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THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE ON CULTURAL FORMATION

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Abstract

Culture is all material, spiritual and ideological entities created by humans for humanity for the happiness, welfare and potential powers of humanity. Depending on social memory, culture requires awareness of human needs, a creation that is able to provide for these needs, and is not overwhelmed in comparison to other clusters of culture.

Culture is organic; it changes and develops. Culture advances along with developing, changing human mind and thought. Cultural evolution never ends as long as humankind exists. Social developments benefit all humankind; culture expands from the communal to the universal.

Art is particularly a concept intertwined with and develops alongside of culture. Individuals form their opinion of arts within framework of a society's values of culture and shape their attitude towards arts in their sociocultural environment. Members of a society become part of the society's culture. Consequently, culture helps happy people in the contemporary sense lead more humane lives.

Keywords: Culture, art, evolution, human, humanity

Culture is all the material, spiritual and ideological existence created by people for humanity, and even sometimes in spite of humanity, for the happiness, welfare and potential powers of the human. Culture depends on the concept of social memory and in order for culture to exist, people need to realize their needs and create things that meet these needs and are comparable to and can keep their own against other cultural bodies.

The history of civilization shows that all cultural elements embody ways of thinking, scientific inventions, beliefs, lifestyles, languages, ideas, institutions and, especially, artistic creations. Everything inside the definition of culture is created by humans as the product of their ideas and capabilities. Emergence of culture depends on the existence of humans and it is an indicator of their progress towards civilization.

Culture, is organic and it changes and develops. Culture changes as long as human mind and idea changes and develops. The history of civilization functions dynamically with cultural continuity and passing on of culture to the next generation and survives through learning. Culture is born, lives, develops, grows old and disappears, same as other living things. The history of civilization is filled with examples.

Transmission and continuity of culture requires generations living successively or adjacently. People that can feel like a member of the society become a part of the culture with their own individual reasons for existing. Each society creates its own culture. Then, the culture creates its own people. The goal is to help people live easier and better. Consequently, culture helps people that are happy in the contemporary sense live a more humane life.

The most important testament to the culture as a living entity is the humanity's progress from prehistoric times to the age of technology, discovering the power of its mind and using it for intellectual activities. It would be safe to say that one cannot have the urge to improve and develop without having understood that culture is a process that requires movement and cultural change cannot be prevented or these concepts actually do exist.

Culture is association between members of the society and every society finds its own lifestyle. Indubitably, one does not hold precedence over the other. However, cultural evolution is detected by intellect and societies that cannot experience the process or that have obstacles to experience it remove this evolutionary equivalence. So, although culture is an activity performed by people for the happiness and welfare of people, there is a difference between societies that accomplish it and that cannot accomplish it. The progress made by accomplished societies benefit the entire humanity and the culture is no longer peculiar to that society and becomes universal. As long as humanity continues, societies that can become contemporary and modern in the everlasting cultural evolution process rank at the top of the cultural evolution. Societies that cannot recognize the inevitability of change and development get out of date. Another crucial point is that change does not suffice by itself and has to be accompanied by development.

We can categorize the cultural activities of humanity under three headings: Individual Culture, Local or National Culture and Universal Culture.

Individual culture is about personal acquisitions: sociocultural environment, education and other input that give a person his personality, what he gains and what he benefits from. All these acquisitions determine the person's worldview, approach to arts, cultural accumulation and even behaviors and attitudes that reflect on etiquette. Also, humanity's approach towards arts and aesthetic appreciation are developed within the context of culture. The individual establishes his perspective of arts within cultural values and his approach towards arts is shaped within the sociocultural environment that he comes from.

Individual culture was first under the influence of the social culture the person grows up in; however, when the person starts to use his mind and see the developments outside his own society, from then on the individual is under the influence of the social culture and the universal culture.¹

Social culture is the entirety of values, which have been generated in the past of the society and makes it different from other societies, passed from generation to generation and is a source of pride for the society. However, a dominant culture without sufficient accumulation and background influences the individual but it is not necessarily the social culture. The dominant culture or popular culture lacking an universal dimension may be fashionable and passed off as social culture but, in fact, it cannot constitute the real culture. It doesn't have social values and harbors transience without permanence or universality.²

The dominant culture holds authority within the social system, gaining power, and plays an effective part in promoting itself as social or universal culture. It could never be an indicator of social culture to separate the elements of the dominant culture from material culture, impose them on the society as spiritual and ideal values or get a control over the society. At this point, artificial interpretations as "National Culture," "Western Culture," "Eastern Culture," "Islamic Culture" or "Our Culture" cannot be incorporated into the universal definition of culture. The adverse effect of cultured people or groups of this mentality with authority on the social culture, even temporarily, keeps the culture behind contemporary conditions and prevents its development. As a consequence of unproductive debates, cultural

¹ Sıtkı M. Erinç, *Kültür Sanat Sanat Kültür*, Ütopya Yayınevi, 2004, p. 12.

² Sıtkı M. Erinç, *Kültür Sanat Sanat Kültür*, Ibid., p. 26.

congestions and depressions occur and culture is replaced by the lack of culture. Real social values vanish.

Art, is a notion that develops alongside of and nested with culture. The individual establishes his perspective of arts within cultural values and his approach towards arts is shaped within the sociocultural environment that he comes from. By definition, art has to be original, free, novel, creative, educational, informative, directive and developing but cannot perform these functions inside a dependent dominant culture. They cannot be free and come up with the original.

Only by giving the individual and society new points of view by artistic development and popularization is it possible to overcome the congestions experienced during cultural evolution processes of the humanity and communities.

The element of culture is based on humanity; so, the present should be taken into consideration along with the past. Just like for the development of humanity, the concept of culture should be universal and prudential. Universal culture can be influenced by individual or local cultures but what defines universality is not where it comes from or what society it belongs to but that it is for the entire humanity, regardless of time and space. Edison is a person of importance for what he invented for the good of the people, regardless of his nationality. Certain elements special to the society can exceed localness and, thanks to evolutionary progress, become contemporary and modern values in the universal sense, which implies a superior culture.

Universal values, such as architectural works, monuments, mosques, temples, paintings and sculptures of great artists, performance arts like opera and ballet, novels, stories and poetry of world literature, are certainly nourished by local and national arts. So, a work of art is first created within under own conditions, becomes renowned, appreciated, and then, universal.³ Throughout human history, cultures have been in constant interaction through trade or war.⁴

When culture becomes stagnant or gets congested, it becomes harder for creative individuals to express themselves in this unproductive environment.⁵ The solution lies in an education aware of our own cultural values but is given from a universal point of view.⁶

³ Sıtkı M. Erinç, *Kültür Sanat Sanat Kültür*, Ibid., p. 29.

⁴ Server Tanilli, *Uygarlık Tarihi*, Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 2013, p. 17.

⁵ M. Demet Ulusoy, *Sanatın Sosyal Sınırları*, Ütopya Yayınevi, 2005, p.18.

In this context, examples of the reflection of our traditional cultural values on Contemporary Turkish Arts show that it is only possible for arts to overcome the national mentality when artists achieve universal aesthetics, and then, the nation perceives the universal aesthetics.⁷

Painting examples of Traditional Turkish Art also depend on the traditions that bring together cultures of the Central Asia, the Far East and the Near East, which are the former homes of Turks. A group of works currently located at Topkapi Palace Museum Library has been recorded art history as the works of Master Mehmet Siyah Kalem. These paintings reflect a world of faith considered to be associated with Shamanism. Extraordinary creatures in the paintings could have been emerged from religious imagination but they identify hidden forces of nature and evoke some pagan imagination that refers to wizards to fight against these forces, rather than define a monotheistic religious that divides this world and the next. Some of these paintings introduce people of nomadic tribes, who struggle to survive in the difficult Central Asian geography and always migrate. There are art historians that argue that these paintings may be depictions prepared by storytellers to amplify narration of the stories they read out loud.

Paintings without realistic depictions illustrate truths of the world on a superficial surface as abstract, colorful diagrams, just like in the shadow show screen of *Karagoz and Hacivat*... The screen is one of imagination and truth at the same time. We only see shadows and images on the screen. The puppeteer sets up the screen, dims the light, lights a candle, which illuminates the screen and reveals shapes. People of all ages have fun and laugh. Therefore, there are probably traces of the influence of Central Asian cultures in shadow shows of the Turks.

There are great similarities between the shadow shows that have survived as *Karagoz and Hacivat* and Islamic miniatures. Miniature painters abstract and schematize shapes, and attempts to illustrate in colors and lines analogues of the shapes puppeteers project on the screen. In the Islamic world, the art of painting finds a new area of life in books rather than on structures.

In the Anatolian Seljuk and Ottoman periods in Anatolia, "*Varka ve Gulsah*," a manuscript written and illustrated prior to invention of the printing press, tells a love story and allows the reader to watch the entire story in illustrations, much like a filmstrip.

⁶ Sıtkı M. Erinç, *Kültür Sanat Sanat Kültür*, Ibid., p. 29.

⁷ Sıtkı M. Erinç, *Sanatın Boyutları*, Ütopya Yayınevi, 2013, p. 57.

The book *Beyan-i Menazil-i Sefer-i Irakeyn*, written by *Matrakci Nasuh*, is a travel book that introduces the places the Sultan passed through during his expedition to the East. Illustrations in the book are in the style of maps, with no third dimension. The book begins with an Istanbul scenery, which is the oldest image of Istanbul. The illustration reflects the truth but loses reality in the formal language of real Islamic arts.

Mondrian says, "Destruction of the natural is to find the depth." Islamic mystics and, before them, Buddha reached that depth. Mondrian's discourse that overlaps with Eastern wisdom gives the art of painting a liberal form, far from imitating nature. In the 20th century, we see in the West, like in the East, a conceptual style of painting that does not settle for appearance but wants to access the essence. Withdrawing from nature, painting becomes embroidery of colors and shapes, and the embroidery that is first seen in Fauves' spreads across Western arts. Abstract embroideries appeal to Matisse, Mondrian and Klee. This influence is apparent in some of the paintings of Mondrian and Matisse.

Today, the artist of the 20th century is the inventor and creator of a new truth in his efforts to open possible worlds. Today's truth continually develops in constant change, and expects new people of the 20th century to actively take part as the creators of reality. After founding a republican state in the 20th century, Turkey managed to easily adapt to all contemporary renovations in form without losing its own traditions and identity, and create an order of values faithful to our land, having a striking impact on the contemporary world.

Erol Akyavas, a master of contemporary Turkish art, reinterprets and expands the idea behind Islamic arts within principles and methods of art. The artist sets out from visual heritage of his own culture, and his interest in miniature is a determinant element in the structure of his paintings. Matrakci's topographic works constitute a rich, visual background for Akyavas.

Another Turkish artist, Devrim Erbil has art in his paintings as a genetic carrier. The gene codes peoples' histories and cultures. He uses the traditional miniature master Matrakci Nasuh as a starting point and inspiration in topographic bird's-eye views of Istanbul and reaches a different and modern dynamism.

Ergin Inan gives shape to and expresses the metaphysical meaning between existence and nonexistence and the humankind's attitude towards life and reality in his extraordinary and fantastic works, which synthesize and reexamine his accumulation of Asian, European and Anatolian cultures in his original method. Human figures, bugs, butterflies, reptiles,

teardrops, leaves are integrated with writings in his compositions, which are depicted on a philosophical basis and reflect visual, symbolical and mystical relationships between iconographical and cultural images.

Adnan Coker is an artist who deliberates on the venue of painting, which means depth. Coker is nourished by his own cultural environment while researching the venue of painting, develops new formal schematics with elements he chooses from Seljuk and Ottoman architecture, creates new abstracts from tangible architectural elements, and depicts the monumentality and literal splendor he observes in these venues.

Suleyman Saim Tekcan takes his contents from rich historical background of Anatolia, which goes back hundreds of years, and combines the traditional with the sensitivity of an artist. He gives his works identity with shapes from the environment, nature, Anatolian civilizations and the Ottoman art, and at the same time, uses a modernist perspective in his creations, and has developed an original technique in printmaking.

In her very plain paintings, Ayse Ozel sets out from Eastern painting tradition and uses simple forms of the West, and attempts to combine the two traditions in a broad perspective. The artist starts from the visual heritage of her own culture, and her interest in traditional arts constitutes a determinant element in her paintings.

In contemporary Turkish sculpture, Mehmet Aksoy's "Kibele" is "strong as an Amazon, beautiful like a Goddess, a gentle, mellow melody, and a powerful symphony that emerges suddenly." Mehmet Aksoy goes back into history with the statue of Cybele, which he comes across among statues of millennia-old Anatolian civilizations, and his long lasting passion begins. Although in different shapes and under different names, Cybele is repeated almost in every country and survives until today, and comes back to life in her homeland, in Mehmet Aksoy's sculptures.

We can see that an individual creates his own perspective of arts within his own cultural values, shapes up his approach towards arts in the sociocultural environment he has come out of; thereby, art ceases to be specific to a society and is universalized.

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