

DELIBERATING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

BRINGING SOCIAL LEARNING INTO THE THEORY AND PRACTISE OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN THE CASE OF TURKEY

By

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December 2004

**A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian
National University**

DECLARATION

This thesis is the original work of the author, except where acknowledged in the text. It has never been submitted for degree or diploma in any university.

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21. December.2004

ABSTRACT

This thesis will argue that one of the main challenges for deliberative democracy is the lack of attention paid to the different modes of deliberative practices. The theories of deliberative democracy often treat deliberation as a decision-making process. Yet, I would argue that this approach fails to appreciate the full benefits of deliberation because it ignores the fundamental role that the social learning phase of deliberation plays in reconciling differences. Hence I argue for a deliberative framework in which social learning and decision-making moments of deliberation are analytically differentiated so that the resources of social learning are freed from the pressures of decision-making procedures and are therefore no longer subordinated to the terms of decision-making.

This is particularly important for countries such as Turkey where divisions cut deep across society. A case study examines the discourses of the Turkish public sphere regarding Islam, democracy and secularism to identify the kinds of discourses present in relation to the topic in question. By analysing the types of discourses through Q methodology the study reveals points of convergence and divergence between discourses, hence provides significant insight into how deliberation oriented to social learning can play a substantive role in reconciling differences between sharply divided groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my supervisor Prof John Dryzek for his astute guidance throughout my research, for his generosity with his time and knowledge, as well as for his prompt and thoughtful responses to my queries. Also I wish to acknowledge the helpful suggestions of Prof Levent Koker and Dr David West, members of my advisory panel.

No thesis can be completed without the intellectual and moral support of colleagues and friends. For fruitful discussions and refreshing new points of view I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Bob Goodin, Christian List, Joelle Vandermensbrugghe, Carolyn Hendriks, Jensen Sass, Akasha Rose Emmanuel, Nelly Lahoud, Nic Southwood, Akira Inoue, Lindy Edwards and Doris Kordes.

Special thanks must be made to the participants of the discussion groups and the interviewees who rendered their valuable time and effort to answer the challenging questions of the Q study.

I should also express my gratitude to the Faculty of Communication, University of Ankara and The Department of Political Administration, Izzet Baysal University. Conducting discussion groups for the Q study in Turkey could have been a very challenging task without their generous support.

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DELIBERATING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

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INTRODUCTION

After more than a decade of intense debate, the normative idea of deliberative democracy has managed to establish itself as a viable basis for thinking about how to design democratic institutions. Yet, the debate continues and there is still ample room to be covered. It appears that the more diverse the social context, the more difficult it is to develop a sustainable framework for deliberative democracy. Some difficulties stem from the usual predicaments any democratic project faces, such as existing power relations and inequalities in various forms. On the other hand, some are generated by ambiguities in deliberative theory itself.

In order to develop the idea of deliberation as a practical program, the impact of the increasing diversity of modern societies needs further investigation. This is particularly true for those societies divided sharply by religious, ethnic and cultural lines, which face unique challenges in establishing a democratic order. The question, from the point of divided societies, appears to be how to establish a properly functioning deliberative environment when those divisions represent a fundamental challenge for resolving differences in order to reach an agreement, or at the least a common understanding, over controversial issues. At the moment it seems that deliberative theory does not offer much more than arguing for a normative framework that is expected to be universally valid.

Deliberative theory presupposes that in order to guarantee proper rules of engagement during deliberation, basic individual rights, such as freedom of expression, are to be established as governing normative principles. This is so not only for the deliberative process itself but also for the society at large. In other words an established liberal culture is considered to be a prerequisite for the success of deliberative practice. Yet, this concept could be limiting in applying the deliberative idea to societies, which do not have a properly functioning democratic order. The limitation stems from the fact that if deliberation requires a well-established, mature liberal culture, then deliberative theory offers little to improve the conditions of those societies divided and trapped in a cycle of non-democratic rule. The question for deliberative theory then appears to be whether it can envisage a place for deliberation in those societies at all or not. If the answer to this question is yes, then the theory should revisit some of its main assumptions.

One of these assumptions is related to the insufficient level of attention paid to the internal differences of deliberative theories and the tension this insufficiency creates in the formulation of a deliberative framework, particularly for divided societies. The internal difference question can be associated with the different phases of deliberation as decision-making and social learning. A general trend among most deliberative theorists is to treat deliberation as a decision-making procedure. Yet, this tendency overlooks the fact that there is another important phase of deliberation, which is oriented to social learning and understanding rather than decision-making. Therefore the aim of this thesis is to point to the importance of recognising the social learning aspect of deliberation and to argue that for the development of democratic governance in divided societies this phase of deliberation is in fact as important as the phase of decision-making.

The first chapter of this thesis lays the theoretical foundation as to why deliberative theory has to defer to the social learning aspect of deliberation. The differences between social learning and decision-making stages of deliberation are established with an emphasis on how effectively to deal

with them in designing deliberative processes. In this respect, deliberative theory requires a revised framework in which an analytic distinction between social learning and decision-making aspects of deliberation is clearly established.

This section is followed by a comparison of the theories of Habermas and Rawls to show why a dialogical account of deliberation is essential to appreciate the concept of social learning within this context. A monological account of deliberation, as in Rawls, does not grasp the different dimensions of deliberation sufficiently because it neglects the fact that individual preferences could only be formed in relation to the preferences of others. Hence a monologic account of deliberation fails to conceive deliberation as an ongoing learning process.

In contrast to Rawls, Habermas' theory of communicative action provides important insights into the social learning aspect of deliberation. However, despite his emphasis on social learning Habermas does not sufficiently elaborate its role in deliberative practice. Instead he subordinates the social learning dimension of deliberation to an analysis of the formal role that decision-making procedures play in institutional settings. As will be examined, his strict rationality requirement in deliberative settings plays an important role in this shortcoming.

The first chapter also discusses other deliberative theorists, who despite their emphasis on the importance of alternative deliberative models still treat deliberation as part of decision-making processes. It is important that deliberation as social learning should be acknowledged in its own terms with its own claims in order to show how domination of decision-making terms in the theories of deliberative democracy constricts the social space in which a practical framework for deliberative action is applied. This section also expands on the hermeneutic character of deliberation through a brief analysis of Gadamer's framework.

The second chapter provides a background to the existing conditions of the Turkish political sphere where secular and Islamic ideas contest each other in relentless fashion. Turkey is one of those societies where ethical, religious and cultural divisions cut deep. This is not only because of its diverse social fabric, but also because it is one of the very rare examples in the Islamic world where Islam coexists with a secular system. Therefore, it is important that a background to the current conditions of Turkey is outlined. Here, particular attention is paid to the different stages of the development of Islamic discourse in Turkey in order to demonstrate that Islam has proven it has the capacity to adapt to the conditions of the day.

In Turkey, Islam sits at the background of the secular regime established by Mustafa Kemal in 1923, in which the paradigms of the Quran have no visible influence in the conduct of public affairs. Kemal's dramatic steps towards secularisation transformed the circumstances in which religion and politics interacted in Turkey. Having lost its dominant position, for the first time, Islam had to play a defensive role against an unfriendly state. This required a different type of interaction between Islamic and Kemalist secular forces of the society, changing continuously according to the social and political circumstances of the time.

It is the dynamics of this interaction that makes Turkey a unique case study of the alternative ways in which deliberative processes can function. The divisions between secular and Islamic lines in Turkey have become increasingly antagonistic following the rise of the Islamic Welfare Party, known as the Refah Partisi (RP) in Turkey, into the ranks of government during the 90s. The tension between the army and the RP leadership resulted in the resignation of the RP from the government in 1998. Yet, instead of a decline, the Turkish political sphere witnessed a strong comeback of Islamic politics in the 2002 general elections due to the formation of a new party, Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (the AKP) founded by a group of elite RP members disenchanted by the orthodox Islamic politics of the RP. The AKP owes its election success to a paradigm shift in Islamic politics. This shift, apart from its fundamental role for democratic

development in Turkey, testifies to the importance of social learning in divided societies, such as Turkey. A healthy dialog oriented to social learning and mutual understanding between Islamic and secular forces of the Turkish public sphere could enhance the possibility that an adequate framework for reconciling differences can be established.

The third chapter provides a background for a Q study conducted in Turkey to analyse the discourses of the Turkish public sphere. Developed by William Stephenson from the 1930s onward, Q methodology is a useful tool to map out a typology of different perspectives pertinent to the area of research. Through this typology it becomes possible for the researcher to examine the relationship between different perspectives, thus to identify the points of convergence and/or divergence among them. This is in fact the main reason that Q methodology is chosen to analyse the varying relations between the perspectives of the Turkish public sphere. The chapter, hence, aims to emphasise the importance of Q methodology as a research tool through an introduction to its technique and method.

The fourth chapter presents how the Turkish Q study conducted in Turkey prior to the 2002 general elections was organised. The aim of the Q study was first to determine the kinds of discourses about democracy, Islam and secularism in the Turkish public sphere and then identify how they converged and/or diverged from each other. The critical moments of convergence and divergence, on how each discourse perceives and identifies a problem reveals important clues that can lead to the development of a new framework in which differences can be reconciled. This framework will then be used to map out the possible ways of developing an understanding between discourses.

In order to conduct the Q study in Turkey, firstly three discussion groups were formed. The first group consisted of only secular minded people. The second group was formed by only Islamic people. The third group was a mixed group attended by equal numbers of Islamic and secular people. Each group debated the relationship between Islam, democracy and

secularism. The statements to be used in the Q sorting sessions later on were drawn from these discussion groups.

The fifth chapter presents the interpretation of the findings of the Q study in Turkey. After factor analysis, the Q study indicated the existence of four main discourses present in the Turkish public sphere: Kemalist Discourse, Nationalist Discourse, Liberal Left Discourse and Islamic Discourse. The chapter analyses the findings about each discourse by thoroughly examining what each statement means for each discourse.

Before interpreting statements, a background section for each discourse in connection with the findings of the Q study will be provided. This will be a historical account aiming at tracing the roots and development of each discourse in the Turkish public sphere in order to display the complexity of the relationship between discourses. Hence, the link between past and present of each discourse will be explained in this section. Combining the historical origins of each discourse with their present position in relation to the topic at hand will provide important insights as to why social learning and understanding aspects of deliberation are crucial to relate each group to the common ground on which they belong. The discovery of potential moments of reconciliation is in fact closely tied to the development of a healthy dialog between opposing sides. The competitive disposition that decision-making procedures prompts between conflicting groups does not usually allow developing the kind of dialog that is necessary for establishing trust and/or empathy. Historical origins of each discourse will testify to the fact that there are indeed more commonalities between secular and Islamic discourses of Turkey than it is usually thought.

The Q study findings provide important clues why in a divided society, such as Turkey, deliberation oriented to social learning and understanding could play a vital role. The findings show that divisions between secular and Islamic discourses in Turkey are not necessarily insurmountable, against a common perception. Yet, achieving an understanding of commonalities between discourses requires an emphasis on the implementation of the

right deliberative framework; deliberation oriented to social learning and understanding. Hence, the analysis of the findings demonstrates why divisions of the Turkish public sphere can better be reconciled within the social learning phase of deliberation rather than decision-making oriented processes.

The sixth chapter will analyse each discourse from a different perspective. This time similarities and differences across discourses will be looked at in comparison to their attitudes towards some themes that commonly appeared in the statements such as dialog for mutual understanding, the scarf, Kemalism and secularism, the state and the army, the media, democracy and Islam. Through this topic-based analysis, the points of convergence and divergence across all discourses will be further clarified.

The seventh chapter will elaborate on the prospects of democratic development in Turkey on the basis of an important finding of the Q study. As will be revealed in the fourth chapter, the Q findings detect some similarities between liberal left and some Islamic groups. These two groups show signs of converging in their conceptualisation of a democratic order based on the protection of individual rights. The basis of this proximity between Islamic and liberal left groups is a paradigm shift that occurred first within the left and then among Islamic groups. During the post 1980 coup period some sections of the left, trying to recover from the relentless onslaught of the army, switched from their traditional class based politics to a new paradigm based on the acknowledgment of basic individual rights. A similar shift occurred in the late 1990s within the ranks of Islamic politics, ironically caused again by the army. In 1998, following an ultimatum by the army indicating that the political manifestation of Islam reached an intolerable level of threat to the secular system, some groups within the mainstream Islamic politics decided not to use Islam as the basis of their political discourse. Instead they redefined the vision of their politics on the basis of individual rights, as in the case of liberal left groups. The paradigm shift by both groups represented a vital turning point for the future of democratic polity in Turkey. The fact that two different sections of Turkish

society, traditionally hostile to one another, are now able to develop a similar view of democratic politics is of fundamental importance for the future forms of democracy in Turkey. The reflections of this move in the public sphere, in the form of broad alliances, are not commonplace yet. However, the genesis of an alliance between these groups is already at work. It is therefore the purpose of this chapter that this crucial development within the ranks of the left and Islamic politics is analysed. To this end, firstly an historical account on how the concept of individual rights is evolved both in Islamic and leftist ranks will be presented. The findings of this section then will be tested in the case of Women's Platform for Peace (WPFP), an anti-war alliance formed with the participation of a very diverse political and cultural representation of groups, ranging from Muslim women and Kemalists to leftists and homosexuals. The case of the WPFP will provide a real life experience of how social learning aspect of deliberation can bring about a better understanding between conflicting perspectives by establishing trust and enhancing the overall acceptance of democratic principles.

Finally the eighth chapter will revisit some of the theoretical issues on social learning raised previously. The first section will evaluate social learning one more time in the light of Seyla Benhabib's latest book *The Claims of Culture* (2002). The second section will revisit Islam and democracy relationship and discuss how a Habermasian framework can offer some remedy for reconciling the principles of a democratic polity with some Islamic concepts.