

Turkey – 100 Years of Longing for Modernity

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Abstract

The text traces the painful development of Turkish modernity – a process of still ongoing clashes between the aspirations of a part of the elites to be “modern Europeans”, the unquestioning certainty of another part of them that “modernity” and “Europe/West” are by no means equivalent, and the traditional mentality of broad segments of Turkish society. At the heart of the study are two extremes: high literature (the works of Orhan Pamuk) and popular culture (television series), which reveals the wide register of possibilities for tracing the longing for modernity and its (un)realisation in Turkish reality. The original synonymy of “modernity” and “the West” that fueled the longing – from the late Ottoman Empire, through the Republican period until the end of the millennium – gradually disintegrated. In the new millennium, the official notion of achieved modernity increasingly asserted itself, however not as juxtaposition with the West, but in spite of it.

Keywords: Turkey, Europe, West, modernity, Orhan Pamuk, TV series

JEL: N4, Z1

Introduction

“The country is bound to become modern, civilized and renewed. This is a vital matter for us,” said the “Father of the Turks” (Atatürk) Mustafa Kemal in a 1922 speech (Inalçık, 2001: 143). A year later he affirmed his revolution and proceeded to modernize the new state. First, veiling and traditional dress were strictly forbidden. Clothing must be “after the European model” (Pamuk, 2011: 240). Eighty years later in the novel *Snow* Orhan Pamuk would invent a play, supposedly performed throughout Turkey during the early Republic and reaping unprecedented success. The play would be called *The Homeland or the Turban*. A veiled girl would light her religious garment (the hijab) on stage because “we must free

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our souls from the hijab, from the turban, from the fez, and from the turban... and set out for Europe, for civilized and modern nations”² (Pamuk 2006: 44, 201). On the “road to Europe” Turkey will switch from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet, introduce the European calendar instead of the Hijra³, Sunday instead of Friday will now be a day off, women will be given greater rights, and secularization will be enshrined in law.

The debates over these changes – both the nationalist, conservative critiques of them and the pro-Western and pro-modernization defenses of them – are still at the heart of the underlying ideological clashes in contemporary Turkey as well, Pamuk would say again (Pamuk, 2011: 239-240). For Atatürk, modernization is explicitly “modernization, reaching the modern civilized level or orientation towards the West” (Inalçık, 2001: 147). For him (and for the enlightened elites in the Republic and even back in the Ottoman Empire) modernization meant Europeanization, the Westernization of primitive, patriarchal, traditional Turkey: an Europeanization both of the political system, introduced by decrees, and of manners, lifestyle, culture, mentalities, in which decrees were not so successful.

And while the traditional circles, the countryside and Anatolia will resist radical reforms, the enlightened elites – mainly in Istanbul – will continue to yearn for modernity, for “Westernisation”, for “civilisation”. The constant juxtaposition with “Europe”, the doubts in the realization of the longing will mark decades of the life of Turkish intellectuals and produce anger towards “Europe” or (more often) a fixation. The “Europe” complex will dominate the minds of enlightened elites – as long as modernization is understood as Europeanization, while “modernity” equals “West.” The separation of “modernity” from “the West” will create new elites whose new understanding of modernization will think of it as already achieved.

In this paper I will attempt to trace the longing for modernity and the appearance of its realization in Turkish society, using as a basis the writings of Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk and the large-scale industry of television series. By this paradoxical reconciliation I do not at all mean to equate the qualities of high literature and popular culture. I only want to show the vast register of possibilities for exploring the longing for modernity and its (un) realization in Turkish society.

The longing for modernity back in the Ottoman Empire

The longing for modernity, understood as Europeanization, is not alien to some elites back in the Ottoman Empire. The “opening to the world” occurred at the beginning of the 18th century – the time of Ahmed III (1703-1730), called the “Tulip Age”. The Ottoman elite entertained themselves by copying “European” manners, or – rather – recreating their own idea of “Europe”. Not only tulips were imported from Europe. The first “envoys” to the courts of Paris, Vienna, Moscow and Warsaw, who were not exactly ambassadors but rather spies, brought to Istanbul the “fragrance of the world”. The “envoy” to France,

² All quotations from Orhan Pamuk’s works are translated from the Bulgarian editions of his novels.

³ The traditional Muslim calendar.

Mehmed Bey, delivered a model of the palace at Fontainebleau, a replica of which began to be built at the Golden Horn. Along with the thousands of images of tulips that gave the name to this cultural flourish, there were fountains, gardens, aqueducts and even portraits of Ottoman royalty painted by Western artists - a serious transgression of Sharia norms⁴. The first printing press was opened in the home of Ibrahim Bey Mütefrika. Ibrahim Bey himself wrote and printed a work on America there. There was also a spectacular change in the sultan's appearance - for the first time in the history of the Empire Mahmud II (1808-1839) wore a European suit and put a fez on his head.

The reformist Sultan Abdul Majid (1839-1861), who even ascended the throne wearing a fez, published the most important documents of the Tanzimat era: the Gulhane Hattisharif of 1839 and the Hatihumayun of 1856⁵. These proclaimed equal rights for all subjects "without distinction of religion practised or sect affiliation". Taxes became uniform: the special levy on infidels – the *jizya* – was abolished. An army contingent was conceived on a general basis, in which religious distinctions would be wiped out. In 1840 a Civil Code, copied from Napoleon's, came into force, under which some of the powers of the Sharia courts were transferred to the civil courts, and in 1876 (mainly under pressure from the Great Powers) a Constitution was enacted (Castellan, 2002: 211, 276-278). In addition to the new policies introduced by the Europeanized state elite, the reformers also introduced Western ways of life: crinolines, pianos, dinner tables, modern furnishings. Some insisted that "even their women must be from Europe..." (Kuntay, 2012: 166).

Pamuk's protagonist in his first novel, *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*, dreams of "building a life similar to the everyday life of that French family" from the French textbook. And his future father-in-law Shukru Pasha says of his daughters: "They asked for a piano. We bought a piano. They play, they have fun, they read, they joke with each other, they imitate like monkeys, I don't understand them, but I let them do so" (Pamuk, 2009: 17, 66).

Pamuk's grandmother, in the 1920s, would meet his grandfather (without being married) and go to a restaurant with him!). However, his mother (50 years later, on the occasion of his intention to become an artist) would exclaim: "This here is not Paris for you, this here is Istanbul" (Pamuk, 2007: 134, 408).

The debate between conservatives and modernists began with the Tanzimat, not to subside, as Pamuk writes, until today. The "patriots" mock the "Europeanized" for their monkey-like imitation of "the false and superficial Europe, the Europe of outward glamour and luxurious armchairs, of gilded books and monocles..." (Kuntay, 2012: 101). Imitation

⁴ In fact, the first portrait in the history of Ottoman art was of Mehmed II the Conqueror. However, his example was not followed by any ruler in the following century and a half, when the images of one or another sultan appeared stylized only in the miniatures illustrating memorable battles, lives and legends. Only in the "tulip era" did portraiture become a practice.

⁵ Documents proclaiming reforms in the Ottoman empire.

conquers not only the superficial stratum of everyday life with the caricature flavour of ‘misunderstood civilisation’⁶, but also high culture, where it will sound dramatic.

Yahya Kemal (whom Pamuk considers Istanbul’s greatest writer) describes himself and his associates as the “alafranga”⁷ generation. The dream of Paris is his greatest desire: “For me, my homeland was like a prison and Europe like a blessed world”. Riza Tewfik (poet and philosopher of the same generation) says that “... every Turkish citizen should visit Europe at least once. It is enough just to walk the cobblestones of European cities” (Kemal, 2013: 86-87, 208). The yearning for modernity of the “alafranga generation” according to Pamuk is also fed by “... the passion of Europeanized intellectuals to gain the approval of the West, to hear from selected literati and from a widespread print media outlet that they have become Westerners” (Pamuk, 2007: 270).

The lack of such ‘approval’, the lack of recognition of their ‘Westernness’ gives rise to the self-enclosure and the complex. Yahya Kemal admires Flaubert and Verlaine (especially Baudelaire), but in Europe he befriends mostly Turks. Among the “carefree and cheerful life” of Parisian cafés he felt “completely alone”. And he asked himself: “... is it possible that we Turks are deprived of the ability to grasp the essence of European political ideas?” (Kemal, 2013: 113-116, 120, 181, 197).

“The Alafranga Generation” reads André Gide, who – after his trip to Istanbul – finds that “... Western civilization, even French civilization, is superior”. “I cannot give my heart,” writes Gide, “even to the most beautiful sights of the world, since I cannot love the inhabitants there”. And also: “The feeling I get from this journey is equal to the disgust I feel for the country. I’m glad I didn’t love this country”. While – masochistically feeding their complex – the Istanbul intellectuals are reading Gide, they “... torture themselves and conceal their grievance from the nation as if it were some secret. And, of course, one of the reasons is that Europeanized intellectuals covertly agree with the Gide” (Pamuk, 2007: 270-271; Pamuk, 2011: 235).

Pamuk is thinking precisely of them when (in reference to Dostoevsky’s anger at Europe) he writes about “... the radical intellectuals who, on the periphery of Europe, far from the centre, live amid the crises of their Western fantasies...” (Pamuk, 2011: 165). And then the Europeanised intellectuals in Turkey - like Dostoevsky - become nationalists. And they begin hating “Europe”... Yahya Kemal, for whom Europe was a “blessed world”, now fawns over the Gypsies – the only ones who have preserved “the colours, the traditions, the enjoyment, the pleasure” of the “old customs” – unlike the Europeanised [poeuropeichenite] Turks in Istanbul. Only the Gypsies are still “convinced that being an Aga is much better than being a Monsieur today”⁸ (Kemal, 2013: 59).

⁶ A play by the Bulgarian writer Dobri Voynikov (1871), which satirizes some Bulgarians’ ape-like imitation of European manners and customs.

⁷ Old Bulgarian, literally “like the French”.

⁸ And it inspiredly recreates the sense of celebration felt by the Ottoman conquerors when they conquered the Balkans with their crooked knives (Pamuk, 2016: 102).

And Cevdet Bey's allegedly Europeanised brother, who does not want to be "agha" at all and who – after his return from Paris – no longer likes anything about Istanbul, often repeats: "In the end, all those who wanted to be alafranga became alaturka, and this is a characteristic of the alaturka" (Pamuk, 2009: 127).

Not only Cevdet Bey's brother, but most of Pamuk's modern heroes who dream of 'Europe' tend to drink, face failure and death – Yomer and Refik of *Cevdet Bey*, the three generations of men in *Silent House*. Refik (Cevdet Bey's son) wrote in his diary: "As I read Voltaire, *Red and Black*, or perhaps *Confessions*, which I read again today, I ask myself why I cannot find their light in myself, in any of my acquaintances, in any Turkish writer. I seem desperate, unpleasant, lazy, but why is everything in Turkey like this? As if everything, everyone is asleep..." (Pamuk, 2009: 274).

Seljahattin of *Silent House*, in his encyclopedia, makes a list of things that are in deficit or in excess in Turkey: "In deficit: science, the hat, the picture, commerce, the submarine, the bourgeoisie, fine arts, the water crisis, the chess, the zoo, the factory, the professor, discipline, mathematics, the book, principle, the fear of death and the consciousness of nothingness, the can, freedom. In excess: the man, the peasant, the clerk, the Muslim, the soldier, the woman, the child, the coffee, the privilege, the laziness, the insolence, the bribe, the profligacy, the fear, the hauler, the minaret, the honor, the cat, the dog, the guest, the friends, the oath, the bedbug, the beggar, the garlic, the onion, the maid, the craftsman, the shopkeeper, the imam."

Fifty years later, his grandson Farouk, a history teacher, would become a hopeless drunkard because: "I'm not real now. If a man rules himself, if he questions himself every moment, such a man in Turkey will cease to be real and will necessarily go mad. In order that a man in Turkey may not go mad, he is forced to loosen himself in some way". In both novels for all generations the most frequently used word is "live". The characters, yearning for modernity, simply "live" notwithstanding the fact that "East is still dormant in the deep and hideous medieval darkness" (Pamuk, 2013: 28, 256, 259-260).

La nouvelle heure

The medieval dark sleep continues in the "new age". In *Istanbul*, Pamuk quotes extracts from newspapers marking the non-modernity of his beloved city in different decades. To be sure their authors are inspired by European achievements. For example, at the very beginning of the "new age" in 1924: "Inspired by the rules of the road published in the famous French newspaper *Matin*, let us in turn recall a purely native problem of Istanbulites who do not know how to move properly in the street: do not walk in the street with your mouth open". And after three decades of intensive modernization (1956): "By turning a blind eye to the fact that carts still appear in unlikely places around our city so that the poor can earn their bread, we are condemning doom Istanbul to facing sights it does not deserve" (Pamuk, 2007: 161-162).

An important aspect of the longing for modernity is social stratification. The poor men with the carts, the paupers whose wives are veiled and cover their bodies with wide mantas (Pamuk, 2016: 131), are interested neither in “Europe” nor in modernity, but only in their survival. Longing for modernity is a luxury for the rich and enlightened. Europeanization comes from wealth (or wealth from modernization?) – the secularized intellectuals of the Beyoğlu, Nisantasi and Shishli neighborhoods are not quite sure which is primary... In Pamuk’s childhood (the 1950s), modernity and wealth were synonymous concepts – until the invasion of the provincials from Anatolia.

“... the favourite beliefs of the poor could do colossal harm to us and to the country, harm to the motherland, of which we felt ourselves much more the masters than they, so I fully justified our existence as a ruling class. Thus, in time, when the engineering spirit of the mathematics-lovers at home took full possession of us, I came to the conclusion that we were the ‘masters’ – and not because we were the owners, but because we had modernised and Europeanised. This allowed us to despise non-Europeanized families like us, whether or not they were as rich as we were. In the years that followed, as the country’s democracy strengthened, wealthy people from the countryside flocked to Istanbul and began to make their presence felt in “society” – the existence of persons much wealthier than us, who did not receive what they were due from Western culture and secularism, caused both anger and disappointment in our family as we became poorer due to the bankruptcies of Dad and Uncle.... The Europeanized Istanbul bourgeoisie supported all the military interventions conceived in Ankara and the army’s interventions in politics... out of fear that one day the lower classes and impoverished provincials might unite under the religious banner against their way of life” (Pamuk, 2007: 210-211).

For intellectuals yearning for modernity, there are two Turkeys – the Turkey of Istanbul (and not the whole of it, just the upmarket ‘European’ districts) and the Turkey of everything else, the summed-up image of which is Anatolia as a metaphor for the provincial traditionalism. At the Atatürk Lyceum for Men (with a statue of Mustafa Kemal in front of it⁹) in the 1970s, they lamented that the school had been taken over by “the crowds of poor Anatolian children who have come over the last ten years from the neighborhoods with illegally built *gejekonduklar*¹⁰ on the remote hills” (Pamuk, 2016: 90). It is not only the “crowds of poor” Anatolians who arrive. The “Anatolian tigers” (the nouveau riche traditionalists) are also arriving, redefining not only economic relations but identity itself (Tabakov, 2018: 214). Thus, the fears of the “Europeanized Istanbul bourgeoisie” are becoming reality...

TV series also highlight the synonymy of modernity and wealth. In them, too, the poor women are veiled, wearing bodices and *şalvarlar*, their hair in long braids: Zehra from *Mirror World*, Jevrie from *Leafall*, grandma Safiye from *Pearl*. Conversely, the wives of the bankers

⁹ I could find no record of whether such a lyceum actually existed in one of the newly developed suburbs of Istanbul at the time, or whether Pamuk invented it. All the lyceums now existing in Istanbul with the name “Atatürk” are in the central areas, i.e. the novel *A Strangeness in My Mind* is not about them.

¹⁰ Housing for the poor without a notarial deed, slums.

and the rich are dressed in a “European” way: loose long hair, a strict suit (for those who hold prestigious positions themselves) or a sporty-elegant style (for the rest). Their homes and cars are luxurious and their offices are in glass skyscrapers (Borisova, 2014: 255-257).

Istanbul is a major, almost personified character both in Pamuk’s books and in the series. In this respect, however, differences emerge. Pamuk’s Istanbul is immersed in “... the sadness emanating from this dead culture, from this vanished empire, which still hovers everywhere. In my view, it sprang not so much from the effort to Europeanise, from the drive to modernise, as from the sorrow-laden, bitter memories of objects left over from the collapsed empire” (Pamuk, 2007: 39). And the TV series show a thriving, glamorous Istanbul, with its freshly painted old *konaks* [inn, guesthouse], for which tour operators organise special excursions and remind tourists – locals and those from the Balkans, Russia or the Arab world – exactly where the action takes place in *Pearl*, *Leaffall* or *Melody of the Heart*...¹¹ We even know the address of the 150-year-old house – the main character in “Leaffall” (and in 24 other productions): Istanbul, Beylerbay, Eskisehir, 9 Şemşi Efendi str. (Borisova, 2014: 325-326, 418).

The modernity vs. patriarchy clash also occurs in Istanbul itself. This dichotomy is coded in the title of the 2013 series – *The Two Faces of Istanbul*. Half of the characters live in Fatih, Istanbul’s most religious district, the other half in Beyoğlu.¹² The wealthy of Beyoğlu are fashionable, the families of Fatih conservative (a premarital pregnancy causes hysterical panic, and the brother of the wronged woman beats the culprit). In the finale, the “two faces of Istanbul” are married. Cultural differences remain, however: veiled women send the bride away from Fatih with a drum and bawdy music, to which the groom scowls. After all, “traditional” is not necessarily “good” and “modern” is not necessarily “bad” – not yet.

The main background is, of course, the Bosphorus, designed to ennoble differences. And it is again on the Bosphorus, but with reworded messages, that the action unfolds in one of the latest (2019) series, symptomatic of its very title – *Merciless City* (original title *Zalim Istanbul*).¹³ The clash here is Istanbul vs. Anadol. The provincials (not all of them, though) are the bearers of truer values: nobility, decency, tradition (the brother beats his sister because she sings in a bar, and the mother – the most positive heroine – slaps her in front of everyone). Most Istanbul rich men are cynical, evil schemers or irresponsible

¹¹ Pamuk writes that in the 1990s “due to the incompetence of its own screenwriters, actors and producers” the Turkish film industry collapsed “with the power of a Hollywood, left with no means to imitate...” (Pamuk, 2007: 47) At the beginning of the new millennium, the television film industry was reborn to become the third largest in the world – after Hollywood and Bollywood (Borisova, 2014: 412).

¹² Since the time of the Empire, the inhabitants of Galata and Pera (where the “western” prestigious districts are) live “in Europe” – with luxury shops, restaurants, cafes, fashionable confectioneries, theaters, elegant establishments, clubs and the prestigious Pera Palace Hotel (Mantran, 1999: 569). In the 1930s, a “patriotic” author described Beyoğlu as follows: “The boulevards where the mud puts on its festive clothes. The houses look like fairground theaters. Beyoğlu is the unconquered Istanbul” (Kuntay, 2012: 50).

¹³ The house where the main characters, the Karachay family, live is a restored 19th century pavilion, and is known in Turkey as the “White Mansion”.

layabouts. In the end, the “bad” ones are punished and die while the “good” ones leave “cruel Istanbul” to live happily ever after...

Pamuk also leaves it despite his earlier revelations that he cannot imagine his life outside Istanbul, which for him is “the centre of the world” (Pamuk, 2011: 119, 450). Today’s Istanbul, in which “there is no freedom of speech, angers, saddens, and drives mad” Columbia University New York professor Orhan Pamuk. Though richer and more glamorous (as in the TV shows), this is no longer “his home” Istanbul. His “home” has been destroyed, he says in an interview for *La Stampa* (quoted in Glasove, 2020).

In fact, it is through the relationship to the “former” and “present” Istanbul that the suggestions of Pamuk and the serials diverge. The writer longs for his “home” Istanbul – the home of freedom, the home of diversity of ideas and moods, the home of intellectuals yearning for modernity. In the serials (especially the post-2016 ones), Pamuk’s beloved Istanbul with its freedom, its diversity and its longing for modernity is corrupting, vilifying, killing metropolis. “Turkey’s future is the West” concludes the same interview with the newspaper *La Stampa*. This confidence does not sound entirely convincing, especially compared with Pamuk’s observation¹⁴ of twenty years ago that “In the end, the attempt at modernization remained half-finished and Turkey became a limited democracy in which intolerance prevailed” (Pamuk, 2001: 3). When in 2002 the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, its professed “democratic conservatism” gradually carried out reformulation of Turkish identity.

Redefining Turkish identity

The synonymy between “modernity” and “the West” imposed from above (by Atatürk and his followers) lost its stability and imperative security, shaken by the unification of “the lower classes and the impoverished provincials under the religious banner”, as Pamuk himself had written.

I’m not sure if the “return of religion” is actually a complete “redefinition of Turkish identity”, or if it is in line with the attitudes of the disaffected majority so despised by the “Europeanised” modernisers. It seems more likely to me that the “return of religion” is a gesture of resistance against Kemalist secularism. Resistance to the hitherto “new ages” is visible on many levels, from economic reforms directing state protection to the “Anatolian tigers” rather than the hitherto favoured Kemalist bourgeoisie yearning for modernity, to the initial preaching of democracy aimed at disarming the power and authority of the military (Tabakov, 2018: 281, 283).

And while large-scale high-tech projects have been implemented under AKP rule, while (at least initially) the party pushed for Turkey’s European integration, Turkey’s notion of modernity has increasingly moved away from “Europe”. The “return of religion” is perhaps

¹⁴ Delivered in the speech “The Wrath of the Damned” on the occasion of the attacks in this same New York in 2001, the year in which the Justice and Development Party of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (born in Anatolia) appeared on the Turkish political horizon.

the surest instrument of this distancing, because in the attitudes of a majority dissatisfied with forced modernization “the West” is synonymous with atheism.

Pamuk’s character in *Snow*, Ka (the author’s alter ego, raised like him in Nishantashi, socialised in a secularist environment, torn between the melancholy of the East and the longing for the West), shares with the doubting Islamist Nejip: “I wanted to be like the Europeans. I moved away from religion because I realised I could not become a European with an Allah who wraps women in sheets and veils their faces. When I went to Europe, I felt that perhaps there was a very different Allah from the Allah of the bearded, retrograde provincialists”. And the doubting Islamist Nejip objects without any doubt: “To become an atheist, you must first become a Westerner” (Pamuk, 2006: 34, 130, 189).

The “return of religion” is perhaps a resistance not only against Kemalist secularism, but also against the West, whose norms have been imposed by the previous modernizers. The suicides of the headscarfed women in *Snow* are rather a rebellion than authentic religiosity. Velvet goes to the Pedagogical Institute (where Islamic symbols are banned by the Kemalist state) with a headscarf “not as an act of supporting Islam, but as an act of opposing the state” (Pamuk, 2006: 153).

Alongside “neo-Osmanism”, corruption and the trampling of democracy (which, apropos, was not strongly applied by previous administrations), which are not the subject of this text, the dissatisfaction of secular intellectuals with AKP rule relates to the ‘rolling back of the country’ – the refusal to modernise – particularly in terms of women’s participation. In the 1980s, the classical ‘female’ professions in the education and healthcare women accounted for 42.5% and 19.5% respectively. Some 86% of women employed in healthcare were nurses and midwives. Female doctors are rare, and only 6% of them hold managerial positions (Dogramaje, 2001: 249). It is obvious that even before the AKP rule, female participation was not very intense, especially compared to the “civilized” West that the “modernists” long for.

Under the AKP government, the percentage of non-working women with higher education is over 30%. In the “civilized West” it is only 16% (according to a 2010 World Bank report). Non-participation is inversely proportional to education levels – the lower a woman’s education the more likely she is to stay at home. Thus, in 2012 there were about 8 million working women in Turkey and 12.3 million housewives. The majority of women stop working when they “get married” and have children (Borisova, 2014: 261-262).

It is difficult to assess to what extent this trend is the result of external pressure (from the family, from the environment) and to what extent it expresses the autonomous will of women themselves. Indeed, Erdoğan’s call (for every woman to give birth to at least three children) supports the assumption of external pressure. But one should also bear in mind certain cultural stereotypes that condition, for example, the unquestioning acceptance of arranged marriages by not a few contemporary women in Turkey (see Pamuk, 2016).

However, feminism has dominated the early 21st century sitcoms. The most frequently used female line in *Leaffall* (2006) is “Don’t push me!”, directed at men, at relatives, at society at large. Moreover, the cultural stereotype of Turkish shyness is outright blasted

by the erotic scenes in *Forbidden Fruit*¹⁵ (2008) or *Ashes of Roses* (2010). At this time, which coincides with the first period of Erdoğan's rule, the messages are presented in the packaging of "Western values" and modernity (Borisova, 2014: 170-171, 288, 300, 411).

Gradually, the emphasis shifts: the "Western values" (economic prosperity, progress, democracy) remain attractive, but somehow become more inherent to the "bad" characters, while the conservative worldview (family, religion, morality) remains reserved for the "good" ones ("Dangerous Temptation" 2018, "Merciless City" 2019).

Unlike in soap operas, where women without headscarves (still) predominate – both "good" and "bad" – in real life, headscarves are on the rise. According to a 2008 Sabanci University study, half of women do not follow strict Sharia rules: they tie their headscarves with a simple knot under the chin, even allowing some of their hair to show. Only 11% wear the hijab, which leaves only the face visible. The same study found that the number of women wearing headscarves had decreased by 10% under Erdoğan's rule (Thumann, 2008).

It is possible that the repeal of secular prohibitions may have reduced the wearing of headscarves as an expression of rebellion (as it was in *Snow*) at least in the first period of AKP rule. In subsequent periods, however, the headscarf has increasingly come to be seen as a political symbol including, again, as rebellion against the imperative values of the West. More and more intellectuals (especially among the supporters of the preacher Gülen¹⁶) are speaking out against the equalization of modernity-with the West. „One doesn't have to look Western to be a progressive", says the headscarf-wearing journalist Ayşe Buürle. And one of the founders of *Zaman* newspaper (financed by Gülen) – Ali Bulaç – decisively denies the synonymity: "The Ottoman Empire was too spiritually oriented to the East; Turkey's secular elites, on the other hand, have become too Western-oriented. They both have only one wing. That is why they cannot fly. In the 20th century, Turkey made a great leap towards modernity. The founder of the state, Kemal Atatürk, modernized the state from above. A new bourgeoisie was created, the fez was banned, the headscarf – branded as backward, the Western lifestyle – imitated, and the declared backward religion – excluded from public life" (Thumann, 2008: 3).

After the attempted coup of 2016, the *Zaman* newspaper was closed (including its branch in Bulgaria). Fatih University in Istanbul, also linked to Gülen, was also closed. 171

¹⁵ *Forbidden Love* (screen title *Forbidden Fruit*) is one of the most popular and beloved Turkish novels. It is considered the best work of Khalid Zia (1868–1945). The author belongs to a literary circle whose representatives are known for their innovative ideas and are influenced by Romanticism, Parnassism and Symbolism. The broadcast of the last episode of the series coincides with the discussion and voting of an important law in the Turkish parliament. In fact, some of the MPs are on the sidelines of the Parliament watching the episode, which is why it is necessary to make an extraordinary organization in order to carry out the vote at the same time as watching the series (Trifonova, 2022).

¹⁶ Fethullah Gülen, like Erdoğan was born in Anatolia. He is a famous preacher of tolerant enlightened Islam and sponsor of media and schools. In the initial period of Erdoğan's rule, Gülen exerted a strong influence on his politics. Subsequently, the two separated and Gülen immigrated to the United States. Erdoğan blames him for the 2016 coup attempt.

teachers and employees were arrested (Webcafe, 2017). The founders of the university are conservative businessmen from Anatolia. In 2008, there were about 8,000 students – more women than men. They come from the eastern provinces, from poor conservative families. They also come from China, Africa, the Middle East and Russia. The atmosphere at the university is “honorable” (as one professor put it), no drugs are used, and there are no seminars on Fridays during noon prayer. However, there is no faculty of religious studies because “this could be misunderstood by the secular establishment” (says the same professor). The university is located very close to the Mercedes Benz – Turk factory and some of the students go to work directly there. The quoted professor is extremely proud of their modernity (Thumann, 2008).

“The new Turkey is our equivalent of the American dream”, a political analyst who worked for Erdoğan’s campaigns liked to say. And indeed – there are twice as many shopping malls in Istanbul as in London. Most were built in conservative neighborhoods to change life there. Even in Konya – the stronghold of Islam in Anatolia – a shopping mall is named “Jelaladdin Rumi” after the mystical Sufi sage and poet who founded the Mevlevi order in the 13th century. “The country may be secular, but its population is not”, Erdoğan thinks¹⁷ (Genge, 2014: 2).

The “population” (both in Pamuk’s novels and in the TV series) drinks, cheats, divorces, but in the evenings and on holidays they sit down at the table as a big fellowship. Traditional rituals are an invariable part of the otherwise modernizing everyday life: protection from hexes, matchmaking, blessing, gifts, bringing out the bride’s chaise, the henna rites of the bride and bathing in the hammam, guessing the gender of the baby, circumcision, prayer in the mosque, burial... (Borisova, 2014: 199, 306). “The home is not only a place of action, but also a cult character”, argues the series researcher Evdokia Borisova.

The presented (most often luxurious, but there are also more modest) homes combine the most modern trends with the “solemn gait of the Ottoman tradition”: couches in a clean style with glass tables are adjacent to ottoman sofas along the walls, French windows alternate with narrow latticed ottoman “windows”, antique candlesticks and sets, huge mirrors, sideboards with showcases and family treasures locked behind them together with chests of drawers and chests inherited from grandmothers. The most iconic place is, of course, the table, around which everything happens: happiness, quarrels, fateful decisions. The characters meet and diverge. Meals are prepared according to traditional recipes, but

¹⁷ It is hardly a coincidence that the rich man Haji Vural of *A Strangeness in My Mind* (Pamuk, 2016), who becomes a local feudal lord by buying up the illegally built-up land in the hills around Istanbul, erects a mosque with a Koranic school there and makes everyone kiss him hand, comes precisely from Rize, the province in Anatolia, where Erdoğan was born.

brandy is also served. This is especially true for *Leaffall*¹⁸, but it is also characteristic of other series where food plays an important role (Borisova, 2014: 287, 331-333).

Pamuk's characters longing for modernity (and himself) inhabit the same homes where the entire extended family gathers: the matriarch grandmother, the sons, the daughters-in-law, the grandchildren, to eat endlessly at the traditional festive table, strewn with traditional Kurban dishes. This is the case not only in *Istanbul*, but also in *Cevdet Bey* and to some extent in *Silent House*. In an essay written at the turn of the century, Pamuk recalls another childhood celebration: "... in the pro-Western cosmopolitan Istanbul, the emphasis was not on the sacrifice, but on the celebration, during Kurban Bayram. And because it was a holiday, the most formal and western outfits were put on, jackets and ties were put on, liquor was poured, men and women sat together at the big table and, longing for the modern and western family, ate "Western-style" meals".

This (perhaps a little idealized?) memory of the longing for modernity is in stark contrast to the current (end of the century) "holiday": "... angry and unhappy old men dozing in front of the always-on televisions, middle-aged people and Istanbul bourgeois, who took their share of the wealth of Turkey and visited Paris and London enough to shop, in one voice reviled Europe and the West. The jackets and ties from the previous festive tables were gone. However, the real anger does not come from the fact that we failed to become Westerners, but from the fact that we learned during the meetings held in the European Union that Europe does not want us enough... Today everyone speaks with the joy felt by adults whose childhood dream is remained unfulfilled" (Pamuk, 2011: 244-245).

In fact, it is hardly a mismatch. The "back then" feast – despite the eating of the abundant traditional dishes – is vividly marked by the appearance of an **almost** achieved longing for modernity. The actors in it are **mostly** Westerners. The "present feast" has brought together confirmed Westerners rejected by the West. In his novels, Pamuk puts the angry mood towards the West, characteristic of the late series, in the thoughts of the conservative, retrograde, not very smart characters, most often arriving from Anatolia. But in some essays (such as the one cited above) he allows himself to share the Europeanized Istanbulites' disillusionment with a Europe that is no longer "theirs".

Fascination with the Ottoman past

The disenchantment with the already "foreign" Europe as a future is manifested in the Fascination with "our" Ottoman past, in which the Empire is invariably seen as great – whether in the truly 'magnificent' century of Suleiman, or in periods of decline - such as the

¹⁸ The success of *Leaffall* in Turkey is unquestionable. It was declared the best film and director of the year in three consecutive years (2007, 2008, 2009), and the actors Halil Ergün, Benu Yıldırım and Deniz Çakar were awarded with the first prizes (Borisova, 2014: 271). The heroes of the Tekin family (like the plots of many other series) come from Anatolia to storm Istanbul, which shakes their moral foundations. On their first walk in the "ruthless city", when they see kissing couples and naked girls, the reactions of the family are divided: the young watch with curiosity, the old – with indignation.

following 17th century, also labeled as 'magnificent'. (The series *Kosem*, for example, tries to find the "magnificence" even in the so-called "management of women", full of intrigues and failures...)

While Pamuk almost artistically imagines how the last prince of the Ottoman dynasty would become a tour guide in his former home-turned-museum, the series, which lacks his reverence for the museum as a reimagining of the past, experiences the past as the present.

The "return of the Empire" – along with the "return of religion" – gives rise to the definition of the "Erdoğan" era as "neo-Ottomanism", a concept invented by its critics, mainly in the West, which the AKP activists themselves reject. Indeed, the increasingly lavish celebrations of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the construction of new Ottoman-style mosques, and the careful restoration of old Ottoman buildings could provoke such thoughts. However, I am more inclined to subscribe to Elif Batuman's concept - "Ottomania", which ironically suggests the profanation of the "magnificent" Ottoman past. Batuman recalls that many of the restored Ottoman buildings have been converted into hotels and shopping malls, talks about the "sultan" portion offered by the Burger King chain (a 2006 TV commercial shows a Janissary gorging on a giant burger with hummus), about "modern" Ottoman recipes, Ottoman-style bathroom consoles, wedding invitations executed in Ottoman calligraphy, to student togas and flight attendant uniforms inspired by the cuts of kaftans and fezzes (Batuman, 2014: 6).

Serials are also conquered by the "Ottomania". In the most emblematic of them – *The Magnificent Century* (2011), telling about the era of Suleiman – "Ottomanism" is intertwined with the longing for modernity. The "Western" interests of the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha (European furniture, a painting by Titian, Machiavelli's book "The Ruler", which Ibrahim presents to the Sultan) lead to a Renaissance worldview - not too characteristic, however, for the Ottoman court (Borisova, 2014: 411-412).

However, it is not the Renaissance that makes an impression on the general public, and it is not the Renaissance that provokes the dissatisfaction of the conservative section. The problem turns out to be the plunging necklines of the women, as if they copied the fashion of Versailles, their going out in the street insufficiently covered, and the too long time Suleiman spends in the harem instead of going to war and legislating. The airing of the series was accompanied by angry demonstrations in which eggs were pelted at the TV station's offices and a man dressed as Suleiman read aloud an "imperial firman" condemning the series (Batuman, 2014: 7).

The authorities also intervene, unhappy that the great Sultan is portrayed as a "womanizer and a swagger" who spends his glorious reign sweet-talking the minders with a glass of alcohol in his hand, while the Empire is ruled by a treacherous Greek and a perfidious Russian woman, and the television blathers on with historical relics. Lawmakers from the ruling AKP say the broadcast will be suspended and are introducing a bill to suspend and ban series that "harm Turkey's national values and deheroize important historical figures." Instead, it was supposed to create "artistic works that are in the spirit of Turkish family traditions, respect for elders, education of moral values and dignity in the

younger generations.” Erdoğan himself says: “We did not know such a legislator, such a Sultan Suleiman. Thirty years of this sultan’s life were spent on horseback, not in the palace as shown on screen. I publicly condemn the directors of this series, as well as the owners of the TV station that broadcasts it” (Borisova, 2014: 410-416).

The series was discontinued, and “dehonorization” was quickly replaced by “moral values and dignity”: *Mehmed: The Conqueror of the World* (2018), *Osman: The Founder* (2019) and above all *The Last Sultan: Abdul Hamid* (2017). I will dwell on this work in more detail – not so much because it is Erdoğan’s favorite series, but because of the symptomatic implications marking the final rupture between “modernity” and “the West”. Abdul Hamid’s rule is absolutist. Immediately after coming to power in 1876, he suspended the first Ottoman constitution, which lasted only a few months, and parliament was dissolved. The Sultan believed that the people were not ripe for parliamentarism. He needed a “leader”, a “father” until the structures created and the reforms undertaken, especially in the field of education, yield results. In fact, he liquidated a significant part of the reforms carried out by his predecessors – especially in the field of minority rights. The pogroms against the Armenians in 1895 earned him the nickname “the bloody sultan”. He hated the Jews, the liberals, the Freemasons. He hated the West. He hated him not only because of the riots and assassinations, which he thought were organized by European spies, but also because of the huge debts of his country to European banks.

Although Turkish historians (from the 21st century!) glorify him as a modernizer, his only movement in this direction was the effort to build a railway line to connect the capital with the Caucasus and Anatolia mainly because of the oil deposits discovered in the east. And at that time (the beginning of the 20th century) there was still no electricity in Istanbul. The trams in the Sultan’s capital were horse-drawn¹⁹. Despite the Sultan’s declared concern for education, at the end of his reign (1908), Turkish students in the most prestigious educational institution in the capital - “Robert College” - were only 5%. Otherwise, Abdul Hamid loved modern architecture and Italian opera...

In his private life, he was modest, pious and thrifty, with which he managed to win the sympathy of a part of the population, shocked by the luxury and Western manners of his reforming predecessors. Instead of reforms, the Sultan offered the population pan-Islamism. Islam occupied an increasingly large place in state affairs and proved to be the only glue of society, which – in the name of Islamic values and tradition – had to reject modernization and the emancipation of women²⁰ (Mantran, 1999: 541-554, 596-598).

The series *The Last Sultan*²¹ traces the events from 1896 until the end of his reign in 1909. The year was probably chosen to avoid the anti-Armenian pogroms of the previous

¹⁹ The first power plant in Belgrade, emancipated from the Empire, started operating in 1891, and the first electric tram started in 1894 (Ivanova, 2005: 153).

²⁰ Later it will be argued that the defeat of the Ottomans in the Balkan Wars was precisely the fault of emancipation (Mantran, 1999: 600).

²¹ Abdul Hamid was not actually the last Sultan. After him, until the liquidation of the Empire in 1923 there are three more, who, however, do not possess his “greatness”.

one. The first episode opens with a glorification of the Sultan in honor of his twenty-year reign. The people rejoiced around their honorable and pious ruler. However, we further understand that the stability of his rule is constantly threatened by foreign forces: liberals in tailcoats, Freemasons, Armenians, Jews, Greeks who insist on rights and autonomy taught by Europeans... (Bellaigue, 2017: 10). “We will break the hands of Europe, which is greedy for our lands!”, the sultan reassures his subjects who are worried about the western threat. “The Freemasons - along with the Jews and the English - want to conquer the world”. No cleavage here. Women are pious and obedient, with their heads covered, and on the street – even veiled. “My father Sultan Abdul Mejit’s biggest mistake was that he listened to women. I won’t repeat it!” Abdul Hamid promises.

In *The Magnificent Century*, Suleiman also listened to his wife... And drank wine. At Abdul Hamid’s, only the “bad” drink wine. The “good” ones are pious abstainers – like their sultan, who orders that the future modern railway pass only through Muslim-populated lands (and the British want to divert it). And he ordered to build small mosques²² at the railway stations. “The railway will strengthen our faith!”, he promises to his obedient subjects and assures them that “the lands of the Muslims will be paradise”. The latest episode takes place after the death of the Sultan, in 1930, when it is understood that his most devoted servant, Tahsin Pasha, wrote a memoir about him. In front of the young journalist interviewing him, the Pasha lists the most important moments in the life of his beloved ruler in the following order:

He awarded Conan Doyle with an Order because he loved reading his Sherlock Holmes novels; he did not cede Palestine to the Jews, because it would always be an Islamic land; he gave half of his property to the needy and personally distributed it to their homes; he gave Pasteur money for the rabies vaccine. Also, he banned the staging of an Italian play because it insulted the Prophet and Muslims. Moreover, he threatened the Italian ambassador that if they staged this play (even in Italy!) he would invade there with his troops. “I will die, but I will not let you mock our prophet! Until my last breath I will fight for the glory of Allah!” (This detail probably reflects Erdoğan’s dream of banning cartoons of Muhammad worldwide.)

On his deathbed Abdul Hamid forgave his people and died with the Koran in his hands, pronouncing “Allah is one!” “He only wanted the happiness of his people!”, concludes the interview Tahsin Pasha. The journalist is crying with emotion... And the people are crying.

At the very end, Tahsin tells a dream that his master had: He walks along a ghostly corridor with portraits of the greatest sultans who say “welcome”: Suleiman, Selim the Terrible, Mehmed the Conqueror, Osman. “You were walking our way!” say the sultans. Of course, there is also his own portrait, in front of which he proudly stands with the words “So be it!” The last descendant of Abdul Hamid (isn’t he the prince Pamuk saw as a tour guide in his own house-museum?) loved the series. “History repeats itself” – the descendant said – “these foreigners now call our president a dictator, just as they called Abdul Hamid “the bloody sultan”.

²² Small mosques that do not offer Friday prayers.

Just two days before the president actually became a dictator²³, the series turned out to be Erdoğan's favorite because: "The same schemes are being carried out today in exactly the same way... What the West is doing to us is the same - just the era and the actors are different"²⁴. Erdoğan calls Abdul Hamid "a despotic but beloved by the people, patriotic and pious sultan" and names hospitals after him.

While the series was running, Pamuk was writing *Plague Nights*, also set in the era of Abdul Hamid. The Sultan is not directly involved in the plot, but he is narrated by the author and some of the characters, most notably the fictional daughter of his dethroned brother Murad V, Pakize Sultan, who is sure that her uncle is a murderer. He was neurotic and vengeful and grew poisonous plants in the palace gardens to carry out his murders. The novel also tells of a ceremony on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the reign of the Sultan, copied from the lavish celebrations for the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria. For the ceremony (five years after the one shown in the series), huge funds were spent, ruining the treasury. Pamuk's greatest interest, however, centers on Abdul Hamid's love of crime novels. Pakize Sultan believes that it was from them that the killer understood how murders are carried out without leaving traces and what the latest European methods in this field are.

The Sultan even married his niece Hatice (Pakize's sister²⁵) to the translator of foreign novels. There were also other translators (who did not know who they were working for) most often found among his enemies – Young Turks or Jews. During the day they translated, and at night they called him the "bloody sultan" and wanted to overthrow him. And here, of course, we are talking about Sherlock Holmes and the order with which Conan Doyle is decorated. Abdul Hamid presented the order, but did not grant the writer's wish to see his palace. He was afraid that the location of his next novel might be right there...

Pamuk's sympathies are firmly with Murad V, whose dethronement in favor of Abdul Hamid delayed "constitutional, pro-Western, liberal and parliamentary reforms" by 33 years. Murad was educated in France and took music lessons from Italian masters. Liberals, constitutionalists, Europeanized poets, journalists, writers visited his palace (before Abdul Hamid closed it). In Paris, he "gathered around him too lightly dressed French girls, and even danced with one of them." Like the rest of Pamuk's characters, who yearn for modernity, Murad also drinks until the end of his life (Pamuk, 2022: 92, 208, 211, 274, 277, 296, 299, 578, 673-674, 678-679).

²³ I am referring to the 2017 referendum, which changed Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential republic.

²⁴ The quote is taken from the Bulgarian version of the Wikipedia page of *The Last Sultan* series (https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Последният_султан:_Абдулхамид).

²⁵ Unlike Pakize, she is an actual person.

Conclusion

At the time when the “bloody sultan” was dethroned (1909) and the Young Turks made famous (not very successful) attempts at modernization, Mehmed Akif – poet and professor at Istanbul University – spoke of “the gap between intellectuals, blind imitators of the West, and the masses who see in Western morals the decline of Islam.” The role model should have been Japan, which managed to master Western science and technology without losing its original spirituality (Mantran, 1999: 603). The characters in the series (especially after 2016) seem to have realized this model: they have mastered the achievements and even the appearance of Westerners without – in their mentality – renouncing traditional Islamic values. For them, there is no synonymy between “modernity” and “West”.

For Pamuk’s characters, who continue to equate “modernity” with “the West,” it is not enough to assimilate European technologies and fashions to become Europeans. For them, the most important thing is the mentality - getting out of the security of collective anonymity and taking the risk of being yourself in “your” Europe. The risk-takers most often fail - either because of their own inability to fulfill the longing or because of the discovery that Europe is actually “foreign”. If the authors of the earlier (before 2016) series still recognized the longing for modernity and tried to satisfy it through the deep necklines in the 16th century or through the liberated modern morals²⁶, for the creators of the latest works in the genre it is completely foreign: for them, Turkish modernity has long been achieved - without the help and even - in spite of the West...

Pamuk tried (at least once, at least symbolically) to align East and West: he carried out Flaubert’s idea to write a book in which “a civilized Westerner and a barbarian from the East gradually resemble each other and exchange places” (Pamuk, 2007: 324). In *The White Fortress* (Pamuk, 2005), an Ottoman scholar called “Hoxha” and a European captive called “The Venetian”, outwardly looking like twins, swap identities and lives. The “barbarian from the East” heads for the Renaissance (to modernity, to “the West”), and the “civilized Westerner” remains in the “medieval slumber.”

Probably, for their successors (as for Pamuk himself), Europe will be both “own” and “alien”, and the longing for modernity will be realized in uneven thrusts. As for the series, the longing creeping into them will gradually be replaced by the appearance of fulfilled illusions...

²⁶ The most scandalous scene in *Forbidden Fruit* where the characters make love in a garden gazebo but the audience only sees their faces, earns the wrath of the censors. The actress had to explain to the media the “technology” by which decency was preserved during the shooting process: a pillow was placed between her body and the body of her partner. Despite the explanations, the scene continues to stir the spirits of the audience and public opinion (Borisova, 2014: 2016).

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