

VEDAT MILOR – RENAISSANCE MAN

It was 2010. I was giving an address in Ankara to the Turkish Sociological Association on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. I wondered if anyone had heard of Vedat Milor – I had lost touch since 2000 when he had begun teaching at the Georgia Institute of Technology. People looked at me in disbelief. Could it be, they asked, the same Vedat Milor who was now a television celebrity – a culinary guru with his own gastronomy show on NTV. Unbeknownst to me he had become the star of one of the most popular shows on Turkish TV, a live assessment of restaurant food and wine, making or breaking their reputation.

Vedat had come a long way from his days as student extraordinaire in the sociology department at the University of California, Berkeley. He joined the department in 1980 having previously graduated with an economics degree from Boğaziçi University as well as spending time at the London School of Economics. In his first year I remember him being streaks ahead of other students and even his professors in his knowledge not just of economics but of the latest turns in philosophy, especially Foucault, and Marxism, especially the French structuralist variety. He was perfectly situated to develop a theory of state planning relying on his knowledge of sociology and politics as well as economics.

Milor's dissertation, published here, took the unusual move of comparing planning in two countries – countries that one might never have thought to compare: Turkey and France. Apart from speaking and reading English and Turkish he was also fluent in French. He couldn't be better prepared for such a study. His dissertation made, at least, four significant contributions. The first was to show that these two countries had similar levels of development at the end of World War Two and yet they took divergent paths after the war. Why was this the case? While not denying that international factors were important, their effect, he argued, was mediated by a specific configuration of internal forces. Cultural factors could be dismissed as they could not cause different patterns of development over time, and so he turned to economic and political institutions. Here was his second contribution. After several years of research, he determined that it was the planning function of the state that was responsible for France's economic dynamism while the ineffectiveness of state planning was responsible for Turkey's stagnation. But why did planning play such a different role in these two countries?

Here lies Milor's third and most original contribution – the organization of the dominant classes. To put it simply he argues that economic development depends on a synergistic relation between the state and the capitalist class. In Turkey, certain fractions of the capitalist class were organized into powerful monopolies that were able to obtain profit through rent seeking and gaining preferential treatment from the state, thereby inhibiting the latter's ability to guide the economy. In France on the other hand, the enhanced capacity of the state could orchestrate the relations within the capitalist class that allowed real planning to take place. Interestingly, one of the reasons the state was more effective in France lies in the entrenchment of political democracy. The accountability of the state to parties results in an autonomy that allows the state to act against fractions of the capitalist class in the interest of the capitalist system, capitaliswt

growth. Since the argument of the book revolves around the effectiveness of plan it is, therefore, organized into three parts: the genesis of planning, the development of planning, and deplanification in both countries.

The final contribution, then, is to show how, in the consolidation of planning, state planners organize market relations among capitalists. In short, markets and plans are inseparable – markets require plans and plans require markets. Dissertations might offer one or possibly two major findings, but a dissertation that produce three let alone four is very rare. Not surprisingly his dissertation won the American Sociological Association's annual award for the country's best dissertation in 1990. No mean achievement!

Milor's talents came to the attention of the World Bank where he was invited him to give a presentation of his dissertation. Addressing an audience of skeptical economists, Milor convinced them that the sociological analysis of planning had a lot to offer. He was given a trial project to study the economic situation of Algeria. The resulting paper established his reputation immediately and the World Bank offered him a six month and then a yearlong consultancy to study privatization in Eastern Europe that led him to spend time Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Uzbekistan. Milor brought the ideas developed in his dissertation to the pressing problems of the transition from a socialist administered economy to a capitalist market economy. Privatization, he argued, has to be planned and regulated. For the state to abstain from these processes would be to allow the old managerial class, often in alliance with foreign capital, to misappropriate funds and perpetuate old irrationalities. Milor had his finger on the pulse of a world historical processes. His reports were quite prophetic given what we now know about the trajectory of the former Soviet Union and its satellites in the 1990s.

When he took up an assistant professorship at Brown University he continued to pursue the question of privatization. I remember he organized an international conference on the political economy of privatization in "Post-Communist and Reforming Communist States." It brought together specialists from different disciplines, studying privatization in different countries. A German Marshall Fellowship gave him the opportunity to write the introduction and conclusion to the edited collection of papers that was published in 1994 and is still one of the best collections on the subject.

What I never knew, however, that while he was a graduate student he belonged to many wine tasting clubs and groups in Berkeley. He was already then interested in the culinary side of life. Indeed, when the Fulbright Program came to interview him for one of their fellowships, he was asked why he was comparing France and Turkey. He joked that it was because he was interested in wine and food. As I now know, it was no joke.