

Pluralist Philosophy of Yunus Emre: Remaking of Peace in Turkey's Popular Culture and Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

This paper inquires early philosophical foundations of peace in Turkey. It revisits popular poetics of Yunus Emre. Re-interpretation of Yunusian philosophy is important for understanding cultural implications of Turkey's peace efforts made under the umbrella of "Yunus Emre Institutes." In spite of the fact that Ankara strives for peace, it could not sustain cultural habitus and communicative practices that would prevent erosion of pluralism from within and without. Following popular preaching of Yunus Emre, Turkey needs to seek "unity within diversity" in both internal and external realms. Re-presenting this type of plural popular culture would be a challenging task. Foremost, there are domestic predicaments entangling Ankara. Deep divisions among the Turkish society even give credence to politically biased readings of Yunus Emre. In this highly polarized cultural environment, one way to restore public resonance might be endorsement of non-ideological/literal interpretations of Yunus Emre. By rejuvenating aesthetics and ethics of peace in Yunus Emre, Turkey could establish a more holistic philosophical position and hence provide better assistance to re-making of pluralist popular culture inside and outside of its borders.

Keywords: Turkey, Yunus Emre, popular culture, public diplomacy, peace, pluralist philosophy.

1. Introduction

By inquiring the extant literature in the first part of this paper, I provide a conceptual framework for understanding of peace as constellation of popular discursive practices constituted within public contexts. Here, I offer a pragmatist perspective to analyze making of peace at the intersection of public diplomacy and popular culture. Based on this analytical framework, the following part looks at contextual conceptualization of peace discourse in Anatolia during the middle ages. Then, poetical philosophy of Yunus Emre is revisited in order to explore discursive implications shaping Anatolian peace in the thirteenth century. By distilling

critical pragmatist insights from popular making of peace in ancient Anatolia, the author highlights significance of communication ethics and cultural aesthetics for re-construction of peace under current circumstances surrounding modern Turkey. Contextual comparisons and discursive reinterpretations of these two eras enable us to draw conclusions for reorienting Turkey's public diplomacy along pluralist philosophy of Yunus Emre.

In order to achieve this task, domestic dimension of public diplomacy has to be reevaluated. Pluralization of domestic popular culture would only come through nonideological/non-partisan representations of Yunus Emre. Literal and holistic readings would save Yunus Emre from the status of "fakeloric" figure (Tunç, 2007). Only by then, modern residents of Anatolia could rediscover "pluralist ideas" of Yunus Emre (Kula, 2012). Pluralist understanding of Yunus Emre would help Turkish people to re-capture their ethical and aesthetic sensibilities towards rebuilding of cultural habitus for peace from within and without. With the broadening and deepening of plural popular practices, Turkey's public diplomacy of peace might bear fruit over the long run.

Reconfiguration of Turkey's public diplomacy and popular culture could bring about "hybrid forms of international peace" (Richmond, 2015) co-evolving at the intersection of local, regional and global. While managing these transformations, Ankara should be ready to address longstanding and emerging socio-political questions. Handling of policy dilemmas through hybridization of peace would make it possible for Turkey to project its self in aesthetically and ethically more resonant ways in both realms of popular culture and public diplomacy. These reintroductions might gradually pave for transforming the strategic context of Turkey's relations with regional and global others. As a result of these long term transformations, peoples within and beyond Anatolia might again co-constitute the public discourse and popular habitus of peace and hopefully move towards aesthetically more beautiful and ethically better international future.

2. Popular Culture and Public Diplomacy: A Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Peace

In this part, I take a pragmatic perspective to analyze peace constituted in crisscrossing realms of popular culture and public diplomacy. First and foremost, pragmatism offers an understanding of "popular culture as international relations." Within this analytical tradition, one can explore peace in "products of popular culture." Literary texts, such as novels and poems, should be treated as popular "interpretants" revealing symbolic, cultural, habitual, and experiential aspects of peace (Kangas, 2009).

By inquiring representations of peace in artefacts of popular culture, one can also better delineate "discursive" implications of public diplomacy in "building mutually beneficial relationships with internal and foreign publics." In order to enhance discursive peace, public diplomacy has to capture popular cultural imaginations from within and without. Pursuing public diplomacy of peace is not an easy political task. More than anything, it requires politically efficient communicative engagement (Filippos and Frangonikolopoulos, 2012) with strategic publics (influential stakeholders) at home and abroad (Fitzpatrick, 2012). Therefore, "public diplomacy" of peace should be viewed from an "intermestic" (domestic-international) perspective (Huijgh, 2012). Pragmatic and intermestic viewpoints provide analytical angle to discern inter-linkages between making of peace in popular culture and public diplomacy as they are mutually constituted in both internal and external domains.

With this conceptual framework, we can also better highlight the role of popular culture in the conduct of Turkey's public diplomacy aiming peace at home and abroad. In this regard, Ankara had better restore culture of peace at the popular level in order to pursue public diplomacy of peace within and beyond its borders. For this reason, Turkey should reorient its discursive peace agenda in the realms of popular culture and public diplomacy. Given the intensity of current geopolitical crises surrounding Turkey's immediate periphery, it would seem untimely and naïve to talk about rebuilding popular culture and public

diplomacy of peace in and outside Turkey. At this point, Turkish politicians need to remember the fact that popular representation (Kangas, 2009) and public communication (Olsson, 2013; Jönsson and Hall, 2003) establish two important venues for the resolution of challenging crisis situations (Acuto, 2011). In an increasingly complex crises environment engulfing Turkish public diplomacy, peace could become a central theme to relocate “logics of narrating and networking” (Hayden, 2013) in domestic and foreign politics. While revisiting popular narratives and public networks in the remaking of peace, Turkey could turn to interpretation of pluralist philosophy preached by Yunus Emre in ancient Anatolia.

3. Interpretation of Peace in Ancient Anatolia: Revisiting Pluralist Philosophy of Yunus Emre

In this part, poetics of Yunus Emre (1240/1-1320/1) is taken as interpretant of peace in thirteenth century Anatolia. Revisiting Yunusian philosophy (Çubukçu, 1982) is quite important for our interpretation of peace in present-day political conditions. In fact, there are some striking parallels between political contexts of ancient and contemporary Anatolia. Despite unfavorable contextual conditions of the thirteenth century Anatolia, such as the invasions of Mongolians and Crusaders, Yunus Emre’s popular discourse delineated peaceful possibilities to transform and reconstruct the political “world of our making” (Onuf, 1989) in national and international public spheres. For some, poetics of Yunus Emre might be associated with humanistic trends of his age. During the early period of Renaissance, Italian intellectuals such as Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) have disseminated humanistic ideas. Compared to individualistic humanism of his time (Bal, 2009: 158-174), Yunus Emre preached pluralist philosophy “by emphasizing the superiority of love and tolerance” for the making of peace transcending our inner and outer worlds. Rather than opting to pessimistic humanism, Yunus Emre appealed to optimist tradition of *sulh* (peace) permeating the Sufi orders of his time (Derin, 2005-2006: 8).

In an age where sectarian hostilities and political fighting were pervasive, Yunus Emre preached constitution of “love” among all humans and by extension aimed to build “brotherly” relations among all nations. Yunus Emre recommended peaceful popular-public relations even in case of physical and symbolic violence: “He must be without hands when someone hits him. He must be tongueless when cursed” (Derin, 2005-2006: 9).

In his famous work *Risâletu’n-Nushiyye*, the book of the advice, he counsels us to curb the animal nature of mankind which causes all kinds of crimes and violence. It contains 573 verses all advising to purify the soul from animal characteristics: The verses 14-82 [are] about the evilness of greed and the excellence of self-sufficiency (*kanaat*), 83-160 [are] about being proud and vainglory and its opposite modesty, 181-302 [are] about the dangers of anger and the necessity of patience...[He allocated] the largest section of his work to the dangers of anger...[and] the significance of forgiveness and controlling one’s wrath (Derin, 2005-2006: 9).

In his “mystic poetry,” Yunus Emre used “uncomplicated and comprehensible—and thus attractive—language.” The Sufi poetics of Yunus Emre “calls for harmony among all people” and portrays peace from a pluralist perspective. Despite the bygone ages, philosophical reinterpretation of Yunus Emre is ethically and aesthetically relevant (Baykal, 2012) for reconceptualization of pluralist peace in present times.

In order to re-constitute universal spirit of peace, Yunus Emre offers a pluralist philosophy transcending all kinds of human differences constructed in various times and spaces.

The following verses would help us to reinterpret pluralist philosophy of peace in Yunus Emre.

I am not here on earth for strife, Love is the
mission of my life.

The world is my true nation Its people are
my nation.

For those who truly love God and his ways All the people
of the world are brothers.
The man who doesn't see the nations of the world as one Commits heresy
even if the pious claim he is a saint.

Mystic is what they call me,
Hate is my only enemy;
I harbor a grudge against none,
To me the whole wide world is one. (Halman, 1968)

Come, let us all be friends for once,
Let us make life easy on us,
Let us be lovers and loved ones,
The earth shall be left to no one. (Saraçoğlu, 2005: 346)

At this point, Yunusian philosophy of peace has to be conceived as a universal human spirit encompassing our popular and public lives. It is all about winning human hearts and making friends in all over the world. In the words of Yunus, “a single visit into the heart” is “better than a hundred pilgrimages” (Halman: 235). The aesthetics of “popular mysticism” and ethics of “cosmic consciousness” espoused by Yunus Emre made him to reach out a wide ranging audience cross-cutting all social, economic and cultural cleavages (Başkal, 2004). Yunus Emre’s age-old pluralist philosophy is still pertinent in making sense of peace in current era. In this regard, universal spirit of peace should be constituted inter-subjectively as both an aesthetic value and an ethical responsibility. By rejuvenating aesthetics and ethics of peace, Turkey would possibly move towards pluralization in crosscutting spheres of popular culture and public diplomacy.

4. Conclusion: Pluralization of Turkey’s Popular Culture and Public Diplomacy

People of ancient Anatolian constituted peaceful habitus of co-existence at both popular-cultural and public-communication levels. In order to understand pluralist philosophy of Anatolian peace, one should reinterpret poetics of Yunus Emre. First and foremost, Yunusian universalist pluralism provides a discursive key to rejuvenate aesthetic value of peace in domestic popular Turkish culture. If and when Turkish people and politicians “turn to aesthetics” in their popular cultural representation of peace they would also be able to ethically reorient their public “understanding of the political [peace]...representative practices themselves...come to constitute and shape political practices. The key challenge ahead consists of finding ways to reclaim the political value of the aesthetic” (Bleiker, 2001: 510) in peace through popular cultural representations and by extension rebuild the ethical responsibility of peace through public deliberation.

At this point, one could recognize the fact that Western philosophy of peace, as reflected by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), also exalts aesthetical and ethical value of political peace within national and international public spheres (Duva, 2014; Heimsoeth, 2014; Mengüşoğlu, 2014).

Indeed, there are significant similarities between Yunusian and Kantian understanding of universal peace. Aesthetics and ethics paves the way for multi- or “para-sensual” (Deleuze, 1994: 146, 136-137; cited in Bleiker, 2001: 515) and “poly-lateral” (Wiseman, 2004: 41; cited in Huijgh, 2012: 363-364) reconceptualization of peace transcending popular and public domains of world politics.

Pluralist discourse of Yunus Emre “transcends time and space” and hence resonates with all humans, notwithstanding their popular and public differences. Believers of any faith, and even non-believers, could appeal to Yunusian poetics in order to re-gain spirit of peace in their lives. Re-making of peace spirit might be a remedy for our common self-inflicted ills and selfdestructive diseases, such as “egoism, hedonism, and utilitarianism” (Yılmaz, 2013: 165-166), permeating spheres of popular culture and public communication. By re-interpreting conventional concept of *sulh* in Yunus Emre, we “can contribute to our [peaceful making of] solutions for the complex social problems of modern life” within and beyond Anatolia (Derin, 2005-2006: 10).

It seems that most people of modern Turkey have come to grips with negative implications of cultural, communicative and political peacelessness in and around Anatolia. The popular ratings and public appeal to the drama series “Yunus Emre: The Journey of Love” still shown on the first channel of Turkey’s state television (TRT-1) have revealed the ceaseless quest for transcendental peace in the hearts of most Turkish people. In fact, Governments of Turkey have long been striving for peace within and beyond its borders. Ankara has made great effort to celebrate 750th anniversary of Yunus Emre. Turkish diplomacy bear fruit when the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed “1991” as the “Yunus Emre Year of Love.” More recently, the first “Yunus Emre Institute (YEI)” was opened in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 17 October 2009. By the beginning of 2014, the number of YEI centers reached to 37, which were located in 28 different countries. These developments demonstrated the incumbent Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*-AK Parti/AKP) government’s institutional success in cultural sector of public diplomacy (Ekşi, 2014: 194-199). Among other popular-public activities conducted under the name of Yunus Emre, “The Yunus Emre Oratorio” deserves particular mention. “International Organization of Turkish Culture (TÜRKSÖY)” supervised performance of the “Yunus Emre Oratorio” in New York and Washington D.C. on 23-25 April 2012. Both concerts were well-received by the audience (Purtaş and Özkan, 2012).

Despite the fact that the name of Yunus Emre has been renowned, his philosophy of pluralism still awaits much needed popular and public attention. By and large, the responsibility still rests on the shoulders of Turkish public. First and foremost, people of Turkey should overcome “fakeloric” (invented, unreal) treatment of Yunus Emre (Tunç, 2007). Single-sided ideological/partisan readings, be it conservative, nationalist, or socialist, could not help to contextualize pluralist philosophy of Yunus Emre in Turkish domestic public sphere (Ocak, 1995). In order to better represent the name of Yunus Emre in the field of public diplomacy, Turkish people need to live up to domestic popular cultural commitments that Yunusian philosophy of pluralism entails. Re-contextualization of Yunusian pluralist communicative philosophy might gradually pave the way for co-constitution of peaceful habitus in Turkey’s popular culture and public diplomacy.

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