

Ibn what university?

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The writer of this column has also joined only a couple of months ago and therefore is subject of questions about his new school. When I tell my colleagues and friends that I have joined the “*Ibn Haldun Üniversitesi*” the usual reaction happens to “*Ibn what?*”

Ibn Haldun, my man! Have you never heard of him?

No, he has not.

How could he? We are living in a country where even our language has gone through a catastrophe (*Geoffrey Lewis, The Turkish language reform: A catastrophic success. Oxford 1999.*). We cannot read the tombstones of our own grandparents. We denied the legacy of them; we have forsaken everything they have built for us or transferred from their parents.

The political firestorms of the last 200 years left us with one dimensional ideology: In order not to be beaten in the military field, to be respected by our adversaries in the political arena, we had to be “*like them.*” The words “*Europeanization*” and more general “*Westernization*” were the words on that prescription.

I don't like any reductionism in neither science nor in daily life. The worst of all reductionisms appears to be in sociology: some students of sociology try to see the society as a biological organism. Andrew Sayer calls it “*biological reductionism*” or “*psychologism*” and sees a strong drive towards social constructionism and anti-essentialism (*Andrew Sayer, Realism and Social Science, London: Sage 2000.*). Some scientists and many politicians explain away these mistakes as the growing necessities of the new polity that replaced the Ottoman Empire in the last two centuries.

Could the social and political architects of the Progress and Union governments that have seen the death of the Empire and the Kemalist movement that organized the birth of the Republic could find another solution to what they perceived as the problem? Not, according to adherents of those social reductionist theories who would see a deterministic form of essentialism. Prof. Taha Parla used to say that the grandsons of the Ottoman pashas could not bring “*Westernization ideas*” when they returned from their studies in Paris and London.

Well maybe not! The net result of these “*reform movements*” turned to be a neglected status of social sciences and the exalted status of material sciences. Still you had to emulate a standard curriculum of a “*Western*” school, thus you had to have social studies courses. Hence, our translated sociology textbooks which did not have a chapter on Ibn Khaldun or Gazali! In all my 15 years of schooling, my classmates and I had not heard the name of Ibn Khaldun. The sociology was invented by Auguste Comte, the historiography was the brainchild of Thucydides; Aristotle developed the methodology. If my friends and I wanted to study the Turkish society, our neighbors, Post-Ottoman nations, we had to learn French, English and/or German. The ability to read and understand the Ottoman texts was not a requirement in many schools in the country.

Now the Ibn Haldun University represents the new wave of science in Turkey; we will instruct our students in three languages; if they are willing we will teach them a fourth and even a fifth language.

The Ibn Haldun University will educate a new generation of professionals -scientists, artisans and craftsmen- who shall not be prisoners of one (*albeit their own*) civilization. They will rewrite the science textbooks in their field to create the architects of the truly open civilizations.

It will take some time to explain this to all my colleagues and friends:

You know! That Ibn Haldun we never knew.