

# The Sociological Foundations of Turkish Nationalism

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## Abstract

Although Ziya Gökalp was one of the most important intellectuals who shaped Turkish nationalism, scholarship did not systematically examine the links between his sociological perspective and nationalism. This study portrays how Gökalp's culture-civilization theory, predominantly adapted mainly from Emile Durkheim's sociological perspective, provides a basis to his Turkish nationalism. Gökalp developed two central premises in line with Durkheimian sociology: (a) civilization is dependent on cultural unity; and (b) religion is the root of culture. Via the culture-civilization duality, Gökalp constructed Turkish nationalism that excluded non-Muslim and non-Sunni minorities. This article not only provides a comprehensive account about the roots of Turkish nationalism but also posits a fresh perspective on Gökalp's trinity of Turkification, Islamization and modernization. In so doing, it underlines Durkheim's indirect impact on the foundations of Turkish nationalism.

## Article History

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*Trust me [gentlemen], without Ziya Gökalp, this state would not exist today!*

Cemal Gürsel, 15 May 1961

A year after the 1960 *coup d'état*, in a heated debate about Turkish nationalism in the parliament, the prime minister of the period and a former commander of the Turkish army, Cemal Gürsel, firmly asserted that Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) developed the intellectual base of the Turkish state ideology. Indeed, Gökalp can be seen as the most influential sociologist in Turkish history. He was one of the pioneers of Turkish sociology and a very influential political figure during the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Gökalp acted as a key social theorist behind the origins of the Turkish

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state ideology and nationalism and gave clarity to the transformation from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic in the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> He is known as ‘the best intellectual formulator’ of the Turkish republic,<sup>3</sup> ‘the originator of a systematic theory of Turkish nationalism’<sup>4</sup> and ‘the grand master of Turkish nationalism’.<sup>5</sup> Zubaida added that the state ideology followed Gökalp’s nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its apparent significance, academic literature did not provide a systematic analysis of the links between Gökalp’s sociological perspective and nationalism. This is an important gap in the scholarship not only on Gökalp and Turkish nationalism, as ‘we may even say that his sociology was his political contribution’,<sup>7</sup> but also with regards to the potential impacts of Emile Durkheim’s sociology on the foundations of Turkish nationalism, as it predominantly shaped Gökalp’s approach. This study contributes to fill this lacuna by a novel conceptual approach on the interplay between Durkheim’s theory, Gökalp’s sociology and Turkish nationalism. It demonstrates Durkheim’s influence on a central concept in Gökalp’s sociology, the civilization-culture duality, and explicates how this duality plays a key role in Gökalp’s nationalism. To do that, the study scrutinizes Gökalp’s underexplored main works, *The Principles of Turkism* and *A Sociological Analysis of Kurdish Tribes*. It underlines that Gökalp’s nationalism is centred on Turkish culture and expects non-Turkish Sunni Muslim minorities, such as Kurds, to assimilate into Turkish culture. In other words, Gökalp regards Sunni Turks as the central group while excluding non-Muslims and endeavouring to assimilate non-Turkish Muslims.

This study also proposes a comprehensive explanation about the roots of Turkish nationalism and a fresh perspective on Gökalp’s ideological trinity of Turkification, Islamization and modernization. The academic literature does not have an agreement with regards to which aspects of the trinity were stronger. While Davison argued that three elements were proportionate,<sup>8</sup> Berkes believed that Islam was the weakest.<sup>9</sup> Dressler criticized the latter approach that sees Gökalp’s view of religion subordinate to a secularist agenda and claimed that Gökalp’s attempted social order aimed at a harmony between Islam and modern institutions.<sup>10</sup> Kadioğlu noted that Gökalp intended to create a synthesis of folk Islam and modernization.<sup>11</sup> In parallel, Özervarlı stated that Gökalp and his supporters pragmatically used selected aspects of Islam to create a modern society.<sup>12</sup> By scrutinizing the Gökalpian foundations of Turkish nationalism and its interplay with Islam and modernization, the research provides a historical background to the academic debate on the nature of Turkish state nationalism, which is divided with regards to whether it is territorially,<sup>13</sup> religiously<sup>14</sup> or ethno-racially<sup>15</sup> oriented.

To provide explanations of the history of ideas, one needs to consider both contexts and contents of the works.<sup>16</sup> In line with this view, this paper first gives a short biography of Gökalp and contextualizes his contribution in the early twentieth-century Turkey. While a full account of Gökalp’s biography and the historical context is beyond the scope of this article, it highlights the most relevant and important facts about his biography and the social and political milieu. Subsequently, the study illustrates the Durkheimian background of Gökalp’s culture-civilization

duality and analyses how this duality characterizes Gökalp's nationalism in his main works. Last, it discusses Gökalp's view of nationalism and Durkheim's indirect but significant impact on it in a brief conclusion.

### **Ziya Gökalp: a short biography**

Ziya Gökalp was born in Diyarbakır. His father, Tevfik Efendi, had a great influence on Gökalp's intellectual development.<sup>17</sup> He asked Gökalp to not only learn the latest developments in sciences from the West but to also stay in touch with his native culture. His uncle Hasip Efendi, who taught him about Islamic mysticism,<sup>18</sup> his biology teacher Dr Yorgi, who convinced him that a political revolution in Turkey should be in line with the national character of Turkish people,<sup>19</sup> and Dr Abdullah Cevdet, a staunch supporter of Western materialism in Turkey,<sup>20</sup> were other important influences on young Ziya. In addition, Gökalp followed a prominent intellectual of the nineteenth century, Namık Kemal, who suggested that the Ottomans should heed the material developments of European civilization while keeping its national character.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Kemal, Gökalp proposed a societal change beyond the individual level in line with Durkheimian sociology. In line with his desire to synthesize Western knowledge and local culture, Gökalp learned both Eastern and Western languages, French, Persian and Arabic, and studied English.<sup>22</sup> Due to intellectual frustrations, Gökalp attempted to commit suicide in 1895 at the age of eighteen. He explained the motive for his attempt as unhappiness about not reaching 'the great truth'.<sup>23</sup>

Gökalp's political activities in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), one of the most important movements of the Ottoman modernization, from 1898 onwards shaped his intellectual career. In 1909, he attended the Young Turk Congress in Salonika as the Diyarbakır delegate.<sup>24</sup> There, he was elected as a member of the Central Council of the CUP.<sup>25</sup> Gökalp established the first sociology department in Turkey at Istanbul University in 1915.<sup>26</sup> He held his role in the CUP until 1918, when the party's power declined as the Ottoman Empire was on the losing side of the First World War (1914–1918). His position in the CUP gave him a chance to get acquainted with Western intellectuals, particularly when Gökalp was residing in Salonika.<sup>27</sup> Gökalp was exiled to Malta with other CUP members after the end of the First World War.<sup>28</sup> In 1921, Gökalp returned to Diyarbakır. The state put him in charge of translation and requested from him a report about the Kurdish population. Gökalp praised the newly established regime and its leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He was an intellectual inspiration to the Turkish republican elite during his lifetime as well as after his death in 1924.<sup>29</sup>

The biographical evidence is in line with the arguments of this paper with regards to the motivations of Gökalp's intellectual endeavour and his influence on the young regime. Gökalp intended to afford a social scientific basis to create a modern Turkey.<sup>30</sup> That might be why he rejected the offers to become a government minister but stayed in touch with politics to inform policy decisions.<sup>31</sup> Gökalp used sociological knowledge, which mostly meant Emile Durkheim's

theory, to explain the reasons of collapse of the Ottoman Empire and to afford a foundation for a modern Turkish nation. By the virtue of having attained to important positions among the founding elite, who called him ‘the professor’, Gökalp was able to have an important impact on the foundations of Turkish nationalism.

### **Historical context of Gökalp’s sociology**

Understanding the milieu that shaped Gökalp’s intellectual contribution is imperative to discussing his work. Gökalp lived through the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Turkish Republic. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the main concern in the empire was about avoiding collapse from the independence movements of its minorities. To that end, there were attempts to modernize the country, such as sending students abroad to learn about scientific developments and extending the rights and liberties of minorities. Various ideological directions were followed to maintain the unity of the empire: Ottomanism endeavoured to unite all subjects under the Ottoman identity; Islamism attempted to unite the Muslim population in the empire under the leadership of the Ottoman caliph; and Turkism aimed at the unity of all ethnic Turks.

All these efforts were rendered fruitless at the end of the First World War. The Sèvres Treaty between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies imposed an allocation of large proportions of the Ottoman territory to the Allies as well as Kurdish and Armenian minorities. This was annulled after the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923) by the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, which drew the current borders of the Turkish Republic. The Sèvres Treaty meant the end of the empire and produced a long-standing trauma in Turkish politics, called the Sèvres syndrome, about an existential threat posed by foreign powers and local minorities.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, Gökalp’s intellectual endeavour was characterized by his vision of a sociological model for Turkey that would hold people together. Initially, he attempted to evade the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire through minority movements, and then, he theorized about the Turkish nation and proposed a comprehensive synthesis of Turkification, Islamization and modernization. In the centre of this synthesis, we can find the culture and civilization duality.

### **Gökalp’s culture-civilization duality**

Gökalp understood civilization as the sum of techniques and methods in a society.<sup>33</sup> He saw individual agency at the root of civilizational development, as it is dependent on people’s innovations. Moreover, civilization is an international phenomenon and is not specific to a particular group: Gökalp highlighted the contribution of the non-Western Japanese society to the Western civilization.<sup>34</sup> Culture, according to Gökalp, refers to the character of a society that is manifest in beliefs, attitudes, norms and sanctions. Gökalp’s view of culture echoes Durkheim’s theory of collective consciousness. Unlike civilization, culture is a local phenomenon that emerges as a spontaneous product of interaction in a group and is visible in the language, food, folklore and sense of humour of a community.

Kadioğlu pointed out that the culture-civilization duality differentiates between the material and spiritual aspects of society.<sup>35</sup> Gökalp suggested that ‘what separates culture and civilization is the fact that culture consists essentially of emotions and civilization of knowledge’.<sup>36</sup> While culture shapes social norms and identity, civilization is the product of individual innovations responding to material problems, such as the discovery of fire. Gökalp stated that civilization affords means for society to make empirical judgements and that culture functions as a normative, spiritual guidance.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Gökalp noted that ‘civilizational institutions do not produce social solidarity.’<sup>38</sup> In contrast, they cause cultural dissolution, because civilizational institutions, originating from magic, lead individuals to egoism and utilitarianism... Cultural institutions lead individuals to social solidarity because of their altruistic and idealistic nature’.

Gökalp claimed that culture and civilization are in constant conflict, because while civilization represents individual reason and agency, culture entails social values that confine individual agency.<sup>39</sup> He proposed that the conflict between culture and civilization is avertable if culture and civilization are balanced,<sup>40</sup> which brings about a healthy society. Notwithstanding the need for harmony between culture and civilization, culture is the primary element in the duality, as it creates civilization and shapes its development. Progress is dependent on cultural needs, because without a shared culture, people would not identify with each other and lack solidarity necessary for establishing a social division of labour that facilitates progress. Civilization balances culture as a secularizing trend in Gökalp’s view: ‘If the intensity of the intrinsically altruistic sacrifice-demanding religious and moral feelings are not tempered by the secularizing influences of magic and civilization, these feelings become ascetic’.<sup>41</sup> In short, culture forms society and civilization leads to material development.

### **The Durkheimian origins of the culture-civilization duality**

The culture-civilization duality is a key concept in Gökalp’s sociology.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, a deeper understanding of the duality would afford a lucid perspective not only on the sociological rationale of Gökalp’s nationalism but also on his views with regards to the interplay between Islam, Turkishness and modernization. To do that adequately, this article suggests, one should demonstrate the Durkheimian logic of the duality. This does not mean that Gökalp was solely influenced by Durkheim while developing this conceptual differentiation. Nevertheless, it helps to provide a thorough understanding of the sociological logic behind the culture-civilization distinction.

The Durkheimian understanding of the relationship between individual agency and social structure is intrinsic to Gökalp’s conceptualization of culture and civilization. Durkheim described a tension between individual agency and collective morality that restrains people, because individuals have irreconcilable desires and interests.<sup>43</sup> Society has to mediate between individuals with morality to keep them living peacefully together.<sup>44</sup> Moral restraints teach self-mastery and turn individuals into social beings by removing them from their egoistic desires.<sup>45</sup> In

this view, religion is born out of the social need for morality. Durkheim suggested that religion provided morality in the form of Gods.<sup>46</sup> As the root of all social institutions, religion socializes individuals by separating them from all innate natural selfishness.<sup>47</sup> Durkheim also viewed social institutions and morality as an assurance for individuality.<sup>48</sup> He postulated that morality, by providing discipline to an individual, propels an individual towards intellectual development and argued that Christianity allowed individual agency. Unless an individual is a part of a society, s/he would not be aware of complex social needs and would not go into a deep, laborious pursuit of science.<sup>49</sup> Durkheim's view of a functioning society is based on a balanced relationship between individual freedoms and societal restraints, which is in line with Gökalp's tension between culture and civilization and emphasis on the need to have harmony in between them for a healthy society. Both Durkheim and Gökalp saw culture as the primary element without which individual agency/civilization is not possible.

In parallel, Durkheim's religion-magic duality has the same characteristics of Gökalp's culture-civilization distinction; while culture/religion is a spontaneous product of social interaction that affords communal identity, magic/civilization is formed by individual agency. Durkheim stated that magic, as a product of individual deliberation and agency, was born out of religion and its sacred-profane distinction.<sup>50</sup> Compared to religion, magic was a more elementary form, oriented towards a utilitarian end.<sup>51</sup> He gave the example of a magician individually interpreting and using religious sacredness to solve a sick person's problem. There exists a utilitarian, accidental and transient relation between the magician and the sick person, which relies on the magician's agency in adapting religious sacred principles to solve personal problems. In parallel, Durkheim claimed that unlike religion, magic does not give birth to social institutions and solely establishes pragmatic and momentary relationships.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Durkheim considered magic and individual agency to be products of society rather than its architects.<sup>53</sup> Religion tames individual egoism, and then an individual finds intellectual challenges and space in a community to realize his/her agency. While culture and religion respond to the spiritual needs of collective groups, civilization and magic are material developments relying on individual agency. Gökalp's nationalism and trinity of Islam, Turkishness and modernization are in line with the Durkheimian rationale of the culture-civilization duality, as Gökalp sees Islam as the root of Turkish culture and defines the Turkish culture as the prerequisite of the civilizational progress, i.e. modernization.

## **Understanding Gökalp's nationalism via the culture-civilization duality**

### ***The Principles of Turkism***

This book comprises a collection of essays by Gökalp, most of which were written in 1923, one year before his death. In *The Principles of Turkism*, Gökalp expressed his views on the modern Turkish nation most completely. According to Devereux, this work summarizes Gökalp's contribution to the modern Turkish republic.<sup>54</sup> It consists of two parts: the nature of Turkism and

the program of Turkism. The former contains ten essays that define the Turkish nation, Turkism and explain the social reasons for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, Gökalp focuses on the need for strengthening national solidarity. The second section delineates the direction that Turkism should take in the linguistic, aesthetic, ethical, legal, religious, economic, political and philosophical fields. The culture-civilization duality plays a central role in both parts.

To start with, Gökalp saw a nation as a community with a shared culture: ‘a nation is... composed of individuals who share a common language, religion, morality and aesthetics... The Turkish peasant expresses it as “the one whose language is my language, whose religion is my religion”’.<sup>55</sup> Gökalp rejected the view that sees a nation as a racial or an ethnic entity, because biological lineage is incapable of transmitting social traits.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Gökalp disagreed with the idea that nation is composed of a community in a specific geographic area, since people in the same locale do not necessarily share the same cultural characteristics.<sup>57</sup> Hence, Gökalp regarded the attempt to create an Ottoman identity among different nations as a grave error and claimed that the Islamist endeavour to gather a Muslim nation was fruitless because of cultural differences among Muslim groups.<sup>58</sup> Gökalp also refused the notion that individuals can rationally choose their nationality, because they were a part of a national group via their feelings and cultural sentiments: ‘The individual has absorbed through education all the sentiments of the society in which he lives’.<sup>59</sup>

In line with the definition of nation as a culturally homogenous group, Gökalp explained the main reasons behind the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire: the formation of independence movements among minorities and culture-civilization discordance. First, Gökalp viewed the Ottoman society as a temporary community composed of various nations. It was inevitable that these communities would eventually realize their national consciousness via a cultural awakening: ‘Subjugated nations may forget their national identities temporarily under the cosmopolitan rule of empires, but real societies composed of nations inevitably awaken one day from their sleep of subjugation to demand their independence and political sovereignty’.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Gökalp delineated the independence movements as cultural rather than political and recounted the secession process in the following steps:

1. Two main communities in the Ottoman Empire, Christians and Muslims, were organized around the Greek Patriarch and the Caliphate.
2. An increase in social density facilitated a social division of labour and created occupational groups. This produced occupational consciousness and weakened the religious collective consciousness of Christians and Muslims.
3. Native languages became a significant medium for the minorities with the spread of newspapers and schools. People began to view themselves as a member of a linguistic community, and the religious belonging eroded.

4. The linguistic communities disaffiliated from their religious community and from the Ottoman Empire as independent nations.<sup>61</sup>

Second, Gökalp mentioned a dissonance between culture and civilization in the empire.<sup>62</sup> The distinction between culture (*hars*) and self-improvement (*tezhib*) is imperative to understand this argument. According to Gökalp, while culture is a collective consciousness, self-improvement is the learnt culture: ‘Its basis is a good education and an unpretentious and sincere love for rationality, fine arts, literature, philosophy, science and religion, free of any bigotry’.<sup>63</sup> Culture is democratic by including everyone spontaneously, and self-improvement is aristocratic, as it is obtained via an individual’s deliberate efforts and refers to absorbing international civilization-knowledge. With regards to the culture-civilization discordance, Gökalp noted that the Ottomans imitated Eastern civilization, which was not compatible with Turkish culture. Ottomans were cosmopolitans who valued self-improvement over Turkish culture. According to Gökalp, this resulted in a dichotomy between Ottoman self-improvement and Turkish culture, which ‘was so detrimental to Turkish culture and life.’<sup>64</sup> It was cosmopolitan and placed class interest above national interest... The ruling cosmopolitans became the Ottoman class and the ruled Turks the Turkish class’. Table 1 summarizes some aspects of Gökalp’s portrayal of the dichotomous relationship: Gökalp attributed simplicity, sincerity, authenticity and democracy to Turkish culture while seeing Ottoman civilization as imitative, international, pretentious and aristocratic.<sup>65</sup>

Table 1 Ottoman dissonance between culture and civilization

	<b>Turkish culture</b>	<b>Ottoman self-improvement</b>
<b>Language</b>	Turkish: spontaneously spoken among people	Ottoman: a conscious mix of three languages: Arabic, Turkish and Persian
<b>Music</b>	Played among folk	Imitation of Byzantine music
<b>Literature</b>	Popular proverbs, riddles, tales, ballads, epics, chants, hymns, folk plays, transmitted and persisted as traditions among people	Individual stories and novels, imitated odes and European-style verses
<b>Ethics</b>	Heroism, selflessness, optimism, no pretentiousness	Imitative, pretentious, pessimistic, despairing
<b>Ulema (learned man)</b>	Folk Ulema: Learned, modest, without rank ( <i>avam</i> )	Not learned, pretentious, with rank ( <i>havas</i> )



Moreover, Gökalp stated that Ottoman civilization degraded Turkish culture, as ‘overdevelopment of civilization corrupts national culture’.<sup>66</sup> Despite that, Gökalp believed that Sunni Turks retained Turkish culture: ‘They built for themselves a national culture and remained completely indifferent to Ottoman civilization’.<sup>67</sup> The oppression of the Ottoman civilization led to a schism among the Turks and the emergence of the Alevi sect, a religious and cultural minority in Turkey that combines Anatolian folk Shi’ism with Sufism:

The Ottoman always called the Turk ‘the stupid Turk...’ The appearance of the Kizilbash [Alevi] among the Turks can be explained by this dichotomy. Shaikh Junayd... spread propaganda among the Oghuz sub-tribes which turned on the question, ‘...Were not the Oghuz peoples the children of Oghuz Khan and the cousins of Qayis? Why were the Sultan’s slaves – conscripted boys from the palace – given preference over them?’ The popular sheikhs of the time compared the oppression of the Turks to that suffered earlier by the House of the Prophet. Many Turkmens were persuaded by the analogy and left the hearths of their fathers, creating for themselves a separate literature, a separate philosophy and a separate house of worship.<sup>68</sup>

Gökalp’s solution to the Ottoman political collapse and cultural decay was to create a new nation by establishing Turkish national solidarity ‘for national consciousness is not only the source of all progress but also the source and cornerstone of national independence’.<sup>69</sup> He asserted that patriotic and civic moralities constitute the basis of national solidarity.<sup>70</sup> Patriotic morality involves loving the fatherland, recognizing the nation as sacred and sharing national ideals and duties. Gökalp noted that independence and territorial integrity cannot be achieved without strong patriotic morality.<sup>71</sup> Gökalp explained that civic morality is honouring and loving other countrymen, co-religionists and then all other human beings.<sup>72</sup> For him, to invigorate national solidarity, patriotic morality should precede civil morality. Gökalp added that professional morals, which would enable each occupational group to realize that they mutually need each other, should be realized to strengthen national solidarity.<sup>73</sup> Invigorating national solidarity brings social order, progress, national freedom and independence.<sup>74</sup> He recommended establishing a national museum, an ethnographic museum, national archives, a national historical library and a statistical directorate to enable a better appreciation of the Turkish national culture.<sup>75</sup> Through these institutions, the Turkish elite could fulfil a double role that involves receiving culture from Turkish folk by studying how lay people live and bringing Western civilization to Turkish people.<sup>76</sup> Gökalp’s attempt to invigorate Turkish culture first and then introduce Western civilization echoes the priority he gave to culture over civilization, as he argued that civilizational progress is not possible without cultural unity.

### *The Program of Turkism*

*Linguistic Turkism.* Gökalp claimed that there was a linguistic anomaly between written Ottoman, which is an amalgam of Turkish, Persian and Arabic, and spoken Turkish. He found the Ottoman written language artificial and argued that we should go to people and adopt their spoken Turkish without problematizing grammatical purity: 'To a Turkist every word used and recognized by the people is a national word... for the language of a nation is a living organism composed not of its lifeless roots but of its living words'.<sup>77</sup> Unnecessary Arabic and Persian terms should be removed from the Turkish language, national expressions should be added to Turkish, and lastly, when national expressions fall short, international words should be transferred: 'We can call the first of these three operations purging, the second culturalization, and the third refinement'.<sup>78</sup> The culture-civilization distinction is central to linguistic Turkism, because it recapitulates Gökalp's insistence on first establishing a national unity that would enable civilization progress.

*Aesthetic Turkism.* Gökalp stated that modern Turkish literature should involve both Turkish culture and Western civilization: 'It needs to include folk-tales, ballads, national forms of literature and at the same time Western classics, such as Homer and Virgil, which would provide ideal models for the Turkish national literature'.<sup>79</sup> In parallel, Gökalp postulated that Turks should have both national and European music.<sup>80</sup> Like linguistic Turkism, Gökalp's suggestions for aesthetics rely on the duality between culture and civilization, as he recommends knowing Turkish culture before learning from Western civilization. Gökalp talked about how Renaissance artists not only reflected their culture but also imitated ancient Greek-Latin techniques to support his case.<sup>81</sup> He criticized the fact that Ottoman artists did not produce important artefacts,<sup>82</sup> because they lost touch with Turkish culture and solely imitated French and Persian artists. Gökalp intended to establish a healthy balance between culture and self-improvement that would enable unity and progress in Turkey.

*Ethical Turkism.* Gökalp listed moralities in a hierarchical order: (1) patriotic morals; (2) professional ethics; (3) family morals; (4) civic morals; and (5) international morals.<sup>83</sup> In so doing, Gökalp re-established his view of the balance between culture and civilization and reiterated that a strong culture is the basis of social unity and civilizational progress.<sup>84</sup>

*Legal Turkism.* Gökalp set three goals for legal Turkism: (1) creating a modern state free from theocracy and clericalism; (2) establishing occupational autonomies based on different specializations that would liberate professional guardianship from the interference of public guardianship; and (3) facilitating modern family life by the principle of equality between man and woman in terms of marriage, divorce, inheritance and professional and political rights.<sup>85</sup> Legal Turkism endeavours to assist social unity and progress through applying modern law to the standards of Western civilization.<sup>86</sup>

*Religious Turkism.* Gökalp claimed that religious sermons and prayers should be in the Turkish language so that people can understand the true nature of Islam by appreciating the content of religious books and rites.<sup>87</sup> This illustrates Gökalp's emphasis on religion as the root of culture; when people understand religion better in Turkish, it will strengthen cultural/national unity, because they will be more erudite about the roots of Turkish culture and morality.

*Economic Turkism.* Alluding to the rationale of first going to the people to learn culture and then bringing them civilization, Gökalp argued that economic Turkism should first study the reality of Turkish society and then formulate a national economic program in light of this scientific research.<sup>88</sup>

*Political Turkism.* Gökalp highlighted two aspects of political Turkism in line with the logic of learning Turkish culture from the people and introducing them to modern civilization. First, he regarded Turkism as a modernization movement opposing theocracy, clericalism and despotism.<sup>89</sup> Second, Gökalp portrayed Turkism as a populist movement that took heed of the Turkish culture.<sup>90</sup>

*Philosophic Turkism.* Gökalp used the culture-civilization duality to develop a Turkist philosophy.<sup>91</sup> On the civilization level, he admitted that Turks did not contribute much to the universal philosophy; on a cultural level, Gökalp found that the folk-philosophy of Turkish people was rich. Therefore, philosophic Turkism aims to discover and expose this national folk philosophy. All in all, the program of Turkism builds on the culture-civilization duality and emphasizes a need to go to the Turkish people to learn their culture and then present them with knowledge from Western civilization as a way to establish social unity and progress.

### ***A Sociological Analysis of Kurdish Tribes***

This book consists of a collection of essays by Gökalp on the Kurdish population in Turkey. Gökalp began his research on Kurdish tribes, which produced the majority of these essays, in 1921 after receiving a letter from Dr Rıza Nur, the Minister of Health and Foreign Affairs, which asked Gökalp to conduct a sociological study on the Kurdish population. Nur explained the importance of this research by stating that many of those among the Kurdish population were actually of Turkish origin and that it was urgent to prove this, because 'we left hundreds of thousands of Turks assimilated among Arabs in Egypt and Algeria. However, we did not lose Kurdistan which is still in our borders, but we left Turks there to be assimilated among Kurdish population'.<sup>92</sup> Nur's request reflects the anxiety about the further disintegration of the country by minority movements, the Sèvres syndrome, and sees unveiling the supposed Turkish origins of many Kurds as a facilitator of social integration and a potential impediment to Kurdish nationalism. Gökalp studied the Kurdish population in Diyarbakır with the intention of publishing a book on tribal life in Diyarbakır among Kurdish, Arab and Turcoman tribes. His death prevented him from finishing it.

To begin with, Gökalp interpreted ethnographic data about Kurdish tribes and claimed that Kurds spoke four languages (Kurmanc, Zaza, Soran and Lur) and did not understand each other.<sup>93</sup> He suggested that Kurds were mainly living in primitive nomadic or settled tribes that were led by chiefs, which he considered an illness to be cured. Gökalp described it as a feudal system that maintained the tribal leaders' tyranny and exploitation.<sup>94</sup> This was not only the biggest catastrophe the Kurds encountered, but it also caused problems for the country, as tribal leaders helped and led villagers to evade state tax, military service and law.<sup>95</sup> In other words, the tribal system hindered the integration of Kurdish people to the Turkish nation. According to Gökalp, one of the main reasons for Kurds to be nomadic and tribal was geographical; many of them were situated next to the desert and were living under constant threat from Arab tribes.<sup>96</sup>

Gökalp believed that if the state relieved Kurds of the territorial problems, then, they could modernize and evolve to settled tribes and villages.<sup>97</sup> For example, if the border with the Arabic tribes could be defended by military posts, their malevolent influence on Kurdish tribes would disappear.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, Gökalp brought forward a fourfold plan to end tribal chiefs' power and replace it with state power: (a) the state should stop the election of officers from tribes and attain different officials from other towns to impede local power; (b) land owners should not be allowed to become government officials; (c) only government officials should mediate the relationship between villagers and the state, not tribal leaders; and (d) the state should provide education services to integrate these communities into the nation.<sup>99</sup>

While Gökalp admitted that Kurds preserved their distinct national culture, they allied with Turks to defend the motherland for a thousand years.<sup>100</sup> Gökalp referred to Kurds as Muslims who shared the Turkish culture and believed that with Turks they should form a nation: 'If there is a Turk not loving Kurds, s/he is not a Kurd, and if there is a Kurd not loving Turks, s/he is not Kurd'.<sup>101</sup> He added that 'even if I discovered that my ancestors came from Kurdish or Arabic origins, I would still consider myself Turkish, because I learnt that nationality is gained through cultural education'.<sup>102</sup>

Gökalp envisaged Kurdish integration through assimilation into the Turkish culture and hinted at this as follows 'when two nations from the same religion live side by side, one of them assimilates the other'.<sup>103</sup> He noted that Kurds and Turks assimilated with each other. Moreover, Gökalp associated Turks with city life, because their national character involved enjoying freedom that was available in urban areas.<sup>104</sup> He also argued that the Turks, who did not live in cities, became Kurdified. For example, Gökalp claimed that Diyarbakır's Kurdish was a version of Turkish, and the people of Diyarbakır were actually of Turkish origin.<sup>105</sup> He supported his argument by pointing out that while Kurds were generally from the Shafi sect, the people of Diyarbakır were Hanafi like the Turks. Furthermore, Kurds from other cities in the southeast were speaking a version of the Diyarbakır dialect and followed the Hanafi belief.<sup>106</sup> Given that Gökalp endeavoured to ignite a move in Kurdish groups from primitive nomadic tribes to modern communities, it could be assumed that he thought that modernized Kurds would live in

cities and eventually become assimilated into Turkish culture. It would not be a far-fetched idea to infer that Gökalp's intention to modernize Kurds by breaking up the tribal system was aimed at their assimilation into the Turkish nation. Overall, Gökalp's perspective not only assuaged Dr Riza Nur's apprehensions about Turkish assimilation in Kurdish communities, but also envisaged Kurdish integration via modernization.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This study explored the rationale of the culture-civilization duality, highlighted how it is in line with the Durkheimian understanding of the relationship between individual agency and social structure, and then examined Gökalp's nationalism under that light. It argues that (1) the culture-civilization duality is intrinsic to Gökalp's nationalism, and accordingly, (2) Gökalpian nationalism excluded non-Muslim and non-Sunni minorities. These are based on two basic premises of the culture-civilization duality: (a) civilization is dependent on cultural unity; and (b) religion is the root of culture. In line with the culture-civilization duality, Gökalp's project of creating a new nation attempted first to maintain a cultural unity that is rooted in Turkish Sunni Islam and believed that only this could facilitate civilizational development in the country.

To start with the first argument, for Gökalp, a nation was defined as a people with a shared culture.<sup>107</sup> As Gökalp saw cultural unity as a prerequisite of civilization, he suggested that only the cultural unity of the Turkish nation would facilitate development in terms of civilization. This not only shaped *The Principles of Turkism*, which proposed a program that aimed at a mixture of Turkish culture and Western civilization, but also *A Sociological Analysis of Kurdish Tribes*, which advocated an assimilation of the Kurdish people to the Turkish culture. Furthermore, in line with the argument that religion is the root of culture, Gökalp's nationalist trinity of Turkification, Islamization and modernization prioritizes Turkification, while Islamization is an indispensable element and modernization is complementary. Gökalp's nation cannot negate Islam, because the Sunni Turks' way of living with Islam was surviving the Turkish culture. Therefore, national unity should be based on the culture of Turkish Sunnis. Islam is an indispensable element of Turkish culture, but it is secondary to Turkism because, as Gökalp expressed in *The Principles of Turkism*, modern nations broke away from traditional religiously dominated societies and should not be organized by any religion. In this perspective, civilization/modernization was the inferior component, as it would not be possible without a Turkish cultural unity.

With regards to the second point, *The Principles of Turkism* and *A Sociological Analysis of Kurdish Tribes* show that Gökalp was willing to admit non-Turkish Muslim minorities to the modern nation, provided that they assimilated into Turkish culture. In this, Islam has a key role on deciding who could be assimilated. Assuming only Turkish Sunni Muslims were living in an authentic Turkish culture, Gökalp defined all non-Muslim minorities and non-Sunni population as cultural outsiders. Seeing religion as the root of culture, Gökalp argued that these people

constructed different social institutions and cultures foreign to Turkish culture. For that reason, in the program of Turkism, Gökalp set the religion of modern Turkey as Islam and excluded Christian, Jewish and non-Sunni minorities.<sup>108</sup> This provides a curious contrast that Gökalp excluded minority religious groups to provide a vigorous and integrated society by expanding on Emile Durkheim's sociological perspective, which countered anti-Semitism in his age and saw anomie as its root cause.<sup>109</sup> Gökalp seems to have arrived to an opposite conclusion due to his perception of the obstacles to the social integration in Turkey. This shows that Gökalp did not simply imitate Durkheim's views, but built on the main premises of Durkheimian sociology to understand the Turkish context. Further, Gökalp recommended that the Turkish language should be used in sermons and prayers instead of Arabic.<sup>110</sup> This excluded non-Turkish Muslim minorities, such as the Kurds, and is in line with his expectation of their assimilation into Turkish culture. Last, Gökalp took the Hanafi version of Sunni Islam as the cultural core and associated Shafism with Kurdish communities that had not been assimilated. In this view, modernization affords an inclusionary element for non-Turkish Muslims: through modernizing primitive Kurdish groups, Gökalp seemed to hope that they would assimilate into Turkish culture that he associated with modern urban life.

Understanding the sociological rationale the culture-civilization duality helps to unfold Gökalp's nationalism. Gökalp relies basically on a Durkheimian theory that religion is the root of culture that affords communal identity, which gives way to the development of individual agency and civilizational progress. Accordingly, Gökalp's nationalism first attempted to ensure a cultural unity of people from the same religious root to facilitate civilizational progress. This sheds light on the debate with regards to which aspects of Gökalp's trinity were stronger. It shows that Islam was seen as an indispensable component of Turkish culture, but it was of secondary importance. Gökalp did not aim for an Islamist unity but a Turkish unity. Modernization would come after the cultural unity according to Gökalp, and therefore it was the least important in the trinity. The argument also points to the study's contribution to the discussions on Turkish nationalism, which were divided on identifying Turkish nationalism as modernization, territorially, religiously or ethno-racially oriented. Gökalp's nationalism was modernization oriented, but it did not aim to import the Western culture as suggested by the modernist nationalism argument. Gökalp suggested a cultural Turkism that was neither ethnically nor religiously oriented. Anyone who embraced Turkish culture was Turkish. Nevertheless, for him, Sunni-Islam was at the root of Turkish culture. Gökalp's cultural nationalism did not fully fit into any of the categories in the discussion on Turkish nationalism. It was closest to religious orientation but was not limited to it.

Various studies on Turkish nationalism's perception of minorities hint that the Turkish state ideology might not have diverged from Gökalp's ideas. Yeğen illustrated Turkish nationalism's aim to modernize the tribal system and assimilate Kurds.<sup>111</sup> Likewise, others underline exclusionary state attitudes towards non-Muslim communities.<sup>112</sup> One could also ask whether the President Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) conservative politics follow the footsteps of Gökalp's ideas. A short answer would be both yes and no. Yes, because the JDP

currently attempts to create social cohesion under the Sunni Turkish identity and tone down the differences, manifest in its current policy with regards to the Kurdish question. No, because Gökalp's views on religion basically differ from the JDP's. For example, Gökalp suggested changing the language of sermons and prayers from Arabic to Turkish, which would not be acceptable for the JDP. In addition, Gökalp came from and shaped the ideology of the republican elite, which JDP strongly criticizes. Despite both JDP and Gökalp aimed for national solidarity under the Turkish Sunni Hanafi identity, they have important differences about the ways to achieve that target. While this study provided an in-depth analysis of the sociological foundations of Gökalp's nationalism, it is beyond its scope to analyse the direct influence of Gökalp's ideas on Turkish state policy. This could be a worthy task for future studies.

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## Notes

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