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Abstract
Over the past decade or so, a number of secular critics and Muslim activists of the Islamist social movement in Turkey have described the political conflicts dominating Turkish social life in cultural terms, as a struggle between incompatible cultural orders. A rich variety of similes have been used to describe the clash and its protagonists: black and white Turks, Islamist untouchables, Turkey's Negroes, even transgendered secularists (Western souls in Turkish bodies). This narrative construction leads to a number of unhelpful generalizations, all of which serve to obscure the merging shades of grey between Islamists and secularists. It also overemphasizes the efficacy of the civilizing project of the Turkish state. The article argues that the term 'legislating virtue' better captures the complexity of contemporary political conflict.

Keywords
- civilizing project
- construction of locality
- Islamism
- Orhan Pamuk
- republicanism
- subjectivity
- Turkish fiction

Social analysis is an art, an art which like that of the novelist and her characters demands a narrative that can do justice to the intricate lacing of virtue and vice informing the political projects of states, their elites and their citizens alike. Yet writing artfully is difficult; and analysts of the incredible history of Turkey over even the last 80 years sometimes need a stock of organizing abbreviations that throw light on both the contested past and present of the Republican era. Activist state, targeted society is one such concentrating phrase: its opposite, the domestication of the state by society (see Beller-Hann and Hann, 2001; Hann, 1990), is another. Paradoxically, both enlighten and obscure. Their limited truthfulness suggests the need for more differentiated regional histories and ethnographies of Turkish republicanism, a perspective sensitive to the diverse articulation of Kemalism with earlier Ottoman spatial incorporations and exclusions, and cognizant of the way contrasting local cultural practices impacted on people's willingness or ability to respond to the new institutions emanating from Ankara.

In his essay 'Projects as Methodology', Serif Mardin describes the neglect of microsociology by a 'prominent group of modern Turkish scholars', unified in part by their inclination to privilege social change as sparked by 'projects'; that is, 'plans for change originating among a cohesive group of social “engineers”' (1997: 65). The outcome is, according to...
Mardin, a dismissal of ‘identity processes, the noninstitutional basis of religion, and personal histories as “colourings” of social processes’ (1997: 66). I want to argue here that this neglect cuts both ways: not only, or even particularly, in the work of progressive scholars in their treatment of Islamist activities, but just as much by Islamist-inclined writers in their analysis of the secular public. This Islamist neglect concerns a disinterest in the ‘lifeworld’ or ‘everyday’ experience – to use Mardin’s words – of republicanism, or in what anthropologist Michael Jackson calls the ‘strategic field of social interaction and intersubjective experience’ that constitutes – as much as reflects – cultural forms and norms (Jackson, 1998: 153). Ironically, perhaps, an emphasis on republican culture as created in intersubjective encounter might also be relevant for Mardin in his treatment of the crisis of early republican intellectuals, seen by him in that same essay as cast adrift from the moorings of an ‘Islamic cultural universe and the elaboration of the self linked to it’ (1997: 74).

To ground this rather abstract introduction, let me re-tell the powerful narrative constructed by Hakan Yavuz in an article on Turkey in the fall 2000 edition of the Journal of International Affairs, entitled ‘Cleansing Islam from the Public Sphere’. Yavuz presents the 28 February 1997 military-engineered suppression of the Islamist social movement in Turkey – described recently on national TV as a ‘postmodern coup’ by one of the generals involved – as an inflammation of the bitter cultural cleavage created in Turkey with the establishment of the republic. This cleavage divides what Yavuz calls the black and white Turks, for whom allegiance is signified by their authorized or unauthorized expression of Islam. White Turks are Turkey’s Kemalist establishment, a ‘pseudo-Westernized’ elite symbolized by their ‘display [of] Western roles, attire and habits’ and their ‘ability to imitate external European appearances’. Kemalism here is defined as an authoritarian project of Westernization, spearheaded by a military-bureaucratic enclave. By contrast, black Turks are Turkey’s Muslim masses, the ‘poor and marginalized sectors of society’, inspired by the ‘underlying Islamic vernacular of Turkish society’. Black Turks include Kurds within their ambit, shared religious traditions leading equally to their exclusion in this state-driven cultural transformation. In a striking simile, Yavuz concludes that Turkey is like a transgendered body, where ‘white Turks regard themselves as Western souls in the body of a foreign sociopolitical landscape’.

Yavuz is not the only writer to use the logic of a pervasive cultural difference between black and white Turkey to explain the fear and loathing that characterizes their interaction. In an equally arresting turn of phrase, Nilufer Göle describes the difference as resembling a caste system, where the infiltration of the Islamic ‘untouchables’ into the public spaces claimed as their own by secularists (the university, the professions, the municipal offices) necessitates a purifying counter-offensive by beyaz (white) Turkey (2000). She cites Islamist writer Emine Şenlikoğlu, who claims that Muslims
are ‘Turkey’s Negroes’. In like vein, Kevin Robins explains such fear and loathing as incited by the ‘return of the repressed’, ‘the real Turkey reasserting itself against official and state culture’ (1996: 72). For Yavuz, Göle and Robins the major ongoing drama of Turkish politics resides in this cultural struggle and its mobilization of society’s warring moieties.

What, as an aside, is the relationship between colour and class? Despite an occasional superimposition, the three writers do not map black and white Turkey directly on to class interests, even as they note how conflict between and within classes is intimately connected with the production of this cultural cleavage. Accordingly, they would not foresee, as many analysts of global Islamist revival imply, a ceasing of Islamism in the event of any hypothetical resolution of the vast economic and social discrepancies characterizing the New (and old) World Order. Ali Ameer, to give one recent example, argues that:

> the issue, which in the final analysis will determine the future strength and legitimacy of the Islamists, is economic... [A]lthough Islamism has received a religious coloring, it is essentially a politico-economic and social protest movement calling for emancipation from the status quo and protest against its inequities. (2000: 23, 24)

Conflict over the norms and forms of the Turkish modern is not, however, mere displaced class struggle.1

Yet if our three writers know that the bourgeoisie–proletariat and centre–periphery distinctions do not transpose neatly on to white and black Turks— not least because all three dualisms refer to a subjective identity as much as an objective status— both Yavuz and Robins have a tendency to equate white and black Turks with the state and society respectively. Here the state is narrated as engaged in an activist and alien assault on the Muslim masses, who are essentially oriented to a more vernacular Ottoman/Islamic culture. In this account state, not economic, determinism rules, as the state in the last analysis is seen as directing the pace and orientation of change in Turkey as it drags behind it a reluctant society. That the state might also portray itself as the vanguard of Turkish modernity, as in the exhibition celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Republic in 1998 entitled ‘Creating a Citizen: Mobilization Knowledge for a Modern Civilization, 1923–1950’, no doubt reinforces such a reading (see Monceau, 2000).

This narrative construction of an opposition between white state and black society ushers in at least three unhelpful generalizations. First, the self-creation of subjects as different ‘shades’ of ‘white’ is obscured, positioning the cultural cleavage as existing primarily between state and society rather than within a heterogeneous civil society itself. To illustrate how misleading this positioning is, I will analyse in the next section how a particular association in the Istanbul suburb of Kuzguncuk has attempted to re-fashion its locality, re-working elitist perceptions that situate it as a
Shangri-La among the lost suburbs of peasantized Istanbul (1). A second consequence of the opposition is that black society is homogenized and given a Muslim character. And yet, as I will seek to show here in a discussion of recent novels, some ‘black’ and ‘white’ fictions are converging on similar themes, including an exploration of the loss of certainty in collective and juxtaposed Islamist and laic identities (2). And, third, the opposition means that society is portrayed as a passive target of the state’s modernizing zeal while Islamism, as a product of black society, becomes by definition anti-modern, rather than a producer of modernity, however understood, in its own right. In response I will suggest that the term ‘legislating virtue’ is a useful ‘organizing abbreviation’ or ‘concentrating phrase’ that encompasses some of the contradictions obscured by both of the other abbreviations cited above (3).

Much recent anthropological work in Turkey has focused on the Islamist social movement and its various interventions in different spheres of social life (Atacan, 1993; Çakır, 1990, 2000; Göle, 1996; I·lyasog˘lu, 1994). Such research takes as its primary focus the constitution of Islamist identity in the context of a polemically asserted Kemalist norm. Quite properly, the bias of such studies leans towards the views and historical interpretations of those who conceive themselves to be the most mis-recognized by the Turkish Republic.

However, an interest in the equally compelling drama of the constitution of republican sensibility is not so apparent. Yet secularization, like Islamization, is a process, not a state. It is always being achieved. Analysis of the threat of an activist Islamism, growing like a cancer, often portrays the secular order as in passive crisis, its once-and-for-all reforms rapidly being wound back, its original energies atrophying over time. Ethnographic research devoted to the equally productive practices of secularism on a local level is strangely lacking.

Two general explanations for this relative impoverishment might be proposed. The first has been a historic bias towards modernization theories in many sociological studies of Turkey, which normalize modern or Western practices and identities as historically irresistible, if perhaps retarded in rural areas by the economic weakness of the Turkish state and its modernizing institutions. On a more pessimistic note, recent studies have extended this retardation to the peasantization of the city. At any rate, because the perceived problem for social planners, sociologists included, is to ease society’s transition to modernity, the mystery of their own ‘modern’ consciousness often escapes consideration as a focus of reflection. A revealing contradiction resides here: despite the historic importance placed on Western clothes as sign and seal of inner conversion, the wearing of a head-scarf often outrages secularists who view it as political statement.

A second explanation for this lack of interest in an ethnography of modern sensibility might be the preponderance of top-down accounts of Turkish modernization that give priority to reforms in what Deniz
Kandiyoti calls the ‘juridico-political and institutional realms’ (1997: 113). Here interest has centred more on law reform as a paradigm of modernization, and less on the arabesque forms of modernity created by the articulation of such reforms with society. Polemically related to these accounts, but posited as originating from the real people ‘below’, is a simplistic Islamist distinction – sometimes mirrored in the work of Western orientalists – between an essentialist Muslim identity and inauthentic imitators of the West, especially the architects of those very legal and institutional reforms. In Hakan Yavuz’s narrative, secularizers are too often encountered in the guise of carriers of an alien ideology. These polarized interpretations are in fact related – one praises the Jacobin reforms of the state elite as a long-delayed de-Ottomanization, and the other lays claim to representing the people’s revenge in self-exoticizing Islamist movements. Yet a number of writers, including most recently Stefanos Yerasimos, have argued that a form of secularization is indeed indigenous to Islamic societies, as a common law legislated by the state has always regulated the vast array of social practices not covered by the Sharia (Yerasimos, 2000).

Ironically, then, both a belief in the inevitability of modernization, and a concentration on the legal and institutional aspects of the state-driven reform project, obscure the self-constitution of subjects who, in their own lives, have filled out and redesigned the state-sponsored but narrowly defined civilizational shift. Navaro-Yasin makes a similar point: in contradistinction to Islamists, secular Istanbulites themselves believe they have ‘transcended culture’ (Navaro-Yasin, 1999). A change in emphasis with regard to the creativity of lived republican modernity, as well as its peculiar strangeness, would allow us to trace how subjects continually erase old autobiographies and write new life-stories. These self-civilizing practices should not be thought of as taking place against the backdrop of the city, but as manifesting themselves in the very pores of the city’s surface and through its transformation. In brief, there is a need for an urban ethnography of modern sensibility, in the context of a Kemalist society instituted by its imaginary signification (to use a phrase of Cornelius Castoriadis) of the West.

To illustrate briefly, let us look at one particular neighbourhood in Istanbul and the processes through which it produces its own sense of locality, somewhat off-white in relation to the civilizing project of the Turkish nation-state. The urban form of the Istanbul suburb of Kuzguncuk testifies to its rich history. Once joined to Üsküdar only by a rutted goat’s track snaking along the ‘Asian’ shore of the Bosphorus, Kuzguncuk’s main streets boast two Greek churches, two synagogues, one Armenian church and a padlocked and cobwebbed childless Greek primary school. Despite this rich religious heritage there are few Christian and Jewish families still living there. Their cemeteries, however, hedge the suburb in on two sides. Kuzguncuk is host also to two mosques, the first built in 1953 next door to the Armenian church, whose priest gave 500 liras towards its construction (Bektaş, 1996a), the second finished in 1990. Their construction charts
both the nationalization and ‘Muslimification’ of the suburb, as early post-
war migrants to the city, particularly from the Black Sea, took advantage of
anti-Christian rioting and the subsequent Christian evacuation from
Istanbul in the 1950s and thereafter to buy into cheap housing.

Recent attempts to constitute a new sense of post-minority locality in
Kuzguncuk need to be understood in the context of wider urban trends
facilitating Istanbul’s transformation into a global city. One significant
process has been the deserting of the older suburbs by a significant portion
of the city’s middle classes to move into new housing developments and
even garden cities dotted along the highways exiting the city. The result has
been an increasing residential separatism and social uniformity, as class
differentiation is reconstructed in the consumption of housing and the
commodification of such housing’s respective lifestyles (Aksoy and Robins,
1994; Keyder and Öncü, 1994; Öncü, 1997). The discursive rhetoric
accompanying such developments occasionally find an echo in Kuzguncuk,
where locals are fond of citing a newspaper article that calls Kuzguncuk
Istanbul’s son cennet (last heaven), in which the flavours of the old Istanbul,
the Istanbul alleged to have disappeared under the flood of peasants
choking its insides, can still faintly but sweetly be savoured.

Yet one response of some of Kuzguncuk’s residents to the perceived
incivility and ‘village-ization’ of Istanbul has not been an escape to homo-
genous (at least in built form) housing complexes on what used to be the
periphery of the city, but an attempted revitalization of the city’s sociabil-
ity in its ‘heart’. In this endeavour Kuzguncuk is Istanbul’s son cennet pre-
cisely because it bears witness: not to a golden age that can never come
again, but to a possibility that can be incarnated in present time, not
resuscitated but created anew according to Kuzguncuk’s changed con-
ditions. Here a number of local residents and intellectuals, including the
architect and community educator Cengiz Bektas, have been major figures
in the art of place-making in Kuzguncuk. Bektas, for example, has been
instrumental in a project of conservation that has resulted in 300 of Kuz-
guncuk’s 1,700 buildings being restored; locals have been aided to beautify
rather than sell their old homes. Unlike Keyder’s (1999) account of gen-
trification in Arnavutköy, this initial restoration was at least partly organ-
ized by locals themselves, not sponsored by incoming urban professionals.2

Simultaneously the related Kuzguncuk Derneği (Foundation) has organ-
ized numerous activities to encourage the suburb’s inhabitants to partici-
pate not just in the restoration of the physical environment but in the
‘reconstitution’ of an imagined community (of neighbourly hospitality) at
the same time. (Indeed, one of Cengiz Bektas’ books publicizing the com-
community-building enterprise in Kuzguncuk is titled Hıygörünüң Otèki Adı:
Kuzguncuk (Kuzguncuk: Another Name for Tolerance)). These have
included shadow puppet (karagöz), street theatre, a children’s pots and
pans band, wall-painting, the construction of a children’s playground and
basketball court on vacant land, a summer school (with painting, sculpture,
poetry, literature, photography and map-reading courses), a kite com-
petition, fund-raising activities for the primary school (a fete, a football
tournament, greeting cards, street markets, school dinners), a carnival,
block printing in the square and an exhibition, pebble-paving of the
mosque yard, the establishment of a public library and cultural centre,
communal dinners with muhtar candidates as guest speakers, and perhaps
most significantly - at least in terms of Kuzguncuk’s urban environment -
two successful mobilizations against attempts by developers to turn the
suburb’s market garden (owned by a church trust) into a private school
and, more recently, into a private hospital.

Is there a difference, however, between the organic intellectuals of Kuz-
guncuk who have attempted to develop a new urbanity in the city, and the
republic’s earlier generations of schoolteachers charged with imparting
civilization (in word and deed) to the countryside? Has the mountain, in
the form of Black Sea villagers, merely come to Muhammed? Bektas himself
might admit the force of the question: ‘the sole criterion of cultural validity
for our intellectuals is the avoidance of alienation from society as a whole.
Participation by the people in cultural production is a condition without
which it cannot be said to exist at all’ (Bektas 1996a: 11–12). Although the
project to make Kuzguncuk both a symbol and parable of enlightened tol-
erance might share some formal properties with historic Kemalist discourse,
the key difference is this: Kuzguncuk is imagined not as an external object
to be transformed but as an inclusive subject in process. This sentiment
applies in a related way to the Kuzguncuk Dernek. Resolute in its focus on
issues of local importance to the suburb and its surrounds, the association
refuses to relate its mission to the grander narratives of either republican
progress or Islamist authenticity. By contrast, the extensive recruitment of
‘non-Islamist’ NGOs into the 28 February 1997 process has been described
by one commentator as issuing in a civil society now ‘briefed by the military’
(Seufert, 2000: 35).

Ironically, however, the partial success of Kuzguncuk’s self-institution
has also led to its attempted co-option in the wider struggle to interpret the
meaning of recent changes to the city’s demographics and urban structure.
The Islamist Akit newspaper, in a recent take on the suburb’s transform-
ation (‘Suspicious Sales in Kuzguncuk’), claimed that a new round of house
sales in Kuzguncuk were made by Jews, taking advantage of Muslims finan-
cially pressed by the February 2001 devaluation and the economic crisis.
The article claims the houses were then sold on to Jews living in Israel for
astronomical prices, and were a further indication that Turkey was sinking
inextricably under Jewish and Armenian hegemony. Local objections to the
‘illegal’ building of the hospital on the church trust-held land and market
garden, organized by the Kuzguncuk Dernek, were then linked to these
Jewish acquisitions. What the article didn’t reveal was its source of infor-
mation, a local real-estate office differentiating itself from its rival Luici –
explicitly named in the article as brokering the sales with Jews – by its rather
self-conscious Islamist presentation, as well as its owner’s rumoured association with the Suleyman坎 tarikat. Relations between Kuzguncuk’s own local Islamist group (see Houston, 2001: 17–33), who also protested against the market garden’s redevelopment, and this new ‘Islamci’ real estate business are not particularly close.

Kuzguncuk is a site for social and discursive contestation in another way: its house restoration movement has also meant that the suburb is now a desirable site for the filming of soap operas, many of which allow Istanbulites to imagine Republican forms of sociability and hierarchy portrayed as characterizing the city before its ruin by mass migration. One of the best loved of these series has been Perihan Abla, whose characters inhabited the repainted and repaired doorways and windows of Kuzguncuk’s Üryanizade Sokak. Yet when the Üsküdar council sought later to change the name of the street in commemoration from Üryanizade to Perihan Abla Sokak, its real residents banded together in protest. In refusing to re-inscribe their street, residents displayed a dislike for nostalgia that implicitly rejected their attempts to constitute Kuzguncuk a contemporary model for a new urban tolerance. The council was forced to give up the idea, and renamed as Perihan Abla Sokak a small street nearby dominated by a car park in which no filming ever took place.

(2) Kuzguncuk’s fragile enactment of a local identity, in the context of both the Turkish nation-state’s continuing intent to make neighbourhoods ‘incubators of compliant national citizens’ (Appadurai, 1995) and Istanbul’s incorporation within global flows of money and information, is just one illustration, then, of both the relative autonomy and heterogeneity of ‘white’ society. Might we not presume that ‘black Turkey’, too, is equally heterogeneous, indeed open in part to the discovery of elective affinities with liberal republicanism? Captivated by the prospect of the clash of civilizations within Turkey itself, analysts are disinclined to see how the very categories of white and black Turkey act as useful fictions suppressing difference within each imagined community. Again, we might take Hakan Yavuz as our straw man: while ‘secular discourse seeks to empower the state’, he argues, ‘Islamism empowers the excluded black Turks and Kurds’ (2000: 3). Here Yavuz unifies Turks and Kurds under the green banner of Islam, despite the problems faced by Kurds within the Refah Party, and indeed the problem of Kurdish ethnicity for the Islamist movement as a whole (see Houston, 2001). In this regard, Yavuz, like a host of interpreters, privileges an Islamist historiography that minimizes the equally thorough and long-term cleansing of Kurds from the modern Turkish public sphere. Hence the standing suspicion of Kurdish Muslims that, in its complacency, the Islamist movement is also stained with the conceit of Turkish nationalism. In that case Yavuz’s construction of an implacably opposed white and black Turkey ignores their mutual interest in either denying Kurdish ethnic difference or the validity of any politics based on a resistance to ethnic assimilation.
But I wish to focus in this article on the heterogeneity of black society in Turkey in another way, on what Kenan Çayır in an innovative article names as the construction in recent Islamist fiction of ‘new Islamist subjectivities’. How do such novels dissolve the unitarian identity created in earlier Islamist fiction? And are similar ‘subjectivities’ also encountered in the work of writers perceived as aligned to some extent with white Turkey? Here the novels of Orhan Pamuk will be read as exploring some of the same themes dealt with by novelists more committed to Islam, not only in his critical vision of the mode of modernity in Turkey, but also in his portrayal of sensibilities unable to apprehend themselves as a unity.

Any brief survey of the vast array of Islamist journals and newspapers produced in Turkey since the mid-1980s will note both the variety of takes on important social issues and a similarity of style that made such journals recognizably Islamist. The representation of the West as bloody imperial power, diabolically committed to either the economic and cultural pillage or destruction of Muslim societies, facilitated a rhetorical overlap with the anti-colonialist discourse of groups with a more nationalist Turkish-Islamic bent. A form of surreal pop art became the signature of the classic Islamist book or journal cover: a Kalashnikov sub-machine-gun with its trigger formed by the curves in Arabic of the word ‘Allah’. Signifying a thousand different evils, the ‘West’ - or in the more radical journals its proxy and slave, the Kemalist regime - became the other against which the dominant Islamist identity could reconstruct itself. By the middle of the 1990s, however, both Islamism as a discursive practice circling around a limited number of themes and Islamism as a consumer style had begun to diversify. Class, ethnic and gendered Islamisms multiplied over issues of more particularistic concern as the Islamist social movement lost its unifying focus. The onset, then, of what Nilufer Göle has called a ‘post-Islamist stage’, and Olivier Roy rather more negatively the ‘failure of political Islam’ (Göle, 2000; Roy, 1994), might also be interpreted as a pluralism of style, as well as a widening of the various contexts Islamist discourse is able to speak to.

Kenan Çayır’s essay on ‘new Islamist subjectivities’ concurs with the above schema in its discernment of a difference in the Islamist fiction of the 1980s compared to the 1990s. He notes the evolution from an us-and-them mentality to a nuanced, more self-reflexive treatment of faith, as well as the expression of an increasing dissatisfaction with the demands Islamism places on individuals to conform to its ordering of social relations and its particular valorization of the world of things. (Here I am thinking of that tendency in certain Islamist groups - such as the members of the Ismail Ağa Cemaati - to construct a life in conformity to both the sunnet of Hz. Muhammed, and the exemplary life of the first Muslims in the asrı saadet, resulting for example in the refusal to eat food from a table or to cut bread with a knife). According to Çayır, 1980s Islamist fiction was a committed fiction, devoted to the depiction of right Islamic belief and practice, a fiction concerned with encouraging edep (decency). He gives the example
of Ahmet Günbay Yıldız’s novel Yanık Büğdaylar (Burnt Wheat), in which the return of the pious Dikce (whose name can be translated as ‘upright’) to the village from teacher’s college results in a conflict between the powerful family that owns the village grocery shop, who sell at exploitative prices and employ at low wages, and those inspired by Dikce’s example. Çayır sums up the outcome thus: ‘With Dikce’s endeavours the café [of gamblers] is transformed into a library. Playing cards are burnt in the village square. He teaches the people how to read and write. Finally, all characters are blessed with true faith’ (Çayır, 2001: 11). The resemblance to Kemalist themes of education and enlightenment is unmistakable, yet here we have an Islamist civilizing project, targeted not so much against backwardness and oppressive tradition in the name of progress but against exploitation and wilful ignorance in the equally universal name of justice. Çayır goes on to note that such ‘happy’ endings are a feature of Islamist novels of the 1980s.6

Yet we might read such novels not only as a discourse on Islamic decency reacting to the perceived worldly and vain-glorious aspirations of Kemalism, but also as a rebuke to the ‘arabesk’ moment in cinema and music so dominant during the same period. The arabesk debate has often been reported in terms of Kemalist disapproval; indeed, the genre has been seen as subversively Muslim or Arabic (Stokes, 1992; Tekellioğlu, 1996). But Islamist fiction in the 1980s was equally oriented to the exposé of ‘local’ traditions of superstition and hybridity that were seen as distortions of the original practices and beliefs of the first Muslims. (Of course, Islamism itself might be analysed as a rather hybrid phenomenon, even if it does not reveal in the fact.) Against arabesk, then, Islamist novels and films of the 1980s sought to correct ‘passive’ notions of fate with a more voluntarist ideal, in which active obedience to a divinely ordained way of life ensured happiness in this life as well as in the life of the world to come. This in contrast to the fate of the protagonists presented as carriers of the arabesk sensibility, whose own inner passions, inarticulatable notions of honour and shame, and experiences of a social powerlessness expressible only through music made them victims of powers and circumstance beyond their control. Islamist fiction of the 1980s rejected such weakness, even presented the turn to a radical religious practice as an antidote to it, its male and female characters empowered by their rejection of urban disorder and embrace of new knowledge. Parenthetically, a turn to an Islamic identity was an antidote, too, to the problematic Kurdish background of the ideal-typical arabesk singer and the emasculating experience of migration from the south-east dramatized so often in film or song.

Islamist fiction in the 1990s suggests a loss of confidence in such prescriptions, as well as in the presumed unity of the alternative religious community inspired by them. Çayır gives us as examples two novels, both of which detail the inability of their main protagonists to conform to an Islamist lifestyle identified by its polemical relationship to everyday life ala
franca. Halkaların Ezgisi tells the story of a young Islamist woman who decides, after much self-examination, that she will no longer wear the veil, the symbol so central to Islamist self-definition. Nisa is a young wife and member of an Islamist circle in the heady days after the Iranian revolution, a time when ‘radicalism was religion. It was a time of new language, new namings. We were swallowing journals, books, dreaming revolution. Those who did not have time to wait were going to the Afghanistan Mountains or Khom’ (Çayır, 2001: 14). Educated but veiled, Nisa is not sure how to live this new ethic: ‘the new way of dress was conveying its own rules. Modesty was the primary command. . . . We did not know yet how to walk, live with this new style. We would learn. Looks, warnings would shape us’ (2001: 16). Yet Nisa begins to feel that the Muslim male pressure on veiled women to signify as the stormtroopers of the Islamist movement is as straitjacketing as the state’s refusal to open public space up to their presence, with new freedoms curtailed by new internal oppression (Çakır, 2000). She takes off her scarf and tries to make her angry husband understand that her identity as a believer is firm, as she still feels ‘veiled’. Her rejection of the communal symbols of Islamism is the prelude to a new Islamist self-confidence.

The second novel which Çayır discusses, Yağmurdan Sonra by Islamist journalist Ahmet Kekeç, details the love affair of a married Islamist intellectual in the context of the ‘postmodern’ coup of 28 February, 1997. Ex-publisher Murat now sells stationery, but following the military intervention is taken to court for a book he published six years before. His wife’s lack of engagement with his case confirms the sterility of their marriage, and encourages Murat to socialize with new laicist friends from outside his Islamist circle. At the same time, he initiates contact with his irreligious father, who left the family when Murat was young to marry another woman. Over time, he falls in love with his stepmother’s daughter, earning himself the censure of old friends. But Murat is unrepentant:

> I love her. Even though my love is not reciprocated, it is a source of strength and meaning in my life. It may be a dangerous intimacy, an immoral tie, but I don’t care. . . . Let this be the denial of my whole life, of the order that I have for years struggled to establish. (Çayır, 2001: 20)

On its release Yağmurdan Sonra (After the Rain) was attacked by one of the more radical Islamist journals for its depiction of indecency, which asserted that the novel did not reflect ‘us’. In defence, Kekeç replied in his newspaper column that, ‘the “we” is not so clear I think’ (Çayır, 2001: 21). What is clear, however, is the novel’s exploration of ‘illegitimate’ congress, sexual or otherwise, between parties who, in the earlier Islamist salvation fiction with its concern for appropriate gender apartheid, would not have been permitted intimacy. Çayır concludes, among a number of points, that the focus of later 1990s Islamist fiction is the troubled ‘interiority’ of Islamist subjects: ‘the integrity that an individual possessed in earlier narratives has disintegrated in the new novels’ (Çayır, 2001: 23).
Is the disintegration of the integrity of a homogeneous Islamist subject echoed in the fate of secular characters in the fiction of Orhan Pamuk? His novel *The White Castle* (1990) is set in the Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire, in the reign of Mehmet IV, before the scientific and technological superiority of the ‘West’ upsets an evenly poised power balance between Ottomans and Europeans. An educated young Christian nobleman is captured by the Ottoman navy and enslaved in Istanbul, where he is passed on to a master who bears a remarkable physical resemblance to him. The novel traces their relationship, as the Ottoman *hoca* (teacher) seeks to consume the scientific knowledge his new Italian slave possesses. In the process, first the *hoca*, then his slave, become a favourite of the young sultan, as they entertain him with fantasies both scientific and marvellous. They are taken on the sultan’s military campaign to Poland, but the failure of the secret weapon crafted by the *hoca* to take Doppio Castle causes him to flee. He ‘returns’ to Venice, taking the identity of his Italian slave and leaving his ambivalent double to assume the *hoca*’s role. The scandal of becoming what each had previously both despised and yet been intrigued by is enacted through the mutual plundering of the other’s childhood memories.

By contrast, the novels *The New Life* (1997) and *The Black Book* (1994) are set in what Pamuk describes elsewhere as the ‘provincial backwater’ of post-Republic Turkey. ‘No other country’, writes Pamuk in a review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, ‘can ever have disassociated itself from its environment and its history to the extent that the Turkish Republic has done. How this has occurred is a story of alienation and isolation, full of extremes.’ He goes on, saying:

... the cultural climate can best be described as a kind of mental silence. Since people have lost their memories, and their relationships with their cultural neighbours, the entire country has acquired the crudeness, inflexibility and slovenliness which often occur in those who live alone. (Pamuk, 1997b: 34)

Despite this rather derogatory dismissal, however, Pamuk’s bestowal of significance on everyday things in Istanbul gives the novels a rich, almost obsessive, ethnographic texture. The variety in the cries of the *Boza* sellers, circling the block one last time late at night, the sitting of a wooden dog on a cotton doily, the smell of onions in apartment stairwells, heighten the protagonists’ distracted consciousness while exhuming their memories. The chief characters in each of the novels are subjects whose equanimity, both social and psychological, is suddenly taken away, as the familiar contours of known existence dissolve. Memories and signs refuse to signify in the old way, and their new meanings are not yet made clear. A young engineering student reads a book that transforms his life: he feels that the book had found in himself ‘the lost treasury that had been lying below the surface for ages and brought it up’ (Pamuk, 1997a: 6). Another man is left unaccountably by his wife. His ultimately forlorn search for her reveals the
mystery of all he previously took for granted (Pamuk, 1994). The trauma experienced by the two narrators mimics – or at least resonates with – a wider cultural trauma that the subject only now begins to perceive. Upon such a realization, the narrator (and both novels are written in the masculine first person, although this only becomes clear in The Black Book near the end) begins an intensely lonely journey or search, a search for an other that is as much a search for themselves. Though the object lost is familiar enough, it increasingly embodies an unknown quality: the characters only ever meet with some form of provisional rapprochement with what it is they desire.

Why are the protagonists of The White Castle, The New Life and The Black Book condemned to such restless resignation? In one way the text’s refusal to consider any closure in the search for personal or cultural authenticity is mirrored by the narrators’ ongoing lack of fulfilment. Both the desire to be oneself or someone else is problematic. Finding solace in another person’s identity shows one cannot endure being oneself. On the other hand, in giving assent to someone else’s story or narrative one becomes its active co-author. And yet the novels suggest that the mimetic relationship between Turkey and the West involves both and more than these, despite their stories illustrating the triumphalist modernization pursued by Turkey’s Westernizers and the obsessive strategies in response by nativist nationalists (Islamist or otherwise). An account of a painting competition in The Black Book reveals that the characters’ dilemmas go deeper than this. A Beyoğlu gangster decides to decorate, via a competition, the lobby of his spacious brothel with scenes of Istanbul: ‘taking his cue from bank presidents’, he offers a large sum of money to two competing artisans. Being mutually jealous, each works behind a curtain for six months, until judgement day with its full formality arrives. Upon opening the curtain, guests beheld ‘a splendid view of Istanbul on one wall and on the other opposite it a mirror that made the painting, in the light of the silver candelabras, appear even finer…. Naturally, the prize went to the artist who installed the mirror’ (1994: 346).

And yet over time the mirror did not seem (at least to intoxicated patrons) merely to reflect the painting:

The scrawny, miserable mongrel eyeing the lunch stand in a market scene on the first wall was transformed into a sad but cunning beast when you looked at the reflection in the mirror opposite, yet when you went back to the painting on the first wall, you perceived not only the dog’s cunningness, but also a suggestion of movement that aroused your further suspicions; crossing the room once more … you saw stirrings that might explain the nature of that movement, and now, completely bewildered you found it difficult to hold yourself back from running over to look again at the original painting on the first wall. (Pamuk, 1994: 346–7)

Indeed, closer inspection by befuddled customers revealed that the details,
differences and transformations on the two walls were endless. Even more startling were ‘the new significances, the strange signs, the unknown worlds that appeared in the faces reflected in the mirror’ (1994: 349), including in the faces of those pacing up and down agitatedly between the velvet chairs. The eventual imperfect repose of the novel’s main protagonists, stripped of their illusions and hopes, suggests that reconciliation with these new faces (including one’s own) and these new cityscapes occurs only when the search for the solution to the authenticity of one’s enigmatic identity is given up.

Similarly, the new Islamist fiction signals that at least some in the Islamist movement concede, too, how transformed imitative contemporary Islamist life is from its brilliant first sketching in the ‘asrı saadet’. Here the ‘adventures of interiority’ of the main characters undermine the recovered unity of the Muslim collective identity. Accordingly, the homogeneity of the authentic Islamist ‘we’ is fragmented, as the term loses its integrity. Heterogeneous Islamist practices are not flawed copies of an authentic Muslim life that need, like a peeling painting, touching up but instead constitute new social creation.

(3) Literary representations of Islamism in Turkey may be primarily literary conceits, but they also mirror (once again, with endless transformation of detail) newly emerging Muslim subjectivities in the public sphere. The novels of Orhan Pamuk indicate that they mirror (with appropriate deviation) secular subjectivities too. Despite Yavuz’s claim that ‘the only force unifying the “white and black” Turks is their common fear of each other’ (Yavuz, 2000: 11), the disillusionment of certainty experienced by both Islamist and secularist fictional subjects suggests that elective affinities between their doubles in the public sphere should also be assumed. It follows, then, that an alternative narrative of social relations needs to be presented, in order to leaven a social analysis predicated on the hostile alienation of state and society, and of white and black Turks. How might we better acknowledge their merging shades of grey?

First, on a general level we might like to step back from the polemical official historiography that posits the Kemalist intervention as the definitive epistemological break in the history of Turkish modernization. Zürcher (1995) is more considered: he treats the Young Turk period as stretching from the early 20th century until the election of the Democrat Party in 1950. In similar vein, Duben and Bahar’s (1991) work on the late Ottoman censuses and Istanbul households in the years 1880–1940 shows that, even before the great war, a large majority of Muslim middle-class families exhibited similar reproductive and family strategies to the middle classes in other European capitals, including a high average age for women at first marriage. In early 20th-century Istanbul at least, society was more ‘modern’ than the laws, which were amended in 1928 to outlaw polygamy. Indeed, Martin (1997) argues that this earlier social revolution was one of the reasons Atatürk’s reforms were accepted with so little opposition by the
urban middle class. Further, Keyder (1999) notes that, despite the hostility of the first generation of Ankara republicans towards an Istanbul reviled as contaminated by the twin ill odours of cosmopolitanism and Islam, that generation was in fact overwhelmingly Istanbul born. In other words, pre-republic middle-class Muslim Istanbul was already well acquainted with various currents and dilemmas of modernization, as the Ottoman novels of the late 19th century attest (see Kandiyoti, 1997; see also Dumont, 1993 for a record of everyday life recorded by the diary of an Ottoman bureaucrat in the first years of the 20th century).

Although this long pre-history of Ottoman/Muslim reform doesn’t negate its radicalization by the Turkish nationalists under Atatürk, it does pose some questions to those whose analytic categories consist primarily of a post-republic ‘cultural cleavage between Turkey’s Muslim masses and its pseudo-Westernized elite’ (Yavuz, 2000: 2). After all, that so-called ‘pseudo-Westernized elite’ was also Muslim, while there were many in the ‘Muslim masses’ willing to creatively adapt institutions and practices from the West for local use (see for example June Starr’s [1978] ethnography of the Republican legal system in the Antalya district during the late 1960s and its articulation with villagers’ lives). Rather than an analysis that implies pseudo-culture or ideology on the one side and authenticity on the other - or indeed that merely reverses their order, as Al-Azmeh (1993) does in his discussion of the derivative nature of Islamism - we need one that more adequately apprehends the conceptually distinct but socially inseparable pairing of power and meaning in both Kemalist and Islamist projects for transforming society. Otherwise we are left with a model in which power and the state aggregate in one corner, and culture and society in the other.

Perhaps there is some merit, by contrast, in characterizing the experience of modernity in Turkey as a contest over the legislation of virtue. The term ‘legislating virtue’ gestures to the central paradox in the Kemalist project: the republican reforms and their ongoing sponsorship in cultural life were and are acts of coercive power, forcing people to act in ways that worry them, to practise certain forms of sociability. But there was also an ethical appeal intrinsic to those reforms, invitations to imagine oneself and one’s community anew, to constitute one’s ethical standpoint differently. This constructed national self is always a gendered self as well, a process of imagining different ways that masculinity and femininity might be expressed and relations between Republican men and women practised. Indeed, this is one key way that nationalism ‘works’. The tension between these two intentions might be expressed in legal terms as well. Hart, for example, pluralizes the functions of law, distinguishing between legislation’s ‘imperative’ mode concerned with social control and constraining action, and what he calls ‘power-conferring’ laws, which are ‘constitutive of the activity they govern’ (in Reath, 1997: 219). The laws of a game are examples of power-conferring rules: they facilitate activity by establishing procedures for its performance. Problems arise, however, when Hart
characterizes specific laws as either restrictive or power-conferring. The point might become clearer if we note that in the Turkish context it is certain notorious clauses inserted within different Constitutions (1922, 1961, 1970 and 1982) that have been used to close down and prosecute tens of political parties and their leaders. Yet Reath presents Constitutions primarily as a body of constitutive rules that confer a social status on people which otherwise they would not have – in this case, the status of citizens.

Once we accept this dual character of the Kemalist legal and cultural reforms, the debate, then, might shift to the appropriateness of legislating for virtue, or whether virtue by definition has to be lived and worked out by one’s self. It shifts, too, to the question of whether people have been given a fair choice, so that their decision one way or the other is made with some reasonable knowledge of rival ways of acting in and making sense of the world. Again, these questions need to be asked with an eye for regional optics, as argued in the introduction. This concern is addressed to the Islamist movement and its attempts (or desire) to legislate an alternative virtue as well: it, too, should be judged for its willingness to open its ordering of its desired world to the claims of another ethical vision. Can Islamism and Kemalism apprehend each other in the other’s own terms, constituting themselves in this process without excluding the other? My example of the independent deconstruction of Kemalist and Islamist certainties in some recent fiction suggests they can, and suggests moreover that analysts should seek to research such meeting points as assiduously as they seek out evidence of their estrangement. Others examples might include the increasing cooperation of the secularist and Islamist human rights foundations (Plagemann, 2000), or interactions at a local suburban level.

In brief, black and white visions impute an insufficient ethical reflexivity to various players in contemporary Turkish life. An inclination to downplay the virtuous community desired of ‘white’ subjects has been complemented by an equal tendency to minimize the modernist homogeneity informally legislated for and by ‘black’ Turks. Once we take for granted that both Islamism and Kemalism are ‘composed modes of control and communication which order and organize’ (Eipper, 1998: 321), we can proceed to the more vital task of assessing not only the adequacy of the virtue they envision but the forms of power-conferring their contemporary legislation promises.

Notes

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On the other hand, we might acknowledge how inequality within the Islamist movement is sometimes obscured by its own ideological portrayal of Islamist unity: the religious station Channel 7, for example, has been screening a dramatization of the birth of the now extremely profitable Yimpanş Holding, in which the pious yet patriotic founder seeks capital to build an industrial enterprise in the underdeveloped areas of Anatolia. The rhetorical ‘other’ is profit-seeking and speculative investment, seen as synonymous with Turkey’s secular bourgeoisie, its cosy relations with the state and the dominance of a têkelcî sermaye (monopolistic capitalist class) (see Vorhoff, 2000).

Keyder’s (1999) informative discussion of the recent history of Arnavutköy, a Bosphorus village neighbourhood on the opposite side of the strait, is remarkable for the similarities it describes for developments in the two suburbs. And yet as a wishy-washy ethnographer, I do have some qualms about the ‘world systems’ optic he uses to discern the forces driving such changes in greater Istanbul. True, Kuzguncuk and Arnavutköy’s similarities may only be understood with ‘appropriate attention to flows that define the cultural strategies of similar social groups across globalizing cities of the post 1980s world’ (Keyder, 1999: 185). Their differences, however, need also to be seen as deriving from more local constructions of place and that place’s affective meanings for the users of its spaces. Indeed, the battle over the market garden in Kuzguncuk (see p. 431) is as much about people controlling the symbolic meaning of space as it is an intraclass struggle between different groups of gentrifiers. See Low (1996) for a succinct discussion of the difference between the social production and social construction of space.

The Kuzguncuk Dernek has also been involved in a long running battle to stop the illegal building of a restaurant and function centre in Fetih Paşa Forest, the large park bordering the suburb.

Of course, not all people of Kurdish origin are cleansed from the public sphere, nor identify themselves as carriers of a Kurdish identity. Indeed, the political identification of ‘Kurds’ as Islamists, Kemalists, or even sometimes as Turkish nationalists suggests there is a performative aspect to Kurdish nationalism as well. Nevertheless, the pervasive nationalism of most Turkish Islamist groups as well as the long war in the south-east, mercifully ended by the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, is often not remarked upon by otherwise perceptive commentators on Islamist heterogeneity. See as but one example Jenny White’s article ‘Islamic Chic’, which ignores the Kurdish situation whilst claiming oddly that Turkish ‘civil society in general is flourishing’ (1999: 85).

For example see Açar (1991) for a comparison of the different approaches to the ‘women problem’ in three Islamist journals.

Ahmet Günbay Yıldız’s ten novels have sold over 500,000 copies, while Hekimoğlu Ismail’s Mınıydi Abdullah has reached its 70th edition, with sales of about 275,000.

Because the same law may simultaneously enable capacities and impose control, the difference might better be thought of as one of degree: though power-conferring rules (say a marriage contract) primarily provide individuals with a framework for realizing ends, they also limit the range of possibilities that they define. And, contrary to Hart’s emphasis, not following such rules may also lead at times to sanction - at the very least one may no longer be allowed to play the game.
References


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