cupples et al 2007, 787).
The processes of discursive contestation whereby particular ideological formations dominate the public sphere that allows no room for alternative and competing discourses and visions for society (Cupples et al 2007, 787). This domination is secured by the ideological apparatuses of the state like schools, churches, or media that make hegemony more acceptable (Mattei 2003, 5). The media also plays crucial roles in bringing “the overwhelming majority of citizenry into line and to marginalize the dissenters through a campaign of vilification” (Buttigieg 2005, 46).

Media has an important role in justifying the establishment rule by supporting its claims to superiority, and in persuading the ruled to consent to the status quo. People who formulate and disseminate ideas (such as journalists, priests, public relations companies, politicians, advisers, and academics) “are constantly engaged in interpreting current events and debates so as to fit dominant conceptions and categories (not always conspiratorially)” (Harris 2007, 2101). Journalists can also unwittingly promote hegemony by using hegemony’s cultural categories and symbols as they do their work, even though in most cases as part of the ruling elite, journalists employ “these codes consciously and strategically to promote dominant ideological interests” (Chaney, 1981, 117, cited in Altheide 1984, 478).

Turkish Modernization

The Ottoman Empire was a bureaucratic empire. The ruling class was strictly controlled by the center. In parallel to that, while the empire was dissolving, the elites who started to build a nation-state and modernize it were not of the bourgeoisie but of the bureaucrats (Keyder 1993, 3). The modernization of the Ottoman Empire emerged with the Westernization of the bureaucrats (Mardin 1973, 179). Thus, in Turkish political culture an elitist aspect has always existed (Frey 1965, 43). As a natural result of this, Turkish modernization has been mentioned together with Turkish intellectuals or elites.

After Tanzimat, with the replacement of the Ulema by the modernizing elites, the reforms changed in form and quality, and a series of changes in a ‘top-down’ process affected the whole society. The West’s political, military and economic successes were not recognized until the Ottoman Empire started to decline. Along with the military defeats, the idea of implementing some reforms in the context of technology came into
being. While discussing over the issue of “Can the technology be imported without importing the culture of the Western world?”

The reforms carried out also revealed Ottoman Empire’s envy for the West in its attempts to get modernized. The point that must be emphasized here is that, modernization was carried out in a ‘top-down’ fashion in Kautsky’s (1972) words by a group of “modernizers”. The intellectuals and artists who in fact must have been analysts owned a collective identity with a view to transform the society and they became ‘ideologues’ (Göle 2000). The Western powers could indirectly and to some extent directly affect the Ottoman modernization through these people. Also, the debts of the Empire were used as a tool in manipulating modernization movements.

The Noble Edict of the Rose Garden (Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu) in 1839 can be seen as one of the most radical aspects of the modernization movements. Despite the fact that its rhetoric is totally Islamic, the text has a completely secular character announced by Mustafa Reşit Pasha. Moreover, some Ottoman intellectuals in their novels at that time, conserved the Islamic epistemology while also putting a passive role on modernity. Another edict (Islahat Fermanı) declared in 1859 brought the idea of “nation-state” into the Empire despite the risk of Empire’s collapse.

Meanwhile, the new Ottomans with their publications released from Europe, eclectically defended the ideas of democracy, parliamentarism, constitutionalism, secularism and liberalism. New Ottomans who used Islam as a source of legitimacy struggled to bring new themes and concepts to the Empire. For instance, Namik Kemal tried to reach a consensus between Islam and parliamentarism by showing that consultation (Meşveret) in Islam is harmonious with parliamentarism. The Islamism which was adopted by the new Ottomans had emerged in an ideological form as a result of the interaction between the ideological thinking of the West and traditional values (Türköne 1994, 25). Briefly, the new Ottomans aimed to reach a more modern, secular and Western type of political system (Kara 1994, 62). In this context, it can be asserted that even positivism had been introduced with the new Ottomans (Köker 1994, 222).

What the new Ottomans desired, happened in 1876 and a constitution (Kanun-i Esasi) entered into force. However, this step was not seen sufficient and the elites in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) got the control of political power through a military coup in 1908. Thus, the political power of the bureaucracy and the elites had
been established. The Young Turks and the CUP evidently declared that they had been the inheritors of the new Ottomans in terms of modernization (Hanioğlu, 1985, 36).

The nationalist discourse as one of the effects of modernization was firstly pronounced by the elites, Turkish nationalism was used against the nationalist attitudes of minorities. The publications such as Turkish Association (Türk Derneği), Young Pens (Genç Kalemler), Turkish Homeland (Türk Yurdu), Islam Magazine (İslam Mecmuası) tried to prove that nationalism had been the most rational one in “Three Types of Policy” (Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset) (Mardin 1992a, 275). Besides, the language was simplified, through these simplification attempts with the help of social communication channels, the masses were tried to make mobilized for modernization (Mardin 1992b, 143).

Consequently, the elites had strengthened their hands while drifting apart from the society. For example, “The Young Turks started to have feelings of hatred towards the idea of populism and got engaged in elitist attitudes”(Hanioğlu 1985, 613). It is possible to assert that, most of the revolutions carried out in the early years of the Republic including that of adopting the Latin alphabet and abolishing the Caliphate were planned in this era. From this perspective, it can be understood that most of the revolutions seen with the introduction of the Republican Regime do not constitute a radical change. These reforms differ from the previous ones in the context of their ability to exercise sanctions. Unlike the previous decades, in the Republican era the revolutions were imposed to the masses in a ‘top-down’ fashion. In Weber’s words “the bureaucratization of the political authority” had started in as early as in 1908. From then on, the impact of Islam on state was minimized and even folk Islam was controlled. The Kemalist “Republican elite’s passion for modernization, seen as an escape from backwardness, translated itself into a total dislike and distrust of all things associated with the ancient regime and the old way of life. Topping the long list of suspect establishments were religion and religious institutions” (Yılmaz 2005, 387).

The reform movements concerning the language were radicalized in the early years of the new regime and with the introduction of the Latin alphabet, a total break from the past was witnessed. In addition, with a new conception of history, a new secular Turkish history was rewritten.

After the War of Independence, Westernization was seen as the second goal. The positivist understanding inherited from the Young Turks was kept alive through the
revolutions carried out by Kemalist elites. Apart from that solidarism paved the way for the legitimization of the single-party rule (Köker 1994, 234, 235). Also, the people appointed for the bureaucratic cadres were chosen from the enthusiastic people towards modernity, because bureaucracy was seen as an important agent for change (Heper 1977, 70).

Kemalists did not want to rule Turkish society by means of traditions, and social convictions and symbols and they “preferred to create a new ideology and symbols which would permit Turkey to progress rapidly into the twentieth century” (Ahmad 1993, 56). They were very clear in their minds about the pace of modernization: “to reach the level of contemporary European civilization, the Western way of life had to be espoused and imported with all kind of its institutions including laws” (Yilmaz 2002, 114). In parallel with this, it was also obvious that the opposing elements for the new regime were treated very harshly. The nationalist discourse which Kemalism has tried to establish opposed liberalism and pluralism as well as neglecting the idea of civil society (Göle 1994, 130). Even today, as Yilmaz (2009, 109) puts is succinctly,

There are both de jure and de facto constraints in the name of Kemalism limiting a fully functioning democracy in Turkey. The 1982 constitution, which was prepared after the Sept. 12, 1980 military coup, severely limits the democratic power of parliament and elected government compared to Western democracies. Until very recently, through the National Security Council the military had direct influence on the government. A parallel military court structure with even a Supreme Court of Appeals which has no equivalent in the West makes even a black-letter civilian control of the military impossible... It is also a fact that there have always been civilian supporters of such a Kemalist autocracy among elite circles such as the media, politics, business and even judiciary.

The institutions which produced this socio-political climate tried to transmit the messages of the new regime to the public via education. To serve this aim, the press was used in an effective way.
The mass communication as well as press and publishing have a firm relationship with modernization and Westernization project in Turkey. Publishing, above all, is one of the reform movements following the West; it is known that, publishing has been employed in order to motivate other reforms. However, what is more important is that, while the Republican elites were trying to carry out the social-engineering projects through revolutions in the early years of modernization, they did not just enact laws, but also used mass communication instruments as an efficient tool to make the modernization project get a wide support among the masses.

In another sense, the Republican regime like any other regimes, from the very beginning, got engaged in the legitimization of itself and adopting itself to the public. Like any other regimes, it used the press as a tool to serve this aim (Kabacalı 1987, 78). The supreme interests of the State pulled the journalists to getting engaged in shortcuts, and because of the notion of “interest”, the journalists turned into an identity of a civil servant (Kongar 1986, 46). Besides, modernity had been defended, and a consensus had been made about reaching the “level of modern civilizations”. Under the name of “Ottoman”, the traditional had been discredited, and the Western culture had been put in the foreground. The revolutions had been defended and the cultural metamorphosis of the masses had been tried to be effectuated via the press. On the other hand, the antagonists had been accused of being “ignoble” (Kabacalı 1994, 151). Moreover, the antagonists’ rights to have a voice in politics were quite limited until 1946.

The journalist-deputies had tried to legitimate the new regime and the political power with their publications, while seeing the demand for a second political party as a divisive behavior. (Güvenir 1991, 70, 74). In addition to that, it was evidently declared that a second political party would pave the way for “reactionary trends”. The period of the Republican era until 1946 witnessed the steering of the press including that of magazines too within the boundaries of the new regime. The starting point of this steering came into being with the trials of the journalist referring to the Caliphate. With the introduction of the “Law of Maintenance of Order” in 1925, the press in Istanbul was put under strict control; the newspapers representing the Islamic stand or extreme left were closed down. Some journalists were sent to exile, and all newspapers adopting liberal or socialist positions were closed down.
The magazines published between the years of 1923 and 1950 had the following sub-titles:

- Praise to the regime and political authority
- Passion for modernity and technology
- Empowerment of women
- Popularization of upper culture (Oktay 1995, 58-62).

Those magazines tried to loosen the ties with the past by emphasizing the superiority of the Western technology and by pushing the masses towards a radical modernization. The issues such as the mandatory Greek classes, skating, employment life and factories, urbanism, nationalist ideology, gymnastics and television were all undertaken by the members of the press (Topuz 1973, 137).

During the time of War of Independence, the press had played a major role too. For example, Mustafa Kemal paved the way for the publication of “National Will” (İrade-i Milliyet). This journal published in 1919 was used to make the decisions taken in Sivas Congress gain a widespread audience. Moreover, the journal called “New Day” (Yeni Gün) which was published by Yunus Nadi was one of the most important publications that supported the War of Independence.

Besides, in most of the Anatolian provinces, national struggle was supported by the press. In 1920, in order to inform the Turkish public and foreign public about the process of national struggle, a news agency called “Anatolian Agency” was founded. Even though Ankara became the capital city after 1923, Istanbul remained as the center of the press. Mustafa Kemal in order to underline the key role of the press in the modernization and Westernization process gave a speech to the journalists in 1924:

*Turkish press should build an iron wall around the Turkish Republic as a reflection of the nation’s real voice and will. A wall of ideas, a wall of mind… Our nation has a right to demand this from the members of the press. It is a must for the whole nation to be in a sincere union and solidarism (Topuz 1973, 142).*
It was obvious that the modernization project was not welcomed by a majority of the masses. Hence, one of the influential journalists of the time-being – Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın – who was judged in the Independence Tribunals (İstiklal Mahkemeleri), while defending himself said that “Am I not republican? Am I not secular? Am I not progressive? Do I not favor democracy? How can you complain about me?” (Köktener 2004, 68).

The new regime had wanted all the new publications to work with the aim to help the modernization project. Also the opposing publications were repressed. After the Sheikh Said Rebellion with the enactment of the law of “Maintenance of Order”, all the opposing press was hushed. A newspaper called “Tomorrow” which was favoring the Free Republican Party was closed down.

The experience of the opposing press lasted as long as the life of the opposing political parties at that time. “With the press out of the way, on the advice of the Independence Tribunal the government closed down the Progressive Republican Party on 3 June. According to the tribunal, members of the party had supported the rebellion and tried to exploit religion for political purposes” (Zurcher 2004, 172). All newspapers and periodicals leaning towards the liberal or socialist opposition had been closed down in 1925 and from then on only the government-controlled newspapers appeared since the adoption of a new press law that gave the government to close down any paper that published anything contradicting the “general policies of the country” (Zurcher 2004,180).

Even though the press had acted in a monolithic way in supporting the modernization project, some journalists revealed a heavier effort compared to others. For instance, despite the existence of almost the whole press’ support for Mustafa Kemal, the role of the newspaper called “Republic” (Cumhuriyet) had been a distinguished one (Köktener 2004, 70). That newspaper tried to support each single new law and social change ((Köktener 2004, 69). For instance, when the reform of the alphabet was experienced, the newspaper published an article called “The New Writing” on the very first page and it was emphasized that the adoption of the Latin Alphabet had been the main step towards Westernization ((Köktener 2004, 70). “It must be known that with this reform Turkey will completely resemble to Europe holding the key of civilization.”
Another newspaper called “The Evening” which was first published in 1918, in its first volume with the new alphabet declared that with this the reform of the alphabet; the country would get rid of ignorance (Kavakli 2005, 51).

It was easily seen that the newspaper called “The Evening” played a key role in making the masses adopt the revolutions and Kemalist principles (Kavakli 2005, 51). The publishing policy of the newspaper was to educate the masses in the light of Western values and to help the new regime transform the masses in line with Kemalist principles. The radical reform movements carried out in the fields of art, education and economics were placed in the first pages of the newspaper (Kavakli 2005, 51). As noted, this newspaper had adopted a publishing policy that served the interests of modernization project enthusiastically (Kavakli 2005, 68). “The newspaper that supported the social change had revealed progressive attitudes by gently focusing on cultural and artistic issues” (Çavdar 1995, 302).

In the 1930s, radio broadcasting started as a state-run enterprise and was mandated to “define and promote a common and collective agenda for modernization” (Onçu 1995, 55). The radio was used as an instrument of indoctrination (Alankuş-Kural 1995, 105-106). It “acted to reinforce unified understandings and experiences across the nation that could easily be formed and manipulated by those transmitting the messages” (Wuthrich 2010, 221).

In 1931, the journal called “The Cadre” was published to legitimize the new regime. The Cadre explained the purpose of itself in the following words: “In this mysterious process that the world is going through, to keep the revolutions alive and strong is our first duty. The Cadre is alive for this reason” (Er 2003, 91).

The first press law enacted in 1931 put a heavy pressure on the press. The legal amendments made in 1938, besides censorship brought limitations for the people working in the press. According to the press law, the publications could be abolished any time the council of ministers wanted (Topuz 1973, 152). In this new environment, the state declared what it wanted the press to do in many times: It wanted the press to serve the modernization project (Er 2003, 75). (See also Topuz 2003, 113). With a circular sent to all of the members of the press, the press was declared as the vehicle of the social engineering process:
The press constitutes the main pillar of the cultural revolutions. The president called the whole Turkish people for a cultural campaign. He declared that they could make the national culture stand in the same level with Western civilizations. The press of Turkey would play a major role in this process (İskit 1939, 224).

When the Turkish Press Congress was held in 1935, 116 newspapers and 127 magazines were being published. However, all of these publications were to defend the discourse of the ‘top-down’ modernization process. The opposing elements in the press were not given any right to survive despite being modern and Western oriented. According to the press congress, the newspapers were defined as follows:

a. The most powerful tool of propaganda in making the revolutions to gain a widespread support among the public.
b. A tool of defense against reactionary attitudes.
c. A servant for the incumbent governments.
d. The most effective school in the political, economic and cultural education of the masses (İnuğur 1992, 108).

During the Second World War, some kind of front line similar to that seen in the national struggle was witnessed. Some newspapers were defending democracy whereas some others were on the side of Germany. In 1945, some newspapers that had a leftist tendency were abolished. Contemporary scholars argue that this had been an operation of the deep state.

Conclusion

The question of hegemony is also a question of new cultural order (Hall 1988, 145). It also focuses on “the question of whose version of reality is being universalized and which alternatives are rendered unthinkable” (Sim 2004, 7). In this sense, in the Kemalist westernization project, which is a top-down hegemonic socio-cultural transformation process, the Kemalist bureaucratic elite that gained the upper hand after
1923 espoused the view that “modernization” and “progress” consisted mainly of the cultural transformation of society. They firmly believed that European-style civilization was “the pinnacle of progress, and they hurried to adopt the symbols of the European civilization” (Karpat 2004, 228).

Kemalists, as the main successors of Jacobinist and positivist Young Turks, firmly believed that socio-cultural “change must be imposed from the top and should be directed towards altering the traditional institutions, organizations, and, especially, culture, as these were regarded as the chief hindrance to progress” (Karpat 2004, 217). Kemalists aimed at creating a nationalist “Turkish culture to replace the Islamic culture which the reformers sought to sweep away” (Karpat 2004, 219).

The Kemalists viewed themselves as the educator of the masses and established a political tutelage regime “designated to educate the masses in the rudiments of modern politics” (Karpat 2004, 227). This was some kind of a vulgar process of intellectual civilizing (Landy 2008, 129). The realization of this social engineering process “was considered possible only through intellectual conversion” (Karpat 2004, 229). Kemalists wanted radical change first, and democracy only after Turks had come to realize, through Kemalist leadership and education, their true role as patriotic citizens (Dodd 1992: 18). Both the press and the educational institutions were mobilized to implement this project (Zurcher 2004, 181).

The press in the early Republican period was used as a socio-political manipulation tool of mass communication. The press had consistently supported the new regime and Western-oriented policies. The journalists reflected the Jacobin and elitist spirit of modernization in their articles and columns. They acted in a monolithic way and gave no permission and “column” to the opposition. Plurality and freedom of press were the two missing links that characterize this era.

Another dimension of the media hegemony is that the media frames a negative image of other countries, civilizations, cultures, traditions and religions (cf. Schlesinger, 1978; Beharrell et al., 1976, Gitlin, 1980; Dahlgren, 1982). In the early Republican Turkish case, this was done with regard to the Middle Eastern societies, Muslim cultures, practicing Muslims, Muslim religious functionaries, Sufi brotherhoods, and several public manifestations of Islam which were considered anathema to the Kemalist modernization project. Put it differently, they were made “the constitutive other” of the
Kemalist modernization project. In most cases, rather than challenging these directly, the Kemalists made use of an empty signifier: the notion of “reactionarism” (irtica). Kemalist discourse takes the meaning of reactionism as opposition to the existing secular system, but it refers to a social order built on Islamic values, norms and principles (Dursun 2006, 174). What is more, “it has become a signifier for the ‘irrational’ dimensions of Islam” (Dursun 2006, 174).

On the other hand, with the victory of United States after the Second World War, the wave of democratization came to Turkey and made it adopt a multi-party system. With the introduction of the democratic political life, the Turkish press and press elites had to transform themselves (for this pseudo-transformation see now Ozden and Yilmaz 2010). Yet, it is hard to say that this transformation process has ended and the Kemalist hegemony as far as the Turkish media is concerned evaporated.

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