

# Islam and the State - The torn Identity of the Turks

Speech held in Cyprus in 2017

*"You are the best community that arose for mankind. You command what is right, and forbid what is wrong..." (Quran 3:110)*

## 1. Islam and the state

In an Islamic state there has never been a distinction between religious and secular authority. The classic concept of the state in sunnitic Islam evolved during the succession of the prophet Mohammed. It was based on the actions and teachings of the prophet himself (Sunna) and the revelations in the Koran about the pillars of the state:

- God has the supreme power.
- The Kalif (literally "representative") is the secular and religious ruler.
- The schura-congregation is an advisory body, which consists of experts in Islamic law and of "distinguished" people.
- The community of the believers (Umma).

I believe that Muhammed did not originally intend to found a state. He actually started with small raids with men that he gathered. The condition to get a share in the loot was to believe in him. As more men aquired wealth that way the number of his followers grew.

Mohammed's first aim was self-aggrandisement. He declared himself Allah's representative and sole favourite creature and prophet, thus claiming power and omnipotence.

Koran verses indicate that obedience is not limited to God. But he considers himself and God on the same level. Some examples are 3:31, 3:32, 3:132, 4:59. To me the verse in Al-i Imran appears most remarkable. Here God's love of men is joined to obedience of Mohammed.

The community in Mohammed's times was based on war against other tribes and income from robbery. God was apparently not relevant as far as questions of state were concerned. An indication of this is the verse which allocates God his share of the loot. This verse makes God a business partner of his prophet.

The Koran says that God's share in the spoils of war is 1/5. This share was of course to go to the prophet. Apart from the question what kind of God is that, who accepts spoils of war, one might ask how he imagined that this should be done. Should men attack each other, rob, enslave and sell women, and give God's fifth to the kalif as long as the earth exists?

## 2. The political system

The head of an Islamic state is the kalif. This kalif is elected or appointed for life. It is not quite clear who elects or appoints the kalif. The kalif has to enforce the Islamic laws.

The kalif is assisted by an advisory body, the so called Schura-congregation. But that there should be such a body is not really written in the Koran. Its existence is deduced from

sura 42, verse 38:

*"... those who listen to their Lord, say the prayer und confer with each other..."*

Generally the Schura consists of experts in Islamic law and influential people.

Of Course the Schura is not a democratic body. Even amongst muslim believers it is controversial who elects, who may be elected and which rights the Schura has in relation to the kalif.

The community of the believers owes the kalif absolute obedience. If the kalif should act contrary to Koran and Sunna, moderate believers say there might be a rudimentary right of resistance. But what is a rudimentary right of resistance? If I look at the actions of Erdogan I think this „right“ of resistance“ does not exist.

Since the downfall of the Osmanic Empire and the abolishment of the last kalifate 1924 there most Arabic states had totalitarian regimes which pretended to be democracies. No sooner than an Islamic person or party came to power in Turkey, the regime became increasingly totalitarian. The referendum in april is aimed at abolishing the remains of a democratic state and civil rights.

Most Islamic states are infiltrated with nepotism, corruption and stuctures of police states and dictatorships. Also characteristic of these countries are military coups. This political and social misery goes with great economic problems.

The Islamic population often looks for a strong person like a prophet whom they can "obey".

The population accepts the published opinions of the ruling power. Everything negative and every misery is blamed on the western influence.

## 3. Absolutism, Totalitarianism, Universality

The Islamic idea of the state claims to be absolute, totalitarian und universal. This translates to:

- We want to rule everywhere.
- Everybody has to believe in Islam. Der Koran is God's word.
- All creation is His.

The basis for laws are the Koran and religious tradition and, when in doubt,

Mohammed's actions in similar situations. The universality of Islam has the sole aim to enforce Islam on the whole of mankind, thus spreading Islamic power structures worldwide.

Sura 8, verse 39:

*"And fight against them ... until all believe in Allah!"*

That's why Saudi-Arabian foundations as e.g. Al Rabita or the Muslim World League are operating worldwide and found economic networks in European countries.

#### **4. Are Democracy and an an Islamic state model compatible?**

In the forties of the 20th century Islamic theorists (e. g. Abu Ala al-Mawduudi, Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad al-Ghazali, Muhammad Amara oder Hasan at-Turabi) returned to medieval concepts as the "true Islam", which prescribes detailed rules for all areas of life.

They advocate the election of the head of state (kalif) and the Schura-congregation by the people and stress the role of the Schura-congregation as an institution similar to a parliament.

But: There remains a basic difference to democratic rules: The ruler in an Islamic state is not the people but God.

The kalif has far reaching powers, which cannot be limited by a Schura-congregation as it has only advisory function.

But: who can be elected? Only men? People of a different faith may not be elected in an Islamic state. Who decides who may become kalif?

No, Islam is not compatible with democracy. The Koran is in contradiction to the constitution of Germany. It is far removed from the idea of democracy, freedom, equal rights of people as well as genders.

On issues not dealt with in the Koran, Mohammed's life is supposed to offer solutions.

But this is hardly so in our age.

If he lived now he would spend most of his life in jail for:

- child abuse
- robbery
- murder
- incitement to murder

#### **The torn identity of the Turks**

First of all: For me the concept of nationality is the most evil human invention. There is no natural or scientific basis for a group of people to call themselves a nation. The calling into question and abolishment of the "Nation" is a task

which is yet to be achieved by all rational thinking people.

Nationality is part of the identity of the Turks as a society. Like personal identity nationality is constructed narratively. That is to say: a community creates its national identity through narratives of common memories.

The narratives conveyed which historic events are relevant as supporting traits of the nation, and which purpose history aims for. In the beginning national events and ideas were passed on by word of mouth. Later monuments, places, buildings were added. Through written texts and meanwhile also through films they reach a large audience

As the rulers always determined which narratives were relevant, "history" is principally the unconscious acceptance of the ruling powers. It thus accepts the exploitation through rulers or an economic system.

When trying to find identity in cultural history the question arises: When does the history of the Turks start and where does it end?

Let us look at the time when the Turks made their first contact with Islam: In middle asia they were brutally subdued - even by standards of those times. About 80 000 young men were brought to Arabia as slaves. Thousands of men were murdered. Women were put into harems.

In the Ottoman Empire Turks were of no importance, they were not even much appreciated. No Sultan ever married a turkish woman. And if nowadays Turks think they have reason to be proud of the Ottomans: the Sultans were not Turks. And in the entourage of the Sultans there were hardly any Turks. Turks were considered to be rather inferior in the Ottoman Empire.

The only thing left for Turks to identify with was the religion.

I was born and raised in Turkey. In school, teachers told us that the Turks originally lived in Middle Asia. And that they emigrated because of dramatic climactic changes. While some of them took the northern route to Europe, another group took the southern route to Asia Minor. That on their journey they heard of Islam and realized immediately that this was the right religion for them. This historical misrepresentation is a result of their social status in the Ottoman Empire.

It is a historic presentation to create an identity with Islam, but it is simply a lie.

What we were not told in school:

1. Turk-countries (several staates) were subdued by Arabian Armies, and people were murdered in great numbers.
2. Brutality and bestiality of these conquests is proudly described in some so called historical Arabian books, amongst others by Tabari, which is considered as a reliable source by the believers.
3. It is quite interesting that the information of the brutal islamisation of the Turks can be found in the English editions, but is missing in the Turkish translations.
4. The nationalism of the Turkish-Islamic fascists and nationalists is just a farce, since they are hailing their nationalism and its destroyer – Islam - in the same breath.

If I am talking now about the lost identity of the Turks, I would like to point out

to you:

Turkish fascists are proud of their race. But the Turks in Turkey don't resemble at all the Turks living in Middle Asia. The Turks in Turkey are a good mixture of many peoples. If they acknowledged this fact this would be a great plus for Turkey in their international acceptance.

But this idea is far from the minds of the present rulers in Turkey. They prefer trying to adopt Islam, that is: an Arabian culture and the Ottoman Empire, thus creating a Sharia regime.

But what kind of regime was that?

Here some examples:

To pacify the country the Sultans had about 7 people beheaded daily, the vizier 6 and the lower ranks less people according to their rank. This practice originates from the right of the ruler to kill, it originates from the sharia. Pasha Köprülü Mehmet who had 30.000 people killed during his 5 year reign. Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640) had more than 50.000 people killed during the last 7 years of his reign, in 17 year more than 100.000.

To spread Islam the Ottoman Empire started a war about every seven years, regardless of the situation of the people.

18 of 37 Sultans had their relations killed, their father, their sons, grandchildren, uncles. Some of them had killed even their wives and all women in the harem.

What does this tell us about the identity of the Turks who want the Ottoman Empire back?

To idealize your oppressor means to internalize the oppression, the humiliation, to be unable to assert yourself against him. You even identify with your torturer in order not to lose your self respect.

What happened after the founding of the republic? There was a majority who believed in the sharia regime, and a minority which were followers of Atatürk. In one of his famous speeches Atatürk handed over the republic to the young people. This speech was to motivate the building of an artificial modern nation. The youth was to further develop his ideas.

But he had to leave the country 1938 in the hands of his contemporaries, who grew up in the Ottoman Empire with the sharia regime.

What did they do? They applied the Islamic view to Atatürk. They put him on a pedestal as they had done with the prophet before. They made him untouchable. Thus they prevented the youth from further developing his ideas. When the republic was founded, nationalism and the nation building was quite common. Atatürk was a visionary in **his time**.

But nationalism lost its significance after World War II. It should have been replaced with the concept of a multicultural society, which would be more in accordance with the reality in Turkey.

One of Atatürk's most important acts was the decree from 24.November 1934. With this decree the Hagia Sophia, which was used as a mosque by the Ottomans for more than 400 years, was turned into a museum. This was the first time a "place of worship" was secularized. In his time he could not turn

other mosques into museums. But he founded the Diyanet, the Office for Religious Affairs, thus trying to keep religion in check by the democratic state. If his ideas had been further developed, religion could not have been the basis for national identity any more. It would have been banished into the museum.

As we know from the news, the supporters of the sharia gradually have got back into power. Here is not the time and place to list all the steps they have taken to achieve this goal.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The Turks in Turkey are not Turks.

The Turks in Turkey are people who have internalized their Arabian colonial culture, the culture of their conquerors and destroyers.

## **BUT:**

- There are many Turks who no longer identify with this torn concept of what it means to be a Turk - I would guess at least half of them.
- They identify with their painful history of survival.
- They identify with their long tradition of hospitality and their power of integration.
- They identify with their proud and ardent longing for freedom.
- They identify with a modern concept of a democratic state.
- And they identify with universal human values.

We all should unite with this part of the Turkish people, support these forces - and learn from them and their courage.