TURKEY AS A MODEL FOR THE MIDDLE EASTERN STATES: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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This paper is primarily concerned with the relevance of the idea of “Turkey as a model” for the Middle Eastern countries. In such an attempt, the paper builds on the social learning theory to approach the issue of modeling behavior. The social learning theory stands for the idea that people learn within social contexts often through modeling and observational learning and strongly underlines that this learning process is not independent from the interaction of behavior, personal qualities and environmental factors. Building on this framework and departing from the assumption that like people and groups of people, states can learn through modeling, this paper argues that the idea of Turkey as a model for the Middle Eastern countries is not a relevant one as “personal” qualities and environmental factors Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries do not fit enough for a successful modeling. First, subjects under consideration have different “personal” qualities in regard to the one pan of the democracy-Islam balance; they have political Islamic experiences of their own. Second, considering the environment they are surrounded by, Turkey has the European Union (EU) as its “permanent foreign anchor” that have kept Turkey more excited in the way of democracy, which is absent for the Middle Eastern countries. Hence, “personal” qualities and environmental factors do not fit enough for effective modeling in the case of Turkey and the Middle East. In this context, the idea of “Turkey as an example” remains more relevant to encourage and make the newly emerging Middle Eastern regimes to believe in and search for the compatibility of democracy and Islam.

Keywords: Social learning theory, Modeling, Turkey, Middle eastern regimes.

Introduction

Social sciences stated to develop in the 16th century, divided into disciplines in the 19th century and areas of profession emerged. Based on the assumption that systematic research requires specialization in the different fields of the “reality”, there appeared sharp divisions between the fields of social sciences like history, anthropology economics, political science and sociology. However, since 1945 these sharp divisions has started to be questioned as a result of the systematic changes in the political structure and change in the scale of almost all human activities (Gulbenkian Commission, 1996: 37) International Relations that emerged as a discipline in the first half of the 20th century has had its share of these developments in the social sciences. When the new topics come to the research agenda in accordance with the developments in the historical course, the need for International Relations to apply to the expressive power of the other disciplines has deepened.

One of the disciplines that International Relations can benefit is psychology. Up to this point, the attempt to cross the border between psychology and International Relations has mostly come from
psychology. In other words, predominantly psychology “has contributed to” International Relations. This implies the lack or weakness of the attempt or awareness of International Relations scholars to resort to the psychological theories and perspectives. At this point, there is a strong need for International Relations scholars to “benefit from” psychological accounts beyond the “contribution” of psychology to International Relations studies. Building on the awareness of such necessity, this study attempts to analyze the relevance of the idea of Turkey as a model for the authoritarian Middle Eastern countries through the psychological account of social learning theory.

In the first part of the study, famous psychologist Albert Bandura’s theory of social learning is tried to be explained with regard to its key assumptions and its main criticisms to the previous approaches to learning. The second part of the study is devoted to the application of the social learning theory to the issue of Turkey as a model for the authoritarian and newly emerging Middle Eastern states. The concluding remarks contain the outcome of the study in terms of the relevance of Bandura’s social learning theory to the idea of Turkey as a model.

**Bandura’s Theory of Social Learning**

Albert Bandura developed his psychological theory of social learning as a response to traditional behavioral approaches to learning behavior. One can conclude at least two main criticism Bandura raises against the traditional behavioral accounts on learning on which he constructs his theory of social learning.

**Vicarious Learning**

Firstly, in Bandura’s opinion, traditional behavioral theories of learning deal with only one form of learning, namely learning by direct experience. Learning by direct experience is governed by the rewarding and punishing consequences that follow any given action. Bandura explains that in learning by experience, reinforcing consequences in some sense serve as an unarticulated way of informing performers what they must do in order to gain beneficial outcomes or to avoid punishing ones (Bandura, 1971: 3). Since direct learning explanation ignores man’s cognitive capabilities like self-regulation and self-efficacy, Bandura proposes that new patterns of behavior can be acquired by observing the behavior of others as well as through direct experience (Bandura, 1971: 3).

Bandura stands for the argument that all learning phenomena produced by direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people’s behavior and its consequences for them. This capacity to learn through observation enables individuals to acquire large, integrated units of behavior; to develop emotional responses; to extinguish fearful and defensive behavior and to induce behavioral inhibitions without having to accumulate the patterns gradually by trial and error (Bandura, 1971: 2). In short, the idea of learning through observation and modeling constitute the core of Bandura’s theory of social learning.

Bandura formulates four interrelated subprocesses that govern modeling phenomena. These subprocesses are attentional processes, retention processes, motoric reproduction processes and motivational processes. These processes can be considered as modeling prerequisites and each of them has a role to play either in the acquisition of information about events and of rules or in the decision to put this information to use in guiding behavior (Grusec, 1992: 781).

In order for a successful modeling process to occur, the first prerequisite is attention. An individual cannot learn much by observation if he does not attend to, or recognize, the essential features of the model’s behavior (Bandura, 1971: 6). To put it simply, the observer must pay attention to events that are modeled (Grusec, 1992: 781). Since attention relies both on the characteristics of the model and on the characteristics of the observer, the types of behavior that one will repeatedly observe and consequently learn completely are delimited in accordance with the people with whom one regularly associates (Bandura, 1971: 6).
The second prerequisite for learning through observation and modeling is related to retention processes. In early periods of modeling and observation, imitative responses are arose directly and immediately by model’s actions. In later periods, imitative responses are generally performed in the absence of the model long after their behavior has been observed (Bandura, 1971: 7). Therefore, for successful modeling process, long-term retention of activities that have modeled at one time or another is a key component. Learners must remember what they have observed to perform the behavior even in the absence of the model.

The third prerequisite for learning through modeling is concerned with reproduction process through which what has been learned is turned into actions. Bandura explains that to achieve behavioral reproduction, the learner must put together a given set of responses in line with the modeled patterns. The amount of observational learning that an individual can show behaviorally relies on whether or not he/she has acquired the component skills. If he/she possesses the constituent elements, he/she can easily integrate them to produce new patterns of behavior. However, is the response components are lacking, behavioral reproduction will be faulty (Bandura, 1971: 8).

The final prerequisite in Bandura’s formulation of learning through modeling is reinforcement and motivational processes. Bandura stands out that an individual can acquire, retain and possess the capabilities for skillful execution of modeled behavior, but the learning may not for the most time be activated into avert performance if it is negatively sanctioned or unfavorably received (Bandura, 1971: 8). As states earlier in this study, reinforcement in the form of positive incentives and negative sanctions is a facilitator to convert symbolic representation into appropriate action in Bandura’s theory of social learning.

Reciprocal Causation

Bandura’s second criticism against the traditional behavioral accounts is related to these theories’ attribution of all causes of the behavior to environmental factors. Bandura criticizes traditional behavioral theories that by attributing all causes of the behavior simply to environmental factors, these theories ignore the organism itself and its cognitive capabilities. Bandura argues that the idea that man’s behavior is environmentally determined implies a one-way influence and reduces man to a helpless reactor to the fluctuation of external rewards and punishments. In this regard, traditional behavioral theories index behavior to the presence of external rewards and punishments without taking into account cognitive functions and capabilities of man as a thinking organism (Bandura, 1971: 1).

Criticizing traditional behavioral theories, Bandura’s theory of social learning attempts to understand man’s behavior in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between inner forces (person factors), environmental influences (controlling conditions) and behavior. According to Bandura’s social learning theory, inner forces, controlling conditions and behavior influence each other in a reciprocal fashion, contrary to the traditional behavioral theories that solely focus on environmental factors (Bandura, 1971: 2).

Inner forces in this reciprocal causation include, but not limited to, self-regulation and self-efficacy. According to Bandura, people do not constantly shift their behavior with regard to momentary influences. On the contrary, they maintain ideological positions despite a changing situation as judgmental self-reactions are activated whenever people perform an action. Actions that comply with internal standards are judged positively while those seem inapplicable to these standards are judged negatively (Grusec, 1992: 782). This is self-regulation. Self-efficacy in Bandura’s theory, on the other hand, refers to the conviction that one can execute the behavior required to produce a particular outcome. People develop domain-specific beliefs about their own abilities and characteristics that direct their behavior by determining what they attempt to achieve (Grusec, 1992: 782).

Environmental influences in the reciprocal interaction mainly contain rewards and punishments. Bandura points out that conditions of reinforcement have strong incentive-motivational effects. That is to say, external rewards and punishments influence whether behavior will be performed or not. However,
Bandura adds that in opposition to traditional behavioral theories, reinforcement is a facilitative factor rather than a necessary condition for a learned behavior to be performed (Bandura, 1971: 9).

All in all, according to Bandura’s formalization of reciprocal determinism, self-perceptions, self-regulation and self-efficacy, together with other inner forces, direct behavior, with the results of that behavior influencing these cognitions. Environmental influences including reinforcement have an impact on the individual, and the individual in turn brings out different reactions from the environment in accord with his/her personality. Finally, behavior determines aspects of the environment, and behavior is, in turn, modified by the environment (Grusec, 1992: 783).

Relation Between Vicarious Learning and Reciprocal Causation

Interrelationship of inner forces, environmental influences and behavior reveals itself in these four subprocesses of learning through observation and modeling. While inner forces containing self-regulation and self-efficacy seem to play a significant role in attentional, retention and reproduction processes, environmental influences are the main determinants of motivational processes.

As explained earlier in this study, self-regulation refers to the process of taking control of and evaluating one’s own learning and behavior. In accordance with self-regulation, people judge the actions that comply with their internal standards positively whereas the actions that fall short of these standards are judged negatively. In this manner, self-regulation appears to be closely related to the attentional processes of learning through observation. For the observer to pay attention to the essential features of the model’s behavior there seems to be need for convenience between the model’s actions and the observer’s internal standards. The observer ignores the essential features of the behavior if he/she finds them irrelevant, contrary to or incompatible with his/her own inner dynamics. Parallel to its role in the attentional processes, self-regulation is considered to have a decisive role in the retention processes of learning through modeling. Learners must retain what they have observed to perform the behavior even in the absence of the model. The extent of the relevance between the observer’s inner dynamic and the model’s behavior, and subsequent formation of the positive judgments about the behavior delimit to what extent the observed behavior will be performed even in the absence of the model.

Self-regulation is a significant, but not sole determinant inner force in the subprocesses of learning through observation and modeling. Self-efficacy plays an important role in the attentional and reproduction processes as well. Self-efficacy has impact on the attentional processes in the sense that unless the observer believes that his own abilities and characteristics are sufficient to perform the model’s behavior, he will not attend the features of the behavior from the very beginning. In addition to the attentional processes, self-efficacy appears to play a pioneer role in reproduction processes of modeling through which what has been learned is turned into actions. Not only does amount of observational learning that an individual can show behaviorally rely on the presence of the component skills, but it also depends on the strength of the belief in self-efficacy. Although capabilities for skillful execution of the modeled behavior are acquired throughout observation, behavioral reproduction may be faulty if self-efficacy of the observer is low.

The last subprocess of the learning through observation and modeling, reinforcement and motivational processes, is mostly identified by positive incentives and negative sanctions. External rewards or expectation of external rewards facilitates the successful execution of the modeled behavior whereas external sanctions or expected external sanctions make the observer hesitant to execute the modeled behavior.

Social Learning Approach to the Idea “Turkey as a Model”

Bandura’s theory of social learning relies on the idea that people learn within social contexts mostly through modeling and observation and it strongly underlines that this learning process is not independent from the reciprocal causation between inner forces, environmental influences and behavior. Building on
this framework and departing from the assumption that like individuals and groups of individuals, states can learn how to behave through modeling and observation, this part of the study focuses on the application of Bandura’s social learning theory to the idea of Turkey as model for the authoritarian Middle Eastern states. In order to explain whether Turkey can be a model for the authoritarian Middle Eastern states with regard to the successful coexistence of democracy and Islam, it is useful first to turn to four prerequisites of modeling in Bandura’s formulation.

Modeling Prerequisites for the Authoritarian Middle Eastern States

According to the subprocesses of learning through observation and modeling, the first prerequisite for the Middle Eastern states to learn to achieve the successful coexistence of democracy and Islam by modeling Turkey is attention. In this sense, simply exposing these states to Turkey does not in itself ensure that they will attend closely to Turkey, or that they will even practices the aspects they happen to notice that is the coexistence of democracy and Islam. To put it another way, first, the authoritarian Middle Eastern states must have attention to model Turkey and they must willingly attend the matter of successful coexistence of democracy and Islam in Turkey.

Retention processes in Bandura’s formulation focuses on the need to remember the observed behavior to perform it even in the absence of the model. With regard to the issue of Turkey as a model for the authoritarian Middle Eastern states, modeling does not occur at one time or another; rather it is a long-term process. In this regard, it seems more appropriate to employ the word “internalization” or “adoption” instead of “retention” which evokes momentous observations. The Middle Eastern states will model Turkey successfully through an observation process during which Turkey actively share its democratic experience and lead the way. When Turkey’s active support for the achievement of successful coexistence of democracy and Islam ceased, for the Middle Eastern states to maintain this success, it is required to “internalize” or “adopt” the modeled activity. Only when they “internalize” or “adopt” the modeled activity, they can achieve engaging democracy and Islam even in the absence of Turkey’s direct support and pioneership.

In line with the third modeling prerequisite, reproduction processes, the Middle Eastern states can turn what they have learned during observation process into action if they possess the constituent elements necessary for the successful coexistence of democracy and Islam. Thus, in addition to attention and internalization of the idea of the coexistence of democracy and Islam, the Middle Eastern states must acquire the component skills for successful modeling. These component skills include the concrete/physical ones such as the capacity and ability to hold free and fair elections, to ensure separation of powers, to secure accountability to public, and the cognitive ones like internalization of democratic institutions and practices.

In accordance with the reinforcement and motivational process, the Middle Eastern states may attend and retent the idea of the coexistence of democracy and Islam, and may possess or acquire the capabilities to successfully execute it. However, they still may not convert it into appropriate action. They may hesitate because of possible reactions of other Muslim Middle Eastern states on the grounds that they make concessions, depart from Islamic practices, and adopt Western values. They may hesitate due to possible reactions of regional and non-regional powers to whose interests the democratic regimes in the Muslim Middle Eastern states are contrary. On the other hand, the Middle Eastern states may skillfully and successfully put the idea of the coexistence of democracy and Islam into practice thanks to the expected or actual positive incentives. These incentives may come from Turkey, from the West and the USA; they may come through direct and indirect means.

Obstructive Inner and Environmental Factors

As previously stated in this study, the interrelationship of inner forces, environmental influences and behavior reveals itself in four subprocesses of learning through observation and modeling. While inner
forces containing self-regulation and self-efficacy seem to play a significant role in the attentional, retention and reproduction processes, environmental influences are associated with the motivational processes.

Different Experiences of Political Islam

In regard to the issue of Turkey as a model for the authoritarian Middle Eastern states in the way of achieving the successful coexistence of democracy and Islam, the most significant inner dynamic that delimits the success of modeling appears to be the different political Islamic experiences of Turkey and the other Muslim Middle Eastern states.

Political Islam as an alternative political and social project has long been in a principal positions in the ideological spectrum of the Muslim world. The Islamic movements in the Middle East for the most of the time have much of their original inspiration in the works of earlier activists, particularly the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb and the Pakistani Abu al-ala Mawdudi, and in the influence of movements like the pan-Islamic group founded in Pakistan, Jamaat al-Tabligh wa al-Dawa. However, this does not necessarily mean that the Islamic movements in the Middle East are identical. On the contrary, they have been special products of the circumstances created for them by the policies of each government (Anderson, 1997: 23). They are not identical, but share similar outlooks, adopt similar discourses and enjoy many of the same external financial patrons (Anderson, 1997: 23), which distinguish them from their counterparts in Turkey.

Islamic movements in other Muslim Middle Eastern societies mostly advanced as a reactionary movement against the foreign occupation. As the major issue on the agenda was the termination the foreign occupation, political Islamic ideology was directly reduced to a jihad doctrine. In this sense, Turkey has a historical specificity. The details of the Turkish history granted some specific qualities to Turkey’s experience of political Islam (Mardin, 2012: 174). At the time political Islam started to rise in Turkey, there was no foreign occupation and there was an already established independent state. The issue was to strengthen and consolidate the state to prevent any probable foreign influence rather than the termination of the foreign occupation. Consequently, political Islam in Turkey from the very beginning developed as a modernization project compatible with democratic thesis rather than a jihad doctrine. Modernization of the society was a prerequisite to compete with the West. The state would be modernized in the same manner and strong synthesis of Islam and the West would be constructed against the West to deal with its advancement. (Türköne, 2012: 77-78). Since Turkey never remained under colonial or long-term autocratic rule, there have rarely been the grounds to produce radical ideological formulations in Turkey (Türköne, 2012:80). Hence, essentialism that is the core of the modern political Islam studies does not fit the specificity Turkish history. This specificity reveals itself even in the Ottoman Empire that hosted the Islamic law derived from the rational school of Abu Hanife (Mardin, 2012: 175).

Another important component of Turkey’s specificity with regard to the Middle Eastern states is that regardless of Turkey’s prospects for becoming full member of the EU, the country is imbedded in the West, institutionally, economically, strategically. It is a member of NATO and a candidate for the EU membership. The thrust of modern Turkey’s internal evolution and external policy has been overwhelmingly Western. This implies that Islamic politics in Turkey, both “recessed” and overt, unfolds in a more transparent setting and is affected to a greater extent by the international context than is generally the case elsewhere. In this sense, Turkey is distinct from most cases in the Middle East (Lesser, 2004: 176).

The different historical experiences culminated into the emergence of different courses of political Islam in Turkey and other parts of the Muslim Middle East. These distinct experiences of political Islam probably have impact on the self-regulation and self-efficacy of the Middle Eastern states. For the Middle Eastern states to pay attention to the essential features of the coexistence of democracy and Islam, it is required that they believe in the compatibility of the coexistence of democracy and Islam with their own internal standards. In this regard, it is possible that these states will ignore specific features of Turkey’s
behavior since it does not fit enough the characteristics of the political Islamic experiences in these states. Such a situation prevents the observer states from paying attention to the essential features of the way through which Turkey has successfully achieved the democracy-Islam balance.

Parallel to its role in self-regulation and the attentional processes, the issue of having different experiences of political Islam may delimit the extent to which the democracy-Islam balance will be maintained in the later periods of the imitation. Rather radical form of political Islam in other Middle Eastern countries may be rasped in the earlier periods of the modeling process in which Turkey will actively support and share the details of its democratic experience with these states. Yet, it is probable that when they are left by themselves to perform what they have learned and maintain this performance in the later periods, the radical aspects resurge as obstacles to successful modeling. Consequently, since experience of political Islam constitute the one pan of the democracy-Islam balance, the fact that Turkey and the other Middle Eastern countries have political Islamic experiences of their own poses a serious threat to the successful modeling.

The Permanent External Anchor

In their analysis of the political economy of Turkey, Keyman and Öniş conclude that “It is hard to visualize a decisive break with populist cycles and a transformation of the state in the direction of democratic and accountable competition state in the absence of a powerful European Union (EU)” (Keyman & Öniş, 2007: 125). Their conclusion refers to the fact that the process of the accession to the EU has kept Turkey excited in its way to democracy. Such a permanent external anchor, that is to say positive environmental influence, is absent for the Middle Eastern states, which appears as a motivational obstacle for these states to successfully model Turkey.

The prospect of accession to the EU has been a powerful incentive for many applicant states to comply with the famous Copenhagen criteria. Copenhagen criteria named after the European Council meeting that formulated them are set of conditions which a country must fulfill before accession is evaluated as feasible at all. They include democracy, the rule of law, civil liberties, a working market economy, alignment of policies and etc. (Neuwahl, 2005: 18). This political conditionality has contributed to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey in its way to the EU, subsequently the engagement of Islam with democracy.

The reinforcing role of the EU as a permanent anchor in the Turkish case is reflected in the policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party that has Islamic roots. The EU membership bid turned out to be a “modern” project on which the intentions and objectives of the JDP would not be questioned, and one in which the JDP extracted support from modern/ secular sectors, adding to its strength and legitimacy, and lessening its inherent insecurity within the system (Dağı, 2006: 101). It seems that the JDP has instrumentalized both human rights and the EU membership in its search for systemic legitimacy and security (Dağı, 2006: 103).

The Middle Eastern countries lack such a permanent anchor and source of legitimacy and security. Therefore, in accordance with the reinforcement and motivational process, they may attend and retain the idea of the coexistence of democracy and Islam, and may possess or acquire the capabilities to successfully execute it. However, they still may not convert it into appropriate action. Another possibility the lack of a permanent external anchor may lead is that even if they convert what they have learned into appropriate action, the transition to democracy take place, they may give up easily when they meet internal obstacles. The presence of a permanent anchor is seems essential for democratic consolidation to be sustainable.

Conclusion

Turkey has long been thought to be as an example of the successful coexistence of democracy and Islam and represented to be a model for the authoritarian Middle Eastern states in this regard. Especially in the
aftermath of the Arab grassroots movements, often referred as the Arab Spring, Turkey has increasingly been referred as a model for the newly emerging regimes in the Middle East to follow. Throughout this paper the relevance of the idea of “Turkey as a model” for the authoritarian and newly emerging Middle Eastern regimes is tried to be analyzed through the lenses of Bandura’s theory of social learning.

The social learning theory stands for the idea that people learn within social contexts often through modeling and observational learning and strongly underlines that this learning process is not independent from the interaction of inner forces, environmental influences and behavior. Building on this framework and departing from the assumption that like people and groups of people, states can learn through modeling, it is concluded that the idea of Turkey as a model for the Middle Eastern countries is relevant enough for successful modeling in accordance with Bandura’s social learning theory as the major inner forces and environmental influences Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries have do not fit enough for a successful modeling.

First, subjects under consideration have different inner dynamics in regard to the one pan of the democracy-Islam balance; they have political Islamic experiences of their own. Second, considering the environment influences they are surrounded by, Turkey has the European Union (EU) as its “permanent foreign anchor” that have kept Turkey more excited in the way of democracy, which is absent for the Middle Eastern countries. Hence, inner forces and controlling conditions do not fit enough for effective modeling in the case of Turkey and the Middle East. It is useful here to note that this conclusion does not necessarily mean that the coexistence of democracy and Islam is not possible in the authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes or for the newly emerging ones.

References