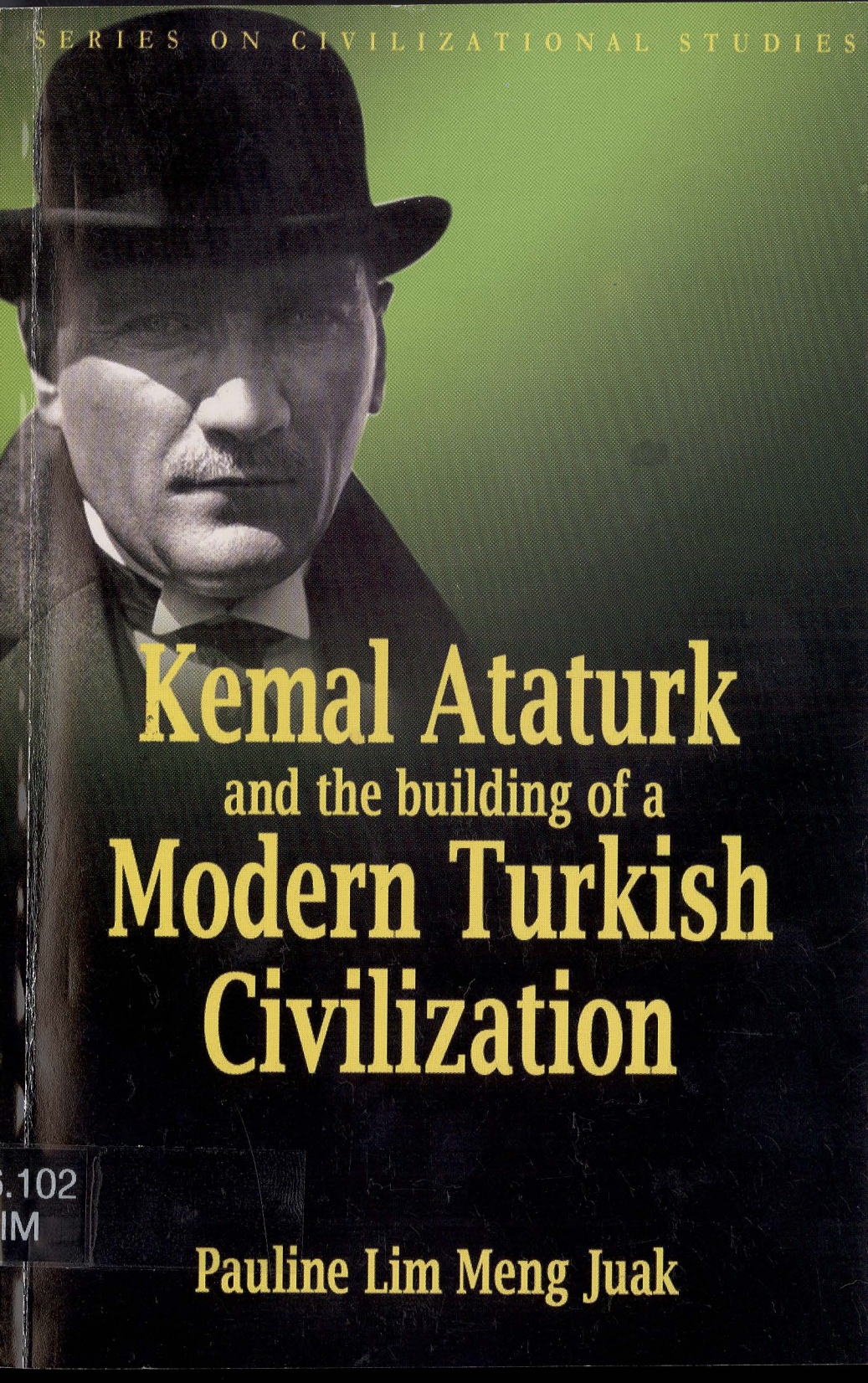


SERIES ON CIVILIZATIONAL STUDIES

A black and white portrait of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, a dark tie, and a dark bowler hat. He has a mustache and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a plain, light color.

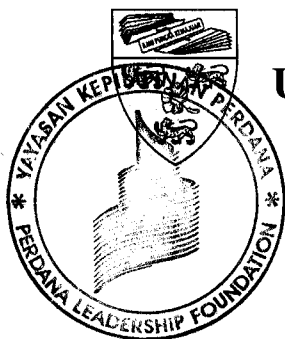
Kemal Ataturk
and the building of a
Modern Turkish
Civilization

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Pauline Lim Meng Juak

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University of Malaya Press

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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PREFACE

This book aims to study Kemal Ataturk's vision and approach in building a modern Turkish civilization. Turkish civilization dates back to ancient history and has seen the rise and fall of many dynasties and their accompanying civilizations. One such civilization was the Ottoman Empire which ruled and dominated Turkey for nearly six centuries, till its collapse in the early 20th century. It represented a nation deeply steeped in religious values and traditions which towards the last century of its decline, sought unsuccessfully to incorporate western ideas of science and technology in an effort to strengthen itself against the encroaching onslaught of the west.

After the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate and caliphate, the nation embarked on a programme to build a modern Turkish nation. The leader of this modernization process was Ataturk whose secular reforms were based on the western model and aimed at side-lining religious traditions and practices – these having been blamed for the backwardness of the nation and the loss of its former glory and position in the world.

The twin guiding principles of his vision was secularism and westernization, representing a determination to depart from the past and forming the basis of Kemalism. He used education as an agent of secularization and the military, the most modern in-

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stitution of his time, both as a modernizer and to suppress opposition. Finally, Ataturk's radical reforms were really an extension and an acceleration of pre-existing attempts at reforming Ottoman society.

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INTRODUCTION

Civilizations are manifestations of a nation's worldview. This is invariably a product of a consciously shared heritage of social and cultural values and traditions of a people. Civilizations are also shaped by the vision of its leaders who sometimes leave behind them a legacy of the type of civilization they have envisioned for their community which then becomes a dominant feature in a nation's psyche and in its institutional structures.

One such strong and indomitable leader who envisioned a 'modern' civilization for the Turkish people was Kemal Ataturk. He sought to re-model Turkish civilization in the western mould. It is hoped that through this brief study, the extent of the appeal of this man, his ideology, his vision and his approach in building such a civilization will be better understood.

For the purpose of studying this building of a new civilization, it would be appropriate to understand some aspects of the term, especially where it is pertinent and has meaning to the origin of Turkish civilization. It is not the intention, however, to go into a detailed exploration of the term.

Etymology and Definition

The word, 'civilization' may have come from the Latin term 'civitas', meaning citizenship, or members of a community or 'city'.¹ Cities are considered one

important criterion of civilization as it is probably in cities that all the socio-cultural variants of a civilization are best manifested. It is not surprising then that civilizations have, among many other criteria, tended to be associated with towns and urbanization which are perceived to represent 'civilized living'. Cities project a society of 'law and order, and justice and authority'.²

Ibn Khaldun,³ the fourteenth century Muslim historiographer used the Arabic word, 'umran' to encapsulate this concept of civilization in his study of the rise and fall of North African dynasties. The root word of 'umran' means 'to build, to cultivate', denoting 'settlement'. The term has been translated by Franz Rosenthal to mean 'urban settlement' or 'urbanization'.⁴ To Ibn Khaldun, a civilization or 'a dynasty requires large cities and towns to make its existence possible; in turn they permit the development of luxury.'⁵ 'Luxury' in this case, implies the achievement of a certain elevated level of social and economic living.

Following from this observation, Ibn Khaldun also noted that nomadism was detrimental to higher civilization.⁶ This point underscores the fact that early Turkish civilization had indeed evolved from a purely nomadic race to a 'sedentary and urban people' to whom Khaldun's description, 'inhabitants of large population centers'⁷ would rightly fit. In his 'challenge and response'⁸ theory of civilizations, Arnold Toynbee also affirmed that it was the early Turks' ability to adapt from a nomadic existence to sedentary settlements that enabled them to establish their empires.⁹ It is also interesting to note that, after the Turkish War of Independence, when he toured the country and saw it in ruins, Kemal Ataturk lamented, 'we have no place we may call a city'.¹⁰

Finally, in the West, the word, 'civilization' was unknown until as late as the eighteenth century. It surfaced quietly in France from the words, 'civilized' and 'to civilize'¹¹ and up to 1732, 'civilization' was still a legal term that described an act that converted 'a criminal trial into civil proceedings'.¹² The word in its modern meaning of 'becoming civilized' and generally understood as being the 'opposite of barbarism' first came out in print only in 1756.¹³

Civilization and Culture

In many sociological and anthropological writings, the words, 'civilization' and 'culture' are often used synonymously. To conclude this overview, it would be useful to differentiate between the two meanings as it would become apparent later in this study that the making of a new civilization was through acquiring and adopting new cultural values and practices.

The American Heritage Dictionary has defined 'civilization' as 'a condition of human society marked by an advanced stage of development in the arts and sciences and by a corresponding social, political and cultural complexity'. It has further defined it as 'those nations or people regarded as having arrived at this stage' and also as 'the type of culture and society developed by a particular group, nation or region or by any of these in some particular epoch'. It is also 'the act or process of civilizing or of reaching a civilized state'.¹⁴ The above descriptions aptly express the content and the idea of the process of 'building a civilization'.

Culture, on the other hand, is the 'totality of socially transmitted and shared behavior patterns, art,

beliefs, values, language and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population.¹⁵ Culture is therefore the complex mix of assumptions, behavior, traditions, stories, myths, heroes, etc, that defines a person or a particular group of people as a member of a particular society. For example, the cultural practices of a Malay person, i.e. his way of life, his value system, etc, distinguish him as a member of the Malay race.

Culture in its many variations is therefore a manifestation of a civilization.¹⁶ It is a sub-set of civilization which is much wider in scope. Civilizations can and often comprise many cultures and transcends geographical space, time and people.¹⁷ An example is the Islamic civilization. It is spread across many countries and continents and it comprises people from different races, cultures and nations. Ziya Gokalp, the Turkish nationalist and sociologist, described culture as the set of values and habits prevailing within a community, while civilization is the rational, international system of knowledge, science and technology.¹⁸ Huntington summarizes the above very succinctly when he refers to a civilization as the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have'.¹⁹

Chapter Outline

The aim of this book is to study Kemal Ataturk's vision and approach in the building of a modern Turkish civilization. It began with a brief introduction to some relevant aspects on the subject of civilization. It highlighted in particular, the aspect of 'urban settlement' as a prerequisite for the development of 'high civilization'

as opposed to that of a nomadic community which was the origin of the Turkish people.

Chapter 1 will outline a short history of Turkish civilization. It will highlight the origins of the Turks; focusing on the Ottoman Empire: its origin, rise and decline, insights into its socio-political structure, early reforms and the emerging signs of westernization. Chapter 2 focuses on Kemal Ataturk, giving an insight into how his family, education and military career might have shaped his vision, and how he imposed the cultural values and practices of another civilization on a society already deeply entrenched in its own traditions and values in order to achieve a modern, secular and westernized nation state. Chapter 3 examines the two main approaches by which he re-modeled a modern Turkish civilization, that is, through education and the military. Chapter 4 elaborates on the six principles of Kemalism, the basis of his modernizing regime and will touch on the general reaction to his methods. Chapter 5 provides some insights on the personal side of Ataturk and assesses the legacy he left behind and two institutions that will preserve it. Chapter 6 concludes this study with some personal views and assessment of Ataturk's reforms.

Conclusion

Many writers, among them renown historians and sociologists such as Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, Will and Ariel Durant, Fernand Braudel and Pitirim Sorokin have written extensively and incisively on the subject of civilizations in the last century; including Ibn Khaldun many centuries earlier. In the last decade however, interest in the subject have been rekindled, per-

haps by Samuel P. Huntington's 1993 article, 'The Clash of Civilizations?'²⁰ and his subsequent book, 'The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order' in 1996.

Huntington's views in his treatise, however, focused interest from a different perspective. He had propounded that the next major 'clash' in the world would not be based on political or ideological grounds but most likely between civilizations of different cultural affiliations.²¹ His claims prompted renewed attention on the importance and the need for inter-civilizational dialogue in the world. This need for dialogue and understanding will be evident in the course of this study as in the process of building a new civilization it was deemed necessary to alienate the traditions and values of one civilization in preference for that of another. In the light of recent world events, specifically the 9/11 attacks on the United States of America and the subsequent bombing of Afghanistan, his claims in his article and book have yet again resurfaced in discussions and debates.