
Orhan Pamuk on the Turkish Modernization Project: Is It a Farewell to the West?

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The mainstay of the Turkish modernization project in the twentieth century has been relegating religion to the private sphere. To this end, traditions associated with Islamic civilization were banned from Turkish public life: women gained a degree of public presence and the semblance of equality; Western style clothing became the only acceptable mode in public life; traditional laws with religious character gave way to modern legal codes; and, above all, the Arabic script was replaced by its European counterpart.

With all due respect to modern Turkey's founder Kemal Atatürk, especially his vision for a new Turkey and statesman-like tact in laying its grounds, the political and intellectual climate of the 1920s was more suitable for carrying out such a radical program of cultural change than that of our time. The reigning intellectual climate in Turkey and the West has changed drastically since then. The success of postmodernist critiques of reason and Enlightenment in the West gradually undercut the intellectual supports of secularization in Turkey, and the westernized Turkish intelligentsia came to be divided within itself.¹

*Postmodernist
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Enlightenment
rationalism
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¹ There are several other notable factors behind this intellectual

The Nobel Prize laureate Orhan Pamuk (2006 literature) has been skeptical of Turkey's state-led modernization project from early in his career. At its current and most mature state of evolution, his perspective seems to be in tune with that of contemporary critics of the Enlightenment in the West who claim that there is not a binary opposition between modernity and religion.² This aspect of Pamuk's art drew international academic attention after the publication of *Snow*, his self-avowed first and last political novel.³ Leonard Stone interprets Pamuk's artistic views on the rise of political Islam and the future of democracy in Turkey as cautious optimism. David Coury argues—perhaps erroneously (Pamuk was critical of secular republicanism from early on)—that *Snow* signifies a shift in Pamuk's political loyalties.⁴ Having said this, Pamuk's bitter criticism of state-led modernization in Turkey does not necessarily correspond to Islamic ties or sympathies. If anything, Pamuk defines himself as a rationalist,⁵ and according to his former translator Güneli Gün's account, he is a nonbeliever.⁶ Scholarly opinion, however, is divided over

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self-defined
rationalist.*

transformation: First, the westernization movement in Turkey, which conflates modernization with secularization, failed to develop a strong philosophical grounding for the masses. Second, the global wave of Islamic revivalism, which began in the late 1970s due to oil money and a population boom in the Middle East, spread into Turkey. Third, there is a growing appeal of a looser interpretation of secularism, as practiced in the Anglo-Saxon world of liberal democracies, as opposed to the French model, or *laïcité*, which frowns on religious expression in public life.

² In their view, the European model of secular modernity is an exception rather than the rule, and there is not a single path to modernity. Therefore, they cite the sway of religion in the United States and the recently emerging economies of the lesser-developed world and refer to the multiple modernities theory. See, Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

³ Orhan Pamuk, *Snow*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Vintage Books, [2002] 2004). The original Turkish version's date of publication in brackets.

⁴ Leonard Stone, "Minarets and Plastic Bags: The Social and Global Relations of Orhan Pamuk," *Turkish Studies* 7, no. 2 (2006): 194; David N. Coury, "'Torn Country': Turkey and the West in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*," *Critique* 50, no. 4 (2009): 342.

⁵ Doğan Hızlan, "Edebiyatın Megastarı Orhan Pamuk: Kendimi de Okuru da Sarakaya Alıyorum [Literature's Megastar Orhan Pamuk: I am Making Fun of Myself and the Readers]," *Hürriyet*, October 24, 1994.

⁶ Güneli Gün, "The Turks Are Coming: Deciphering Orhan Pamuk's Black Book," *World Literature Today* 66, no. 1 (1992): 61.

the extent of his commitment to rationalism. The majority of Pamuk's critics characterize him as a relativist,⁷ or a skeptical postmodernist,⁸ but Marshall Berman, on the contrary, maintains that Pamuk would probably die for ideas including modernity, the Enlightenment, and secular humanism.⁹

This article seeks to interpret Pamuk's emerging optimism in *Snow* concerning the rise of political Islam and the future of democracy in Turkey from a culturalist perspective on modernization and development, which holds that some cultures are more suitable for social, political, and economic progress than others.¹⁰ Within this context, this article maintains that, in contradistinction to Pamuk's earlier novels, the lack of a reference to religio-cultural obstacles to individuation, modernity, and even democracy in *Snow* is unconvincing. To go a step further, Pamuk's covert argument for Islamic modernity in *Snow* (which is a variation of the multiple modernities theory) at the expense of a westernized secular polity in Turkey is insufficiently grounded. Arguably, Pamuk's earlier novels are based on a more sober understanding of the connection between culture and progress. For example, in *The Black Book*, Pamuk is bitterly critical of the state-led Turkish modernization project and its benevolently despotic masterminds for seeking to abandon Turkey's traditional values and identity. Paradoxically, however, he does not engage in a concrete attempt to vindicate those traditions or offer a viable political alternative to state-led westernization or secular modernity.¹¹ Rather, in *My Name is Red* Pamuk suggests that westernization in the Ottoman Empire and in the later Turkish Republic is bound to fail because of deep-seated religious and cultural traditions that hinder the prospects for

⁷ Stone, "Minarets and Plastic Bags," 197.

⁸ Walter G. Andrews, "The Black Book and Black Boxes: Orhan Pamuk's *Kara Kitap*," *Edebiyat* 11, no. 1 (2000): 112; Aylin Bayrakçeken and Don Randall, "Meetings of East and West: Orhan Pamuk's Istanbulite Perspective," *Critique* 46, no. 3 (2005): 202.

⁹ Marshall Berman, "Orhan Pamuk and Modernist Liberalism," *Dissent* 56, no. 2 (2009): 114.

¹⁰ Lawrence E. Harrison, "Promoting Progressive Cultural Change," in *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, ed. Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 296.

¹¹ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Vintage Books, [1990] 2006).

individuation and modernity. For audiences familiar with his earlier novels, *Snow* is extraordinary because there Pamuk suggests that the only glimmer of hope for Turkish modernization comes from Islamists. This, however, signifies less a shift in Pamuk's political loyalties than a problematic self-rebuttal of his earlier criticism of religio-cultural traditions in Turkey as obstacles to individuality, modernization, and political development.¹²

Ultimately, of course, numerous statements about identity, change, and modernization in Pamuk's novels do not constitute a political theory. The attempt to hold the artist up to the standards of theoretical rigor, or consistency, is warranted only to the extent that it contributes to a wider debate between the proponents of westernization and the multiple modernities theory in the Near Eastern context. Therefore, this article begins with a brief account of Pamuk's objection to Turkey's state-led modernist tradition based on *The Black Book*. What follows serves as a critical exposition of Pamuk's contrasting views on characteristic Eastern or Islamic values, most notably the lack of individuality or the prejudice against it in *My Name is Red*, and the prospects for its emergence in *Snow*. At this stage, suffice it to state that Pamuk's focus on individuality and derivative values is not accidental; as the contemporary German academic philosopher Habermas once remarked, individuality is the quintessential modern value.¹³ That is, from an epistemological perspective, individuality acts as the fountainhead, and other modern values such as intellectual skepticism, political liberty, and social progress flow from it.

*Pamuk's
focus on
individuality
not incidental.*

The Black Book and Political Criticism

Within the context of his earlier novels, Pamuk most lucidly repudiates the state-led Turkish modernization project and its benevolently despotic masterminds in *The Black Book*, which is considered to be his magnum opus due to its innovative

¹² Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, trans. Erdağ M. Göknar (New York: Vintage Books, [1998] 2002); Orhan Pamuk, *Snow*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Vintage Books, [2002] 2004).

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 1-2.

dimension and artistic impact. *The Black Book* is the story of the dreamy lawyer Galip in search of his wife and cousin Rüya who deserted him for another cousin, the elusive columnist Celal. The narrative of Galip's quest for the deserting couple over and under Istanbul is laden with esoteric and exoteric references to cultural change and reformist leaders throughout modern Turkish history, including Kemal Atatürk and Sultan Mahmud the Second. However, Pamuk's critique of modernization in the novel lacks a constructive dimension, as it does not offer a viable political response to the circumstances, especially the sense of civilizational decline, which originally prompted Turkey's reformist statesmen to opt for westernization.

Pamuk's
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According to hostile critics, Pamuk's repudiation of the secular republican project and its principal founder suggests that the novelist is in denial of his own privileged background. Pamuk is the grandson of a railway tycoon who had made his fortune during the early years of the Turkish republic when the founding president Atatürk was still in power, and his family had close ties with the governing elite of the time. However, tracing his paternal roots to the Islamic clergy in the provincial Aegean town of Gördes in Manisa, Pamuk also partakes of a traditionalist heritage.¹⁴ (In his first novel, the semi-autobiographical *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*, Pamuk provides a detailed account of his ancestral family traditions.)¹⁵ If anything, the maze of personal influences on Pamuk accounts for the diverse texture and the conflictive elements in his novels, traits that won him international acclaim.

In *The Black Book*, Pamuk makes use of esoteric literary devices in order to rebuke Atatürk. (In the heyday of the Islamic civilization, before philosophy was banned altogether in the twelfth century A.D., Islamic philosophers such as Al-Farabi had made use of esoteric literary devices in order to fend off possible charges of heresy.¹⁶ In contrast, Pamuk's

¹⁴ Cemal A. Kalyoncu, "Valla Yahudi Değilim [I Swear I'm Not a Jew]," *Aksiyon*, June 10, 2002. According to Kalyoncu, Pamuk's maternal grandfather Cevdet Ferit resigned from his professorship at the Istanbul University in 1933 after Atatürk's educational reforms.

¹⁵ Orhan Pamuk, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları [Cevdet Bey and His Sons]* (Istanbul: Karacan Yayınları, 1982).

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: The University

discretion in hiding his intentions is due to the secular Turkish public's sensitivity over Atatürk, particularly against slurs by religionist circles, as well as to legal limitations on free expression.) Early in *The Black Book*, the narrator refers in passing to "the story about the crazy and perverted sultan who had spent his childhood running amok with his sister, chasing crows in a vegetable patch. . . ."17 Although the story of an Ottoman sultan chasing crows in a vegetable patch was unheard of before the publication of *The Black Book* (after all, saving the family plot from ravagers is an activity reserved for the plebian class), the Turkish public is well aware of Atatürk's history of chasing crows with his sister during a brief period in his childhood.18 Seven chapters later, an unnamed prostitute provides a follow-up to Pamuk's perplexing reference to a crazy and perverted sultan: she refers to "the last testament of that queer, the last sultan. . . ."19 Since Atatürk founded the Turkish republic and thereby abolished the Ottoman sultanate, there cannot be another sultan after his likeness, or the sultan who chased crows. Hence, Pamuk's attentive readers are led to associate the crazy and perverted sultan who chased crows with the last sultan who was queer (thus, becoming partners in crime). On this occasion, the unnamed prostitute adds that her car's license plate number is, "34 CG 19 Mayıs [May] 1919. This is the day Atatürk left Istanbul to liberate Anatolia from invading western powers."20

*Veiled
references to
Atatürk.*

Pamuk is equally hostile in his references to Sultan Mahmud the Second (reign 1808-1839), who spearheaded a westernization movement in the Ottoman Empire, which ultimately culminated in the founding of the modernist Turkish republic in 1923. To this end, an unnamed character in the novel (the mysterious man on the phone) refers to

of Chicago Press, 1980), 17-8.

¹⁷ Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 92.

¹⁸ Following the premature death of his father and consequent financial difficulties, Atatürk's family had temporarily taken refuge in an uncle's farm in today's Greek Macedonia. The melodramatic episode is part of the standard Atatürk narrative in Turkish schools, and it conveys the sense that personal genius and determination can overcome obstacles on the way.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

an “engraving that shows Sultan Mahmut II copulating in disguise in a dark Istanbul street, his legs naked but for his boots,” adding that his favorite wife “appears in the same engraving, looking as if she hasn’t a worry in the world and wearing a cross made of diamonds and rubies.”²¹ The mysterious man on the phone claims that Sultan Mahmud the Second secretly met with his wives and concubines who were “disguised as Western whores” in different parts of the city.²²

Pamuk’s gibes at Atatürk and Sultan Mahmud the Second in *The Black Book* are probably motivated by his discontent with the state-led Turkish modernization project and its consequences. In this vein, five disparate characters in the novel lament unopposed over the personal and political consequences of identity loss and the modernist Turkish state’s role in undermining the heritage of the past, without suggesting a viable political alternative. For example, in his newspaper column, Celal (the novel’s protagonist Galip’s romantic rival, target of pursuit, and eventual role model) describes a nightmarish existence which comes into being with the absence of memory: “a nameless, featureless, odorless, colorless world where time itself had stopped. . . .”²³ This description serves as a metaphor for the modernist Turkish ethos, which seeks to systematically undermine past traditions. Subsequently, Galip reiterates similar sentiments within a more political context.

Once upon a time, they had all lived together, and their lives had had meaning, but then, for some unknown reason, they had lost that meaning, just as they’d also lost their memories. Every time they tried to recover that meaning, every time they ventured into that spider-infested labyrinth of memory, they got lost; as they wandered about the blind alleys of their minds, searching for a way back, the key to their new life fell into the bottomless well of their memories; knowing it was lost to them forever, they felt the helpless pain known only by those who have lost their homes, their countries, their past, their history. The pain they felt at being lost and far from home was intense, and so hard to bear, that their only hope was to stop trying to remember the secret, the lost meaning they’d come here to seek. . . .²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 358.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 134.

²⁴ Ibid., 194.

Galip's reference to the "helpless pain" of the new people who have lost their memories but are ill at ease at in their new and rootless identities can unmistakably be taken as a critique of westernization, or a critique of the quest for a westernized Turkish identity.

Arguably, Pamuk's most poignant criticism of westernization in Turkey comes in the penultimate chapter of *The Black Book*, when Galip comes across the story of an imaginary Ottoman crown prince's (or *şehzade's*) quest for his authentic self-identity, but this also does not lead to a political pathway. For crown prince Osman Celalettin Efendi, the fundamental question of his people was, "How to be oneself?"²⁵ Without a proper solution to its identity problems, his country could not be saved from "destruction, enslavement, and defeat."²⁶ Thus, "[A]ll peoples who are unable to be themselves, all civilizations that imitate other civilizations, all those nations who find happiness in other people's stories were doomed to be crushed, destroyed, and forgotten."²⁷ However, Osman Celalettin Efendi's attempt, through austere self-isolation, to discover his authentic self-identity before possibly emerging to guide his country out of its spiritual crisis and impending doom, ends in his literal and figurative demise. Evidently, then, cultural self-isolation and shutting Turkey off from outside influences is dismissed as an unrealistic alternative to westernization, which first emerged as a practical response to increased western dominance in Ottoman Turkey's international relations.²⁸

Pamuk's answer to identity woes emerges by the end of the novel, but this answer is only of a personal nature and devoid of any political sense. The novel's protagonist Galip goes through a process of comprehensive identity

²⁵ Ibid., 419.

²⁶ Ibid., 420.

²⁷ Ibid., 429 (emphasis in the original).

²⁸ The other two characters in *The Black Book* who lament over the consequences of identity loss and modernization are Rüya's ex-husband (126-27) and the mysterious man on the phone (362). Note that a crucial reference to an "authentic self-identity (kendi 'öz' kimliğinde)" in Galip's exchange with Rüya's ex-husband is omitted in the novel's English translation. Compare, Orhan Pamuk, *Kara Kitap [The Black Book]* (Istanbul: Can Yayınları), 120, and Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Vintage Books, [1990] 2006), 130.

transformation. Unable to reach his target of pursuit, Galip gradually internalizes Celal's identity by moving into his house, using his furniture, wearing his clothes, writing his columns, and acting as if he is Celal in interviews and phone conversations. (He may even have had a role in the romantic couple's unresolved murder.) However, Galip's choice to be by becoming someone else is not paradoxical in the context of *The Black Book*, which is partly a criticism of westernization in Turkey. By assuming the identity of a defunct columnist, Galip becomes a writer; that is, far from forgoing his original self-identity, he authenticates it through continual artistic self-expression.

My Name is Red

Deep-seated religious and cultural obstacles to elitist modernization movements described.

If a political reading of *The Black Book* points out the alleged costs of westernization in Turkey without suggesting a concrete political response to Western dominance, then, from a political point of view, Pamuk's sense of helplessness or pessimism goes a step further in his international big hit *My Name is Red*. There, Pamuk dwells on the lack of individuality and its negative connotations in the East, and clearly suggests that elitist modernization movements in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish republic are bound to fail in attaining their ends because of deep-seated religious and cultural values. There are, however, slight references to an undercurrent of Western influence, cultural-valuational change, and modernization in the novel. These changes are arguably due to globalization, and by and large develop outside the reformist elite's grasp or even awareness. They can barely be interpreted as the forerunners of Pamuk's emerging optimism regarding the prospects of Islamic modernity and political Islam in *Snow*.

My Name is Red's plot is built on a murder in the sixteenth-century Ottoman miniature (small painting) and calligraphy community in the imperial capital city of Istanbul. The gradual unraveling of the mystery behind the crime serves to showcase an imaginary attempt at Western-minded artistic innovation, slightly past the zenith of the Ottoman era. Throughout the novel Pamuk contrasts Eastern and Western artistic characteristics, and the irreconcilable religious and cultural differences that lie beneath them. From a politico-cultural perspective,

My Name is Red draws a pessimistic conclusion. Contrary to expectations, the murderous conflict between the reformist and traditionalist Ottoman miniaturists does not lead to an artistic synthesis; instead, the art of painting is altogether abandoned.²⁹

In *My Name is Red*, Pamuk by and large equates the withering away of traditional values and practices, or modernization, with westernization. Enishte Effendi, the instigator of artistic reform in the novel, had in youth visited Venice on official duty, in order to deliver a letter of diplomatic threat demanding the Mediterranean island of Cyprus from the Venetians. Although Effendi's impudent mission had infuriated his hosts and he was barely able to escape death in their hands, Effendi was deeply moved by his impression of European culture and civilization. Consequently, he convinced the Ottoman sultan to sponsor a series of Occidental style paintings by royal Islamic calligraphers. These paintings were to be placed in an Oriental style book of calligraphies and be gifted to the Venetian Doge (chief magistrate). In this, Effendi had two objectives, and Pamuk's delineation of these objectives serves as a glimpse into the modernizing Turkish elites' emotional and psychological state in their dealings with the West. First, "[S]o that the Venetian Doge might say to himself, 'Just as the Ottoman miniaturists have come to see the world like us, so have the Ottomans themselves come to resemble us,' in turn accepting Our Sultan's power and friendship."³⁰ Second, by delivering his book of eclectic art, he would have occasion to visit Venice once more in his lifetime. Now an old man, Enishte Effendi's long-standing yearning for Venice was so powerful that he had begun to identify himself with Western patrons of the arts. As his daughter Shekure muses in the novel: "Was Black [her suitor] as surprised as I was that my father referred to those infidel gentlemen who had their pic-

²⁹ Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, 411. According to Michael McGaha, Pamuk plays with historical facts for increased dramatic impact. In reality, the era of miniature painting in Istanbul was significantly longer than claimed in *My Name is Red*. See Michael McGaha, *Autobiographies of Orhan Pamuk: The Writer in His Novels*. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), 148. The abrupt end to artistic synthesis and western-oriented reform in the novel might possibly be an allusion to the expected life span of the secular Turkish republic.

³⁰ Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, 266.

tures made as 'we'?"³¹

Interestingly, Enishte Effendi is not the only oriental modernist in Pamuk's novels who partly or completely rejects his Eastern identity due to an implicit sense of inferiority or a strong yearning for the Western civilization. However, all of these fictional characters share similar fates. In *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*, Ömer, who returns to Istanbul with a youthful sense of enthusiasm after completing his engineering studies in London, and, in *The House of Silence*, Selahattin, the Enlightenment era throwback encyclopedist, both eventually fall into despair and choose to lead reclusive lives.³² In *The White Castle*, the reclusive pseudo-scientist Hoja goes through an identity transformation, completely sheds his Eastern identity, and eventually flees to Venice claiming to be one of them.³³ In *My Name is Red*, the westernizing modernizer Enishte Effendi suffers violent death at the hands of a guilt-ridden Islamic disciple, and his reformist project withers away. Thus, Pamuk mimics a prevalent conservative criticism against full-fledged secular modernization, or westernization, in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic: that the rootless project, along with its authors, is bound to be rejected by the people of the land.

Negative connotations of Western individuality in Near East place limits on modernist reform.

Beyond the generalities about cultural self-alienation and failure, in *My Name is Red* Pamuk delves into a discussion of the Western notion of individuality and its negative connotations in the Islamic Near East. Pamuk's focus on individuality and its derivatives is not accidental given the scholarly argument that individuality is the quintessential modern value. Hence, Pamuk's treatment of the negative connotations of individuality in Islamic civilization helps to underscore the limits of modernist reform in the Near East.

In Islamic civilization, individuality is a source of shame and embarrassment. For both the miniaturist and the beholder of his paintings, any trace of a personal style is an artistic defect and a sign of religious infidelity. Miniaturists abide by the style of their academy but otherwise abstain from personalized elements in their works and absolutely do not sign them. "Where

³¹ Ibid., 137.

³² Orhan Pamuk, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları [Cevdet Bey and His Sons]*; Orhan Pamuk, *Sessiz Ev [The House of Silence]*, (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 1983).

³³ Orhan Pamuk, *The White Castle*, trans. Victoria Holbrook (New York: Braziller Publishing, [1985] 1991).

there is true art and genuine virtuosity the artist can paint an incomparable masterpiece without even leaving a trace of his identity."³⁴ In this context, portraits are shunned, faces and bodies are drawn identically, distinctions of age, rank, and status are solely marked by costume and equipment. Hence, Master Stork praises another miniaturist specifically for showing a total lack of a personality in his works. "Tall Mehmet drew everything as everyone else did, in the style of the great masters of the old, but even more so, and for this reason, he was the greatest of all masters."³⁵

Pamuk's characters posit a religious reason why individuality is considered to be a moral and an artistic defect in the East. The conservative Master Olive, who in the end turns out to be the rambling murderer, states that, "It was Satan who first said 'I! It was Satan who adopted a style. It was Satan who separated East from West."³⁶

Individuality considered a moral and artistic defect.

Miniaturists who seek perfection in the indistinguishable appearance of their works believe that, by doing so, they aspire to see the world as God does. As God sees things in only one way, perfect miniatures are bound to resemble each other. A miniaturist attains the height of his art when struck by blindness because only at that point can he start to draw not as the eye sees things but as the eye of the mind sees them (that is, merely by relying on memory).³⁷

In parallel, the Western use of perspective contradicts divine wisdom. According to the conservative miniaturist Elegant Effendi, in paintings sponsored by Enishte Effendi, "objects weren't depicted according to their importance in Allah's mind, but as they appeared to the naked eye—the way the Franks painted."³⁸ Elsewhere, Enishte Effendi himself describes the use of perspective as "a sin of desire, like growing arrogant before God, like considering oneself of utmost importance, like situating oneself at the center of the world."³⁹

The use of perspective, the distinct and all too real appear-

³⁴ Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 286.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 391.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

Use of
perspective
in Western
portraiture
viewed as
hubristic or
idolatrous.

ance of a Western portrait (as a challenge to God's creative monopoly), and the immortality achieved by being painted in this way causes several of the characters in *My Name is Red*, including the reformists Enishte and Elegant, to associate the Western art of portraiture with "idolaters", "paganism", and "pagan worship."⁴⁰ In the same vein, Master Olive interprets the emergence of Western style painting in the Islamic East as "an affront to our religion" whereas the moderate Master Stork sees in it a challenge to the hold of traditional or "old morality" in the workshop.⁴¹

"If you begin
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differently."

For Pamuk's conflicting miniaturists, what is at stake is more than the future of an artistic tradition. As Enishte Effendi succinctly summarizes, "if you begin to draw a horse differently, you begin to see the world differently."⁴² Yet, growing Western influence on the Orient emerges as an inevitable undercurrent in *My Name is Red*. The cultural purist-Islamic reactionary Master Olive aspired to "remain pure" and immune from Western methods and influences,⁴³ but this was easier said than done. Therefore, in a fit of self-remorse, he murdered his patron Enishte Effendi for tempting him through the lure of gold money.⁴⁴ When his crimes were revealed, Master Olive sought to flee Istanbul for Mughal, India, in the East, which he believed to be culturally pristine. But just before his impending escape, Black (who took the lead in unveiling Olive's criminal identity) said to him that Western methods are spreading everywhere. "Did you know that Akhbar Khan encouraged all his artists to sign their work? The Jesuit priests of Portugal long ago introduced European painting and methods

⁴⁰ Ibid., 391, 127, 446.

⁴¹ Ibid., 101, 94.

⁴² Ibid., 266.

⁴³ Ibid., 401.

⁴⁴ Apart from the lure of gold money, Master Olive may have been subconsciously swayed by Western culture in another way. Once the list of suspected murderers was narrowed down to Enishte Effendi's hires for his westernist art project, his criminal identity was revealed through a vague element of personal style in his contribution (which was then matched to the same element of personal style in his traditionally executed miniatures). However, unless Pamuk intended to portray his prototypical Islamic reactionary as a hypocrite or as someone thoroughly lacking in self-knowledge, a vague element of personal style in Master Olive's classical miniatures should be attributed to an artistic imperfection or an academic attachment.

there. They are everywhere now."⁴⁵

Ultimately, then, Pamuk makes his readers realize that there is not an easy solution to the prevalent dilemma of the lesser-developed world. On the one hand, modernization is the quest for human dignity in the face of competition from a rival civilization. The choice of holding on to sacred traditions despite hostile challenges may in all likelihood lead to political subjugation and indignity. On the other hand, the success of a cultural change program is at best piecemeal, and the adoption of the ways and means of another civilization, in order to counter its dominance, is undignified and possibly redundant. In this vein, Master Olive forewarns Black and other moderates who are prone to encounter a growing demand for stylistic change and cultural adaptation that, "For the rest of your lives you'll do nothing but emulate the Franks for the sake of an individual style But precisely because you emulate the Franks you'll never attain an individual style."⁴⁶

Snow

Pamuk's communitarian conservatives in *My Name is Red* stand in sharp contrast to his individualized modern Islamists in *Snow*. From a culturalist perspective primarily focused on modernization, *Snow* is Pamuk's only optimistic work. There Pamuk overtly takes on the perennial and temporal fault lines of Turkish politics and society, and suggests that the glimmer of hope for Turkish modernization comes from Islamists. He does not explain why and how the religio-cultural obstacles to individuality and modernization disappeared from one novel to the other, but conjecture leads to the influence of globalization and the inevitability of changing times. As such, Pamuk's covert argument for Islamic modernity in *Snow*

⁴⁵ Ibid. Although this is a clear reference to the transformative influence of globalization and the dispersion of Western ideas, it cannot readily be associated with their natural ease or subconscious workings because India's Islamic Mughal Emperor Akhbar Khan is widely considered to be among history's greatest benevolent despots. See John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Vol. XVIII – Essays on Politics and Society Part I (On Liberty)*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963-1991), 224.

⁴⁶ Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, 401.

seems insufficiently grounded.

Snow narrates a political, social, and psychological confrontation between members of the secular republican establishment and a burgeoning Islamist movement in Kars, a poor and remote provincial town in northeastern Turkey. Its plot revolves around a makeshift military coup d'état attempt ahead of an impending electoral victory by the Islamic party in Kars. Contrary to stereotypical expectations, Pamuk's hard-line secularists are neither sufficiently modern and progressive nor self-assured. They have a superficial understanding of and commitment to Enlightenment ideals but are willing to take recourse to arms when their arguments fail to convince others. They look back at the past accomplishments of the secular republican founders in the 1920s and 1930s and are, therefore, always on the defensive. That is, they are out of touch with the current social and political realities of Turkey and contemporary patterns of change in the West. In contrast, turbaned women, terrorists, and other Islamists in *Snow* are curious about the West and are going through a process of individuation and change, or modernization.

The novel's protagonist Ka, who arrives in Kars in order to write an investigative newspaper report on a series of suicides by turbaned Islamic women, is fatally bogged down in a confrontation between secular republicans and political Islamists. Just like Pamuk the novelist, his creation Ka the poet is born and raised in the wealthy bourgeois district of Nişantaşı in Istanbul, and, although Ka conceives of himself as a mediator, he is received with distrust and skepticism in both camps. A secular nationalist refers to him as a "porridge-hearted liberal" and a "bird-brained fantasist."⁴⁷ "As for the people like you, you love to trash the army even while you depend on it to keep the Islamists from cutting you up into little pieces."⁴⁸ The Islamist perception of Ka is equally disparaging: "You're a Western agent. You're the slave of the ruthless Europeans According to your kind, the road to a good moral life is not through God or religion, or through taking part in the life of the common people—no, it's just a matter of imitating the West."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Pamuk, *Snow*, 218.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 350.

The suicides by turbaned Islamic women which brought Ka to Kars are motivated by a variety of reasons, including a reaction against the nationwide ban on displaying religious symbols and costumes in educational institutions, forced marriages, and—in one case—a rumor questioning a turbaned damsel's chastity. Their choice of suicide as a form of protest against political authority and familial or social pressures suggests that even zealously Islamic women in *Snow* are individuated moderns; the Islamic tradition shuns disobedience and suicide is a very grave sin. Pamuk provides additional information that suggests that these turbaned Islamic women are not suppressed vestiges of traditionalism. Their decisions to wear the Islamic turban are presented as individual choices; hence, as a modern or postmodern protest against Turkey's state-led modernization project rather than a result of traditional influences such as social pressures or domestic violence. In referring to one of the girls who committed suicide, Ka states that, "despite her parents' express wish that she remove her head scarf, the girl refused, thus ensuring that she herself would be removed, by the police and on many occasions, from the halls of the Institute of Education."⁵⁰ Furthermore, although the turbaned women in *Snow* come from traditional Islamic families, there is the exception of Kadife whose father is an atheist. She had originally joined the throngs of turbaned Islamic women, who are excluded from schools and universities due to secular dress codes, solely to express her sense of sympathy and solidarity. At the same time, Kadife is the mistress of the Islamic terrorist Blue, and her premarital affair is at odds with the idea of a traditional Islamic damsel. She displays individual independence.

*Traditionalism
as individual
expression.*

The Islamic terrorist Blue is also untraditional in that he possesses individuated and modern traits. He is an electronics engineer by training and has lived in Europe. The rebel son of a conservative Muslim, at first he became "a godless leftist,"⁵¹ but later rediscovered Islam on his own. "I was an electronics engineer. Because of the hatred I felt for the West, I admired the revolution in Iran. I returned to Islam."⁵² A similar in-

⁵⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁵¹ Ibid., 347.

⁵² Ibid., 348.

dividuated born-again Muslim trait appears in the mayoral candidate of the Islamic party in Kars. Muhtar was formerly an atheist and a leftist. The son of a provincial bourgeois, Muhtar went to university in Istanbul and aspired to become a “westernized, modern, self-possessed individual.”⁵³ Years later, he returned to Kars as a washed-up pseudo-intellectual and felt that he did not fit into Kars anymore. Gradually, he became a disciple of the underground religious community leader Sheikh Saadetin Efendi. “Something was happening that I had secretly dreaded for a long time and that in my atheist years I would have denounced as weakness and backwardness: I was returning to Islam.”⁵⁴ The untraditional source of Muhtar’s newfound religiosity is attested by the fact that he had to buy “a how-to-pray manual at the bookseller’s.”⁵⁵

Even those Islamists with unqualifiedly traditional backgrounds in the novel are prone to defy stereotypes. For example, Necip who is a devoutly religious student of the local imam-preacher high school (*imam hatip lisesi*) expresses traces of doubt concerning the existence of God. “There is another voice inside me that tells me, ‘Don’t believe in God.’ Because when you devote so much of your heart to believing something exists, you can’t help having a little, a little voice that asks, ‘What if it doesn’t?’”⁵⁶ Although it becomes clear in the novel that Necip is far from being a full-blown religious skeptic, such expressions of doubt run against common stereotypes about imam-preacher high schools, which are hotbeds of Islamic revivalism in Turkey.

In contrast to individuating or modernizing Islamists in *Snow* who defy popular stereotypes, Pamuk’s depiction of hard-line secularists is caricatural. They are not able to defend their grounds on an intellectual plane; consequently, they are pathologically idealistic, exhibit authoritarian tendencies, and are prone to violence when conservative social realities clash with their enlightenment utopianism. Thus, for instance, the loose cannon secular nationalist paramilitary Zeki Demirkol sums up his political philosophy in a nutshell: “You have got

⁵³ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 145.

to kill them before they kill you.”⁵⁷

The other leaders of the secular republican coalition behind the coup d'état attempt in Kars are a mid-rank soldier and a washed-up theatre actor. Pamuk's portrayal of Sunay Zaim suggests that the actor is out of touch with current political realities and patterns of social change in Turkey. Zaim had originally arrived in Kars in order to stage a play and was coincidentally convinced by Demirkol to become the public leader of the coup d'état. According to his wife, the theme of Zaim's play is that “the scarf, the fez, the turban, and the headdress were symbols of the reactionary darkness in our souls, from which we should liberate ourselves and run to join the modern nations of the West.”⁵⁸ Snow's narrator defines Zaim's play, which represents the Enlightenment idealism or zeal of the early republican generations, as “desperately old fashioned” and “primitive.”⁵⁹ Zaim is outdated because his secular revolutionary idealism contradicts the liberal democratic ethos. Zaim's only reservation against leading a coup d'état in Kars was the risk of ruining the artistic integrity of his play, but he later convinced himself that he would be hitting two birds with one stone: unveiling an Islamic woman in a play acted and directed by a revolutionary leader would be an artistic triumph with political consequences.⁶⁰

The only dialogue between the director of the Kars Institute of Education and his Islamic assassin points to a substantial void in the theoretical foundations of the secular Turkish republic. The Turkish state and its servants are either unwilling or unable to convince an Islamic populace of the advantages of secularism. When his assassin asks, “How can you reconcile God's command with this decision to ban covered girls from the classroom?” the education director responds that “We live in a secular state and the state has banned covered girls, from schools as well as classrooms.”⁶¹ In the same vein, when his assassin asks, “Can a law imposed by the state cancel out God's law?” the education director responds: “That's

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

a very good question. But in a secular state these matters are separate.”⁶² The Islamic terrorist insists on questions related to the true nature of a secular state but fails to get a satisfactory reply: “Honestly my son. Arguing about such things will get you nowhere. They argue about it day and night on Istanbul television, and where does it get us?”⁶³ Ultimately, the director of education brings forth two arguments at gunpoint. First, although many aspects of Islamic law are abandoned in Muslim communities throughout the modern world, Turkish Islamists are exclusively focused on women’s right to wear religious costumes in school. Second, a liberalization of the dress code in education would inevitably compel secular women to conform to conservative social pressure.

*Turkish
secularism
lacks effective
philosophical
grounding.*

The republican intelligentsia’s inability to develop or unwillingness to defend an argument for secularism that can convince an Islamic public is at the root of current political crisis in Turkey. In fact, despite their loyalty to the state and the constitution, the secular citizens of the republic typically do not have a different philosophical grounding than the rest of the populace. Hence, modernization in Turkey is not so much based on philosophical conviction or logical argumentation as it is on habituation. If anything, the authoritarian foundations of the secular consensus and the persistent (and at times violent) Islamic reactionism render argumentation unnecessary and dangerous for both sides of the political divide. Secularist leaders are wary of offending the public conscience by providing a thoroughgoing defense of secularism or a critique of Islamic theology, and religionists have until recently been forced to operate underground in their struggle against modernity and the separation between church and state. Thus, everyone in Turkey has to take into account legal and conventional limitations against free expression.

On the surface of it, *Snow’s* pessimistic ending reflects Pamuk’s disappointment with more of the same: the sublime secular republican Zaim commits suicide on stage before the unraveling of his coup d’état attempt; his ally the nationalist paramilitary Demirkol murders the Islamic terrorist Blue before it is too late but escapes a serious punishment for his

⁶² Ibid., 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 44.

actions in the newly restored status quo; and radical Islamists assassinate the liberal democrat Ka for allegedly betraying Blue's hiding place. However, from a culturalist perspective focused on modernization, the emergence of Islamic individuality in *Snow* reflects a sense of hope and optimism on the part of its author. Pamuk's atypical Islamists in *Snow* are individuated, politically nonconformist, and showing signs of intellectual skepticism. Thus, they are presented as the potential engines of a progressive Turkish modernity. There is no doubt that a possible modernization process to be led by the Islamists would be quite different from what the westernized or secular Turkish modernists had envisaged, but from an Orientalist perspective, they have genuine ties to their society and, therefore, Islamic modernity offers a more tenable alternative for Turkey than westernization.

Pamuk's critique of Turkish modernity takes a constructive turn in *Snow*, but there are sticking points. Above all, Pamuk does not explain the intellectual grounds of the transformation from communitarian Muslim conservatives in one novel to individualized modern Islamists in the next. Hence, in *My Name is Red* the devout Muslim reactionary Master Olive rejects two values which he thought to be concomitant: westernization and individuality. In contrast, westernization is rejected in *Snow*, but not individuality or modernity. The Islamic terrorist Blue states: "I'm standing up against the Westerners as an individual; its because I *am* an individual that I refuse to imitate them."⁶⁴ Arguably, Pamuk is silent on the theoretical grounds of this pioneering sense of Islamic individuality in the novel because there are no such grounds. However, if Islamic individuality in Turkey is simply rooted in a social or historical context, such as the influence of globalization or the advent of modern times, then its claim to modernity is as shaky as that of the secularists who are exposed to exactly the same external environment and can easily be turned against itself. If the state-led model of secular modernity failed to take root in society or to re-define itself since its heyday in the early twentieth century because it failed to develop a guiding theoretical framework, then how is it possible to expect a more progres-

⁶⁴ Ibid., 351.

sive outcome from an alleged sense of Islamic individuality? Even if Islamic modernity is an inevitable consequence of sociological change, isn't there a need for a theoretical response to the tension between a de facto sense of modern individuality and a religio-cultural sense of communitarianism?

Conclusion

The question remains as to how accurate the novelist's observations are in *Snow* concerning individuated Islamists in the context of contemporary Turkey. It can be said that these observations run parallel to those of some notable sociologists of religion who mainly focus on Islamic youth in Europe. For example, Olivier Roy extensively argues that contemporary radical Islamists in the West are modern.⁶⁵ "Most radicalized youth in Europe are Western educated, often in technical and scientific fields. Very few come out of a traditional *madrassa*, and most experience a period of fully Westernized life, complete with alcohol and girlfriends."⁶⁶ Similarly, Nilüfer Göle extensively argues that veiled Islamic university students in Turkey and the West are modern.⁶⁷ According to Göle, veiled Islamic women are not the relics of a tradition that subject women to servitude, but free and independent individuals who are experimenting with modernity instead of dispiritedly emulating the Western paradigm. Thus, they are contributing to the making of local or multiple modernities. However, Pamuk's notion of free and individuated Islamists in the provincial Turkish setting may smack of an idealistic vision rather than an accurate representation of the current social reality, which is largely patriarchic and repressive. More importantly, even the proponents of the Islamic modernity thesis, including Roy and Göle, are aware that modern Islamic individuality does not necessarily lead to liberating ends.⁶⁸ Islamized youth in Europe and Turkey voluntarily join repressive, or non-individ-

⁶⁵ Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004).

⁶⁶ Olivier Roy, "EuroIslam: The Jihad Within?" *The National Interest*, 73 (Spring 2003): 64.

⁶⁷ Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996).

⁶⁸ Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 232; Nilüfer Göle, "Islam, European Public Space and Civility," in *Religion in the New Europe*, ed. Krzysztof Michalski (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 124.

uating, religious communities. There is not an inherent reason why modern Islamic individuality should lead to a free and democratic polity. Indeed, ever since the publication of *Snow* in 2002, Islamists have been undisputedly at the helm of the state in Turkey, and a staggering number of secularist opinion leaders have been in jail.