

FREUD IN TURKEY

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After the Crimean War, the Ottomans “rented” Cyprus, my birthplace, to the British, and after World War I, the British annexed the island to their empire. My mother was a descendant of a “kadi” (a Moslem religious judge) of the Ottoman period, and her family lost its fortune and prestige during the transition. My father, who came from a farm family in a Cypriot Turkish village, and my mother were both elementary school teachers and followers of the Turkish revolution that took place under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk. I was born on the island in 1932 when it was a British colony, and I can remember my father’s pride and joy one day during my adolescence when my mother threw away her traditional black head cover as she stepped outside our house, thereby becoming “modernized.” Despite her family’s religious background there was no emphasis on religion in our house, and instead of receiving religious education, my sisters and I were encouraged to take violin lessons and appreciate Beethoven. My family was not alone in this cultural transformation.

Earlier this year I spent three months in Ankara, Turkey as a visiting professor. The first week I was there I was asked to dinner at a friend’s house, as was a well-known medical professor in his sixties and his wife, also an educated person. I was amazed to see that this man’s wife, after spending decades in adulthood without a head cover, was now wearing a headscarf and had become a “Muslim,” the exact opposite of what mother had done. Nearly seventy years after Atatürk’s death it is clear that, using a psychoanalytic term, there is now a kind of “identity confusion” in Turkey. Two images are competing there: Turkish westernized liberals and nationalists are hiding behind Atatürk’s image, and Islamists are hiding behind Prophet Mohammed’s image. It is beyond the purpose of this report to examine the causes of this change in Turkey and to predict its outcome. It may, however, serve as background as we consider the topic of how Freud’s thoughts are perceived in Turkey today.

Psychoanalysis came to Turkey in the early 1930s when the country opened its doors to many European Jews escaping from the Nazis. Oscar Weigert, a Jew and an expert in labor laws came to Turkey with his German wife, Edith Weigert who was a psychoanalyst. The Turkish government gave her permission to practice psychoanalysis in Turkey, and one of her analysands, a Turk, began translating Freud’s work into Turkish. Since then many different translations of Freud have become available to

Turkish readers and consequently, many Turkish intellectuals have written about Freud and psychoanalysis.

My original interest in this field sprang from my finding one such Turkish translation, Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, among my father's books when I was in my early teens. Later, when I was a medical student at the University of Ankara in the early 1950s, my interest in psychoanalysis was sparked by Professor Rasim Adasal, Chairman of its Department of Psychiatry. He called himself the "Turkish Freud," and our textbooks included psychoanalytic concepts. After completing medical school in Turkey I went to the USA and became a psychoanalyst.

My close association with psychoanalysis in Turkey started in the mid-1970s when I spent a year at my old medical school as a visiting professor and later began unofficially training 21 psychiatrists in psychoanalysis. Two years ago two official schools of psychoanalysis were opened in Istanbul under the sponsorship of the International Psychoanalytic Association and under the guidance of an international psychoanalytic board. The opening of these two schools has its own long story. Being a psychoanalyst does not necessarily remove a person's prejudices, and a few people actually wondered if psychoanalysis could be taught in a "Muslim country." One jokingly suggested that each candidate should be interviewed in depth to rule out membership in Al-Qaeda. One potential teacher asked me if the psychiatrists and psychologists in Turkey whom he would meet ever use alcohol. At the present time there are Turkish psychoanalysts—most having trained in France—in three major Turkish cities: Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir.

Almost all the patients who undertake analysis in Turkey are those with a modern education and a modern outlook on life. Nevertheless, they come from a Turkish Muslim culture, as I do, and are exposed to certain life experiences that their Western counterparts do not experience. For example, all the Turkish Muslim male analysands have been circumcised, traditionally in their prepubertal years. One of the cornerstones of Freudian theory focuses on the Oedipus complex and the role of the castration anxiety in creating problems, as well as in resolving the Oedipus complex. Does the circumcision of a Turkish boy increase his castration anxiety and force him to regress? If the boy's circumcision takes place according to Muslim customs and is "routine," the boy's castration anxiety will not be increased. In fact, going through a circumcision ceremony helps him develop a concrete male identity. First the boy submits to Allah/father and is symbolically castrated. The circumcision unconsciously serves as a "payment" for incestuous desires, but since the boy makes this "payment," he is given permission to become a man.

A more complicated problem for Turkish children is their experience living in extended or modified extended families. Accordingly, while they are growing up they have multiple mothering persons: the biological mother, a grandmother, an unmarried aunt or relative, and so on. A child in such an environment, when frustrated with one mothering person, may stop relating to her emotionally and start relating to a second or third older woman. Some papers in the Western psychological literature suggest that being raised in a family where there are multiple "mothers" inhibits a child's individuation, and that

being raised Western style in a nuclear family is superior. It is true that if different “mothers” are perceived as not fitting one another there may be some problems. For example, I analyzed many Americans who were raised in the South of the United States with one biological white mother and one African-American mothering person. Such individuals usually had problems integrating the white mother and the black one, and later in life exhibited difficulty integrating certain life events. But in a traditional extended family, “mothers” can be put on a continuum in the child’s mind, and the child can individuate just as much as a child who is raised in a nuclear family. We also know that having experiences with only one mother does not necessarily guarantee healthy psychological development. In Turkey it is true that conflicts between mothering persons who raise a child can produce psychological problems, but such problems are analyzable.

In traditional Turkish families a woman’s loss of virginity before marriage creates shame and guilt. Such reactions are now changing in the cosmopolitan areas where most of the candidates for psychoanalytic treatment live. A focus on sexuality is not a problematic issue among the “modern” Turks or even among the more religiously oriented traditional Turks. In my experience, after an initial hesitation, most patients can speak rather freely about their sexual histories and fantasies. Prophet Mohammed was an orphan. Later he married a much older woman and remained faithful to her until her death. After that he had many wives/women. Psychologically speaking we can imagine that after losing his “mother” he was prone to express his sexuality more freely, but under religious guidance. Sometimes I wonder if the Moslem tradition of fasting during the month of Ramadan, again psychologically speaking, might be connected with the notion of a person first depriving himself or herself of the love of mother (food) and then receiving permission to have sex. Religion provides checks and balances concerning an individual’s wishes and activities. It is the religious fanatic who requires more and more rules and regulations for human behavior. But, religious fanatics—whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims—would not seek out psychoanalysis.

Another custom that may raise special psychological issues in Turkey is the swaddling of babies in rural and traditional areas. Some years ago I supervised the treatment of a young Turkish woman in Istanbul who was covering her hair with a cloth in the style of a turban. At first she spoke of her religious reasons for covering her hair, but as her treatment progressed, she was able to connect her choice of head wrapping with her experience of being swaddled during the first two years of her life. The turban was a reminder, at first an unconscious one, of the psychological problems she experienced as an infant concerning her body ego.

Can a Muslim psychoanalyst analyze a non-Muslim individual? Yes, he or she can do this as easily as a Jewish or Christian analyst can analyze a Muslim individual. My analyst was Jewish. I also worked closely with a female Muslim Turkish analyst who successfully treated a Turkish-Jewish and a Turkish-Catholic person. Of course, she had to obtain information about the minority groups in Turkey and had to develop empathy for their group-related experiences. The Jewish patient’s family members lived safely in Turkey during the Holocaust, but they absorbed the general anxieties and fears of all Jews

of that time. The analyst could treat her patient after sensing that this person's major symptoms were related to the mental representation of the Holocaust.

Are there some special areas of Freudian theory and technique which can be modified or expanded by Muslim psychoanalysts? Early in his career Freud gave up his "seduction theory" and focused more on the child's internal wishes and defenses against such wishes. He minimized the importance of exploring external traumatic events in their own right as they influence the evolution of an individual's psychological problems. Most of the major psychoanalytic theoreticians who followed Freud were Jewish, and I believe that they had to deny in their thinking and work the unbelievably painful Holocaust-related external events. They insisted that classical psychoanalysis should solely or primarily focus on the internal world. For example, Melanie Klein, who started her own school of thought, reported the details of the analysis of a young boy during World War II England with no references at all to the German blitz and related external events. As a "Muslim analyst" I felt more comfortable bringing current external events—and even the shared mental images of historical events which affected our ancestors decades or even centuries ago—into the psychoanalytic work and exploring the special role played by an individual's internal world.

In summary, I do not see unusual difficulties or uniqueness in the practice of Freudian psychoanalysis in Turkey. Both those who become psychoanalysts and those who seek psychoanalysis, however, come from a portion of the population that is leading a "modern" lifestyle, people in whose daily lives religion does not play a major role.