

PROBLEMS OF SOURCES AND DOCUMENTATION IN
RESEARCH ON THE POST-1960 PERIOD TURKEY

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In the social history of Turkey, the period after 1960 is rich in its content and at the same time important for evaluating future developments in Turkey.

I. General Outline of Developments

After 1960, the organisation of social classes and especially of certain sections of the working class developed by leaps and bounds. Although there were setbacks at times, the general trend was towards the growing of the working class and the strengthening of its organisational activity. In 1960, there were only 2.4 million gainfully employed employees (19 percent of active population). In 1985, the corresponding figure is about 7 million (about 40 percent of active population). In 1960, there were only 282 thousand union members. In 1988, the figure, with some overestimation, is 2 227 thousand. Before 1960 it is impossible to mention the working class as an important independent actor on the stage. From 1960 onwards and especially in the last few years, the predominantly spontaneous working class movement is acquiring an ever increasing independent and important role. Thus, any social historian of the post-1960 period is ought to consider the working class as an important social force. The working class formed and developed organisations independent of the state and the ruling classes and waged a class struggle.

One of the main features of this period was the development of a youth movement independent of the state and/or of the People's Republican Party. The Workers' Party of Turkey contributed considerably to the development of this independent youth movement, and it acquired a mass character in the late 1960s. From the late 1960s onwards, the majority of the militant youth and their organisations were never again the apparatus of the state. They tried to align with the working class and other radical elements to initiate and realize fundamental social and political changes. The radical youth in Turkey in the post-1960 period deserves special attention.

1960 was a milestone in the development of the left in Turkey. In the 1960-1988 period, the left, although partitioned into numerous political parties and factions, increased its influence on social and political developments and acquired a mass character. Any study of this period should consider the left as an independent factor influencing social and political phenomena, rather than a marginal movement.

The artisans and petty-tradesmen and small farmers could not form and develop independent class organisations of their own and thus were unsuccessful in playing an important role. Their organisations were under either state or ruling classes control.

The Kurdish nationalist and socialist movements also are playing an increasingly important role. The attitude and alignments of the Kurdish labouring classes will influence major social and political developments in Turkey.

In the period under consideration, concentration and centralisation of capital under direct or indirect control of multinational corporations increased rapidly and capitalists played an increasing and dominating role in all spheres of life. As the struggle of the working class developed, the conflict led to a number of maneuvers on the side of the ruling oligarchy. Fascist and fundamentalist bands were organised and an undeclared civil war was initiated. Any attempt at social history of the period should consider both the development of capitalism and these two movements as well.

The armed forces staged three coup d'etats, in 1960, 1971 and 1980, respectively. Although the independent character of these military interventions can be questioned, it is nevertheless necessary to consider the armed forces as an important factor of social and political history of Turkey, especially in the post-1960 period.

In the evaluation of Turkey in this period, one is never to forget that Turkey is a part of the world capitalist system as a junior partner, and that it is under a very strict control of US imperialism. The US ruling classes played and continue to play an important role on the economic, political and social developments in Turkey through various extensive and powerful channels and means.

II. General Problems of Research

It is impossible to demarcate the economic, social and political factors in general, and it is more so in the post-1960 period Turkey. This period in Turkey is full of re-alignments of forces in all spheres of life. The rapid industrialisation, migration to urban areas and international migration, simultaneously taking place with changes in the international division of labour and in the roles attributed to Turkey, changed all balances of power within the social fabric. Thus, for a social historian, this period of social history of Turkey is both challenging and attractive, but also is dangerous terrain. Grasping the structure and dynamics of such a rapidly transforming society may, as is generally the case, lead to unexpected failures.

I believe that a general and brief review of the difficulties of research on this period will be of help in evading easily-arrived and most-likely insufficient generalisations. For the foreign social historian of Turkey, to differentiate between the propaganda material of the state and the reality is not that easy. The same is also valid in differentiating between what is essential and non-essential. Indigenous social historians are, on the other hand, prone to exaggerate certain phenomena of temporary nature and of minor importance.

Thus, I believe, we all need to exchange views on this rapidly changing and interesting subject. This seminar of the International Institute of Social History, I hope, will provide such an opportunity.

Before briefly outlining the available data and material and research on the subject and evaluating them, I want to attract your attention to an important factor influencing the quality and quantity of the data and research on the post-1960 period Turkey.

The years under consideration are very recent history. The main actors are still on the stage. The revelation and discussion of the realities may and most probably will irritate certain persons and groups in power. Thus, there is a systematic endeavour on the part of the state and the ruling classes to prevent the public opinion to be informed about the realities. This is achieved by disguising essential information and at the same time inventing and marketing through various channels misleading and false information. The conscience of the state and the ruling classes is not so clean as to permit a free study and discussion of reality.

In Turkey, a social scientist (a person independent of the state) was and is never permitted freely to acquire information, evaluate it and publicise his/her findings on vital subjects of social history. Certain topics have been and is being treated as taboos and those scientists working on them continuously face sanctions. The working class, the left, Kemalism, coup d'etats, the Kurdish question, the army, that is, the main factors, fall into this category.

On the other hand, a social scientist is not neutral in a world of conflicting class interests. Analyzing and evaluating reality

means aligning oneself with a party of this contradiction. If you are in Turkey, this may mean trouble.

Being a social historian of the post-1960 period of Turkey in Turkey means that, before tackling problems of acquiring data and information, you have problems due to the lack of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The right-winger members of the teaching staffs of universities are apologists of the established order and are busy in distorting the reality. Other "scientists" serve the same cause behind the pretensions of "neutrality." It is only for the critics of the established social, political and economic order that grasping the structure and dynamics of the social system is essential and that is also the reason why they face persecution.

In Turkey there is a systematic assault on social science. Published material (books, brochures, periodicals and newspapers) have been and are treated as evidence of crime. Every now and then, people accused of certain offences (after being severely tortured) appear on the TV, with books and arms exhibited side by side as alleged evidence against them. Books sold freely in the bookshops are confiscated by the security forces at homes. Books are confiscated even in bookshops without a court verdict. Court verdicts for banning and annihilation of books are also pretty common. In the 1960-1980 period, about 460 books, brochures and periodicals were thus prohibited. Keeping more than one copy of such a publication is automatically treated as intention of propaganda and is severely punished with a prison sentence.

All the above-stated problems do not mean that one should be pessimistic about the prospects of research on the post-1960 period in Turkey. Just the contrary. In spite of all the above briefly stated obstacles and the difficulties to be enumerated below, there is a lively discussion and endeavour to grasp the structure and dynamics of the society.

The oppression and exploitation our people in Turkey had and have to face, increase the need for social science to change this imposed fate. The precondition of success in transforming is to understand the structure and dynamics. Attempts in the past on the part of the social scientists were generally unsuccessful and led to defeats in the struggle for a better society to live in. Now it is commonly acknowledged that without social science enlightening the future, no attempt to change this imposed fate can be a success. Thus, there is in Turkey now a revived and lively interest on the economic, social and political history of Turkey and especially of the post-1960 period. This, however, is taking place generally outside of the universities, which were mainly deprived of their feature as havens of freedom of research and expression.

III. Acquisition and Reliability of Data and Information

In order to make research on the social structure and dynamics of post-1960 Turkey, basic correct data and information should exist and be accessible.

As an example of problems of this sort, I want to summarize the situation with respect to some main factors related with the labour movement. The case for other areas is almost the

same. It should also be borne in mind that, the government frequently feels herself free to play around with and manipulate statistical data for propaganda purposes.

1. Employment and Unemployment: In order to analyze the social structure, the first factor to take into account is employment. Population censuses are held every five years by the State Institute of Statistics. They form the basis of employment and unemployment figures cited in many studies. However, some of these censuses are reliable and others are not. It is commonly stated that many forms were filled without actual interviews during the 1975 census and that the findings of the 1980 census are quite reliable. Research conducted without taking this into account may yield unrealistic outcomes [1].

The censuses supply data on the unemployed as well. However, since there are hundreds of thousands of people not even registered as citizens and do not possess an official identification card, the unemployment figures are not fully reliable.

The Labour Placement Office supplies statistical data of the unemployed who apply for placement only. Since there is no unemployment insurance in Turkey, no official organisation or body can or does have the intention to keep track of the unemployed. So, the student of this period can be astonished to encounter a number of quite different data of the same phenomenon.

With the rapid rate of expropriation in the post-1960 period and especially after the Austerity Program of 1980, the absolute

number and proportion in active population of the unemployed increased. However, it is impossible to specify the real levels, although an important increase can also be observed even in the unreliable official statistics.

2. Class Structures: A detailed analysis of the population censuses provides the opportunity to have a general view of the class structure of Turkey. In the censuses the population is classified under "employers," "employees," "self-employed" and "unpaid family labour." This classification, with some amendments, may be used to draw a general picture. Thus, the censuses in the 1960-1985 period provide valuable raw data. However, students of class structures generally preferred in Turkey juridical definitions of classes and dealt only with predominantly manual labour as the working class. Wage and salary employees employed within the context of the Civil Servants Act and similar acts were not considered within the working class. Classification according to juridical definitions, I believe, constitutes one of the important shortcomings of many studies on the subject. Sometimes only the workers paying contributions to the Social Insurance Institution are considered to be "workers." This leads to even more important misvaluations.

3. Income Distribution: An important factor in analyzing social developments is income distribution. In the post-1960 period, the State Planning Organisation conducted income distribution surveys in 1963 and 1973. Three social scientists analyzed the situation in 1968. In 1986, a sample survey was conducted by

the Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen. In the same year, a member of the METU (Middle East Technical University) teaching staff concluded a study on his own. There are controversies as to the comparability of the findings of these studies, since the methods used in each survey differed.

Thus, although we have empirical evidence of the deteriorating living conditions of the labouring classes in general, reliable accurate data on the changes in the income distribution are non-existent. As for the distribution of wealth, no study exists.

4. Trade Unions and Trade Union Membership: One of the most difficult areas of research is on trade unions and trade union membership. In the post-1960 period, trade union membership increased rapidly and trade unions started to play an important role especially in the last few years. Any student of Turkish social history can easily be misled by the official statistics on these subjects. To cite a minor example, the alleged number of trade union members was 5 721 074 in 1980 according to the Ministry of Labour, whereas the actual figure was below 2 million. Changes in official figures do not reflect reality in the 1960-1980 period. From 1984 onwards, the data are more realistic, but slowly lose their reliability.

Without knowing in detail the methods of collection of data and presentation, gross errors can easily be committed as to the organisational level of the working class in Turkey.

5. Wages and Salaries: Students of the post-1960 period are more fortunate than their colleagues interested in the pre-1960 period with respect to the availability of data on wages and salaries. The data on daily incomes of the Social Insurance Institution are used as wage-series, which leads to a certain amount of distortion of the reality. However, being able to use these data cautiously, knowing their defects and shortcomings, is something to be grateful about. The Özal Government, irritated by the loss of purchasing power exhibited even by these data, forbade the publication of daily incomes data by the Social Insurance Institution in 1985. Thus, the only seemingly representative and independent series of incomes data is not available any more. In its place, the data of the State Planning Organisation is substituted and no explanation as to the method of its preparation has yet been given.

6. Collective Labour Agreements and Industrial Conflicts: One major area of research is collective labour relations.

There is no library or archive in Turkey where one can reach a considerable number of collective labour agreements, leaving aside all. The state is even unable, in the 1963-1980 period, to state the correct number of collective labour agreements concluded. The State Institute of Statistics publishes completely different series of data on collective labour agreements in its two different publications. For example, the number of workers within the context of collective agreements concluded in 1978 is alleged to be 635.9 thousand in one publication and to be 385.9 thousand in another publication of the same Institute.

The same is valid for legal industrial conflicts as well. Different government institutions issue conflicting series on legal strikes and lock-outs. For example, in 1977, 15.7 thousand workers participated in strikes, according to the Ministry of Labour. However, according to the State Institute of Statistics, the corresponding figure is 59.9 thousand. For working-days lost due to strikes in the same year, the two sources issue 1.4 million and 5.8 million, respectively. As for illegal forms of industrial action, no official data exist.

7. Trade Union Activities: Trade union activities intensified in the post-1960 period ⁽²⁾. Thus, in order to understand the social structure and dynamics in the period under consideration, a detailed analysis of trade union activities is a prerequisite. The activities of trade unions can be traced through the reports of activities submitted to general congresses, their statutes, resolution books, periodicals, newspapers, leaflets, press releases and other publications and the memoirs of veterans. There is no library in Turkey (including the National Library) which can boast to possess a considerable number of these items for the 1960-1988 period. Even the material of confederations of unions are difficult to reach, leaving aside the above-mentioned essential material of individual unions. Some material in the National Library is unaccessible.

Even though the law stipulates that copies of all published material be sent to the National Library, most trade unions abstained from doing it. Besides, some material was mimeographed and there is no provision for such publications.

The trade unions and confederations do not generally keep archives. Especially after changes in the leadership, which is quite frequent in some unions, some of the material published during the previous term disappears. Some union officials and employees are ignorant even of the publications of their own union. It is not an exaggeration to encounter two books by the same serial number. The general secretary of the largest confederation (Confederation of Trade Unions of Turkey, TÜRK-İŞ) Sadık Şide sent to the papermill in the early 1970s an important portion of the Confederation's archive.

The Ministry of Labour is supposed to keep an archive of all the above-mentioned material concerning trade union activities, since they are generally submitted there. However, for the 1960-1980 period as well, the archive of the Ministry is both in a mess and is unaccessible to researchers. In 1982, by chance, I received a permission to enter the archive and studied there for a month and a half. My permission was cancelled immediately after an article by me criticizing the government appeared in a periodical. After the new legislation in 1983, all files and documents have been piled up in the storeroom and will most probably perish soon. As an example, I can cite the annual registers of strikes and lock-outs. Last year I applied to the Ministry to study on these annual registers and registers for only 3 years for the period 1963-1980 could be found by chance. The others were "somewhere in the storeroom." It is not unbased prognostication to say that the documents held by the Ministry of Labour for the 1960-1983 period will be sent to the papermill in the near future, thus destroying valuable material of social research.

There is not even a complete bibliography of all published material on the labour movement in Turkey. Attempted bibliographies are insufficient and lack articles in Turkish [3].

Confiscation and sometimes destruction of documents by the state is common in Turkey. The archive of the People's Republican Party was thus sent to the papermill after 1980. Archives of trade unions, political parties, associations and individuals could not escape the same fate. The valuable material in the Research Institute of DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey) is, for the time being, inaccessible and will most probably be destroyed in the future as the court case terminates. There is no guarantee in the short run that a documentation center on the social history of Turkey will not be confiscated by the security forces with or without a court verdict and that it will be preserved for the future generations of Turkey and of humanity.

Although trade union activity did and will continue to play an important role in the social history of Turkey, the material and documents necessary for the preparation of a detailed union history are generally unavailable. Some researchers may suffice to use only or mainly publications of confederations, daily newspapers and even court indictments. However, such an approach can and generally does lead to fundamental faults. Foreign historians, who do not know in detail the characteristics of the available data, are more prone to such flaws. If there had been in Turkish statistical data a tradition of reliability, a few

figures might have been representative and be sufficient. However, the case is quite the contrary, with a tradition of manipulation of statistical data by the government and deliberate distortion of reality.

IV. Social Research and Universities

Universities are normally expected to be places of freedom of research and expression. In the 1960-1980 period, the general environment in the universities in Turkey was favourable for research and many social scientists contributed to the understanding of the structure and dynamics of society.

After the coup d'etat in 1980, the universities were one of those which suffered the most.

Many members of the teaching staffs, especially in the field of social sciences, were dismissed from their posts by the military commanders of the martial law authority, without any clearly and explicitly stated indictment or any court verdict. A completely un- and anti-democratic structure was imposed on the universities through a restructuring of the university system during the military rule, which was perpetuated by the Özal Government. Some members of the teaching staffs resigned in protest of the new policy and implementations. Some remained in the hope that, when the political climate changed, it would be possible to start all over again. In the meantime, the number of students in the universities increased manyfold, without a concomitant increase in the teaching staffs and the facilities. This increase in the

workload and the un- and anti-democratic environment created in the universities were the main obstacles for the universities to contribute to genuine research on the post-1960 social history of Turkey, a period which may create trouble for the researcher.

V. Prospects of Research on the Post-1960 Period

Some of those social scientists who were dismissed from or who left the universities continued with their research. What appears as new products in the market in social sciences are to a considerable extent thus produced.

Legally established political parties, trade unions and a number of non-profit associations are quite insufficient in their activities in this area.

BİLAR, an undertaking of dissident intellectuals and social scientists who left or were forced to leave the universities, is to a certain extent successful in initiating an alternative university, with special attention being paid to the workers. But its activities are still too limited to stimulate and promote widespread original research.

The sections of the left not permitted legality in Turkey are very much interested in the social structure and dynamics of society, most likely as the result of the blow they suffered after 1980. Before the 1980 coup d'etat, most of their scientific rhetoric was a means of rationalising their political stance.

The defeats after 1980 persuaded most of them to do scientific research. Since the 1960-1988 period forms the basis on which the future shall be built, they are especially interested in the social history of these years.

There are many difficulties in making research on the post-1960 period. However, there are also many stimuli for the realization of such research. I believe that a critical review of the books, brochures, theses and articles on the social history of this period, saving vital documents from destruction and a collective international endeavour will provide the opportunities to understand the society in Turkey better, which is considerably more complicated than it seems at first glance. The foreign students of post-1960 Turkey and our compatriots living and studying abroad do enjoy the freedom of research and expression, but have difficulties due to the lack of direct contacts with the social movements and to the deficiency of material. They, however, have better access to some dissident leftist and Kurdish literature, without the danger of being interrogated and jailed, just for having in their possession such material. Those of us living in Turkey, although have certain advantages with respect to observation and material, lack freedom. Thus, only a close cooperation between all students of Turkey can secure a better understanding of the social structure and dynamics. The activities of the International Institute of Social History and of its Department of Turkey have been and will be an important contribution for the furtherance of this collective endeavour.

Notes:

[1] For a detailed analysis of the reliability and characteristics of data pertaining to industrial relations, refer to, Koç, Y., "Türkiye'de Çalışma Yaşamına İlişkin Veriler, Veri Kaynakları ve Özellikleri," ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi, Cilt 9, No. 2, Yıl:1982, s.213-278.

[2] For a general review of the development of trade unionism in this period, refer to, Işıklı, Prof.Dr.Alpaslan, Sendikacılık ve Siyaset, 3. Basım, Birikim Yay., İstanbul, 1979, s.366-446.

[3] Koç,Y., "Türkiye'de İşçilere, İşçi Hareketine ve İşçi Sendikalarına İlişkin Kitap ve Broşürler (1960-1980), Bölüm I," ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi, Cilt 8, No. 1/2, Yıl:1981, s.577-646.

Koç,Y., "Türkiye'de İşçilere, İşçi Hareketine ve İşçi Sendikalarına İlişkin Kitap ve Broşürler (1960-1980), Bölüm II," ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi, Cilt 8, No. 3/4, Yıl:1981, s. 795-872.

Koç,Y., "Sources on the Labourers in Turkey in Foreign Languages," ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi, Cilt 9, No.1, Yıl:1982, s.99-128.