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The Occidental Frame: Orientalism and the Idea of the West in Turkey

By

Philip Balboni

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge

Professor Charles Hirschkind, Chair

Professor Xin Liu

Professor William F. Hanks

Professor Deniz Göktürk

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Abstract

The Occidental Frame: Orientalism and the Idea of the West in Turkey

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Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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Professor Charles Hirschkind, Chair

This dissertation investigates how an imaginary of East/West difference has continued to shape political subjectivities, historical understandings, and embodied conceptions of national belonging in Turkey. It draws together theories and methods from anthropology, history, political science, and comparative literature to explore how this imaginary has impacted domestic politics, social struggles, historical interpretations, and contests over the grounds and expression of cultural identity. With close attention to how the “idea” or “fantasy” of the West emerged in the late Ottoman period, developed under the threat of European colonization, and then became integral to a variety of transformative political projects (including “Kemalism,” the political ideology attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the more recent “Erdoğanism” attributed to current president Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party, “AKP”), this dissertation examines the cultural forms, modes of historical understanding, and conceptions of national belonging that ideas of East/West difference—and of the “idea of the West” in particular—have enabled, the others they have suppressed, and the social and political futures these ideas may catalyze or foreclose.

For my parents

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Introduction

In her 2002 ethnography, *Faces of the State*, the anthropologist Yael Navaro describes an experience on a Turkish Airlines flight from Istanbul to New York in the 1990s. During the flight, a Turkish passenger suddenly began to yell and try to kick the father of an Arab family who had lain down on the floor next to his family's seats. Seeming intoxicated, the Turkish passenger shouted "this is Turkish plane!," implying that while such behavior might be tolerated wherever the family came from, it was impermissible on a *Turkish* plane. After the irate passenger was reseated by flight attendants, a different Turkish man sitting next to Navaro commented that, while the passenger was "crazy," the "Arab guy also doesn't know how to behave."¹

Although taking place some thirty years ago, this incident is emblematic of an enduring politics of identity and history in Turkey,² wherein the question of Turkey's "geohistorical"³ position in regards to Europe and the West⁴ is charged with great significance. The intensity of this question, as Navaro notes, has often manifested in a felt need to present "the best possible image of Turkey" to "the eyes of Westerners," often by policing "the distinction between Turks and Arabs."⁵ Yet it has just as easily manifested in efforts to stress the commonality of Turks and Arabs within an "Eastern" civilizational inheritance, radically distinct from what Mustafa Kemal "Atatürk,"⁶ Turkey's founder, often referred to as "Western civilization" (*Garp Medeniyeti*). Indeed, at issue in this question is not Westernism or anti-Westernism *per se* but rather a kind of existential indeterminacy, which Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar—who Orhan Pamuk has called the greatest Turkish novelist and whose current status as a pioneer of modern Turkish letters developed decades after his death in 1962—

¹ Navaro 2002, 44

² The Republic of Turkey changed its name in international correspondence to The Republic of Türkiye in 2022, after a petition from President Erdoğan's government was approved by the UN—"Türkiye" being the exact spelling of the country's name in Turkish. I have struggled with the decision of whether to use the new official name in this dissertation, and at times have landed on one side, at times on the other. From one perspective, the name change is a nationalist and unilateral decision by Erdoğan's government, akin to if Germany demanded it be referred to as Deutschland in all international/institutional communiques. From another perspective, this is a country asking to jettison a name that carries homophonic connotations (since English is still the lingua franca of international affairs) that often make Turkey the butt of silly jokes in English. I sympathize with this position, at least to a degree, given the Orientalist dynamics that are surely at play in some Turk's frustration with the name "Turkey." At the same time, this was not a democratic decision made on the part of the Turkish populace, and few of my friends and interlocutors feel strongly about the issue (often, the strong feelings are in the other direction—that the demanded name change is absurd). In the end, I have decided to follow the scholarly convention up to now in English, and stick with "Turkey."

³ I borrow the term from the late anthropologist Fernando Coronil, who used it to indicate not merely geographical location but the range of sociocultural characteristics that tend to be attributed to different regions within our largely Eurocentric imaginaries of national and ethnic difference. See Coronil, 1996.

⁴ The distinction between "Europe" and "the West" can be theorized from a variety of angles. For our purposes, it suffices to see "the West" as emerging out of Europe but coming to encompass Europe plus its settler-colonial descendants (America, the commonwealth countries, and Israel). Discursively, while "Europe" is clearly geographically demarcated, "the West" promises a greater expansiveness, such that, theoretically, any nation who fully embraces "Western values" may enter the West. This theoretical inclusivity is, however, matched with a practical exclusivity: it is nearly impossible for a country deemed other to the West to be brought into its fold, although—for unique historical and strategic reasons—South Korea and Japan are sometimes included.

⁵ Navaro 2002, 44-45

⁶ The name "Atatürk," meaning "father of the Turks," was taken by Mustafa Kemal Pasha (as he had formerly been known) after passing the "surname" law in 1934, which mandated last names be taken by all Turks, principally for reasons of state bureaucracy.

referred to as a “*boşluk*”: an “absence” or ambiguity within the “soul” (*ruh*) of the nation.⁷ This sense of absence and indeterminacy, and the forms of politics, emotion, and consciousness it has helped to precipitate, is inextricable from what Turkish intellectuals such as Tanpınar once called the “East-West problem” (*Şark-Garp meselesi*), or what the eminent critic Murat Belge calls the “East-West problematic”⁸ (*Doğu-Batı Sorunsalı*): the “problematic” of where Turkey fits, or ought to fit, in regard to “the West”—the West as both a civilizational “region”⁹ or “geography” (to preview terms that will receive extended treatment in Chapter 3) and as the paradigmatic symbol of modern norms, values, and institutions.

The genealogy of this “problematic” in Turkey can be traced back to the late Ottoman Empire, and to the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a history I will only gesture towards in this introduction but will take up in detail in subsequent chapters. Although the power of this problematic has been operative across the ideological spectrum, it was the revolutionary nationalist program instituted by Atatürk and his supporters, a program and consequent ideology usually referred to in English as “Kemalism,”¹⁰ which institutionalized this problematic within Turkish politics and society. Officially, Kemalism was premised on Atatürk’s “six arrows” [*altı ok*] of “secularism,”¹¹ “populism,” “statism” “republicanism,” “revolutionism,”¹² and “nationalism.”¹³ In practice, these six arrows were accompanied by a West-facing sociopolitical orientation, aimed at bringing Turkey closer and closer to what Atatürk called the “works and ways of Western civilization.”¹⁴ From the beginning, the Kemalist program of moving Turkey progressively from East (*Doğu*, or *Şark*) to West (*Batı*, or *Garp*)¹⁵ was inseparable from what Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, called an “imaginative geography” of “Orient” (East) and “Occident” (West): a civilizationalist imaginary of cultural and geohistorical difference, wherein all the nations of the earth are interpellated as being either within or without the West, with this designation often carrying

⁷ Tanpınar 2016

⁸ Belge 2009, 94. Much has been written, in Turkish and in other languages, on the salience of the East-West problem within the Turkish intellectual and cultural history and political life. Among the sources that have most influenced my own thinking on this topic, see Gürbilek 2020; Meriç 2020; Ortaylı 2019; Ahıska 2010. Pamuk 2007; Tanpınar 1970.

⁹ For a discussion of the significance of “region” in the Turkish historical and political imagination, see Navaro, 2002.

¹⁰ The name derives from Mustafa *Kemal* Atatürk, and translates to *Kemalizm* or *Atatürkcülük* in Turkish.

¹¹ The Turkish word “laiklik,” like the French word “laïcité” from which it derives, is translated into English as “secularism.” One could certainly argue that the connotations of the word in Turkish do not map perfectly onto those contained in the English equivalent; but this would be true, to varying extents, in any language and national context, given the historical and cultural specificities of the places in which secularization has taken place. Given that secularism is not a primary subject of this research, however, I have found it unnecessary to tease out differences between the English and Turkish term: “secularism” works as a perfectly usable translation of the Turkish term and the historical, social, and political processes it suggests.

¹² The Turkish word “devrimcilik” is sometimes translated into English as “Reformism” but is better rendered as “Revolutionism,” both etymologically and historically, given the radical overturning of Ottoman institutions that occurred in the years after 1923.

¹³ Faroz 87-90, 2003

¹⁴ Cited from Döşemeci 2013, 42

¹⁵ “Şark” and “Garp,” deriving from Arabic, sound more archaic today, just as Orient and Occident do in English. They were the terminology of choice for the first generations of post-Ottoman writers and intellectuals, like Tanpınar, however. Today, “Doğu” and “Batı,” derived from Turkic roots, are most commonly used.

enormous social, political, and economic import.¹⁶ Within the terms of this Orientalist geohistorical imaginary, built up over centuries but globalized through the expansion of European imperialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Ottoman Empire was a paradigm of “Eastern despotism” and “Oriental” backwardness. Europe, by contrast, was the place of progress and Enlightenment: the homeland of modernity, the pinnacle of a global ethnocultural hierarchy, and a civilization whose roots stretched back to ancient Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome. Despite its Eurocentric supremacism, the power of this imaginary spread well beyond Europe—to Europe’s settler colonies, of course, but also, through colonization, war, and capital, throughout the “colonized world.”

Despite the globalization of this Eurocentric view of global history and culture, the processes of Westernization initiated by Atatürk and his successors should not be understood as mere consequences of Europhilia and/or the internalization of Orientalist stereotypes, through which Europe’s—and then the West’s more broadly—superiority was discursively reproduced. Rather, the decision to rapidly Westernize the new Turkish Republic out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire should be seen less as a process of idolization and emulation than as an effort at strategic self-preservation: an attempt to protect the new nation from the threats posed to the viability of Turkish sovereignty and self-determination by Western empire, along with its concomitant logics of civilizational hierarchy and difference. Indeed, the principles of Wilsonian self-determination, proclaimed in the aftermath of WWI, did not seem to apply to Turkey’s newly colonized Muslim neighbors; nor did they protect Turkey from its own near colonization, as discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3. Instead, insuring independence in the face of Western imperialism appeared to require either forceful resistance and/or the demonstration of cultural compatibility with the norms and forms of European modernity. Atatürk’s nationalist movement would pursue both goals, achieving the first in the Turkish War of Independence (1919-23), when Atatürk’s troops foiled the plan, ratified by WWI’s victors and the last Ottoman Sultan in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, to partition most of Anatolia between the British, French, Greeks, Italians, Armenians and (potentially) Kurds. Once the immediate threat of colonial partition had been thwarted, and the European forces occupying Istanbul from 1918 had been recalled, a question remained about what Turkey’s relationship—geopolitical and economic, but also cultural and identitarian—with the West would be. Would Turkey be seen by the West as a pariah and a threat, like the Soviet Union immediately became after 1917? Would Turkey be perceived, like its majority Arab ex-provinces in the Levant, as culturally inferior and in need of imperial tutelage? Or would Turkey win a more favorable position in the eyes of West, one that would 1) secure Turkey a relatively privileged place within the global hierarchy of nations, races, and religions constructed and policed by Europe and its settler-colonial descendants, and 2) ensure a high degree of autonomy for Turkey, such that it could never be treated as a “semi-colony” by the West?¹⁷ Answering these questions was not a theoretical exercise. The answers, as I will work to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, would carry existential stakes for the Turkish Republic, not only steering the trajectory of Turkish (geo)politics but also generating some of the most significant and enduring fault lines within Turkish society.

In this context, Western attitudes towards the Turks—and indeed towards all those interpellated as lying on the Eastern side of Said’s geographical imaginary—were not incidental to

¹⁶ Said 2003

¹⁷ Faroz 2003, 90

the aims and viability of Atatürk's secular-nationalist¹⁸ project. The problem was that these attitudes were far from positive. In the years following the Turkish Republic's establishment in 1923, European perceptions of majority-Muslim societies remained steeped in centuries of chauvinism towards "the Orient" and its inhabitants (these perceptions, it should be noted, have proven remarkably resilient, and in some ways have become even more maliciously delusional). Within what Said diagnosed as the "Orientalist" discursive traditions of Europe, "the East" was by definition uncivilized, despotic, lecherous, and untrustworthy—or, alternatively, innocent, childlike, and incompetent, in need of Western patronage and protection.¹⁹ From the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans had been the embodiment of "Oriental" barbarism and exoticism, romance and threat. At once despised and fetishized, the image of the "terrible" and "lusty" Turk was so deeply entrenched in what Paul Valéry called "the mind of Europe" that polls in the 1920s revealed Turks as the most hated ethnicity in America ("negro" came second), indicating the immense power of Orientalist discourse even in a country with relatively little historical contact with the Ottomans.²⁰ In the context of such of animus, pulling Turkey upwards on the West's ladder of civilizational refinement was a priority for Atatürk and his supporters. The threat posed by Western empire and its logics of civilizational difference was coupled by a sense that "the works and ways of Western civilization"—at least in the domains of science, industry, and technology—were indeed superior to Turkish/Ottoman analogues; and thus that the security and success of the new state depended upon modernization-cum-Westernization.²¹

The perceived necessity of Westernization was integral in shaping what historian Christine Philliou has called the "Kemalist paradigm."²² In this "paradigm," or what political scientist Ihsan Yilmaz calls the Kemalist "ideal vision" of national identity and history,²³ the grounds of Turkish nationality and pride were to be staked in the country's capacity to become increasingly "modern," "secular," and, if not completely Western, than at least "West-oriented" (to borrow the

¹⁸ I use this term partly for symmetry, given that I will sometimes refer to the current ideological configuration of Erdoğan's AK Party as "religious-nationalist." I would ask the reader not to become too theoretical with these terms: we are not looking at essences when using political terminology: if an ideological group claims to be motivated by religious commitments (regardless of whether these commitments are sincere; regardless of whether they are in accord with tradition; regardless of whether they pervert to the core the message of founding texts) and claims to be motivated by nationalist commitments (which every party is, in any event)—in such cases, it seems reasonable to use the term "religious-nationalist," insofar as one is fair to all sides: if an ideological group claims to be motivated by a secular commitments *and* to nationalist ones, then the term "secular-nationalist" seems appropriate. These terms tell us little, anyways: they are shorthands, and I hope that the detail I provide in these pages will go beyond their superficiality. Finally, we remember that religious-nationalism is all over "the West," just as is secular-nationalism: there is nothing particular to Turkey, Islam, or the Middle East in these matters.

¹⁹ On the logics of Orientalism, in both its pejorative and paternalistic forms, see Said 2003, esp. Chapter 1.

²⁰ Cited from Makari 2021, 148

²¹ The (non)distinction between modernization and Westernization needs perhaps more attention than it has been given. In Turkey, as elsewhere outside the West's nominal borders, Westernization and modernization can be viewed as the same process viewed in two different aspects: one historical, one civilizational. In practice, they were hardly differentiable, given that "modern" was basically an epithet for actually existing European societies of the time. More specifically, "modern" was the epithet that Europe, and the West more broadly, gave to itself. There were no "modern" norms or institutions that the early Turkish Republic pursued that were not characteristic of European societies; and the perceived European provenance of these "modern" forms was integral to their perceived value in Turkey.

²² Philliou 2011

²³ Yilmaz 2021

anthropologist Alev Çınar's phrase).²⁴ By restructuring society on the basis of European models while distancing modern Turkey from its Ottoman past, post-Ottoman Turkey would move closer to its majority white, Christian neighbors to the north and west than to its majority Muslim ones to the east and south. The aim here was, as stated, largely to secure a more privileged and secure position within a West-dominated world order. But it inevitably also resulted in the diffusion of a Eurocentric, Orientalist worldview, in which the West's (in the Turkish Republic's early decades) actual technical-economic-military might and its alleged sociocultural superiority were difficult to disentangle. There was, from the beginning of the Kemalist project (and really since the Ottoman Empire's commencement of Westernization efforts in the early 19th century), a disjunction between what Said called the 'brute realities'²⁵ of Western states and societies (how Westerners really lived, how Western institutions functioned in practice, etc.) and what the sociologist Meltem Ahiska has called an "idea" or "fantasy" of the West—an idea that, while not totally divorced from these realities, has also never been reducible to them.²⁶ It was this idea, more so than these realities, that would shape the trajectory of Westernization under Atatürk and his successors, and which would become a major source of sociopolitical conflict throughout the 20th century and up to the present. Just as a plurality of Americans or Europeans have experience only with an *idea* of the Middle East²⁷—a mediated representation, sometimes more and sometimes less in accord with history and the 'facts on the ground'—so too has the experience of the West in Turkey been mediated by various and often competing forces, which have tended to portray the West in a variety of (often competing) ways. These modes of portrayal and relation, to repeat, have never been divorced from the political and sociocultural dynamics within Western societies or from—in particular—the foreign and economic policies of Western states. Far more than by these internal dynamics, however, the idea of the West in Turkey has been most impacted by the fact of Western *power*: a fact that, while changing throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (and perhaps now finally in full—and terrifically dangerous—decline) has itself never been coincident with the brute realities of life within Western states. Indeed, Western power, and "the West" as the symbolic embodiment of this power, has never been an adequate expression of life in the West.²⁸ When we speak of "the West" in the context of Turkey, therefore, we are primarily dealing with the symbolic correlate of the globally projected fact of Western power, with the internal sociocultural dynamics of America, France, Germany, etc., relevant only insofar as these dynamics have at times impacted the fact of this power and its manifestations around the world. Still, generally speaking, the demands of Western hegemony have had far more impact on domestic living conditions and sociocultural dynamics than the reverse.

This dynamic—that the West appears and is experienced in Turkey less as a "brute reality" than as an idea or symbol that expresses, supports, and is supported by Western hegemony—is hardly unique to Turkey: as ideational constructs with a relatively modern pedigrees, both "Europe" and "the West" (the latter concept coming into popular circulation only in the late 19th and early

²⁴ Çınar 2005

²⁵ Ahiska 2003; Said 2003, 5

²⁶ Ahiska 2003

²⁷ I use the term Middle East throughout this dissertation out of convention, in both English and Turkish (*Orta Doğu*). This said, "West Asia" is surely a less problematic term: the problem stems from, of course, the fact that the term "Middle East" is premised upon the "East/West" binary itself.

²⁸ This is both because this power has always been controlled by a tiny minority, and because of the gross disjuncture between the exported image of life in the West, on the one hand, and the harsh realities of life for the majority of Westerners on the other—itsself a consequence of an overly large share of the national wealth of America and its European allies being pumped into domains (such as military and finance) that maintain the West's global hegemony but at the cost of the living standards of ordinary people.

20th centuries) have been perceived differently in different times and places and among different social strata.²⁹ This is true in Turkey as in Egypt or China or Germany or America. However, and as I will show, despite the West having been understood and related to in a variety of ways in Turkey, certain features have been more or less constant. Regardless of whether the West is lauded or despised, criticized or affiliated with, it has almost always denoted a singular, coherent, and self-identical historical subject, fundamentally distinct from other civilizational markers such as “the East” or “Islam” and possessing a proprietary claim on what we have come to call modernity. Indeed, being Western and being modern have always been difficult to disaggregate, particularly in the formerly colonized (or, as in Turkey’s case, *almost* colonized) world. This is largely a consequence of the West’s representation, by admirers as much as by critics, as both originator of and model for the norms, institutions, and values most closely associated with modernity.³⁰ Countries whose Westernness was never in question never really had to prove their modernity; although some nations now considered self-evidently Western, such as Ireland or Greece, had to become so over the 19th and 20th centuries. Others, like Japan and South Korea, managed to shed their perceived Easternness through economic development and intimate geostrategic relations with the West (relations that, in both cases, developed under the “protection” of the American military). Russia, while for centuries an integral part of European history and culture, has never been recognized as properly modern by Western powers—a consequence, in large part, of how Russia has for centuries been seen as Europe’s internal other and antagonist, with Russians (and Slavs more broadly) for centuries being portrayed as disqualified for full inclusion within Europe and the West because of their putative possession of *both* a Western *and* an Eastern “soul.”³¹

It has been those nations historically perceived as *unambiguously* other to the West that have felt the greatest pressure, however, to prove their modernity to those whom Navaro sardonically calls “foreigners who matter” (i.e., Westerners).³² The consequences of failing or refusing to do this have often been extreme: for a country to be deemed insufficiently modern (and/or insufficiently “democratic” or “free,” with these and similar terms usually carrying the same ideological force in Western political discourse³³) by the West has usually meant being portrayed by Western governments and media as politically illegitimate and culturally backwards. These portrayals have in turn helped to legitimate Western efforts at diplomatic isolation, economic sanction, clandestine regime change, or overt military intervention. This has been particularly true in the Middle East and West Asia, where successive American and western European governments have mobilized

²⁹ “The West” did not take on its contemporary sense as a civilizational, geohistorical, and then geopolitical unity until the 20th century, with some dating its popularity to the publication Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* in 1918—peculiar, given that “the West” would then emerge as a signifier at the moment that its future was called into question. I will address the history of the idea of the West elsewhere in this dissertation, but for commentary on the genealogy of the West as a concept, see: Appiah 2019, Hall 1992, Baritz 1961.

³⁰ On the postcolonial presumption that modernity is indeed as uniquely Western product, see Chakrabarty 2000. For a contrasting view—which places a rigid disjuncture between modernity and the West—see Huntington

³¹ Dostoyevsky was an important figure in thematizing the specificity of the Russian “soul” vis-a-vis European identity. In the 20th century, Oswald Spengler popularized the idea of Russia possessing both an Eastern and a Western soul, with the idea that Russia—or the Slavic-Orthodox world more broadly—marked off from *both* West and East enduring into Samuel Huntington’s famous study on the “clash of civilizations.” See Huntington 2011, Spengler 1926. See also Williams 1970, Bolton 2016.

³² Navaro 2002, 45

³³ Yesterday as much as today, having one’s government labeled “undemocratic” or “authoritarian” by Western governments has been the first step in legitimizing Western regime change operations (whether by violence, diplomacy, or economic sanction) just as “uncivilized” or “barbarous” functioned to legitimize imperialist interventions in a different discursive stage of Western hegemony.

Orientalist dog whistles and a hierarchical imaginary of political-cultural refinement to justify the devastation of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and (very plausibly) Syria,³⁴ along with the occupation of Palestine, repeated attempts to force regime change in Iran, and persistent interference in Sudanese, Egyptian, Pakistani, and Jordanian affairs, to list only the most prominent examples from the “Muslim world.”³⁵

In the task of proving its modernity “in the eyes of Westerners,” Turkey had certain advantages over its majority Muslim neighbors. Perhaps most important was that Turkey staved off colonization—as detailed extensively in later chapters—and thus avoided the economic exploitation and psychosocial humiliation imposed on nations colonized by or, as in the case of China, subjected to immense imperialist pressure by, the West. The success of Atatürk’s Nationalist Movement against European powers and their proxies—one of the few such successes in modern history—was a setback for European imperialism (as well as a devastating loss for the Greeks, the Armenians and, arguably, the Kurds). Nevertheless, Atatürk, handsome and cutting a dashing image in his tailored European suits, impressed many in Europe and America. This was particularly the case in Germany, with Hitler having great admiration for Atatürk; not because of any obvious ideological kinship (whatever one might say about Atatürk, he was not a fascist³⁶) but rather because Turkey succeeded where Germany failed in forcing the Allies to renegotiate devastating terms of post-WWI peace. Centuries of close geographic proximity to and political-economic relations with Europe also benefited Turkey’s first generation of leaders, many of whom were very familiar with European society and history and could thus present themselves and their interests in ways intelligible to the mores of European elites. Ottoman familiarity with European societies (particularly the French) had deepened over the 19th century, as the Ottoman Empire was compelled to open itself to European ideas, technologies, and cultural forms, undertaking a century of modernization and Westernization efforts *prior* to Atatürk’s revolution, a process discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.³⁷ Moreover,

³⁴ We still do not have adequate information on the US’ role in the Syrian war, including in its initial phases. What is established, however, is that the CIA under Obama worked extensively to overthrow Bashar al-Assad, arming various “rebel” groups, many of which had clear ties to Islamic extremism and would later form ISIS. These efforts were part of “Operation Timber Sycamore,” a program which was hidden from public view until Trump dismantled it. Still, Trump and now Biden have retained military outposts in Syria with the purpose of—as Trump has admitted publicly—stealing Syrian oil. For a totally inadequate but nevertheless historically important account (given that it is the first time the program was acknowledged in the legacy press), see Mazzetti et al., “Behind the Sudden Death of a \$1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria.” *The New York Times* August 2, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/world/middleeast/cia-syria-rebel-arm-trump.html>.

³⁵ I place the term in scare quotes given that it is itself a product of Western categories of civilizational distinction, the “Muslim world” being, of course, yet another term of discerning West/non-West difference. In any event, the countries, regions, and peoples of “the Muslim world” have never been religiously uniform, with Asia Minor (Anatolia) holding a particularly high degree of religious diversity prior to 1923, after which the majority of Ottoman Christians (Greeks, Armenians, etc.) and Jews were compelled, usually under threat of violence, to flee the new Turkish state.

³⁶ In fact, Atatürk seems to have opposed the kinds of ethno-nationalism emergent out of Weimar Germany, insisting instead on a relatively “inclusive” notion of Turkish nationality—relatively, insofar as it primarily included only Sunni Muslims within the new nation’s borders, with limited carve outs for certain religious minority groups (the vast majority of non-Muslims were forced to leave after 1923), the largest of which being the large Alevi community. Faroz 2003, 89.

³⁷ It is difficult to date the beginning of Westernization in Turkey, especially as the exchange of ideas and goods had been occurring between the Ottoman Empire and European nations since the conquest of Istanbul in 1453. This said, the first period of state-sponsored Westernization in the Ottoman Empire is often dated to the “Tulip Period” (1718-1730) following the Treaty of Passarowitz between the Ottomans, the Austrian Empire, and the Republic of Venice. Nevertheless, Westernization in the Ottoman Empire is most associated with the “Tanzimat” or “reform” period (1839-1876), discussed in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

the ethnic diversity of the Turkish population—Turkishness is one of the most ethnically diverse national identities on the planet—meant that many Turks looked indistinguishable from Greeks or Italians, with much of the Ottoman ruling class having roots in the Caucasus and Southeast Europe. The new Turkish republic undoubtedly benefited from Atatürk’s phenotypical whiteness, and efforts were made after 1923 to promote claims about the Turks’ “Aryan” roots in the hope of removing Turkey from interpellation as among “the yellow races,” thereby elevating Turkey’s position with the pseudo-scientific typologies of human difference popular prior to the Nazi genocide (typologies largely retained post-war, albeit with these typologies now rendered—at least in “polite society”—in cultural rather than racial terms).³⁸

Despite such advantages in building *relatively* less exploitative relations with the West, however, Turkey still had to confront the entrenched power of European Orientalism and Islamophobia, within whose representational and affective structures the distinction between Turks and Arabs was largely irrelevant: both were Oriental, non-Western, and thus inferior. Even Atatürk’s “Aryan” visage could not reverse centuries of civilizationalist antipathy. To escape the Orientalist trap and its myriad social, cultural, and geopolitical consequences, therefore, post-Ottoman Turkey would have to demonstrate its modernity and its Westernness simultaneously, the one reinforcing the other, so as to ensure that the new nation’s hard-won sovereignty and territorial integrity would be preserved in the face of Western hegemony and its hierarchal imaginaries of human difference. This was, broadly speaking, the path charted by the Kemalist establishment, especially in Turkey’s first decades. Aided by the traditionally secularist military (which deposed, both through force and by the threat of force, elected governments in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997), Kemalists maintained a dominant position over government and civil society until the 1990s, when self-avowedly Islamic political parties began to win unprecedented electoral success. After the victory of current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, hereafter “AKP”) in 2002 (Erdoğan took power in 2003) the institutional foundations of Kemalist power began to be chipped away in earnest.

However, even before the Kemalist establishment was challenged by new opposition parties in the 90s, a key difficulty for the Kemalist project was how to maintain a “West-oriented” sociopolitical agenda while also fostering a specifically *Turkish* national identity, one distinct from *both* the (Christian) West and the (Muslim) East. This was not easy, however. This was partly due to the state’s own reliance on religious identity (Sunni Islam) to draw the borders of Turkishness. But it was even more so because of the marginalization of the Ottoman-Islamic inheritance initiated under Atatürk. The rich, syncretic traditions of religion, language, culture, and political organization under the Ottomans were largely evacuated in Turkey’s first decades, with piety circumscribed by the state and replaced (at least formally) by an at once secular and Turkified conception of what it meant to be Muslim.³⁹ The marginalization of the Ottoman past and the nationalization-cum-secularization of religion was coupled with a lack of sufficient viable resources through which to construct a pre-Ottoman Turkish culture that could circumvent the Ottoman past and serve as an alternate foundation for national identity. The consequence of this marginalization, as discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, was thus a paucity of cultural/historical resources through which a pre-Islamic Turkish nation and culture might be persuasively articulated, such that Turkish identity could be presented as uniquely distinct from both, say, Europeans and Arabs. One consequence of the marginalization of the Ottoman-Islamic past was a sense of what the novelist, poet, and scholar Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar called an “absence” (*boşluk*) or indeterminacy at the heart of Turkish national identity. For some, the feeling that the foundations of Turkish national identity were built

³⁸ On race in the early Republic, see Ergin 2018 & 2008

³⁹ On the peculiar way in which (Sunni) Muslim identity was used as an anchor for the secular state’s construction of Turkish ethnic identity, see Tambar 2016.

over an absence or ambiguity manifested in a desire to root Turkishness more fully in (what were perceived as) the cultural traditions of Europe. For others, it manifested in attempts to re-ground Turkey and Turkishness within Islam and the Ottoman past, and/or within a mythologized, pre-Ottoman *and* pre-Islamic conception of Turkishness.⁴⁰ Regardless of how it was expressed, however, the feeling that the Kemalist “ideal vision” of national identity was ambiguous, shallow, and insufficiently grounded exacerbated concerns about whether Turkey was sufficiently modernized (with modern here effectively synonymous with Western) or whether it had become *too* modern (and hence too Western). As we will see, these concerns have often taken a binarized form: is Turkey Western *or* Eastern, or at least closer to one than to the other? Analogously, given that the secular/religious binary in Turkish political discourse has very often mapped onto the West-East one, is Turkey a secular country or a religious one? Many intellectuals in the late decades of the empire and in the early decades of the republic worked to resolve such questions through attention to what was often called the “East-West problem” (*Şark-Garp Meselesi*); particularly, through appeal to a “synthesis” as the solution to the “problem” posed by the apparent exclusivity of each of these two civilizational poles. Intellectuals like Tanpınar (about whom we will have much to say throughout this dissertation) and his contemporary Peyami Safa attempted, through prose, poetry, and polemic, to realize such a synthesis—one which would show Turkey as the inheritor of, the “bridge” between, two civilizations simultaneously. Because of this complex inheritance, Turkey should, in Tanpınar estimation, be able to take the best from *both* “civilizations,” weaving them together into a life-giving, uniquely Turkish, synthesis or “composite” (*terkip*). Such efforts never succeeded, however, for reasons and in ways taken up in the forthcoming chapters. Indeed, those such as Tanpınar remained conflicted, even tortured, by the question of Turkey’s “authentic” identity between East and West.⁴¹ Yet even as he felt incapable of resolving this question, Tanpınar was also unable to do away with the feeling that resolving this question was of existential importance—for Turkey, but also for himself as a Turkish writer. Despite myriad efforts (some of which are detailed in Chapters 5 and 6) to at least *imagine* the possibility of a non-binary resolution to the “East-West problem,” the force of the civilizationalist binary implied by this “problem” retained its power to inflect—and, one might argue, *infect*—Turkish politics and society throughout the 20th century. It has retained this power up to the present, and may continue to do so until Turkey is forced to pick a side in the world war that, at the time of this writing, has arguably already started.

Internationally, the effort to bring Turkey closer to the West was not unsuccessful in preserving Turks from the *intensity* of disdain and dehumanization to which its majority-Muslim neighbors were, and continue to be, subject. Yet Turkey never won acceptance as a cultural equal in the eyes of the West, with this lack of acceptance greatly impacting the trajectory of both domestic politics and foreign policy. Turkey’s relationship with the West has, indeed, never escaped questions of civilizational identity and difference, with even economic and geopolitical partnership with Europe compromised by the persistent sense in the West that Turkey is essentially and insuperably other (Turkey accession to NATO had nothing to do with warming attitudes towards Muslims in the West. It was simply a consequence of America’s desire for military bases and potentially Turkish troops next door to the USSR and the Soviet’s Crimean fleet).⁴² As EU intransigence towards

⁴⁰ Today, this former conception is associated with Erdoğan and the AKP while the latter is associated with the far-right ethno-nationalism of the Nationalist Movement Party—*Milletçi Haraket Partisi*, “MHP”—and its militant wing, the Gray Wolves.

⁴¹ For analyses of the anxieties of cultural authenticity in Turkey, see Sezer 2010 and Gürbilek 2003. For an overview of the construction of this national-cultural identity, and the differing elements that made it up, see Zürcher 2017 [1993] & Yılmaz 2021.

⁴² MacMillan 2013

Turkey's accession bid in the 90s and 2000s made patently clear, formal inclusion within Europe (an attempt at integration that is effectively defunct today) had less to do with Turkey's GDP, human rights record, or democratic norms than with the question of whether a majority Muslim nation and the descendent of the "Oriental apostasy incarnate"⁴³ (i.e., the Ottoman Empire) could ever be accepted into majority white, historically Christian Europe.⁴⁴ Believing in the US' military umbrella, furthermore, the EU did not see Turkish membership (coming as it would with the largest land army in Europe, after Russia) as a geopolitical boon, a decision that Brussels may soon kick itself for if Turkey ultimately decides to side with Russia and China, or simply chooses to remain neutral in the global war that, as of June 2024, now seems inevitable.

At home, Kemalist efforts at modernization-cum-Westernization led to advances in education and industry that even ardent critics of Atatürk and the Kemalist project usually acknowledge. The processes of sociopolitical transformation commenced in the years after 1923 also left lasting wounds, however. These manifested in, for instance, the marginalization of the Ottoman past, the forced removal of most Ottoman Christians in the 1920s, a legacy of one-party rule (1923-1950) and military intervention, a penchant for corruption and cooperation with organized crime and, perhaps most of all, a history of repressive policies towards the practice of piety and towards the expression of ethnic (Kurdish, Laz, Armenian, etc.) and linguistic difference. These issues, coupled with the failure of the Kemalist establishment to deliver on closer partnership with Europe, the pervasiveness of political corruption in the 90s, and the state's failure to adequately respond to devastating earthquakes around Istanbul in 1999, helped bring Erdoğan's AKP to power in a landslide election in 2002.⁴⁵

The rise of Erdoğan and the AKP followed a decade of intense contest in the 1990s between a newly electorally powerful, self-described Islamic political movement—of which Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) was for a time the most powerful instance—and more secular Turks, many of who sincerely felt that their country was under threat from forces that would tear apart the foundations of the secular state.⁴⁶ Yet the AKP, as I discuss in Chapter 2, won some liberal and leftist votes in 2002—both because of exasperation with the Kemalists, and because the AKP began its tenure as a moderately socially conservative and economically (neo)liberal party, at the time likened to the "Christian Democrat" parties, bolstered in Europe during the Cold War as a check, especially in Germany, on socialist sympathies. The AKP's policies and formal ideological stance changed by the late 2000s and early 2010s, as Erdoğan's early attempts to satisfy conditions for Turkish accession into the EU were rebuffed, as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq increased animus towards the West; and as the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis hurt much of the Turkish electorate, with many Turks recognizing that the crisis was a consequence, first and foremost, of Western financialism and monetary policy. Tensions between Turkey and the West further increased as the Syrian war and consequent refugee crisis progressed (a war blamed by many in Turkey, and with good reason, on the United States), and as the 2013 Gezi

⁴³ As Said writes, "Istanbul represents the terrible Turk, as well as Islam, the scourge of Christendom, the great Oriental apostasy incarnate. Throughout the classical period of European culture Turkey was the Orient, Islam its most redoubtable and aggressive representation." Said 1983, 6.

⁴⁴ See Philip Balboni, "Turkey is the EU's Only Hope." *Foreign Policy* May 23, 2023. That Turkey was allowed into NATO in 1952—which many Europeans opposed—was a consequence of America's desire for a military ally in geo-strategic proximity to the Soviet Union. It was not a signal of Western acceptance of Turkey as a cultural equal.

⁴⁵ See Balboni 2023a

⁴⁶ Turkey's experience of counter-secular movements in the 1990s can be productively considered in comparison to similar movements in other majority Muslim countries, such as Egypt. See, for instance, Mahmood 2005 and Hirschkind 2006.

Park protests and 2016 coup attempt intensified the AKP's drift towards repressive policies on assembly and free expression. As what Yılmaz calls “AKP 1.0” was replaced by “AKP 2.0,” Erdoğan and his party moved further towards the kind of religiously-coded nationalism formerly championed by Erbakan, for reasons of electoral strategy at least as much as of religious conviction. As Erdoğan and the AKP ramped up efforts to weaken the Kemalist establishment, and leaned into the mobilization of anti-Western discourse to whip up the base, the AKP began to openly advance what Çınar (speaking of the AKP's predecessor parties in the 1990s) has called an “East-oriented, Islamic nationalism,” promoting a vision of national identity that is “essentially Eastern, Ottoman, authentically local, and Islamic.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, what scholars have called “Erdoğanism” has inherited the Kemalist concern with where/how Turkey “fits” in regard to Europe and the West. Indeed, the “imaginary geography” of East/West difference, long integral to the Kemalist project, has been re-occupied under Erdoğan, with these discourses animating religious nationalism, identitarian conflict, historical revisionism, and revanchist fantasies of reclaiming the glory (and perhaps some of the territory) of the Ottoman Empire. For Erdoğan and his supporters, being an “other” to the West need no longer be a problem to be solved through political modernization and cultural Westernization. Rather, and as we will see, the AKP has become adroit at using this sense of otherness as a tactic for bolstering national solidarity and pride. The content assigned to the “idea of the West,” and to the “East-West problem” that this idea engenders, may have changed under Erdoğan. But this idea and this problem remains central to the Turkish political landscape today.

Without this history in mind, one might read Navaro's ethnographic anecdote and presume that the angry Turkish passenger was intensely Orientalist or Europhilic, given his willingness to violently police a minor infraction of bourgeois comportment to ensure that Turkey's “image” remains more Western than Arab or Oriental—or, rather, closer to the West's vision of itself (modern, secular, bourgeois, etc.) rather than to the West's Orientalized vision of Arabs. Had Navaro been able to speak with the man, however, I suspect she would have found that his feelings about the West were more complex than Europhilia or antipathy towards historically Orientalized peoples. One need not be a psychologist to recognize that the intensity of the Turkish passenger's reaction indicates something deeply unsettling, even traumatic, about the predicament of Turkey's position vis-a-vis the West: the predicament of having to prove, and be constantly vigilant about proving, that Turkey is *not* Arab or Oriental. What sort of entity could the West be, what immense force could it radiate, in order for such vigilance to be required? Required, that is, to ensure that one's country, and by extension oneself, *not* be rejected by or disaffiliated with it. How could the “idea” of the West, and what Navaro calls the “critical gaze” that issues from and towards it, carry such immense import? Is this West a promise or a threat? Is it identified with out of affection or fear, affinity or coercion? To preview some of the arguments presented later, the felt need to be recognized as Western (or at least as *not* non-Western) has been regularly experienced as both an existential necessity and as an abusive imposition, one that places the (national) self at the mercy of how this self is recognized by “Western eyes”—including, to repeat, the Western eyes that many Turks, such as Navaro's passenger, have internalized within their own sensibilities and modes of perception and evaluation. In a world in which Westernness is regularly equated with political legitimacy and cultural refinement, and non-Westernness with despotism and unfreedom, the reaction of Navaro's fellow passenger is indicative of how the stakes of how one is recognized by Western eyes can be very high indeed.

When rereading Navaro's book, just after the commencement of Covid lockdowns in March 2020, I was reminded of an experience I had had soon after moving to Istanbul in summer 2019. At the time, I still planned to conduct an “ethnography of reading,” studying how certain mid-20th century Turkish novelists, often associated with what scholars have called Turkish literary

⁴⁷ Çınar 2005, 102

modernism, have experienced a resurgence of popularity in recent decades; and how re-engagement with the novels of this period might illuminate something of the specificity of both the Turkish experience of modernization and Westernization and how the legacy of these processes is differently understood and related to today. To approach these themes, I began the first few months of my fieldwork asking everyone I met what they liked to read and what they thought about writers like Tanpınar and Sabahattin Ali (1907-1948), novelists whose works, while published three-quarters of a century prior, have experienced a renaissance of popularity in recent years, especially among younger generations. Sitting at a coffeeshop in Istanbul's Cihangir neighborhood in September of 2019, I struck up a conversation with a late 20-something barista, Murat, who also worked as a stage director at a nearby theater and had studied literature at university. After telling him what I was planning to research, he looked slightly taken aback: why, he asked, would I want to study *Turkish* literature? Tanpınar and Ali were fine, Murat supposed. But their novels were less important than—and in his view derivative of—their great counterparts and antecedents in Europe. “What about your own writers?” Murat added. Why leave America to study literary culture when America has its Melvilles, its Hemingways, and Fitzgeralds? Or why not “go to Russia” (I had mentioned that my then girlfriend was Russian) to study literary culture? Why study Turkish literature, Murat seemed to suggest, when I could study the “model” or “original” out of which modern Turkish literature arose?⁴⁸

“What about Pamuk?” I asked—referring to Orhan Pamuk, the most famous Turkish novelist (and likely the most famous Turk full stop) in the West. Pamuk was fine, Murat told me. But he wasn't nearly as great as people in Europe and America liked to pretend: he was feted in the West (Murat referenced Pamuk's 2006 Nobel Prize) less for his quality than for his exoticism: a Turkish writer—imagine that!—who bore what Murat called a “superficial resemblance to Tolstoy.” (While intended as a slight, Pamuk, as a writer fascinated with both surfaces and with Tolstoy, might not have taken offense at Murat's remark). Pamuk's biography was, in Murat's view, catnip to Western literati who liked to see themselves as cosmopolitan sophisticates, so discerning and good-hearted as to promote voices from the literary peripheries. The treatment of Pamuk in the West was in this sense patronizing: here was a—Murat eventually admitted—“very good” but not great writer, vaunted in the West because his prose sounded familiar to Western ears even as it described scenes deliciously foreign to (to borrow Navaro's phrase) “Western eyes.” It would be better, Murat thought, to spare Turks the humiliation of such tokenism and instead allow Turkish writers to build a great literary tradition of their own, free of the need to impress Western literati, who in Murat's (to my mind, hardly illegitimate) view functioned as cultural imperialists. Maybe I could study Oğuz Atay (1934-77) or Yusuf Atılgan (1921-1989), Murat proposed, who Murat saw was the best example of a mid-century Turkish novelist who could hold his own in his own language. But my proposed research seemed like a dead-end to Murat who, I suspected, felt that my own interest in Turkish literature was likewise a product of the now inveterate Western tendency to fetishize, and tokenize, the cultural production of the ‘other’.

I still believe that Murat's skepticism of my research was well-grounded. That said, I cannot say that I share his judgements on the quality of the works of Tanpınar, Ali, or Pamuk—although he certainly had a point regarding Pamuk's popularity in the West, given that Pamuk is far more popular in the West than he is in Turkey, and given that the Western metropolitan literary elite indeed has a

⁴⁸ On the theme of the Turkish “copy” versus the European “model” or “original,” see Gürbilek 2003. While Murat did not use this word, the implication of his opinions on how dependent Turkish novels have been on European antecedents reinforces Gürbilek's and others' critical comments on the perception of Turkish literature, like many other Turkish political and cultural forms, as ‘belated’ or ‘derivative’ vis-a-vis Turkish analogues.

record of tokenism towards non-Western authors.⁴⁹ Still, Murat's views are helpfully indicative of the problematic status of the West in Turkey. The West appears in Murat's comments as *both* an Orientalizing force (in the patronizing attitude Murat diagnosed in Pamuk's reception in Europe and America) *and* as civilizational subject that has produced cultural forms (and, as we will see, social and political ones also) in regard to which Turkish analogues are perceived as inferior, derivative, not yet fully mature. This duality, in which the West is both threat and model, a civilizational subject that at once demeans and inspires (and often both at the same time) is integral to the "East-West problem." The Janus-faced quality of the West indicated in Murat comments, whereby the West appears as at once model and threat, promising and perilous—even idyllic and demonic—is not limited to young self-described leftists like Murat. Rather, and as we will see, it permeates a variety of political commitments and ideological orientations within Turkey. This perceived duality of the West is integral to assessments of the legacy of modernization and Westernization in Turkey, and of what historian Christine Philliou calls the Kemalist "paradigm" that supported these processes.⁵⁰

A series of important ethnographic works, published in the 2000s and early 2010s and based on research from the 1990s and early-mid 2000s, brought renewed focus to such issues, focusing particularly on the politics of memory and national identity as the historically "West-facing" Kemalist establishment became increasingly unsettled by insurgent non-Kemalist parties in the 1990s, and then became increasingly marginalized during the rise of the AKP in the 2000s.⁵¹ Attending to a growing reckoning with legacies of modernization and Westernization—and with the decades of Kemalist hegemony that set-off and sustained these processes—these ethnographies made the "East-West problem" more central to the anthropology of Turkey, which had previously focused primarily on "village ethnographies" that, in Navaro's view, reified Turkish culture by separating an authentic Turkish cultural identity from broader political, economic, sociological, etc., forces.⁵² While these ethnographic studies from the 2000s and early 2010s have been greatly impactful on this dissertation, I have been most influenced by Turkish literary critics, who have arguably been most attentive to the history and enduring impacts of discourses of East-West difference. By illustrating the centrality of empire, Orientalism, and the East-West problem to the development of modern Turkish letters, and by exploring the narratives, images, rhetorical moves, and structures of sentiment through which this problem has been thematized in poetry, prose, and polemic, these literary studies have shed light not only on Turkish literature but on Turkish politics, history, and culture.⁵³

Evident in both these ethnographic and literary critical works is the unsurprising fact that the perception and invocation of the West in Turkey has a history of its own, one that is at once inseparable from and irreducible to the sociopolitical realities of Western states. Such studies help to remind us of a point suggested above: that when we say "West" we mean two things at once. On the one hand, those actually existing states and societies (with their particular cultural traditions, social norms, political institutions, etc.) that refer to themselves as Western. On the other hand, the *idea* of the West—an idea that, to repeat, can appear differently in different places and at different times and

⁴⁹ In addition to criticisms of his prose style in Turkish, which some of found too syntactically similar to European languages, Pamuk's relative unpopularity in Turkey (in respect to his popularity in America and Europe) is inseparable from his public statements, which almost landed him in prison, acknowledging the Armenian genocide.

⁵⁰ Philliou 2011

⁵¹ See, for instance, Navaro 2002, Çınar 2005, Özyürek 2006, Stokes 2010, Silverstein 2011, Tambar 2016.

⁵² Navaro 2002, 12.

⁵³ There are many such works, but I have been particularly influenced by the writings of Nurdan Gürbilek, Jale Parla, Erdağ Göknar, Murat Belge, Nergis Ertürk, Sibel Irzık, and Berna Moran, many of whose works I will rely on in later chapters.

can be invoked for competing reasons and in pursuit of competing ends. The relationship between the realities of Euro-American states, attitudes, and actions and the *idea* of the West that coalesces around them is not totally disjunctive: how the West is imagined and how people in the West live, and how Western norms and institutions function, are inextricable. Nevertheless, the relation between the idea of the West and the realities of those states which call themselves Western is not totally coincident, either. Just as, for example, the idea of “democracy” can be neither decoupled from nor reduced to those states that call themselves democratic, so too can the idea of the West be neither reduced to nor separated from those states that call themselves Western. The partial yet critical disjuncture between the idea of the West and the actualities of its nominal referent means that the idea of the West in Turkey is not the same as the idea of the West in France or Malaysia; and it means that *within* each country there will be various, often competing, conceptions of what the West is and stands for. For this reason, investigating the idea of the West in Turkey demands an analytic interplay between, on the one hand, how this idea has been interpreted, related to, and utilized in sometimes diametrically opposed political projects and, on the other hand, how these uses and interpretations have been shaped by the actions, attitudes, and internal dynamics of nominally Western states. Approaching the West in this manner helps us to see the West “in Turkish eyes,” rather than trying to grasp the West “in of itself”—which is any event an impossibility, given that the West *is*, first and foremost, and ideological construct: a “supreme fiction,” in Said’s words, which is no less powerful for its fundamentally fictive (which is not to say unreal or ontologically impoverished) character. One of my hopes in these pages, therefore, is to help in the project of constructing a genealogy of “the West,” in Turkey, but also globally. While my efforts here are limited, my hope is that this dissertation will offer evidence and hypotheses that can be further developed elsewhere, ideally towards a *comparative* genealogy of the (idea of the) West across national-cultural contexts, a project that seems to me long overdue.

II

The broad rationale for two of the three terms referenced in the title of this dissertation, “Orientalism” and “the idea of the West,” will by now hopefully be clear, even if in outline only. The third term, “Occidentalism,” is more difficult to provide succinct account of, which is why I have dedicated the first chapter of this dissertation to its explication. Nevertheless, some preliminary remarks may be useful: if “Orientalism” has taken on a more-or-less stable meaning in academic discourse following the publication of Said’s *Orientalism*, “Occidentalism” (“Occident” referring to the West in the same way “Orient” refers to the East) has been a far more ambiguous concept. It has sometimes (as referenced above) denoted “Westernism” and sometimes “anti-Westernism”; it has sometimes been portrayed as the opposite of Orientalism and sometimes as its remedy. For my purposes, however, the primary utility of the concept of Occidentalism (which, as a concept, has of course no *essential* meaning) is its ability—precisely because of its parallelism with Said’s use of “Orientalism”—to indicate, first, how “the West” is as strange, obscure, problematic, and ideologically fecund a concept as “the East” has been; and, second, how it has been not merely the West as a “brute reality” but as an “idea” or symbol that has continued to anchor our imaginaries of collective human difference, in ways that have perpetuated all the problems that Said and others have attributed to Orientalism and the concept of the East.

The relevance of thinking with Occidentalism alongside Orientalism goes deeper than this, however. Since the publication of *Orientalism*, scholars have worked vigorously to demonstrate how “the East” and “the West” were not only products of what Paul Valéry called “the mind of Europe” but also served an integral function in the development of European and then American empire.⁵⁴ By demonstrating its participation in projects of domination and dehumanization, scholars and

⁵⁴ For an overview here, see Hall 1992.

activists have dismantled the aura of ethical neutrality and epistemological self-evidence that “the Orient” and “the East” once commanded. This has been so much the case that, through a bit of rhetorical wizardry, these terms have been largely replaced in the Anglophone academy with others like “the Middle East,” “the Islamic world,” “the Arab world,” or, more broadly, “the Global South” or “the developing world.” While some of these categories have the benefit of greater geographical/demographic specificity, they remain as essentializing and integrated within global power relations as the East and the Orient have been. The primary problem with all such designations lies in how they maintain, implicitly but effectively, the same binary structure of geo-civilizational polarity that animated the old East-West, Orient-Occident division. All such terms have retained “the West” as their definitional other, regardless of whether the West is called “the Global North,” “the First World,” the “Developed World,” “the Civilized World,” “the Free World,” etc.,

It is in *relation* to these designations that geohistorical descriptors such as the East or the Orient take on their specificity and substance. This is the case not only the East/the Orient, but also of newer terms like “the Global South,” the “Islamic world,” or simply “the Global Majority.” In practice, these designations all function less as markers of geographical, cultural, religious, etc., coherence than as symbols reiterative of Kipling’s old imperialist logic of “East is East, and West is West.” The names may change. But the logic endures. The increasing popularity of “the Rest”⁵⁵ as a marker of global difference (with “the Rest” often used synonymously with the Global South or Developing World) is emblematic here: its use homogenizes the majority of humanity around a negative relationship to the West, presenting societies as otherwise diverse as India and Ecuador, Venezuela and the Congo, Indonesia and Iraq, as united, first and foremost, in *not* being Western. This may well—and frankly already is—leading to increased geopolitical solidarity among “Global South” countries in an expanding fight against U.S. economic and military imperialism, as evidenced in the rise of the BRICS+ alliance (which has already well overtaken the G7 in economic output, with dozens of countries in line to join) and the success of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Yet even while these quasi-civilizational distinctions may ultimately provide “the Rest” with the necessary solidarity to overthrow some five centuries of Western imperialism, they are nevertheless totally negative categories: they function to bring together what has been excluded from inclusion within “the West.” For what unites Turkey and Venezuela, China and Uganda, Congo and Brazil save that they are all interpellated as non-Western? One may answer that what unites many of these nations is that they were colonized or, in Turkey’s case, almost colonized. Thus one might refer to the (formerly) “Colonized World.” Yet this term contains my broader point: the distinction pivots around the (idea of the) West. The West remains the standard against which all others are defined by negation.

This, broadly speaking, is what I am referring to with the phrase “the Occidental frame.”⁵⁶ What ‘enframes’ us—in Turkey *as well as* in America, and everywhere else for that matter—is a hegemonic imaginary of collective human difference, emergent out of the history European imperialism and carried on through what Michael Hudson long ago diagnosed as America’s post-war

⁵⁵ For a popularizer of the “West-Rest” dualism (although not the originator of the term) see Niall Ferguson. *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. New York: Penguin. 2012.

⁵⁶ Charles Taylor’s notion of the “Imminent Frame” provided some inspiration for this concept—not in regard to anything Taylor says about the imminent frame, but simply because it is a good phrase to play with. I make some comments on Taylor, mainly in regard to Wittgenstein’s concept of a “picture,” in chapter 3.

“super imperialism,”⁵⁷ which has made it all but impossible to conceive of history, culture, morality, rationality, etc., *without* viewing these through the prism of “West-Rest” difference. The effect of this has been the globalization of “the West” as the yardstick against which collective human difference is to be judged. This has been the case *regardless* of whether the West is conceived as an ideal or an opponent, as something to be embraced and moved towards or repudiated and moved away from—or perhaps even destroyed, in the sense of losing its status as the most expansive imperium in human history. What we have reaped from this centering of the West within our dominant imaginaries of identity and difference is an inability to consider ourselves, both within and without the West’s putative boundaries, *apart from* our position vis-a-vis these imagined boundaries (which, to risk belaboring the point, are very real despite being essentially imaginative). The globalization of this “frame” has effectively compelled all nations and peoples to feel that the truth of their identity, culture, and historical experience is, in significant part, contingent upon the truth of the West: of the West’s putative identity, values, sociopolitical forms, cultural and economic production, historical experience, etc. The concept of the Occidental frame, simply put, thus emphasizes the overwhelming power of the *idea* of the West as a universal standard against which collective difference is to be imagined, oriented, policed, judged, ranked, historicized, etc. The Occidental frame is what we run up against, what constrains our thought, when we try to imagine other ways of conceiving human history and difference at both national and international scales. It may be, indeed, far easier to imagine an alternative to capitalism (as goes the old adage) than it is to imagine an alternative to “the West.”

III

The material contained within these chapters is quite different than what I imagined when commencing this research, and I have had to exclude a substantial amount of material gathered over roughly 30 months of fieldwork between summer 2019 and winter 2021 (preliminary, albeit totally unsystematic, research was conducted in the summers of 2017 and 2018). There are a few reasons for these changes, which included a shift from a study of literary culture to an examination of Turkey’s relationship with the West, of the history and politics of this relationship, and of enduring its effects on cultural production, attitudes towards the past, and hopes for the future. One reason for this change was the Covid “war” (to use the term so often applied by Western nations to the situation prompted by the pandemic) and the limitations that lockdowns and social distancing rules placed upon possibilities for fieldwork. Over the first nine months following the commencement of lockdowns in March 2020, my work had to pivot from institutional settings and larger gatherings to solely one-on-one interactions, usually outdoors, along with Zoom and phone calls. These limitations eased by late 2020, but they inflected the entirety of this project. During the first four months of lockdown, when curfews were in effect and even outdoor activities were restricted, I was forced to spend almost all my time in the company of books, which is why these chapters, especially 4 & 5, have such substantial attention to textual resources.

The second reason that this dissertation looks different than expected is due to my arrest, in December 2020, on false but extremely serious charges (given that this case is currently under appeal, I am unable to discuss it in detail here). While forced to focus a substantial amount of time

⁵⁷ For Hudson (2003), writing in the early 1970s, what was most characteristic of American imperialism was how it leveraged geopolitical, military, and financial power in concert, devising an imperial system in which, through rendering the dollar the world’s reserve currency, dollars flowed back to the US in the form of treasuries and dollar reserves. In this system, other countries have been effectively forced to fund the US government by the purchase of US debt, and to prop up the value of the dollar by forcing much of global trade to be conducted in dollars and much of global reserves to be stored in dollars. This system, as we see at the time of writing, is why, although the United States is the principal supplier of munitions for Israel’s war in Gaza, it is the rest of the world that is funding the debt that allows the United States to purchase/produce these weapons.

to the case (ultimately winning acquittal in summer 2021, after which the case was appealed by a new prosecutor, for reasons I still do not fully understand). While fighting for acquittal, I came into close contact with people with whom I had previously had very little exposure: primarily, more conservative and religious Turks, with connections to the police, judiciary, and ruling AK Party. By becoming acquainted with party operatives, government lawyers, former intelligence officials and police officers, I gained a window into values and perspectives different from the ones held by the largely left-leaning artists and writers with whom I had originally intended to work. This has resulted in a dissertation more attentive to the politics of Erdoğan's presidency, to lasting resentments against the Kemalist project, to the appeal of "neo-Ottomanism," and to the version of East/West difference that characterizes the politics of many religious-conservative Turks.

The third—and most important—reason that this dissertation has come to focus on themes different from those originally intended is ethnographic. While I had certainly been aware of the importance of the East-West polarity within modern Turkey, I was unprepared for how frequently the West would appear in conversations about literature, politics, history, and daily life. In my first months of research, when most of my interlocutors were young, usually quite secular and left-leaning Turks, I was repeatedly struck by what seemed to me a massive overestimation of the West: of its politics, its values, its quality of life, its history, its cultural production, etc. I found it hard to understand why the large majority of my 20 and 30-something interlocutors felt so strongly that life would be better for them in various Western countries. For some, emigration was a fantasy that seemed impossible to fulfill; for others, it was goal to be assiduously pursued. The desire to leave Turkey for Germany, Australia, Canada, America, or the United Kingdom seemed, furthermore, to be only partially (albeit a substantial part) connected to hopes for upward economic mobility. People of course hoped for better paying jobs, or for a stable job full stop, given the high unemployment rates at the time. But my interlocutors also recognized, when pushed, that Western societies have seen living standards progressively decline for nearly everyone not at the top of the economic spectrum, with opportunities for those without inherited capital shrinking every year. "The Developed World" was, as I tried to impress on friends and acquaintances, *not* a land of milk and honey. Salaries might be higher in Britain or Germany than in Turkey, but so were prices. Indeed, Turkey ranks higher than Italy, Spain, and Canada (among other Western countries) in Purchasing Power Parity, a far better indicator of economic health than nominal GDP, which is calculated in dollar terms and produces a vastly misleading picture of both the global economy and the real economic strength of Western states, which now being slowly exposed as a house of cards, built on US hegemony and deficit spending. My interlocutors who wished to move westwards appreciated that well-paying work was often difficult to find in the countries they hoped to live in. They also appreciated that major Western societies (especially in the urban areas that almost all of my interlocutors wanted to live in) largely lacked the communal spirit still present even in metropolitan Istanbul. This lack of community elevated risks of atomization and loneliness, which a number of friends and acquaintances who succeeded in moving to the West from Turkey have reported suffering from. Especially without family nearby, life in the West could be profoundly isolating—even more so for those who had grown up in Turkey's relatively more communal, family-oriented society. This not to mention the Islamophobia and racism that still characterizes much of Europe and America, and that Turks—as detailed in this dissertation—have certainly *not* been exempt from.

All of this is to say, I was perplexed by the intensity of the desire of many young Turks to get out of Turkey and move to Europe or the broader West: by the intensity, sincerity, of the hope that life would be better "over there." I soon began to feel that this belief derived from something more than the "brute realities" of life in the West. It would take me a long time, however, to work out what this something more was: that it had to do with the *idea* of the West, and not merely with

the (hardly impossible, but also hardly assured) promise of a materially richer and socially freer life in Europe or America.⁵⁸

In examining these themes, this dissertation is broken up into five body chapters. Chapter 1, “Occidentalism, Orientalism, and the “idea of the West,”” works to lay out some of the theoretical terms and debates that will be developed in later chapters. It is the most theoretical chapter of the dissertation, and the one least focused on the Turkish context. Chapter 2, “Contested Conversions: the Hagia Sophia in the Kemalist and Erdoğanist “Paradigms,”” examines the 2020 reconversion of the Hagia Sophia from museum to mosque. It investigates the historical context and political dynamics out of which the decision to reconsecrate the Hagia Sophia emerged, and exploring how these dynamics have been inflected by, and shed light upon, Turkey’s experience of European imperialism and Orientalism. Chapter 3, “The Occidental Frame: Geography, Destiny, and Orientalism in Contemporary Turkey,” expands on themes from Chapters 1 & 2, examining the prevalence of the phrase “geography is destiny” (*coğrafya kaderdir*) in contemporary Turkish sociopolitical discourse among otherwise ideologically opposed segments of the population. As the dissertation’s most ethnographic chapter, it works to show how usage of the phrase “geography is destiny” demonstrates underlying tensions regarding Turkey’s position within Said’s “imaginative geography.” Chapter 4, “Towards a Theory of European and Turkish Literary Modernity,” consists of two investigations into the development of literary modernity, first in Europe and then in Turkey. By taking up issues treated in the prior three chapters through the lens of literary history and theory, this chapter provides an alternative vantage on the issues treated in the first three chapters, as well as an entree into Chapter 5. In particular, Chapter 4 examines the development and dynamics of a distinction between “modernity” and “tradition” (along with parallel pairs like “affiliation” and “filiation,” autonomy and heteronomy, individuality and normativity) through the lens of literary history, showing how this distinction opens up onto the East/West one. Chapter 5, “Bildung, Modernism, & The Tragedy of East and West,” brings together a variety of themes touched on in previous chapters, taking up the concept of “tragedy” to explore the social, cultural, political, epistemological, and downright existential predicament into which Turkey was thrust after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

Throughout these chapters, my primary aim is the investigation of how an imaginary of East/West difference has continued to shape political subjectivities, historical understandings, and embodied conceptions of national belonging in Turkey. It draws together theories and methods from anthropology, history, political science, and comparative literature to explore how this

⁵⁸ A similar dynamic is popular today in regards to Russia: although Russia today has the 4th highest GDP Per Capita in the world—above nearly all of Europe—it is still perceived, even by expat Russians, to be in far worse economic straits than Europe or America. This is empirically false. But the fantasy of prosperity and possibility in the West has rarely been a matter of empirics: it is itself bound up with the idea of the West, rather than its brute realities. The dream of prosperity in the West, a hangover from the post-War years when the U.S. controlled over half of global GDP, has endured far past its expiry date; and the fact that more elite segments of Western society miss this is a consequence of how these segments are less likely to know Americans or Europeans who are suffering, and more likely to know immigrants already possessing relatively high levels of social, educational, and/or economic capital. There are exceptions, of course. But the fantasy of a better life in the West cannot be separated from the fact of Western hegemony, a hegemony that may be finally entering terminal (as discussed in the conclusion to this dissertation) but has nevertheless proven remarkably resilient. This resilience is inseparable from the West’s enduring imperial structure, moving wealth from periphery to center (even if much of this resource extraction is today largely invisible, operating less through the sword than through the dominance of the dollar as the world’s reserve currency, and the Federal Reserve’s imperialist role in determining the value of debt and fiat currency in countries as otherwise diverse as Turkey and Japan, Nigeria and Nepal).

imaginary⁵⁹ has impacted domestic politics, social struggles, historical interpretations, and contests over the grounds and expression of cultural identity. With close attention to how the “idea” or “fantasy” of the West emerged in the late Ottoman period, developed under the threat of European colonization, and then became integral to a variety of transformative political projects (including both “Kemalism,” the secularist ideology attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the “neo-Ottomanism” and religious-nationalism espoused by current president Erdoğan), I aim to provide an examination of the forms of life and politics that ideas of East/West difference—and of the “idea of the West” itself—have enabled, the others they have suppressed, and the social and political futures these ideas may catalyze or foreclose.

As a final note: I do not claim that my ethnographic evidence represents anything approaching the full diversity and nuance of Turkish sentiments regarding the issues I treat in this dissertation. My focus on Istanbul has meant that I have largely ignored the important ways in which ideas of East-West difference color not only a *global* “geographical imaginary” but also a *domestic* one, with the more metropolitan areas in the western portion of Turkey often seen as culturally divided from the Anatolian heartland in ways that mimic the East-West divide at the international scale. Furthermore, given that the majority of my interlocutors (with a few exceptions) were ethnically Turkish, I have regrettably been unable to give sufficient attention to how ethnic, religious, and linguistic divisions within the country reflect and bear upon the major themes of this study. Finally, I regret the lack of direct engagement with gender or class in these pages. This is, in part, a consequence of timing and the kinds of material I ended up gathering. But it is also an ethnographic and analytical inadequacy, one that limits the breadth and depth of this work. I hope to make up for these limitations in future writings, including in the book that will hopefully grow out of these pages.

⁵⁹ As throughout this dissertation, I am uninterested in getting into debates over the theoretical subtleties of concepts like “imaginary.” These concepts have no intrinsic meaning apart from how they are used, and anthropologists, among others, have a penchant for getting hopelessly bogged down in debates over terminology. In my estimation, the aim of concepts is less specificity than impressionism: to catalyze an impression on the reader that pulls them towards a cluster of ideas that approximate those in the mind of the writer. The correspondence between the mind of the writer and that of the reader will never be one-to-one; and this, for a variety of reasons, is very much for the good. Nevertheless, the function of concepts or categories is not merely to group together but to transmit an impression of this grouping from one mind to the next. Writing “imaginary” calls to mind a host of connotations, a mix of ideas and associations that approximate the ideas and associations I hope to incite the reader to think within. In any event, I also like “imaginary” because of its use by Said (as in “imaginary geography”), but one could easily swap it for “worldview,” “discourse,” world “picture,” “episteme,” etc. Different such terms call to mind different connotations, but we are always speaking of a collective pattern of thought and perception, which has the power to both shape and distort reality.

Chapter 1: Occidentalism, Orientalism, and the Idea of the West

Since the appearance of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, the concept of Orientalism has taken on a fairly stable set of meanings within academic discourse. While the historical and conceptual terrain denoted by this concept is complex and subject to occasional innovation and critique⁶⁰, academic uses of "Orientalism" since the publication of *Orientalism* have largely followed the roadmap set by Said: Orientalism as (1) the tradition of essentialist and regularly dehumanizing representations of nominally non-Western regions and peoples, (2) the mechanisms through which these representations have been deployed in Western projects of colonization/imperialism (including the "postcolonial"—or "super,"⁶¹—imperialism led by Washington since WWII), and (3) the distinction between West and Rest that this tradition and these projects have at once reiterated and relied upon.

The semantic stability of the concept of Orientalism has decidedly *not* extended to "Occidentalism," a "polysemic conceptual monster"⁶² that has been invoked to denote distinct, and often contradictory, discursive formations and interpretive positions: as Westernism or anti-Westernism; as assertion or critique of the West's supposed moral exceptionalism and historical singularity; as the reversal, the subversion, or what Said might have called the "secret sharer"⁶³ of Orientalism itself. In part because of this polysemy and the competing meanings assigned to the concept, "Occidentalism" has largely vanished from anthropological theory since the mid-2000s. At the same time, "the West" (to which the Occident refers in the way that "the Orient" does to "the East") is as potent and ubiquitous a term of political, historical, cultural, and often moral distinction as at any time since the idea of "the West" entered popular discourse in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁶⁴ When invoked in the pages of major Western newspapers or in the analyses of the Western (neo)liberal commentariat, "the West" usually appears—particularly since the commencement of the NATO-Russian war in Ukraine—as a self-evident entity needing no qualification. The discursive use of "the West" is, indeed, so ubiquitous that its "ontological and epistemological" premises, to borrow a term from Said, are rarely questioned.⁶⁵ Within Western media and political discourse, and even in most academic (including anthropological) work, the West is usually described in what James G. Carrier has termed "essentialistic," "simplistic," and highly

⁶⁰ For two recent (albeit distinct) reexaminations of the moral, historical, and philosophical foundations of Orientalism, see Hallaq 2018 and Levene 2017. For a powerful recent reassessment of Said's formulation of Orientalism, and of the limitations of this formulation for grasping the force and modality of the historical imagination and the feeling of the past in contemporary Andalusia, see Hirschkind 2020.

⁶¹ See Hudson 2003

⁶² Coronil, 2019, 315. Coronil borrows the phrase from Latouche 1996, 7.

⁶³ Said borrowed this term from the story by Joseph Conrad, which Said analyzed in his first book, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966). The term appears in the introduction to *Orientalism*, when Said comments that he has "found [himself] writing the history of a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-semitism." Said 2003, 27.

⁶⁴ For a recent account of the modernity of the concept of "the West" as a geohistorical, and ethico-political, entity, see Appiah 2019. The notion of the West as a promised direction, in which miraculous places and peoples reside, is much older. See, Baritz 1961.

⁶⁵ The exact phrase, which I will make repeated use of in this chapter, is as follows: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'" Said, 2003: 2.

“stylized” ways.⁶⁶ It tends to appear this way outside the West’s putative borders as well, with the West’s self-evidence and susceptibility to essentialist characterization (regardless of whether the characterization is positive or negative) remaining integral to a range of political movements, geopolitical interventions, and discourses of cultural difference around the world—movements and discourses, certain of which I will return to later on in the context of Turkish political modernity.⁶⁷ It is the discursive practices that reiterate the West’s self-evidence and coherence, which reproduce the West as seemingly ineluctable term of cultural, ethical, political, and geohistorical description, and as a central figure in narratives of national identity (and difference) around the world, that this chapter works to interrogate through the consideration of the concept of Occidentalism. While the bulk of this chapter does not directly engage the Turkish context, I will return to this context in the second half of this chapter. Most importantly, the work done in this chapter will help lay the theoretical groundwork for the subsequent investigations into Turkish modernity and the enduring role of the “East/West problem” within it.

II: Occidentalism in Theory

As the term “Occidentalism” has most frequently appeared in academic discourse as a counterpoint to Orientalism (although the modality of this relation, as we will see, has been construed in very different ways) it is useful to begin with how Said himself invoked the former term in his book on the latter. While referenced only four times in a text of nearly 400 pages, “Occidentalism” appears on the final page of *Orientalism* as precisely that thing, the threat of which Said wished “above all” to caution readers against. *Orientalism*’s primary focus was, of course, Orientalism not Occidentalism. It was in regard to the former that Said worked to 1) illuminate the systematicity of the essentialist representations mobilized by Europe in its projects of imperial expansion and 2) to warn against “the seductive degradation of knowledge” (“of any knowledge, anywhere, at any time”). Yet while Orientalism was the primary focus of Said’s book, Occidentalism appears on the final page of *Orientalism* as posing a grave threat to the project of secular humanism to which Said always understood himself as committed. This threat stemmed, Said obliquely suggested, from the possible emergence of a discourse about the West, the systematicity and essentialism of which would be as much of a moral and an epistemic “degradation” and tool of power as Orientalism had been.⁶⁸ While Said wrote that “no one [was] likely to imagine a field symmetrical to [Orientalism] called Occidentalism,” his final warning in *Orientalism* suggested that the threat of such a field—whether existent but not yet recognized, or as not yet existing but possible—was sufficient to warrant explicit reference. How such a field would function, however, was left unclear, with Said’s earlier references to Occidentalism in *Orientalism* being opaque enough to leave it up to the reader whether Occidentalism should refer to a kind of “Orientalism in reverse”⁶⁹ or to (as in Joseph Massad’s understanding of the concept and, as I will make clear, in mine) a

⁶⁶ Carrier, 1995

⁶⁷ Carrier, 1995a; Carrier, 1995b; Ahsika, 2003; Herzfeld, 2016

⁶⁸ Said 2003, 328

⁶⁹ The term “Orientalism in reverse” is Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azmi’s, although his sense of it—in a review of Said’s *Orientalism*—is more complex than sometimes assumed. See, al-‘Azmi 1980. In addition to al-‘Azmi’s account, Egyptian philosopher Hasan Hanafi has proposed a different sense of reversed Orientalism, advocating for those outside the West to take the West as both an “Other” and an object of study, generating knowledge about this Other in a manner not only similar to, but in direct and aggressive response to, the discursive strategies of European Orientalism. See Ahsika 2010, 5.

complement to and underlying support for Orientalism, with both discourses “presuppos[ing] and subtend[ing] the other.”⁷⁰

Despite the ambiguities of Said’s references to Occidentalism, it has been in response to Said that one of the most prevalent senses of Occidentalism has been derived: Occidentalism as a warped and reversed Orientalism, wherein the essentialist and dehumanizing impulse of Orientalist discourse is mobilized to reify and malign the West. Within this view (which, since the publication of *Orientalism*, has been more prevalent than the opposite sense of Occidentalism as “Westernism” or Europhilia⁷¹), Occidentalism refers to a discourse of anti-Westernism, which tends to portray the West as essentially immoral, materialistic, and rapacious. The most sustained attempt to articulate this sense of Occidentalism was in Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit’s *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (2005). By defining Occidentalism as an antagonistic, totalizing, and ‘irrational’ discourse about the West, Buruma and Margalit’s book elicited considerable attention—so much so, in fact, that their account has had a chilling effect on attempts to make the concept of Occidentalism perform other kinds of interpretive work.⁷² A key problem with their definition of Occidentalism is that, although Buruma and Margalit juxtapose Occidentalism with the Orientalism diagnosed by Said, they largely ignore the questions of colonialism, power, and hegemony about which Said was always principally concerned.⁷³ While it is undeniable that some of the most influential intellectuals of the formerly colonized world often relied on reductive tropes to characterize and critique the West, Buruma and Margalit are largely silent on the histories of Euro-American hegemony that have given these tropes their rhetorical power and political purchase.⁷⁴ Instead, Buruma and Margalit repeatedly flip the historical script, focusing on threats to the West (rather than the West’s violence against its others) and portraying Occidentalism as a danger to, rather than a consequence or corollary of, Western hegemony. In juxtaposing Occidentalism and Orientalism, moreover, Buruma and Margalit seem unaware of the complex range of attitudes towards “the East” that have animated Orientalist discourse: the East as generative Origin *or* as degenerated Eden; the site of magic *or* maliciousness, decadence *or* depravity, promise *or* threat, but rarely an object of unalloyed antipathy. Perhaps as a consequence, Buruma and Margalit largely ignore the range of positions that have found anchor in reified conceptions of a Western other or incipient self: the West as savior or oppressor, the source of good or evil, that which must be emulated or refused, admired or detested, or—not uncommonly—all of these together. Still, the most critical error of *Occidentalism* is this: it presents Occidentalism as primarily threatening to the West itself, rather than to those countries and cultures long marginalized by the West’s will to power. Because of this, Buruma and Margalit fail to consider whether a systemic and essentialist discourse about the West remains just as—if not far more—detrimental to those *excluded* from the West’s putative boundaries than to those included within them.

While Buruma and Margalit’s has been the most broadly influential formulation of Occidentalism, it has been within anthropology that many of the most rigorous efforts to develop

⁷⁰ Massad 2015, 92

⁷¹ For the sense of Occidentalism as (pro-)Westernism, see Chen 2002.

⁷² See, for instance, Gary Rosen. “Is Terrorists’ Hatred of the West the West’s Own Bastard Child?” *New York Times*, March 27, 2004. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/27/books/books-of-the-times-is-terrorists-hatred-of-the-west-the-west-s-own-bastard-child.html>

⁷³ Buruma & Margalit 2005, 10. For this and related criticisms of Buruma and Margalit’s book, see Massad 2015, Bilgrami 2006, Abu El-Haj 2005.

⁷⁴ For a study that also roots contemporary discourses of anti-Westernism in counter-Enlightenment and Romantic thought, but which centers the histories of imperialism and colonial extraction, see Pankaj Mishra. *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux. 2017.

the concept have appeared. One of the first of these efforts came in James G. Carrier's collection, *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (1995). Nodding to *Orientalism* while largely diverging from Said's conclusions and concerns, the contributors to Carrier's volume used "Occidentalism" to refer primarily to representational practices (textual and linguistic, but also "practical," i.e., the ways in which an imaginary of East/West difference has been embodied in patterns of behavior; how it has informed not just representational discourse but embodied praxis) whereby the West is construed in "simplistic" and "essentialistic" terms. Examining the prevalence of "stylized images of the West" within both the methods and discursive strategies of anthropological research *and* in the politics and quotidian realities of specific sociocultural contexts, the volume proposed a distinction between two different modes of Occidentalism: on the one hand, "occidentalism in large publics" (i.e., Occidentalism within the cultures anthropologists study) and, on the other hand, scholarly Occidentalism: how Occidentalism has informed how anthropologists construe the West as an object of inquiry.⁷⁵ Scholarly or "anthropological" Occidentalism could include, to use one of Carrier's examples, how anthropologists have made contrasts between small-scale societies in Melanesia and industrialized societies in the West by characterizing the latter as, unlike the former, defined by the "commodity" rather than by the "gift." The problem Carrier identifies does not regard the appositeness of anthropological claims about the importance of gift-giving in Melanesia. Rather, the problem arises in how anthropological contrasts made between Melanesian and Western societies have been often too neat, relying on simplifications of the internal diversity of Western societies—for instance, how gift-giving *is* an integral part of socio-economic relations in Euro-America, the prevalence of commodity fetishism notwithstanding.⁷⁶ If such simplification was to be rectified, comparisons between Melanesian and Western societies would need to be more subtle, resisting the "essentialist," "dialectical" logic of "us" and "them" that has regularly informed anthropological comparisons between the West and its others—comparisons which themselves have, as Carrier notes, often *reinforced* the West/non-West binary.⁷⁷ It is such essentialism in the description of Western societies that Carrier's contributors identify in the work of key figures of 20th century anthropology. As Jonathan Spencer argues in his contribution, anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss and Louis Dumont relied on contrasts between Western and non-Western societies that functioned through a process of "dialectical definition," whereby the "other" was defined through what is taken to be lacking in the "self," and vice versa.⁷⁸ Such definitions are not only "unstable" and essentialistic but threaten to reproduce the same dynamics of othering, the same hierarchies of difference, which anthropologists otherwise claim to oppose.⁷⁹ Within anthropology, Carrier and a number of his contributors suggest, these essentialistic characterizations and dialectical 'us-them' comparisons often depend upon what Said called a "textual attitude," wherein the description or definition of a thing (in this case, the West) is drawn less from experience and observation than from the "schematic authority of a text."⁸⁰ It is this textual attitude that has allowed anthropologists to reproduce definitions of the West as rationalist, Cartesian, individualistic, positivistic, etc., even though these generalizations are more often taken from theory and philosophy

⁷⁵ Carrier 1995a, 15

⁷⁶ Carrier 1995b

⁷⁷ Carrier 1995a, 3

⁷⁸ Spencer 1995

⁷⁹ Carrier 1995a, 3

⁸⁰ Said 2003, 93

than from rigorous ethnography or social history.⁸¹ Such generalizations might sometimes be justified by the interests of polemic or ideal-typification. Yet Carrier's volume demonstrates that their prevalence can lead to reductive comparisons between cultures, as well as to a variety of cultural chauvinisms and what Michael Herzfeld calls "practical" strategies for both navigating and capitalizing on such essentialisms/chauvinisms within global cultural hierarchies—a point also suggested by Laura Nader's slightly earlier use of the term Occidentalism to describe mutually reinforcing discourses for legitimizing patriarchy and the control of women in both East and West.⁸²

The second form of Occidentalism that Carrier's volume attends to is what I quoted above as "occidentalisms in large publics" (a pluralization of the concept that I avoid here, for reasons that will become clearer below). Through attention to particular contexts from Greece to Sri Lanka to Japan, Carrier and his contributors show how "stylized images of the West" become central to contests of power and prestige at various scales. They become important, moreover, to efforts to build "alternative visions of a political community" and to "criticize the unjust distribution of cultural [and economic] resources in deeply unequal societies," with these inequities often directly traceable to the exercise of Western imperial and postcolonial power.⁸³ Because of the complexity of these contexts, and because of the ways in which Occidentalism discourse can function as a tool for building solidarity and challenging Western hegemony, Carrier and his contributors caution against subjecting Occidentalism outside the academy to "dogmatic anti-essentialism" or empiricist "historicism."⁸⁴ The "rhetoric of historicist, anti-essentialist authenticity," although important for scholarly self-critique, risks denying agency to postcolonial subjects, whose sometimes "simplistic" generalizations about the West can serve specific sociopolitical functions that respond to histories of harm and marginalization.⁸⁵

Its many strengths notwithstanding, Carrier's volume contains one overarching flaw: it does not seriously consider the relationship between Occidentalism and what Said called the West's "ontological stability."⁸⁶ Throughout the volume, a clear distinction is implied between Occidentalism discourse on the one hand and its referent (the West) on the other, such that the brute objectivity and self-evident there-ness of the West is neither challenged nor really questioned. Instead, the West is presented as self-evidently existing regardless of how it is represented and spoken about (whether by anthropologists or by the people they study). The possibility of Occidentalism discourse being a truly generative discourse (a discourse whose iteration is both ontologically and epistemologically bound up with that which it iterates) is not really considered. As a consequence, Carrier's volume places too much emphasis on the distinction between Occidentalism in scholarship and in sociopolitical practice. By taking Occidentalism as principally a form of *representation*, Carrier and his contributors can rightly note both the distinct aims to which essentialist representations of the West can respond and the diverse contexts out of which they can emerge. By focusing principally on representation, however, Carrier's volume sidesteps what all such contexts and aims share: the reproduction of the West's embodied facticity—its intimate, even inescapable, presence. *Pace* Carrier, the principal issue for Occidentalism in *both* scholarship and social practice may be how the West is

⁸¹ As Jonathan Spencer writes in his contribution, Louis Dumont's "version of the West, like that of some other anthropologists, depends entirely on the writings of intellectuals, rather than, say, material from the work of social historians." Spencer 1995, 239.

⁸² Nader 1989

⁸³ Spencer 1995; 252

⁸⁴ Spencer 1995, 249-250

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 250

⁸⁶ Said 2003, xii

substantiated and reproduced, and the various social, cultural, political effects of this substantiation/reproduction, rather than how the West is variously represented. The differences in representation are very important, as much of this dissertation will attest to. Yet focusing too heavily on them can obscure the ways that these representations, despite their differences, can serve similar ends, viz., the reproduction of the West's ontological stability and epistemic centrality, of its hegemonic position in how geographical, historical, social, cultural, etc., difference is globally imagined and performed.

I will return to these points shortly. Before doing so, however, two other anthropological engagements with Occidentalism are of particular relevance for any attempt to rethink and redeploy the concept today.⁸⁷ These are Jonathan Friedman's "Occidentalism and the Categories of Hegemonic Rule" (2009) and Fernando Coronil's "Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories" (1996). If Carrier's volume largely conceived Occidentalism in terms of representational essentialization and over-simplification, Friedman's account sees Occidentalism less a form of essentialization than of *singularization*: Occidentalism here concerns the production of the "idea of the uniqueness of the West," here understood as the idea that the West or "Western civilization" is a cultural and historical anomaly, rigidly marked off from other regions and cultures. For Friedman, therefore, more pernicious than simplistic or reifying representations of the West are discourses that mark the West as radically distinct from all other regions, cultures, or civilizations. By insisting on the West's exemplariness, Friedman argues, cultural-historical similarities and continuities between the West and its nominal others are elided, and the West is taken as unique in the magnitude of its accomplishments or its violence: the question of whether the uniqueness of the West is seen positively or negatively is beside the point.⁸⁸ "Postcolonial critiques" of "the supposed superiority of the West" thus come under as much scrutiny from Friedman as do full-throated affirmations of this superiority, as the former (in Friedman's view) regularly present the imperialist and capitalist West as a singular historical perversion, with the "fault" of the West's rapacity placed solely at the feet of Western "culture," rather than on a "much more general, and even universal, characteristic of imperial rule."⁸⁹ Against such "postcolonial critiques," Friedman argues that "the West is not unique since it [the machinations of Western imperialism and capitalism] has all happened before and in other parts of the world."⁹⁰ In this manner, the West's supposedly defining features ("democracy, capitalism, private property, [romantic] love," to which we might add secularism, imperialism, colonialism, even modernity itself), do not constitute qualitative singularities or *sui generis* perversions of more general phenomena. Instead, and as Friedman argues through reference to the later work of anthropologist Jack Goody,⁹¹ these histories and features have appeared elsewhere and at other times—and they will appear again, perhaps next time with an "epicenter in East Asia."⁹² For Friedman, therefore, Occidentalism is most visible in discourses of Western exceptionalism, regardless of whether this exceptionalism is expressed in terms of exceptional greatness, exceptional depravity, or radical historical singularity. It is for this reason that Friedman sees Western chauvinism on the one hand, and postcolonial critiques of the West on the other, as linked in the suggestion that the West is exemplary: exemplary in greatness or in violence, in good or in evil. Through such

⁸⁷ There are other works on Occidentalism, adjacent to anthropology, which are very much worth examining, although not immediately germane to my analysis here. See Chen 2002 and Bakhshandeh 2015.

⁸⁸ Friedman 2009, 86

⁸⁹ Ibid, 90

⁹⁰ Ibid, 87

⁹¹ Friedman's arguments rely heavily on Jack Goody's late work, particularly: *The Theft of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.

⁹² Friedman 2009, 87, 96

(Occidentalist) presumption of the West's singularity, there is an occultation of both the historical unremarkability of many of the definitional features of Western modernity and of the interconnections and commonalities between Western and non-Western societies—interconnections and commonalities that, for Friedman, cannot be properly determined if we continue to assign an absolute particularity to either the achievements or the crimes of Western history.

Before saying more on Friedman's view, it is helpful to sketch Coronil's as a counterpoint. In a powerful analysis, Coronil understands Occidentalism neither as anti-Westernism (Buruma and Margalit), nor as a discourse about the "uniqueness" of (Friedman), or a set of "stylized" and essentialistic "images" of (Carrier et al.), the West, although all of these are suggested within his analysis as possible ramifications of Occidentalism as Coronil understands it. For Coronil, Occidentalism concerns the specific "representational practices that portray non-Western peoples as the Other of a Western self," rather than the essentialization or singularization of either term of this binary *per se*.⁹³ The practices in question may or may not rely on valorizations of the West or denigrations of the non-West, and they may or may not be essentialistic in any obvious sense. Yet they all operate, in Coronil's view, through the conversion of relative and contingent "differences" between nominally Western and non-Western peoples into the grounds of an essential "otherness," often by reifying such differences within the naturalizing language of "geography." The emphasis here is on how "the histories of interrelated peoples become territorialized into bounded spaces," thus creating "the illusion...that their identities are the result of independent histories rather than the outcome of historical relations."⁹⁴ It is this transmutation of actual historical commonality into reified "geohistorical" distinction that is, for Coronil, the chief characteristic of Occidentalist discourse. This is not to deny that historical differences between what we now call the West and other parts of the world do not exist. Surely, they do. The issue is the magnitude and absolutism of these differences, and whether they arise to a level that justifies what Said called an "ontological and epistemological" distinction between West and East.

A variety of representations—positive or negative; politically charged or of apparent analytical neutrality—may be employed to achieve this reification. Orientalism, as Said described it and as Coronil acknowledges, has an integral to the facilitation of this process. Yet, for Coronil, it is Occidentalism, in making the West appear as a self-evident and distinct geohistorical unit, that has functioned as Orientalism's "condition of possibility," rather than the reverse. As Coronil writes, Occidentalism is "not the reverse of Orientalism but its condition of possibility, its dark side (as in a mirror)," in that while Orientalism concerns "the West's representations of the Orient," Occidentalism refers to "the conceptions of the West animating these [Orientalist] representations." Occidentalism, in other words, connotes "the concerns and images of the Occident that underwrite both [Western] representations of non-Western societies" and, very often, "non-Western" societies' representations of themselves.⁹⁵ If Orientalist discourse (as a discourse on "the other") relies upon a co-constituted conception of "the self," then Occidentalism concerns the (re)production of this self within a globalized system of "unequal power relations," a system that has endured long after the formal end of European imperialism and colonial rule. In this sense, it is in relation to the endurance of Western global hegemony that Occidentalism takes its particular character and relevance: "Occidentalism is...the expression of a constitutive relationship between Western representations of cultural difference and worldwide Western dominance," by which Coronil means not only representations made by Westerners but *all* representations that mark an infeasible divide

⁹³ Coronil 1996, 52

⁹⁴ Coronil 1996, 77

⁹⁵ Coronil 1996, 56

between the West and its others.⁹⁶ For Coronil, such representations—again, regardless of the contexts in which they are made/used⁹⁷—carry with them the mark of specific political epistemologies and interests, forged in the crucible of European imperialism and colonial rule, which maintain a “remarkably consistent mental picture or map of the world.”⁹⁸ What is this picture? Precisely the picture underwritten by Said’s “imagined geography” or, in Rudyard Kipling’s colonial adage, by the principle that “East is East and West is West, and never the ‘twain shall meet.’”

The emphasis here goes beyond what Carrier’s volume details. While Coronil at no point denies that Occidentalism may sometimes operate to build community and afford possibilities for critique, he is principally concerned with how the conversion of difference into ‘otherness’ is an integral tool in the reproduction of “worldwide Western dominance.” Most relevant to the study of Occidentalism, in other words, is how the naturalization of West-Rest difference reproduces the very “polarized and hierarchical conceptions” of the world that shore up Euro-America’s global power.⁹⁹ As Coronil writes,

“[Occidentalism is] the ensemble of representational practices that participate in the production of conceptions of the world, which (1) separate the world's components into bounded units; (2) disaggregate their relational histories; (3) turn difference into hierarchy; (4) naturalize these representations; and thus (5) intervene, however unwittingly, in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations.”¹⁰⁰

From the diagnosis of these “representational practices,” Coronil argues that opposition to Occidentalism requires the development of new “geohistorical categories” that can “reveal the hidden connections” within the “imperial dichotomies” of “the West” and its geohistorical other(s). development of such categories, Coronil hopes, will ‘de-mystify’ the “connections between Western and non-Western peoples” *without* collapsing the historical specificities of the development, spread, and crimes of Western modernity.¹⁰¹ Such categories would refuse to either “inflate or erase” the “distinctive differences” between peoples, rejecting the transmutation of such differences into “fetishes” that “naturalize” a “colonial Self-Other polarity.”¹⁰² At the same time, part of the difficulty of this effort to counter Occidentalism would be in how the Occidental “fetishization” of differences between (a Western) self and (an Oriental) other can emerge in places where the intention is in fact the *critique* of such “imperialist” forms of hierarchy and representation.

This point is clarified in how Coronil takes both Michael Taussig and Timothy Mitchell to task (the anti-colonial thrust and theoretical rigor of their analyses notwithstanding) for re-reifying a sense of absolutized difference between an imperialist West and a subjugated East or South. By “exalting” the differences between these regions, “erasing” the “historical links” between them, and “homogenizing their internal features,” Mitchell and Taussig “unwittingly reinscrib[e] an imperial

⁹⁶ Ibid, 57

⁹⁷ While Coronil is sensitive to differences in context, making approving note of Carrier’s work, his emphasis is repeatedly on the unifying logic of Occidental discourse and its roots in imperial and postcolonial power, rather than on the possibilities for this discourse to sometimes serve counter-hegemonic purposes.

⁹⁸ Coronil 1996, 52

⁹⁹ Coronil 1996, 57

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 73

¹⁰² Ibid, 73-6

Self-Other duality even as [they seek] to unsettle colonial representations.”¹⁰³ More specifically, Coronil sees both Mitchell and Taussig as making use of a particular Occidentalism— we might say “Occidentalizing”—“move,” which Coronil calls “the destabilization of the self by the other.”¹⁰⁴ Here, “non-Western peoples...are presented as a privileged source of knowledge for the West”— principally in the way that the apparent and radical otherness of non-Western peoples serves as a foil to illuminate, and hopefully to “unsettle,” the West’s putatively fundamental (and fundamentally proprietary) characteristics: “This knowledge [of the West] becomes available...by opposing Western and non-Western peoples as contrasting entities, but in this case the depiction of radical Otherness is used to unsettle Western culture.”¹⁰⁵ In this fashion, analyses such as Mitchell and Taussig’s attend to non-Western cultures “less as a means to understand “other” societies in their unique complexity than as a way to gain a critical vantage point to critique “our” own.”¹⁰⁶ As among many ‘ontological-turners’ today, with their laudable anticolonial aspirations tending to fasten onto ideas of distinct metaphysical worlds,¹⁰⁷ Coronil finds in Taussig and Mitchell’s studies a tendency, despite their intentions and intelligence, to construct the non-West as an absolute other, who exists (at least at the level of scholarly theory) first and foremost to teach “us” more about “ourselves.”¹⁰⁸ Such moves are for Coronil paradigmatic instances of Occidentalism at work; examples of how imperialist imaginaries of human difference have persisted within scholarship and critique, despite the power of, say, *Orientalism* and the “postcolonial theory” that developed in dialogue with Said in the 80s and 90s. (Although Said’s affirmations of “secularism” and “humanism,” along with his fondness for the “Western cannon,” have made him a sometimes difficult figure for postcolonial theory to deal with).

Despite their distinct positions, Carrier et al., Friedman, and Coronil all share concerns with 1) the dangers inhering in the reification of Western identity (and difference), 2) how this reification can reproduce likewise reified, usually hierarchical and patronizing, conceptions of the non-West, 3) how these conceptions can be replicated not only in the study, but also in the *critique* of Western imperialism and power. Friedman follows these concerns towards a critique of how the West is too often treated as singular and unique (particularly within postcolonial theory). Carrier et al., by contrast, focus on the problems of essentialism, and the need for more nuanced descriptions of the West in anthropological scholarship, including more rigorous understandings of how and why the West is reified *also* in non-Western societies. Coronil, for his part, takes up these concerns to advocate for a postcolonialism more aware of how even the attempted critique of Western imperialism and postcolonial hegemony can reiterate the “epistemological assumptions” that “underpi[n]” these formations.¹⁰⁹ If we synthesize these three accounts while giving special attention

¹⁰³ Coronil 1996, 68. For a similar argument, see Lazarus 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Coronil qualifies Mitchell as using a slightly modified form of this move, in that Mitchell illustrates the “metaphysics” of the West through attention to how the West imposed its metaphysics upon Islam and the East.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 70. As Coronil writes of Mitchell, whose work he otherwise admires: “Despite Mitchell’s recognition of the undesirable consequences of polarized typologies, he constructs Egypt as a self-contained, pre capitalist totality in order to make visible the assumptions underlying capitalist culture.” Ibid, 72.

¹⁰⁷ See, for instance, de la Cadena & Blaser 2018 and Viveiros de Castro 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Coronil, 1996: 72-3. Coronil may have been unfair to the theoretical methods of Mitchell’s excellent first book, yet the trajectory of Mitchell’s subsequent scholarship suggests that he may have come to recognize the core of Coronil’s point.

¹⁰⁹ Coronil 1996, 73

to Coronil (as I think we should), we would understand “Occidentalism” as referring to the discursive “reproduction of a colonial Self-Other polarity,” the critical engagement of which tends to reconstitute such polarities and preserve the West as a coherent, distinct, and self-evident “geohistorical category.” Occidentalism would, in this sense, name a discourse that reiterates the West as a fixed marker of identity and difference, in regard to which *both* selfhood and otherness (and their critique) are systematically articulated to achieve intelligibility and persuasiveness. Most broadly, Occidentalism would concern the reproduction of the West as an ineluctable epistemological category and a self-evident ontological fact, with this reproduction perpetuating West/Rest typologies that in turn help to sustain inequitable global hierarchies and dehumanizing divisions between (and among/inside) different regions and collectives. Coronil, Friedman, and Carrier et al. guide us to this formulation, one far different than Buruma and Margalit’s. Yet the former authors’ ideas for how we might *critique* Occidentalism do not, I think, grapple with the fullness of the problems they see Occidentalism as posing. It is the possibility of such a critique that I turn to now, beginning with the question of why such a critique has not really been attempted for almost two decades.

III: Occidentalism and (Anthropological) Critique

Despite the intelligence of Carrier et al., Friedman, and Coronil’s contributions, and despite the challenge of Buruma and Margalit’s dubious but influential formulation, it is striking how marginal the concept of Occidentalism, and the kinds of questions that the concept has been used to raise, has been in anthropological work. One answer for this marginality is the differing meanings that have been associated with the concept. In particular, the sense of Occidentalism forwarded by Buruma and Margalit (as anti-Westernism) has made what Akeel Bilgrami calls “the very idea” of Occidentalism seem suspect of pivoting attention from the primary victims to the primary beneficiaries of European Orientalism and imperialism.¹¹⁰ To take Occidentalism seriously, therefore, can appear as the substitution of what Bilgrami calls a “trumped-up culturalist notion” for what ought to be sustained attention to the practical operations of Euro-American chauvinism, violence, and exploitation.¹¹¹ Such concern has made it difficult to raise the question of Occidentalism without at least a few presumptively raised eyebrows, as if a concern with how the West is represented is inherently imperialist, or at least distracts from the operations of Western power. My argument here, and throughout these chapters, is of course the opposite: if we do not examine the movements of these representations and discourses we will fail to adequately understand and respond to the workings, transformations, and effects of Western hegemony.

In any event, the general lack of attention to Occidentalism within anthropology over the last two decades may also be the result of an unaddressed conceptual confusion, one that is present, to varying degrees, in all of the formulations glossed above. This is the confusion about whether or not Occidentalism denotes a kind of misrepresentation. This confusion, suggested in the preceding discussion of Carrier’s volume, can be framed in terms of a series of questions: does the West exist separately from, or prior to, the discourses of Occidentalism that nominate and describe it? Is there a Western referent that can be more or less accurately represented, such that Occidentalism would refer to the West’s ideological distortion, rather than to its production (i.e., to its very constitution and reproduction as a sociological, geohistorical fact)? Or is the existence of the West both coincident with and dependent upon the very discursive practices and interpretive moves diagnosed by Coronil, Friedman, Carrier et al., and others?

If Occidentalism is indeed to be understood as Orientalism’s clandestine twin, its “secret sharer,” and if we are to follow Said’s lead for the former concept, then the answer to these

¹¹⁰ Bilgrami, 2006

¹¹¹ Bilgrami 2006, 388

questions would be clear: “the West” would be as inextricable from Occidentalism as “the East” is from Orientalism. As for the East, the West of Occidentalism (and there is, I submit, no West apart from Occidentalism) would be inseparable from the modality and politics of its representation. Its social ontology an enunciation of power, the West’s naturalized self-evidence would be a tool for framing, and consequently mobilizing, the perception of identity and difference at a global scale. If this is the case, and as for Said’s critique of Orientalism, then the critique of Occidentalism would require (Carrier’s perplexing insistence that Occidentalism in sociopolitical practice differs from Occidentalism in scholarship notwithstanding) challenging the “internal consistency”¹¹² of Occidentalist discourse, linking its workings to projects of politics and domination, and recognizing that all invocations of this discourse’s object (“the West”) are very much *not* self-evident or value neutral. As in Said’s decoupling of the critique of Orientalism from the question of the “brute reality”¹¹³ of nominally Eastern societies, the issue with Occidentalism would lie not in the misrepresentation of a complex reality. It would reside in the production, reproduction, and political mobilization of the sense that such a reality exists apart from “the discourse and the institutions that produce [it] in the first place,” with this (re)production and mobilization taking place in ways and in places we might not expect.¹¹⁴

It would seem that rectifying this confusion, thus developing the concept of Occidentalism as referring to the West’s discursive construction and centrality to operations of global power, would allow scholars to relieve worries that concern with Occidentalism is code for concern over the representational rights of Western societies. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is exactly the formulation of Occidentalism outlined at the conclusion of the previous section (as “the reproduction of the West as an ineluctable epistemological category and a self-evident ontological fact”) that, in some perhaps not-quite-conscious recognition of the challenge of this formulation, has prevented scholars from investigating the concept more thoroughly. Why? Because the investigation of *this* sense of Occidentalism forces us to consider how our reliance upon “the West” as a qualifying term and a historical subject (not just “Western modernity” or “Western culture,” but also phrases such as “the West has pursued,” “the West has acted to,” etc.) may be neither neutral nor self-evident, but rather part of the problem we need to understand and confront.

With something of this in mind, some have argued for the demystification of the West as an “illusion”¹¹⁵ or a “fetish.”¹¹⁶ In a way, this seems reasonable: if the only ‘there there’ in regard to the West is as an effect of power (if there is no West save as a rhetorical device for dominating and dividing), should we not commit ourselves to exposing the manufactured apparency of its “mere being,” as Said, borrowing from Wallace Stevens, put it?¹¹⁷ Should we not, in recognizing the West’s problematic (non)existence, refuse to fall for what Hamid Dabashi, in a powerful recent study, calls the West’s “illusory power”?¹¹⁸ Should we insist on this “illusory” status to the extent that we strip “the West” from our critical vocabulary? Perhaps. And yet, if we recognize the West as a “fetish,” as a discursive construction (that is no less ‘real’ for this fact, but which can nevertheless not survive without constant reiteration), and if we make good on this recognition by refusing to invoke the

¹¹² Said 2003, 5

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Massad 2015, 86

¹¹⁵ Dabashi 2022

¹¹⁶ Lazarus 2004, Coronil 1996

¹¹⁷ Said 2003, 5

¹¹⁸ Dabashi 2022, 29

West in anything but a questioning, self-reflective manner—well, in this case, what agent or entity will be capable of providing geohistorical orientation to the course of modern history? Even more urgently, if not the West, then what historical agent or actor will be capable of holding responsibility for the transformations, crimes, and crises of modernity? What, in a word, will we talk about when we talk about, say, modernization, secularization, or colonization, if we do not have “the West” to fall back on as the origin, executor, and beneficiary of these processes?

Some critics of the project of postcolonial theory, largely sharing this project’s political goals but disagreeing on its primary concepts and frames of analysis, have at times advocated for a return to Marxist categories to take on this (interpretive, moral, political) responsibility.¹¹⁹ “Class,” “capital,” “the bourgeoisie,” etc., are here presumed to be far better—more objective, more historical, less geographically and culturally bounded—categories than those of “Europe” or “the West” for designating the violences and inequalities that have marked, and continue to mark, the course of modern history. Such critics are, in my estimation, correct. But, to be frank, the ability of Marxist categories to fire the political-theoretical imagination today is uncertain at best. As the global framing of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, of Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza, of the US’s continued suggestion that war with China is inevitable, and other conflicts have made clear, the imaginative force of “the West” remains not only powerful but practically inescapable. “Class” does not seem, at present, capable of overcoming the civilizationalist, cultural, racial, religious, etc., divisions that Occidentalism has helped to generate. As in geopolitics, there appear to be no obvious alternatives to the West (whether as a noun or an adjective) in anthropological theory for the work of cultural comparison and critique at a global scale. To push against the sense of Occidentalism articulated at the end of the previous section thus seems to risk hollowing out our critical vocabulary, leaving us bereft of an entity at once capacious and coherent enough to ground the systematic critique of—and here’s the rub—*Western* imperialism, capitalism, modernity, and the like. For if “the West” is the *effect* rather than merely the agent or subject of these processes, in regard to what can we hold these processes together conceptually, let alone morally, legally, and politically? How do we make sense of the contemporary world that—and here we go again—the *West* has helped bring into being if the West’s own historicity and sociological coherence demand clarification and critique rather than providing a foundation for these? If we are to claim, therefore, with David Graeber (or, more recently, with Bruno Latour¹²⁰) that “there never was a West”¹²¹—if we are to do this in the name of theoretical-historical rigor and a commitment to non-Orientalist scholarship, what then will be the principal object of our critique? How will it nominate and hold together the responsible parties for the myriad crimes of modernity? However, if in the name of these same ends we continue to invoke the West as if it were an epistemologically coherent and ontologically self-evident historical subject, can we be sure that we are not unwitting purveyors of the very imperialist, Orientalist logics we wish to overturn?

It is in consideration of such questions that we find the pernicious dexterity of Occidentalism in fullest flower. As Carrier and Spencer also suggest, those nations, peoples, and regions that have most suffered the injustices and inequalities of some three centuries of Western global hegemony (and five centuries of Western colonial violence) deserve a responsible party to answer for and make sense of the course of this history. Moreover, as Euro-American states have narrated and justified their actions through recourse to broader civilizational constructs, it seems

¹¹⁹ For instance, see: Chibber 2013; Lazarus 2004; Hardt & Negri 2001; O’Hanlon and Washbrook 2000.

¹²⁰ Latour’s passing remark about the non-reality of the West is perhaps unsurprising from the theorist who proposed that ‘we have never been modern’; Chakrabarty’s apparent agreement is more notable, coming as it does from the author of *Provincializing Europe*. Chakrabarty & Latour 2019.

¹²¹ Graeber 2007; Chakrabarty & Latour 2019

appropriate to interpret and judge this history through reference, not only to Britain or France or America (or, if we are to be even more specific, to ruling classes of such nations), but to that moral monster on whose geography all such imperialist states have claimed to reside. These interpretations/judgements have, of course, animated some of the most robust scholarly movements of the last century, as well as a variety of anti-colonial and nationalist movements that have pursued the cause of emancipation and political self-determination. Neither *Orientalism* nor the postcolonial theory of the 80s and 90s would have been possible *without* taking the West as a point of analytic departure. The difficulty, as I have been trying to suggest, is that such efforts to critique and make sense of past and present tend to reproduce not only the apparency of the West's self-identical being, but also Coronil's "imperial categories of Selfhood and Otherness,"¹²² of Said's "ontological and epistemological distinction" between West and Rest¹²³—the very polarities and distinctions on which the engineers of the violence we aim to critique have recurrently relied. To call attention to this tendency is not necessarily to declaim it, especially if we have no clear alternatives. Rather, my point is to simply highlight a problem: we seem to need the West for the functioning of our critical vocabulary, for the work of comparison and critique, even though by constant reference to the West we reiterate part of the problem we want to deconstruct or overcome.

Indeed, Said *himself* needed the "ontological stability" of the West in order to produce his critique of Orientalism, even as he explicitly denied the existence of this stability.¹²⁴ Although Said wrote that "neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability,"¹²⁵ he nonetheless recurrently invoked a "Western style," a "Western consciousness," a West that can "produce," "identify," "command," "know," "speak," and which, in Said's telling, has existed as a historically coherent agent/subject since the time of Homer.¹²⁶ As Aijaz Ahmed (2002), Sadiq Jalal al'Azm (1980), and others have suggested, these invocations were not incidental to Said's ability to nominate and critique Orientalism. Said's recurrent methodological appeal to the givenness of the West *allows* for Orientalism to become visible as a singular formation, its own coherence dependent, in no small part, upon that of the alleged subject whose will-to-power ushers "the East" into being in the first place. As such, although the West may be a "falsely unifying rubri[c]," it is nonetheless, as Said's critique effectively showed, one that has been indispensable to the critique of (and here the form of the following statement mirrors my point) *its* "inhuman practices and injustices."¹²⁷ In *Orientalism* as elsewhere, therefore, we see how "the West" operates as a hedge against nominalism, against the dispersal of historical causation and moral responsibility; against the fracturing of "History" into a diffusion of "histories," a fracturing that threatens to foreclose the narrative subsumption of difference and multiplicity that is necessary, as Dipesh Chakrabarty acknowledges in his critique of such 'capital-H' history, to the cause of "social justice" at a global scale.¹²⁸

In light of this, I want to suggest that the concept of Occidentalism not be taken to refer to "stylized images," stereotypes, or unjustified singularizations of the West, all of which imply a given Western reality lying behind Occidentalist obfuscations. Instead, we might consider Occidentalism in terms of the construction and reconstruction of the West as an empirical entity, an apparently self-

¹²² Coronil 1995, 60

¹²³ Said 2003, 2

¹²⁴ See Lazarus 2004, Ahmad 2000, Clifford 1988,

¹²⁵ Said, 2003: xii

¹²⁶ Said 2003, 20

¹²⁷ Said, 2003, xxii

¹²⁸ Chakrabarty 2000, 5

evident and seemingly ineluctable ground for the determination of selfhood and otherness in a globalized world still defined, to a large extent, by the fact of Western power and (under the United States's leadership) "super" or "crypto" imperialism.¹²⁹ Understood in these terms, Occidentalism impedes other ways of conceiving of cultural, national, and historical identity even while promotes the construction of historical narratives that connect disparate events/processes (the various colonial projects around the world, say) in regard to a singular subject that brought about these events/processes. The problem of Occidentalism is, indeed, the problem of this double-bind—the double-bind of how attempts to critique and understand the West (or the non-West) reiterate the West's solidity and centrality, thereby reproducing the availability of Orientalist divisions, imperialist categories, and (post)colonial hierarchies of culture and identity.

In theory, to consider Occidentalism in this manner demands attending to the work performed by the invocation of the West in projects of cultural interpretation, ethnographic comparison, historical reconstruction, political discourse, etc., exploring the complexity of what the idea of the West limits, promotes, and makes possible or impossible. As for the analysis of Occidentalism in sociopolitical practice, what is demanded is—as Carrier's volume also suggests—the study of how the West has been imagined, invoked, and critiqued in specific historical and cultural contexts. By thinking at the level of theory and of practice simultaneously, we might come to better understand how Occidentalism is *both* Orientalism's "secret sharer" (reiterating rigid divisions between societies and peoples that, as Dabashi suggests, are "at the root of [the West's] hegemony"¹³⁰) *and* part of the grounds for Orientalism's critique. In this sense of Occidentalism—not as a specific kind or mode of representation, but as a means for conditioning, constraining, catalyzing, and critiquing the construal of identity and difference—that demands more anthropological attention.

III: Occidentalism in Turkey

As a writer friend in Istanbul told me on a walk during the dog days of 2020 Covid lockdowns, "for us the West is the place we never stop wanting to go to and never stop wanting to return from; we run towards it and away from it, back and forth, endlessly...[But] most of all the West is the place that makes it impossible for us to be"—he tapped his foot on the ground—"where we are."

This statement contains the kernel of what a number of scholars have called the problem of Occidentalism in Turkey, and it is an apt summary of many of the arguments contained in this dissertation as a whole. The entirety of this dissertation can, indeed, be seen as one extended exploration of my friend's remark. For the few scholars who have analyzed Occidentalism in Turkey in detail, Occidentalism (Turkish: "*Garbiyatçılık*" or "*Batıcılık*," or sometimes the direct transliteration "*Oksidentalizm*") is an important corollary concept to Orientalism for interpreting the trajectory of Turkish modernity since the late Ottoman period.¹³¹ While Occidentalism has been sometimes invoked in Turkish scholarship in the conflicting ways described above—usually, as either anti-Westernism or as Europhilia—its most effective uses have illuminated how what sociologist Meltem Ahıska has called the "idea" or "fantasy" of the West has been a gravitational force in modern Turkey, especially in debates over Turkish national identity. As Ahıska writes, the concept of Occidentalism helps to both "conceptualize how the West figures in the temporal/spatial imagining of modern Turkish identity" and to thematize "a field of social imagination through which those in power consume and reproduce the projection of "the West" to negotiate and consolidate their

¹²⁹ Hudson 2003

¹³⁰ Dabashi 2022, 29

¹³¹ See Ahıska 2010, 2003; Metin 2013; Duran and Aydın 2014; Aydın 2006

hegemony in line with their pragmatic interests.”¹³² Occidentalism, in this sense, would refer to two dynamics: 1) the ways in which the “idea” or “fantasy” of the West has been integral to the construction (and contestation) of Turkish identity, 2) the political uses to which this idea/fantasy has been mobilized. As Ahiska and others have demonstrated, the West has been alternatively viewed in Turkey with admiration, longing, trepidation, resentment, or anger, and sometimes all of these at once.¹³³ As Ahiska suggests, however, what is most critical to the consideration of Occidentalism in Turkey is not so much the content of representations of the West in this or that period or sociopolitical context. The principal issue is rather the sheer imaginative and affective centrality of the West across all such contexts, particularly in considerations of, and contests over, national history and identity. Whether the West is conceived as something beneficent or baleful, whether it is experienced as something ambiguous or clearly defined, whether it seems to constitute a “promise” or a “threat”—regardless of how one views the West, one’s conception of self and world cannot escape its gravitational force.¹³⁴ It is this imaginative centrality of the West, rather than the contrasting meanings/representations that have been assigned to it, that is key to both the words of my writer friend and to what Ahiska diagnoses as the ‘limitations’ that the West has placed on other ways of inhabiting the nation and conceiving of the national self.¹³⁵

To begin to apply these theoretical remarks to the Turkish context, we now turn to the 2020 decision to reconsecrate the Hagia Sophia—to return it to the status of a mosque—close to 90 years after the monument, first Byzantine, then Ottoman, then Turkish, was secularized by order of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. From the Hagia Sophia to the uses of the phrase “geography is destiny” in contemporary Turkish politics and society to an examination of Orientalism and Occidentalism in modern Turkish literature (and the relevance of this to understanding questions of Turkey’s politicized position between “East” and “West”), I will try to develop the themes laid out in this first chapter through a mix of ethnographic, historiographic, theoretical, and literary analysis.

¹³² Ahiska, 2003, 353; 366

¹³³ For broader considerations of the ambivalence of the Europe or the West within modern Turkish culture and society, see: Meriç 2021 [1974]; Gürbilek 2020; Ortaylı 2019; Pamuk 2007.

¹³⁵ Ahiska 2010, 11

Chapter 2: Contested Conversions: the Hagia Sophia in the Kemalist and Erdoğanist “Paradigms”

I: Contested Conversions

On July 24, 2020, after a decision by the Turkish Council of State (a national high court) backed by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Hagia Sophia (*Ayasofya*)¹³⁶ was reopened as a mosque after nearly nine decades as a museum. A mosque since the Ottoman conquest of Byzantium in 1453, and a church for a millennium before that, the Hagia Sophia was secularized in 1934 by order of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, “the father” of modern Turkey.¹³⁷ During the Ottoman period, the Hagia Sophia had been a paradigmatic symbol of Ottoman sovereignty and aesthetics, serving as the principal mosque of the Sultan (who for centuries also held the title of Caliph) and as a reminder of the Ottomans’ victory over the Byzantines. The monument’s symbolic power was, however, a problem for Atatürk and his followers’ revolutionary vision of what the Turkish Republic, and thus also Turkish national identity, should become. Following in a line of rapid and radical efforts to modernize the new nation, founded a decade prior in 1923, Atatürk’s decision to secularize the Hagia Sophia had seemed definitive proof that Turkey had broken ties with its “Ottoman-Islamic”¹³⁸ past. From 1934 until the early 2010s, the Hagia Sophia’s secular status had indeed seemed permanent, an enduring symbol of Atatürk’s vision of a modern, secular and, to borrow anthropologist Alev Çınar’s term, “West-oriented” nation.¹³⁹ The monument’s secular status had been a *bete-noir* for some religious-nationalist intellectuals since at least the 1950s,¹⁴⁰ but arguments for the monument’s reconsecration had remained marginal until Erdoğan’s second decade in power, by which time the “Kemalist” establishment, which had largely dominated Turkish politics and society throughout the 20th century, had lost most of its institutional power (“Kemalism” [Turkish: *Kemalizm* or *Atatürkçülük*] being the secularist, modernist, statist, often anti-democratic, and broadly Europe-facing nationalist ideology associated with Atatürk and his successors).¹⁴¹

My argument in this chapter is straightforward, although it will take some time to develop. Simply put, I argue that the Hagia Sophia’s significance, and the ongoing politicization of its status, must be understood in regard to two of the most powerful “paradigms” of national identity in Turkish politics and society. First, what I call (following historian Christine Philliou) the “Kemalist paradigm”; second, what I call (following many Turkish and Anglophone scholars) the “Erdoğanist” paradigm: an “alternate” paradigm of Turkish politics and identity, which emerged as a reaction against the Kemalist paradigm, and which, while long pre-dating Erdoğan and the AKP, has become

¹³⁶ The literal translation of the Turkish “*Ayasofya*” into English would simply be “Hagia Sophia,” as Turkish does not use the direct article. The original Greek, meaning “Holy Wisdom,” is also not translated as “*the* Holy Wisdom.” Likewise, in English the direct article is often omitted when referring to the monument. Nevertheless, in this article I will stick with general English grammatical conventions and use “*the* Hagia Sophia” throughout, except when quoting others.

¹³⁷ While the order was given in 1934, the monument’s change of status wasn’t completed until 1935.

¹³⁸ The term “Ottoman-Islamic” is often used to refer to the Ottoman inheritance. See, for example, Çınar 2005.

¹³⁹ Çınar 2005, 102

¹⁴⁰ I have wrestled with terminology here. While “Islamism” is a popular term, in both Turkish (*İslamcı*) and English, it often carries Islamophobic connotations. I have thus elected to use “religious-nationalist,” which has the benefit of being also employed to describe a variety of non-Muslim political movements in Europe and elsewhere, throughout this paper when speaking of religiously coded nationalisms in Turkey.

¹⁴¹ Kemalism, like most all political movements, is not a monolith. Yet its variants have tended to share core features that stem back to the pillars of Atatürk’s program. See, for instance, Yılmaz 2021.

the ideological core of what Ihsan Yılmaz calls “AKP 2.0.”¹⁴² Through attention to how the Hagia Sophia was made into a highly symbolic tool for advancing first the Kemalist and then the Erdoğanist paradigms, I provide a synoptic account of some of the driving tensions of Turkish political modernity, showing how the contested status of the Hagia Sophia is a synecdoche of the contested status of Turkish national identity *tout court*. Drawing on over 30 months in Istanbul between 2019 and 2021, I work to situate the 2020 Hagia Sophia decision within the broader trajectory of Turkish politics and society. Some similar accounts can be found elsewhere,¹⁴³ although I come at these issues from an historical and anthropological vantage that has been largely absent in discussions of the decision. What is perhaps most novel about my examination of these issues, however, is the weight I place on the role of Orientalism and the legacy of Western imperialism in catalyzing the Hagia Sophia’s politicization in 1934 and then 2020. I work to show how the Hagia Sophia has been a causality of a broader battle—which one of my interlocutors refers to as an ongoing “civil war”—over where to situate the Turkish nation within what Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, called the “imaginative geography” of “East” (Turkish *Doğu* or, more archaically, *Şark*) and “West” (*Batı* or, again more archaically, *Garp*).¹⁴⁴ By highlighting the enduring power of this “imaginative geography” to not only inflect but *infect* social and political life in Turkey, I consider how the Hagia Sophia became trapped within the poles of this geography, its identity and function constrained within a binary logic that permits only one of two mutually exclusive positions: mosque or museum, religious or secular, East or West. At the same time and drawing on my ethnographic material, I suggest how the great monument to “Holy Wisdom” may yet break free from what Turkish intellectuals once called the “East-West problem” (*Şark-Garp Meselesi*).¹⁴⁵ As such, this essay both is and is not about the Hagia Sophia: it is a study of the status of the Hagia Sophia in the Turkish political and historical imagination, and of how this status can serve as a privileged vantage (what I called above a “synecdoche”) from which to examine some of the most significant and enduring antimonies of Turkish political modernity. I begin this examination with some preliminary remarks, fleshed out in more detail in subsequent sections, on the historical context out of which the 2020 reconversion emerged.

The decline of Kemalism’s institutional power began in the 1980s, accelerated in the 1990s, and was completed over the decade and a half following the decisive electoral victory of Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, hereafter, “AKP”) in 2002. The AKP formed as a centrist alternative to the statist secularism of the Republican Peoples’ Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, hereafter, CHP), the party of Atatürk, as well as to both the polarizing religious-nationalism of former prime minister Necmettin Erbakan’s Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, hereafter, RP) and the far right ethno-nationalism of the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, hereafter, MHP).¹⁴⁶ In the West, most “Turkey-watchers” heralded Erdoğan and the AKP as the “Muslim democrat” allies that an interventionist, America-led coalition desperately needed to persecute its wars on Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷ While most secular Turks were skeptical of AKP from the beginning, some, as we will see, initially hoped that the AKP’s apparent centrism and

¹⁴² Yılmaz 2021

¹⁴³ I share certain conclusions with, for instance, Sofos 2022 & Yosmaoğlu 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Said 2003

¹⁴⁵ While Sena did not use the term “East-West Problem” in our conversation that day, we discussed it in later discussions, after I began to come across it in the writings of early/mid-century writers, such as Peyami Safa and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar.

¹⁴⁶ The full Turkish names of each party are *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, “CHP,” and *Refah Partisi*, “RP.”

¹⁴⁷ On the brief love-affair between Western liberals and the AKP, see Tuğal, 2016.

capacity to unite a diverse electoral coalition might help bring Turkey out of the polarization, corruption, and state-sanctioned repression that had characterized previous decades. By the end of 2013's Gezi Park protests, however, Erdoğan and the AKP had largely left behind such liberal-democratic hopes, embracing a repressive, plutocratic, religiously coded, and right-wing nationalism. The public ideology of the AKP increasingly grounded itself in a glorified vision of the Ottoman-Islamic past, often referred to as "neo-Ottomanism" (*yeni Osmanlılık*), which the AKP did not invent but helped bring from the margins to the mainstream.¹⁴⁸ For the remainder of the 2010s, particularly after a failed 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan's government and the mass purges and censorship that followed, the AKP and its coalition partners seized nearly all levers of state and civil power, including the judiciary, military, and most of the media.¹⁴⁹ In doing so, they hamstringing the power of the aforementioned "Kemalist paradigm," depriving it of much institutional support.¹⁵⁰ The Kemalist paradigm, constructed in the early decades of the Turkish Republic but with roots in the sociopolitical tensions of the late Ottoman period, was predicated upon what political scientist Ihsan Yilmaz has called Kemalism's "ideal vision" of national identity.¹⁵¹ In this vision, the national subject was—or needed to become—"modern," "secular," "West-facing," "ethnically Turkish" (an ethnic category that was largely absent until the end of the Ottoman period), and committed to narrative of Turkish identity in which the Ottoman-Islamic inheritance was at most secondary importance. Indeed, Kemalism's "ideal vision" of the national subject demanded limited connection to this inheritance, staking the source of national pride in Atatürk's revolution rather than in the cultural and political triumphs of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵² Against this Kemalist vision, largely hegemonic throughout the 20th century, Erdoğan and his allies came to adopt what Çınar has described an "alternate nationalist ideology" (i.e., alternate to Kemalist nationalism). This ideology has tended to frame the national subject as "Ottoman," "Islamic," and "essentially Eastern," with sometimes more and sometimes less insistence on ethnicity (in their first decade, the AKP appeared far less ethno-nationalist than the MHP, and even the CHP, had historically been).¹⁵³ This "alternate" paradigm, moving towards the mainstream in the 1990s, has taken the hegemonic status once held by Kemalism, in the process becoming so strongly associated with Erdoğan and the AKP that many Turkish and foreign observers now refer to it as "Erdoğanism": a non-Kemalist, center-right, often religiously coded, and increasingly authoritarian political project, that often positions itself as *non*-"West-oriented" sociopolitical project, championing a "return"¹⁵⁴ to Ottoman greatness and an embrace of cultural "authenticity,"¹⁵⁵ even while promoting an antagonistic skepticism towards those seen as long suppressing Turkey's sovereignty and full socio-economic power.¹⁵⁶ (That this is a

6 For a broad overview of neo-Ottomanism in Turkey, see Yavuz 2020. In architecture and public space, see Zencirci 2014; Öncü 2010; Çınar 2005 and 2001.

¹⁴⁹ There are many comprehensive accounts of the transformation of Erdoğan and the AKP from the early 2000s to late 2010s—and of Erdoğan's shifting image in the West, from a "Muslim democrat" to an authoritarian "strongman." See, for example, Tol 2021; Bechev 2022; Cagaptay 2021.

¹⁵⁰ Philliou 2011; For a concise overview of Kemalism, see Yavuz 2000.

¹⁵¹ Yilmaz 2021

¹⁵² Cf. Navaro, 2002

¹⁵³ Çınar 2005, 102.

¹⁵⁴ On fantasies of "return" in Turkish political, intellectual, and artistic thought, see Gürbilek 2020.

¹⁵⁵ On the Turkish politics of authenticity, see Sezer 2010; Gürbilek 2003.

¹⁵⁶ For discussions of "Erdoğanism," see Yilmaz 2021; Çapan & Zarakol 2019; Akyol 2016; Bora 2017.

far-cry from the origins of the AKP and Erdoğan's fairly centrist and pro-Western—or rather pro-EU—stance during his first term is often forgotten today by commentators who ignore the ideological transformations within Turkey over the past 15 odd years).¹⁵⁷

Under pressure from the executive branch,¹⁵⁸ the Council of State's 2020 decision reversing the Hagia Sophia's secular status was unanimous: Atatürk's 1934 order, the court ruled, had illegally abrogated Sultan Mehmet II's waqf (Turkish: *vakıf*—an Islamic legal instrument, similar to a generational trust), which, the Council argued, had taken ownership of the monument in-perpetuity after the conquest of the Byzantine capital in 1454.¹⁵⁹ With the imprimatur of non-partisan judicial legitimacy, the decision was greeted with jubilation by many who, in line with Erdoğan's "manifesto" on the significance of the reconversion, saw "the resurrection [*diriliş*] of Hagia Sophia" as "a symbol of the resurrection of [Turkish] civilization (*medeniyet*)."¹⁶⁰ This symbol of national—indeed "civilizational"—renewal was explicitly framed as a repudiation of those subversive, foreign (the West) and domestic (Kemalists) who have for a hundred years kept "shackles on the hearts and feet" of the Turkish people (*halk*) and nation (*millet*).¹⁶¹ While rarely referenced by name in state discourse regarding the reconversion, the identity of the subversive forces in question—the shadowy and hostile "them"¹⁶¹ often invoked by Erdoğan and his allies—was unmistakable. As a kind of second "conquest" of Constantinople—the opponent now being not Christian Byzantium but the hegemony of Western secular modernity—the reconversion signaled for many a "resurrection" of national pride and purpose.¹⁶² In this fashion, the reconsecration seemed to mark a superlative victory for the Erdoğanist paradigm and a major blow to the remnants of the Kemalist one.

This interpretation was shared by both supporters and opponents of the decision. For prominent secular critics such as the novelists Orhan Pamuk and Aslı Erdoğan, the Hagia Sophia's reconsecration was "a slap in the face of those who still believe that Turkey is a secular country,"¹⁶³ a demonstration that the country "no longer feels respect for the secularism of Kemal Atatürk" and his efforts to push Turkey towards Europe.¹⁶⁴ In the words of Onur, a journalist friend working for one of the few remaining outlets able to maintain some editorial independence from the state: "There are few things that this government could do that would be *more* of a rejection of Atatürk and his legacy. Perhaps they could blow up Anıtkabir [Atatürk's grand mausoleum and monument to Turkish secularism] and build a mosque on it...I don't want to inspire them!" Although a committed

¹⁵⁷ Çapan & Zarakol 2019

¹⁵⁸ Since the failed 2016 coup attempt, the judiciary as a whole has become increasingly subject to executive pressure, with thousands of judges and prosecutors purged after 2016 and replaced by AKP loyalists.

¹⁵⁹ Harvard Law Review 2021, Tecimer 2021; see also Yosmaoğlu 2021

¹⁶⁰ See Erdoğan 2020. A truncated English version, omitting many of the more controversial statements in the Turkish original, can be found here: <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/120584/-with-its-new-status-hagia-sophia-the-shared-heritage-of-humanity-will-continue-to-embrace-all->

¹⁶¹ For analysis of Erdoğan's, and the AKP's, use of this 'us-them' language in recent years, see Erçetin 2021, and Elçi 2021.

¹⁶² On the prevalence of the narrative of the Hagia Sophia's reconversion as a kind of second conquest of Constantinople, see Gür 2021 & Çınar 2001.

¹⁶³ Erdoğan 2020

¹⁶⁴ "Pamuk: Ayasofya'nın Müze Olması Laiklik Mesajıydı." 2020.

secularist,¹⁶⁵ Onur was adamantly *not* a Kemalist, viewing Atatürk and his successors as morally ambiguous figures, unjustifiably repressive towards leftists and minorities but responsible also for establishing European-style liberal-democratic institutions, forwarding the rights of women (Turkish women got the vote in 1934, ten years before their French counterparts)¹⁶⁶, and laying the groundwork for educational and economic development. Despite his mixed opinions of the Kemalist legacy, however, on the question of the Hagia Sophia Onur sided fully with his family, who had for generations supported the aforementioned and staunchly Kemalist CHP. One afternoon, just after the decision was announced, while we drank coffee on the terrace of his family home in Istanbul's Kadıköy district, spacing out chairs in the hope of mitigating the risk of the virus still sweeping the city, Onur explained his position. With his mother and aunt sometimes joining us on the balcony to affirmatively punctuate his points, Onur insisted that the reconsecration of the Hagia Sophia was further proof that Turkey had “abandoned” (*yaşgeçmek*) both “Europe” (Onur was referring in particular to the collapse of EU integration talks, for which he blamed both Ankara and Brussels) and “the principles of secularism” laid down by Atatürk. He feared, with a pessimism he despised but could not shake, that this abandonment might be permanent.

In the weeks leading up to and following the Council of State's decision, as Covid-19 restrictions waxed and waned, I would often take walks with Sena, a late 20-something Istanbul architect who, like me and much of Istanbul, had spent most of the past four months under lockdown. Sena loved the Hagia Sophia “like it [was] a person.” This love had developed in childhood when, from the window of her father's study, she would look out at the monument's great dome, watching the colors of the stone change with the position of the sun and fantasizing that she was a Bosphorus seagull, swooping down to perch on one of the monument's stately minarets, added to the structure after Sultan Mehmet II converted the great church of the Byzantine's into one of the most paradigmatic symbols of the Ottoman Empire. In high-school, Sena had become fascinated with the monument's architectural form, and with the great Ottoman mosques whose design it had inspired, this fascination ultimately pushing her to study architecture at university. In more recent years, Sena had continued to visit the Hagia Sophia regularly—at least four or five times a year, usually at off-hours and preferably in the less touristed months—when she needed to think through some problem or clear her head. Inside, she found a stillness and calm, even among the tourists. Climbing up the sloping, cavernous passage to the second story, she would walk slowly along the perimeter of the wide stone railing, feeling the coolness of the rock and tracing the marks etched into its siding with her fingers. Much of what made the monument so beautiful and affecting to Sena were its overlapping layers of culture and history: the Christian iconography juxtaposed with Quranic verses; the runic Viking graffiti scratched into stone; the museum pamphlets in a dozen languages, and the streams of visitors speaking a half-dozen more. She saw the historical layers and cultural polysemy of the site as constituting a singular “whole” (*bütünlük*), even as these different aspects maintained their autonomy and specificity. For her, the Hagia Sophia was not a Turkish or a Islamic monument. Or it was not *only* Turkish or Muslim. Rather, the monument's palimpsestic quality, its diversity of identities, histories, and meanings, formed a unity that could be experienced by any visitor, regardless of nationality or creed, who was willing to resist reducing the monument to any one identity or claim of ownership. The impeding of the experience of the Hagia Sophia's ‘wholeness’ was, for Sena, one of the principal causalities of both the 1934 and 2020 decisions. Yet these decisions, and the harm they had caused the Hagia Sophia, were themselves symptoms of a

¹⁶⁵ The Turkish term for secularism, *laiklik*, comes from the French, *laïcité*. I am not interested here in analyzing the etymological-historical distinctions between the French and English terms, and where the Turkish version fits in regard to, say, the American and French cases. For those wishing for an in-depth analysis of the “development of secularism in Turkey,” see the still classic account by the great Turkish-Cypriot sociologist, Berkes 1998.

¹⁶⁶ Women won the right to vote in local elections in 1930, and national suffrage in 1934.

more pervasive dynamic, one that Sena saw as integral to the experience of Turkish modernity *tout court*.

In the weeks following the Council of State's decision, Sena was alternatively angry and depressed about the reconsecration, although not for quite the same reasons as Onur or Orhan Pamuk. Unlike them, Sena had no issue *per se* with the Hagia Sophia's return to religious use. Sena was no longer a practicing Muslim (at least in regard to the normative modes of piety within which she had been raised), and she was highly critical of what she saw as the politicization, often weaponization, of faith under Erdoğan's tenure. Nevertheless, Sena retained a deep respect for the spiritual and ethical core of her family's faith, maintaining what she felt to be a personal relationship with the divine. In part because of her upbringing and faith, Sena had always felt uncomfortable with how the Hagia Sophia's availability as a place of worship had been so rapidly taken away after 1934, a decision made unilaterally and without popular input or debate. She thus sympathized with those who had resented the building's secular status and who, like much of her own family, celebrated the news of its reconsecration. Nevertheless, Sena did not see the reconversion, or the excitement of her parents and relatives, as primarily concerned with piety or prayer. Instead, she interpreted the decision and the passions it elicited as consequences of a century's long fight over the identity—"the soul," to use Erdoğan's term—of the nation, a fight in which the coercive powers of the state had been repeatedly mobilized by otherwise ideologically opposed governments.

A few weeks after the Hagia Sophia was officially reopened to prayer, Sena and I sat on the hill of a park overlooking the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, drinking coffee and watching the light play on the Hagia Sophia's stone exterior, visible to our right across the Golden Horn. As we sat, Sena talked about what she saw as the roots of the church-mosque-museum's politicization:

"In every country, there are groups who are made to feel as if they do not belong, as if they are unwelcome in their homeland. But in how many countries has the *majority* of society been looked down on? This is how it was in Turkey during the last century. The society was divided into those who thought of themselves as "modern" (*modern*) and those who the modern people saw as living in a different time. And by "modern" of course we meant European... To be modern in France meant appreciating museums more than churches, or appreciating churches as if they *were* museums. And so we copied (*kopyalamak*) this. Whoever cared about mosques more than museums were told they were thinking incorrectly; that they weren't modern; that they weren't even properly Turkish, because to be really Turkish *meant* being modern."

What upset Sena was not that the Kemalists (or the French, for that matter) had gotten it backwards, and that mosques were in fact more important than museums. In her view, the opposition between secular and religious was irrelevant when it came to the experience and value of the Hagia Sophia. Indeed, she struggled to distinguish between the religious and secular aspects of her own experience and appreciation of the monument. Inside the building she experienced no such distinction, feeling rather a unified gestalt, discernible into different dimensions (historical, aesthetic, spiritual, national, etc.) only analytically and post facto. The space could hold diverse meanings, facilitate different uses, without these meanings and uses coming into conflict. The Hagia Sophia should be a mosque for Muslims, a church for Christians, and a museum to whomever was moved by its history and aesthetics. While the apparent opposition between secularism and religion was undoubtedly central to the discursive polarization of the monument's status, Sena felt that this discourse obscured a more fundamental conflict, for which "religion" and "secular" had become shorthands, used to stand in for two competing visions of national identity. Because these two visions were usually framed as existing in diametrical opposition, the status of the Hagia Sophia had likewise become framed—or split—in the same binary fashion. As secular and religious had become code-words for competing visions of national identity and pride, so too had the status of the Hagia Sophia been co-opted into a conflict between these apparently unreconcilable visions or "paradigms." In this way, what Sena called the "heartless" (*şalim*) quality of both the 1934 and 2020

decisions stemmed from how they framed the Hagia Sophia's status as an either/or proposition: museum *or* mosque, secular *or* religious, and “never the twain shall meet.” Why was this “heartless”? Because it inevitably led to the rigid polarization of a society overcommitted to the law of the excluded middle, wherein the victory of one side necessitated the loss of the other. Sena continued,

“They [supporters of Erdoğan and other non-secularist parties] were unable to accept things like [the Hagia Sophia's secular status]. Of course, I can understand this very well. But now we have to live within their world, and for many of us the world they are building is intolerable (*dayanılmaz*). Are we the majority? I don't know. But there are millions who do not accept Tayyip's [Erdoğan's middle name, and a term of non-endearment used often by his critics] program for our country. But our feelings are not counted...If [the 1934 decision] was unjust (*haksız*) for one group, then how is today's decision any more appropriate for another? It's absurd. One part of the country was angry and offended before, and now another part is. How does this solve anything?...I think there could have been a solution, a compromise, a way to allow for prayers while also keeping [the Hagia Sophia] as a museum. But unfortunately, it's like a civil war (*iç savaş*). In such a war, compromise is impossible.”

By framing the question of the Hagia Sophia's status as a binary choice between two opposed values and accompanying functions, and then by resolving this choice through executive/judicial fiat rather than democratic deliberation, the Hagia Sophia had been conscripted into a century-old “civil war,” battle lines of which were regularly drawn along a set of binarized, either/or choices about the character, and thus the representation, of the nation. Yet Sena saw something else here as well: just as the 1934 decision had been intended to present, to both a domestic and international audience, the “ideal vision” of the national subject as “West-oriented,” so too was the 2020 decision intended to re-orient the national subject in opposite direction. It seemed to Sena, in other words, that debates over flashpoints like the Hagia Sophia were also contests over Turkey's cultural and historical relation to Europe and the West, and over how this relation should be represented to both Turks at home and to what Çınar calls “the global gaze,” and particularly the gaze of those “foreigners who matter” (i.e., Westerners), as anthropologist Yael Navaro has sardonically put it.¹⁶⁷ In this context, what Turkish intellectuals once debated as the “East-West Problem” still exerted a grave and gravitational force, complicating the ability to consider questions such as the Hagia Sophia's status without veering into binarized debates over the legacies of Westernization, Kemalism, and Turkey's cultural, historical, and political relationship with the West. Sena saw the Hagia Sophia's status and significance as having become tangled up in the strictures of such debates, forced to appear alongside one or another pole of Said's “imaginative geography.” Until the binary structure of these debates is dismantled, the true status of the Hagia Sophia will remain unrecognized—a status as a diverse yet undifferentiated “whole,” straddling multiple traditions while incorporating, without contradiction, all of these within itself.

Sena's understanding of this struggle—a kind of “civil war” over identity and history—reminds of the anthropologist Esra Özyürek's remark that “the representation of the past” in Turkey has long been “an arena for struggle over political legitimacy and domination.”¹⁶⁸ Certainly, Özyürek's statement can apply to all nations, even to the ideological structure of the nation-state itself (more on this below). Nevertheless, if the “representation of the past” in Turkey has been, as Özyürek and many others have suggested, a *particularly* intense site of struggle, then this is a consequence, in no small part, of how debates over national identity and history have tended to play out within the frame of Said's “imaginative geography.” It is this imaginary that structures what Murat Belge, referenced in the introduction to this dissertation and in a play on the aforementioned “East-West problem,” has called the “East-West problematic” (*Doğu-Batı Sorunsalı*): the

¹⁶⁷ Çınar 2005, 71; Navaro 2002, 44-45

¹⁶⁸ Özyürek 2006, 154

“problematic” of (to repeat the point made in the introduction) “where Turkey fits—or ought to fit—in regard to Europe or the West as both a geohistorical or civilizational “region”¹⁶⁹ and as the paradigmatic symbol of what Meltem Ahiska has called the “idea” or “fantasy” of modern norms, values, and institutions.”¹⁷⁰ In this context, the Hagia Sophia has become caught between two apparently opposed responses to this problematic: Kemalism and Erdoğanism—or, if one prefers, the responses given by a cluster of overlapping political convictions, historical understandings, and nationalist ideations that, while hardly static or agreeing on every issue, can be nonetheless approximated by use of these two ideal-typified terms. If the 1934 decision to secularize the Hagia Sophia was a paradigmatic expression of the Kemalist answer to the East-West problem or problematic, then the 2020 decision to return the monument to prayer was an equally paradigmatic expression of the Erdoğanist reply.

As Sena’s position illustrates, the Erdoğanist-Kemalist divide hardly encompasses the diversity of feeling and thought on issues regarding Turkish identity and history. Nor have the animating principals of Erdoğanism always been Kemalism’s principal challenger, with socialism, ethno-nationalism, and liberalism—along with factional struggles within Kemalist parties and institutions—often taking this role in the mid-late 20th century. Nevertheless, it is in regard to the “ideal vision” of national identity respectively articulated by these dueling paradigms that the problem of the Hagia Sophia comes into view. And it is in regard to these paradigms that the radical import of Sena’s sentiments—her vision of the Hagia Sophia, and of Turkey itself, as possessing a “wholeness” *through* rather than *despite* internal diversity and difference—also comes into view. To properly understand this import, we need to go deeper into the place of the Hagia Sophia in the Kemalist and Erdoğanist paradigms.

II: The Hagia Sophia in the Kemalist Paradigm

The first iteration of the Hagia Sophia was completed in the year 360, commissioned by the son of Constantine the Great to stand as Constantinople’s principle church. Wooden, it burned down forty years later during a protest against the banishment of a bishop. Theodosius II built a new church on the site shortly thereafter, which, like the original, was modest in size and architectural ambition. A century later, in 532, the church was again razed, this time during the Nika Riots, when rival chariot-racing factions erupted against emperor Justinian, precipitating the death of tens of thousands and the destruction of wide swaths of the city. In the aftermath of the riots, Justinian began construction on a new church, grand in scale, at the center of which would be a great dome, unprecedented in architectural history. In 537, just five years after construction began, Justinian would consecrate the church to the “holy wisdom” (*Hagia Sophia*) of God, and the Hagia Sophia would come to represent “not only the authority of the Emperor but also the superiority and the triumph of Christianity over paganism.”¹⁷¹ For the following millennium the Hagia Sophia stood as the monumental heart of the Byzantine Empire and the world’s largest church, despite requiring recurrent repair due to earthquakes and a shoddy foundation. Save for a period of some sixty years in the 13th century, when crusading Catholics took control of Constantinople and used it as a Roman Catholic cathedral, the Hagia Sophia remained under Byzantine control until 1453, when Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II fulfilled the ambitions of his father and conquered the city. Mehmed, as the story goes, was so overwhelmed by the grandeur of the Hagia Sophia that he made it among his

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of the significance of “region” in the Turkish historical and political imagination, see Navaro, 2002.

¹⁷⁰ Ahiska 2003, 353

¹⁷¹ Katipoğlu & Caner-Yüksel, 209

first acts as the city's new ruler to convert it into a mosque—although Bayezid I, Mehmed II's great grandfather, may have been the first of the House of Osman to dream of this transformation.¹⁷²

As Gülru Necipoğlu has argued, after the conquest of Constantinople successive generations of Ottoman rulers worked to incorporate the building's history into a story of the unfolding of divine will, with paganism falling to Christianity and Christianity giving way to Islam. In the Ottoman court histories commissioned to document the life of the building, “the original construction of Hagia Sophia signified the triumph of Christianity over paganism under Justinian,” and “its second consecration as Mehmed II's royal mosque represented the final victory of Islam that had been predicted by various signs.”¹⁷³ In official narratives, the changes in the building's ownership and confessional use were testaments to a “cyclical scheme of universal cosmography,” within which the capture of Constantinople and its great church signified the Ottoman Empire's inheritance of the universal sovereignty once possessed by Rome and then by the Byzantines. The Hagia Sophia's Christian past was, in this manner, not something written out of imperial memory. Rather, as in the Quran's perfection rather than repudiation of Christian revelation, the incorporation of the Byzantine past into a narrative of Islamic and Ottoman triumph was an integral part of the building's ability to serve the Ottomans “as a symbol of universal rule” and of the “perfect concordance between divine will and imperial power.”¹⁷⁴ The incorporation of the building's Christian history extended, for many centuries, to the same figural frescoes and mosaics whose contemporary status has caused so much vexation after Erdoğan's decision to reconsecrate the site in 2020.¹⁷⁵ Many of these iconic decorations remained visible into the 17th century, and for perhaps a century after the building's consecration as a mosque in 1453 the figural frescoes and mosaics within the main prayer hall remained visible, covered by a screen such that they were obscured to worshipers but visible from the upper gallery. The move to cover more of the Christian iconography, beginning with Ahmed I, came as the Ottomans were losing territory in the early 17th century, and began to turn to stricter interpretations of religious propriety.¹⁷⁶ Still, some frescoes and mosaics were spared plaster until the early 18th century, when most of those remaining were whitewashed under orders of Mahmud I, remaining obscured until their rediscovery in the 1840s.

As the preceding brief account shows, the Christian legacy of the Hagia Sophia was a visible and operative part of its symbolic significance for the Ottomans. In Necipoğlu's words, “the appropriation of Hagia Sophia as an imperial and religious symbol by the Ottoman sultans had involved an awareness of its former significance, as well as a shared language of architectural forms transcending the mere *prise de possession* of a Christian sacred space by Muslim conquerors,” with this awareness and shared language integral to the building's ability to anchor Ottoman claims to be the stewards of Islam and the rightful possessors of a universal sovereignty.¹⁷⁷ The Hagia Sophia's pre-

¹⁷² Necipoğlu, 196

¹⁷³ Necipoğlu, 200

¹⁷⁴ Necipoğlu, 200

¹⁷⁵ Ali Tüfekçi. “Hagia Sophia facts: What will happen to 'original' mosaics?” Daily Sabah. July 17, 2020. <https://www.dailysabah.com/arts/hagia-sophia-facts-what-will-happen-to-original-mosaics/news>

¹⁷⁶ As Necipoğlu writes, “Ahmed I's renovation of Hagia Sophia in the early seventieth century reflects a new ethos and ideological orientation characterized by growing emphasis on a more dogmatic interpretation of Sunni Islam.” 218

¹⁷⁷ Necipoğlu, 225

Ottoman past, therefore, posed little threat when this past had been superseded and consequently incorporated into narratives of Islamic triumph and Ottoman sovereignty.

If the Hagia Sophia had been relatively unproblematic for most of the Ottoman period, this changed in the aftermath of Atatürk's revolution. It was not the Hagia Sophia's Christian roots (although these indeed posed problems for the Kemalists, as we will see) but rather its Ottoman-Islamic legacy that posed the real difficulty for Kemalist revolutionaries. Why? Because the Hagia Sophia was a paradigmatic symbol of the Islamic empire that the new Turkey aimed to transcend, even efface. For Turkey's first generation of leaders, indeed, the visibility of the Ottoman-Islamic past had to be radically minimized, or at least tightly circumscribed, in order to promote an image of the new nation as thoroughly modern and secular—more similar to West European countries than to the Ottoman Empire's majority-Arab provenances, most of which had now come under European imperial control.

Although a degree of Europhilia was certainly present in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods, it is a mistake to presume that the rationale for minimizing the Ottoman-Islamic past stemmed solely, or even primarily, from affection for what Atatürk referred to as “Western civilization.” Turkey's first generation of leaders, as for the Ottoman rulers of the 19th century,¹⁷⁸ were well aware that Europe had for centuries maligned “the terrible Turk,” had denigrated the “sick man of Europe,” had repeatedly undermined Ottoman sovereignty throughout the 19th century and, most recently, had tried to colonize much of Anatolia (more on this in a moment).¹⁷⁹ They were not ignorant, furthermore, of European attitudes towards “the Orient,” of Western discourses of racial hierarchy, and of how these attitudes and discourses had been recurrently mobilized to justify imperialism and war.¹⁸⁰ In this context, the Ottoman had to be transcended, not because it was an empire, but because it was “*Oriental*”—because it symbolized “the great Oriental apostasy incarnate,”¹⁸¹ “the barbarian horde from Central Asia,”¹⁸² the homeland of the “lustful” and “villainous” Turk, for centuries the great civilizational enemy and cultural foil of “Christian Europe.”¹⁸³ If Turkey was to rebrand itself in the eyes of the West, thus escaping the forms of othering and dehumanization to which the entirety of the colonized world (and the Muslim world in particular) had come subject, then the new nation would have to show itself as radically distinct from its Orientalized predecessor.

Such concerns over Turkey's position vis-a-vis Europe, and over European perceptions of Turks in particular and Islam in general, antedated Atatürk and the founding of the Republic by at least a century. Such concerns stemmed from the imbalance of power between the Ottoman and West European empires (at least in regard to technology, economy, and force of arms) that had increased dramatically over the 19th century, but which had been largely absent in prior centuries, with the Ottomans coming close to conquering Vienna as late as the 1680s. Europe's de facto global hegemony in the 19th century allowed “the Great Powers” to exert immense pressure upon the Ottoman state, forcing the Sultan and Sublime Porte into a series of socioeconomic “capitulations”

¹⁷⁸ Makdisi 2002, Deringil 2011

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, Koçak 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Ergin 2008

¹⁸¹ Said 1983, 6

¹⁸² “Disposing of Turkey.” *The New York Times*. March 15, 1919. <https://www.nytimes.com/1919/03/15/archives/disposing-of-turkey.html?searchResultPosition=1>

¹⁸³ On historical and enduring European perceptions of “the Turk” see Levin 2011. For a Turkish language account, see Kumrular 2008. For American context, see McCarthy 2010.

to European economic and geopolitical interests.¹⁸⁴ From the Tanzimat or “Reform” period (1839-1876) through the “Young Turk” revolution of 1908, the question of how the Ottoman Empire should respond to growing European power (and thus whether and in what ways Ottoman society should relate to and perhaps adopt European sociopolitical forms) was a key feature of political discourse and intellectual-artistic production in the late Ottoman period. By the commencement of WWI, the Ottomans had endured a century of struggle over the necessity and modality of Westernization, the loss of most of its European territories in Greece and the Balkans, and decades of political strife between the different centers of power within elite Ottoman society. While totally defeated, the Ottoman army had performed well above expectations in WWI, with Atatürk and other future leaders of the Turkish Republic laying the groundwork for their future status as national heroes. Nevertheless, the empire was ravaged by the war, with civilians suffering tremendously.¹⁸⁵ Discontent with the imperial order increased after Istanbul was occupied by Allied troops in late 1918, and reached a revolutionary pitch after a totally disempowered Sultan Mehmed VI, the last Ottoman sultan, signed the Treaty of Sèvres. Mandating the partition of Anatolia and the eastern Aegean among France, Britain, Greece, Italy and new Armenian and (potentially) Kurdish states, Sèvres marked the end of any real hope for imperial renewal.¹⁸⁶ As the Sultan capitulated to European pressure, Atatürk’s National Movement was building the architecture of a post-Ottoman state in what would become Ankara, soon undertaking a multi-front campaign against the Allies and their proxies (most of the actual fighting was against Greek troops in the west and Armenian ones in the east). The success of Turkish troops—success that came at appalling civilian cost, particularly to Anatolian Christians but also to Muslims—ultimately forced the Allies to tear up Sèvres and begin negotiations for a new peace agreement. The Treaty of Lausanne¹⁸⁷ that followed in July 1923, reached between the exhausted Allies and Atatürk’s new government, resulted in the removal of European forces from Istanbul, the withdrawal of non-Turkish armies from Anatolia, the ratification of the borders of the new Turkish Republic, and the “exchange”—deportation—of some million and a half Muslims and Christians between Greece and Turkey.¹⁸⁸ The victory of the Turkish nationalists stunned the world, proving to many that in dealings with European imperialism, as historian Michael Provence writes of Lausanne, “the right of self-determination could only be taken, and was never given.”¹⁸⁹ This lesson would embed deeply in the political consciousness of generations of Turks; albeit often in the form of an enduring anxiety, sometimes termed the “Sèvres

¹⁸⁴ For a succinct discussion of these capitulations, see Ahmad 1993, chapters 2 & 3. See also the entry for “İmtiyazat” (“commercial privileges”; “capitulations”) in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2012.

¹⁸⁵ Akin 2011. For a more synoptic account, Finkel 2007.

¹⁸⁶ Winter 2022, 42.

¹⁸⁷ It was not unintentional that the date of the Hagia Sophia’s reopening as a mosque, July 20, corresponded with the 97th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne. While Lausanne has been historically valorized within Kemalist nationalist ideology, the treaty has been far more controversial among other segments of society, who have often seen the treaty, definitively accepting the forfeiture of the empire, as a capitulation to Western interests. The choice of date thus signified, at least for some, a repudiation of the unjust terms of the treaty. This although the Turkish delegation, with a string of battlefield victories and a British and French populace tired of war, had the upper hand in the Lausanne negotiations. See Winter 2022.

¹⁸⁸ The treaty also doomed hopes for Armenian and Kurdish states in Anatolia, which were part of the Sevres but absent Lausanne.

¹⁸⁹ Provence 2017, 150-151. This truth, we could add, had been learned first by Japan.

Syndrome” (*Sevr Sendromu*), about the threat of foreign, and specifically Western or Western-backed, plots against Turkish sovereignty.¹⁹⁰

While the status of the Hagia Sophia was not a part of the Lausanne negotiations, it had played a part in European designs on Turkish territory after the fall of the Ottomans. It is a fact often forgotten that the status of Istanbul itself was, during those initial post-war years, very much uncertain. Many in Britain and the other victorious powers—particularly the Kingdom of Greece—wanted to see the former capital of Byzantium returned to Greek Christian control, undoing the conquest of 1453 and finally removing Islam from ‘the gates of Europe’. In 1919 the New York Times editorialized, in a piece entitled “Disposing of Turkey,” that “to leave the Turks [in Constantinople] would be another of the innumerable compromises of the Turkish question which have wrought so much trouble in past centuries,” adding that the “restoration” of “St. Sophia” (Hagia Sophia) would be “a symbol of the final expulsion of the last of the barbarian invaders who so long ravaged Europe.” Such plans found significant support in Britain, Greece, and elsewhere, especially among those who hoped to realized the *Megali Idea* (Greek: “Great Idea”): the dream of a restored Byzantine Empire under a territorially expanded Greek state. The conversion of the Hagia Sophia was seen as a critical step towards this goal, with high-ranking politicians, religious leaders, and intellectuals such as Arnold Toynbee supporting the campaign for the “restoration of St. Sophia.”¹⁹¹ In 1919, a rally to support the campaign for restoration was planned to take place near Westminster Palace, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, along with other religious and lay officials, slated for attendance. The event was ultimately scrapped after Lord Curzon—who had previously supported depriving Turkey of its imperial capital, before accepting that such a move could incense an already restive Muslim population in British India—pressured the organizers into a last minute cancelation.¹⁹² Whitehall appears to have even corralled the daily papers to refrain from covering either the planned event or its cancellation, fearing that news of even the *consideration* of such a move could impair British control of pre-partition India.¹⁹³ A similar rally planned for Birmingham was likewise shut down, this time under pressure from Neville Chamberlain, then still a Birmingham MP, who shared concerns about how the many millions of Muslims living within the British Empire might respond to talk of converting the “best known mosque of the caliph’s capital into a Christian church.”¹⁹⁴ This “tug of war between the Christian men of empire and the cautionary administrators of the raj”¹⁹⁵ was coupled with British concerns over reports that a battalion of Ottoman soldiers (along with their machine guns) had taken up residence in the Hagia Sophia, rigging it with explosives lest the occupying Europeans try to take it by force.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Guida 2008.

¹⁹¹ Erik Goldstein. “Holy Wisdom & British Foreign Policy, 1918-1922: The St. Sophia Redemption Agitation.” *Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies*. 15 (1991), 36-64. Pg. 42

¹⁹² Curzon, G. N. 1918. Memorandum on the Future of Constantinople. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/memorandum-on-future-of-constantinople-lord-curzon>. A.E. Montgomery. “The Making of the Treaty of Sevres of 10 August 1920.” *The Historical Journal* 15.3 (1972), 775-787. 778

¹⁹³ Goldstein, 52

¹⁹⁴ Goldstein, 58

¹⁹⁵ Goldstein, 38

¹⁹⁶ Erkin Akan. “Ayasofya Camisi’nin Müzeye Çevrilmesi Üzerine bir Araştırma.” *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Cilt*. 125 Sayı 247 Sayfa 313-328. 2020.

Of course, neither Istanbul nor the Hagia Sophia were ultimately transferred to British or Greek control. Yet this was not a *fait accompli*. Under the terms of the humiliating 1920 Sevres Treaty, signed by Mehmed VI while Istanbul was still under occupation, Eastern Anatolia was to be partitioned between Armenians and Kurds, and both Izmir (then Smyrna) and Edirne were to go to the Greeks. The French and Italians were, for their part, to take portions of Turkey's western Mediterranean coast, along with parts of south-western Anatolia, including the cities of Antalya and Konya. While control of Istanbul was to be left to the Turks (albeit with shipping rights through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles passed to an international commission), under the terms of the Sevres Treaty the city was, as Eugene Rogan puts it, "awarded to the Turks on sufferance. If the Ottomans failed to uphold their treaty commitments, the Allies threatened to retract the award of Constantinople to the post-war Turkish state."¹⁹⁷ It was only the aforementioned military victories of Atatürk's Turkish National Movement that forced the Europeans to return to the bargaining table three years later for the Treaty of Lausanne—an agreement that offered vastly more agreeable terms to the nascent Turkish state and proved, as Michael Provence writes, that in dealings with European imperialism "the right of self-determination could only be taken, and was never given."¹⁹⁸

The experience of imperial collapse and the narrow escape from colonial partition provided the context for Atatürk and his supporters' effort to break with the Ottoman past and rapidly Westernize. Yet Westernization was, as suggested above, less a choice of cultural affinity than the consequence of a perceived existential exigency: if the national project was to succeed, "the works and ways of Western civilization" *had* to be implemented: both Turks and foreigners had to see the transformative potential of Turkish society. The most critical aspect of Westernization here—the aspect through which all others would be affected—was the transformation of a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational empire (or at least the Anatolian rump of this empire) into a formally homogenous nation-state along the lines of those recently constructed in Western Europe. As for Germany or Italy or France, the establishment of a unified nation-state in Turkey seemed to demand the construction of a unique and homogenous national identity,¹⁹⁹ one which, if convincing, needed to be grounded in a likewise homogenous ethnicity, language, culture, and/or religious tradition (Sunni Islam, in Turkey's case: despite Atatürk's focus on secularization, religious classification was an important identitarian tool in constructing the boundaries of Turkishness).²⁰⁰ It was, as for late 19th and early 20th nationalization movements in Europe, *history* that provided the evidentiary and narratological standards through which national distinctiveness could be articulated. Yet herein lay a problem: Atatürk and his allies—like nationalists everywhere—sought to construct national identity such that it could be seen as equal, if not superior to (in the sense of cultural richness, historical import, etc.) other national identities.²⁰¹ However, if Turkish national identity could not avoid interpellation by the same categories of European civilizational prejudice that had relegated the Ottomans to the Eastern pole of Said's "imaginative geography"; if it could not escape the position

¹⁹⁷ Eugene Rogan. *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books. 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017. Pg. 150-151

¹⁹⁹ See, for instance, Anderson 2016, Hobsbawm 2012

²⁰⁰ This is, incidentally, why Sunni Islam was used by Turkey's first generation of secularist leaders to determine the parameters of Turkishness, thereby excluding nearly all Ottoman Christians from inclusion and denying the validity of Kurdish difference on the grounds, at least in part, that the Kurds were generally Sunni. On the overlaps between and paradoxes of religious, ethnic, and national identity in Turkey, see Tambar 2016.

²⁰¹ On non-Western nationalisms and the construction of spiritual superiority against perceived Western technical superiority, see Chatterjee 1986.

of cultural-civilizational inferiority in the eyes of the West; if it could not achieve an at least approximate cultural equality with the West—if Turkey could not accomplish these goals, then its sovereignty and success would remain imperiled by the imperialist chauvinism of an interventionist West, which had retained such a degree of Turko-phobia that, even in America, whose material and imaginative relations with the Ottoman Empire had been historically further removed from those of European states, the “Turk” was in 1928 reported to be the most hated identity among Americans (“negro” came second), despite the certainty that most Americans knew no one of Turkish descent.²⁰² To achieve this approximate equality, Turkey would have to convince “the Great Powers” that the Turks were not *really* Oriental: that they were, their historic attachment to Islam notwithstanding, a modern, secular, and “West-facing” society—or at least held the potential of becoming such a society.²⁰³ But how would Europe ever accept this new representation of national identity, given that the Oriental character of the Ottoman Empire—of the “lusty” Turk, “the barbarian horde from Central Asia,” “the Oriental apostasy incarnate”—was so embedded in what Valéry called “the mind of Europe,” with “the Turk” having provided, in some accounts, *the* civilizational “other” against which modern European identity emerged by negation?²⁰⁴

The 1934 decision to change the status of what the Anglophone press called “St. Sophia” should be read in regards to this context of adopting Western forms and while also working to undo entrenched European prejudice and imperialist ambition. In this context, architectural, archeological, and civilizational heritage was of particular relevance. The Hagia Sophia, it should be remembered, was not the only pre-Ottoman monument within the borders of the new Turkish state that was of relevance to Europe. Indeed, its eventual opening as a museum was due in no small part to the efforts of Euro-American institutions—institutions that, after the end of WWI, became intensely interested in the study and restoration of the cultural patrimony (especially of Greek or Christian provenance) housed within the new Turkey.²⁰⁵ In addition to the Byzantine monuments in Istanbul, the new Turkish state was beginning to confront the challenge of how to engage—archaeologically, historically, nationalistically—with the ancient Greek, Roman, Hittite, and other non-Ottoman heritage over which modern Turkey was now the steward, but whose “foreign” nature” posed a problem for the “cultural identity” of the new republic.²⁰⁶

The ideological circumscription and spatial reorganization of Ottoman monuments such as Topkapı Palace (itself turned into a museum soon after 1923) aimed at diminishing the visibility of the Ottoman past, rendering it an object of aesthetic and historical curiosity rather than part of a

²⁰² Cited from George Makari. *Of Fear and Strangers: A History of Xenophobia*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2021. Pg. 148.

²⁰³ The insistence among some Turks, across the ideological spectrum, on the radical difference of Turkishness and Turkish Islam from the identities and religious practices of Arab nations continues. See, for instance White 2013, esp. Chapter 2.

²⁰⁴ Hall 1992

²⁰⁵ Perhaps the most relevant of these institutions was the American Byzantine Institute, led by archaeologist Thomas Whittemore, who helped uncover the Hagia Sophia’s mosaics in 1931 and subsequently gained permission to restore them. Whittemore is often credited with helping to convince the Turkish government to open the monument as a museum. See, Katipoğlu & Caner-Yüksel 2010.

²⁰⁶ Eldem 2015

living tradition.²⁰⁷ Yet the situation was more difficult for those monuments whose history traversed national, religious, and civilizational distinctions.²⁰⁸ Specifically, the difficulty for the new Turkey was how to incorporate the pre-Ottoman histories of Istanbul, Anatolia, and the Eastern Aegean (from 9th century cave churches in Cappadocia to Neolithic temples in Mesopotamia, to the ruins of Greco-Roman city-states and tombs of Christian saints on the Aegean coast, to the cave churches of Anatolia) so as to, 1) make these compatible with a homogeneous “Turkishness,” 2) construe Anatolia as the authentic Turkish “homeland” (*vatan*),²⁰⁹ and 3) to present Turkish culture as fully compatible with the perceived norms and values of European modernity.

To achieve these ends, a twofold solution was adopted. First, the demonstration of the Turkish state’s appreciation for, and its capacity for stewardship over, the diverse history and heritage within its borders. Second, the use of this history and this heritage to make revisionist, and often implausible, claims about Turkic autochthony in Anatolia and Turkish contributions to human—and particularly European—civilization. In this manner, early Republican historians, linguists, and archeologists proposed the “Turkish History Thesis” (*Türk Tarih Tezi*) in the early 1930s, positing “a Turco-centric view of world history, claiming that Turks had their homeland in Central Asia where the origins of all human civilizations are to be found,” and that, therefore, “Turks were the first people to develop both language and civilization before they migrated westwards.”²¹⁰ Likewise, the “Sun-Language Theory” (*Güneş-Dil Teorisi*) asserted that proto-Turkish was humanity’s ur-language, with all modern linguistic diversity traceable back to Turkic roots. Such pseudoscientific theories were quickly disproven, but they worked to establish “a story of Anatolians sharing a timeless essence from the Paleolithic to the present,” wherein the Hittites (the late-Bronze Age occupants of Anatolia) had in fact been Turks, and the achievements of the ancient Greeks were borrowings from Hittite (i.e. Turkic) culture.²¹¹ Such theories (which tended to present Turks as members of the newly proposed “Aryan” race²¹²) aimed to “insert modernity into Turkishness while showing Turkish contributions to the very modernity that relegated Turkey to the category of the “non-modern.””²¹³ These theories aimed at demonstrating that Turks possessed not only an “innate capacity for civilization,” but had also (contrary to European notions of Turkish backwardness and barbarity) in fact contributed to the creation of Western civilization itself. That Turks *had* of course been a

²⁰⁷ Alev Çınar writes that, “The museumification of Sultanahmet Square represents the power of the secular republic to enclose the Ottoman era and its culture and confine them to a spatially as well as temporally remote area. What had been the center of a vast empire for five centuries was suddenly designated an adjacent district that no longer bore any political viability or national significance for the newly forming secular republic.” Çınar 2005, 112

²⁰⁸ As Pınar Aykaç writes, “In the early years of the Republic, museums played a key role in distancing the secular nation-state from its imperial and Islamic past,” with a variety of Ottoman and Islamic sites (being either closed or transformed into museums. Aykaç 2019, 3.

²⁰⁹ Behlül Özkan. *From the Abode of Islam to the Turkish Vatan: The Making of a National Homeland in Turkey*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2012.

²¹⁰ Redford & Ergin 2010, 4

²¹¹ Redford & Ergin, 6

²¹² Yılmaz 2021, 9; Ersanlı 2002, 116

²¹³ Ergin 2010, 17

critical part of European history during the Seljuk and Ottoman periods was not a focus of such theories, which tended to circumvent the Ottoman period entirely.²¹⁴

Such circumvention, belittlement, and sometimes outright suppression, of the Ottoman period in the first decades of the Turkish Republic, geared at generating the sense of a radical “discontinuity”²¹⁵ between the old empire and the new Republic, has been well documented, and is discussed more directly in the previous chapter. What is important to stress here is that monuments such as the Hagia Sophia were not exempted from the broader project of transforming national identity, culture and history to accord with the imagined dictates of European modernity. Rather, they were integral to that project, working to curate an image of the young nation as fully compatible with—if not an agent of—the putative achievements of Western civilization.

Nonetheless, the Hagia Sophia occupied a particularly awkward position within these transformations. Its status as the principle mosque of the Ottoman caliph (a position dissolved by Atatürk in 1924) had been a symbol of, depending on your position, either Ottoman grandeur or (to re-quote the *Times*) the ‘barbarism’ of the “invaders who so long ravaged Europe.” At the same time, it was part of a pre-Ottoman history that the new Turkey wanted to demonstrate its capacity for appreciating and protecting, albeit without ceding national autonomy to the foreign (Western) powers still seen by many as having designs on Turkish territory. The difficulty posed by the Hagia Sophia, in other words, was that it had to be at once included and excluded from the image of the country that was being domestically constructed and internationally projected. Unlike the Hittite or Greek heritage, which could be incorporated (albeit fantastically) into narratives of Turkish civilizational history without reference to the Ottoman period, the Hagia Sophia was a paradigmatic monument of the empire whose centrality to the legacy of Turkic civilization had to be minimized. As such, some Republican elites considered Hagia Sophia’s total demolition, hoping to remove it from the surface of the new nation like the Ottoman coats-of-arms scrubbed off the facades of public buildings, or the stacks of Ottoman archival documents, sold as recycled paper to Bulgaria in the years after the formation of the republic.²¹⁶ Still, to actually destroy the building was impossible (if only because the European powers who Turkey aimed to placate would have been horrified by such a move), and while the domestic population might have been forced to acquiesce to the plan—ultimately scrapped for reasons of architectural integrity—to demolish Hagia Sophia’s minarets, its complex significance would have to be reconciled with the new narratives of national identity.

The 1934 secularization of the Hagia Sophia, therefore, should be seen in a dual aspect. As a demonstration of the radical distinctiveness of the new nation from the Islamic empire that preceded it, the transition of the building from mosque to museum was intended to prove, to both the national self and to a perceived Western audience, the secular, civilized, and Western-facing character of the new nation. To desanctify the building was not only to perform a secular distinction between *raison d’état* and religious significance,²¹⁷ but to render the Islamic-Ottoman legacy an object of ‘merely historical’—rather than still living and contemporary—significance. Moreover,

²¹⁴ For a recent study of the Ottoman Empire’s influence on Europe and the emergence of modernity, see Mikhail 2020.

²¹⁵ Ersanlı 2002, 122

²¹⁶ Gül 2009, 75-76

²¹⁷ See Asad on the secular circumscription of a putatively religious space of privatized significance from the equally putative universality of state rationality. Asad 2003, 8; 235-6.

while the building's secularization may have had some immediate strategic aims²¹⁸, its rationale was inseparable from both the structure of European ideas about Turkey and, consequently, the effort by Republican elites to disassociate an ideal of the new nation from the practical and affective force of European geopolitical pressure and Orientalist condescension. Failure to be recognized as a "civilized" nation not only kept alive the possibility (or at least the fear) of European imperialist intervention (a concern that lives on in what is colloquially known as the "Sevres Syndrome" or *Sevr Sendromu*, named after the aforementioned 1920 treaty and referring to anxiety over Turkey again being forced to accept infringements on its territory and its sovereignty²¹⁹). It also threatened to derail efforts to negotiate with neighbors and regional powers in the early decades of the Republic.²²⁰ In this context, while the secularization of the Hagia Sophia was performed without any apparent foreign coercion, it was not free from the kind of "crypto-colonial" pressure described by Herzfeld, wherein the Westernization of society, while not directly forced by foreign states, was affected out of an anxiety that such force might be mobilized in the future should national culture not be made to conform with the hierarchical "taxonomies of culture" (Coronil 2019) globalized by European colonial-capitalist power. As a demonstration of the radical distinctiveness of the Turkish Republic from the Islamic empire that preceded it, therefore, the transformation of the Hagia Sophia from mosque to museum would demonstrate—to both the national self and to the "global gaze" of those "foreigners who matter"—the secular, civilized, West-oriented, and decidedly non-Oriental character of the new Turkey. While the decision may have been motivated by other concerns as well,²²¹ it cannot be understood apart from the broader context of, 1) the historical and enduring threat posed by European imperialism and prejudice, and, 2) the attempted conversion, effected in significant part *because* of this threat, of the Islamic-Ottoman legacy into an object of what we might call "merely historical,"²²² rather than still living, significance. In this context, we see more clearly how the Hagia Sophia was offered up as a promissory note of the kind of nation that Atatürk and his supporters wished the world to see Turkey as becoming: a nation distinct from its Ottoman-Islamic past, willing to take a cudgel to centuries of tradition so as to be seen as moving away from the Orient and "Oriental despotism" and towards the West and secular modernity.²²³

This promise of the nation as progressively modern, secular, and internationally respected (specifically in the West) remains dear to many Turks, including those, like Onur, who are critical of much of the Kemalist legacy. Like Onur, Rojhat, a successful art and antiques dealer in his early 50s,

²¹⁸ Such as in the theory that Atatürk believed the decision would be a boon in negotiations with Orthodox nations prior to the signing of the Balkan Pact in 1934. <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/haber/ayasofya-karari-ve-mahmut-esat-bozkurt-213282>

²¹⁹ As Yılmaz writes, "The Sevres Syndrome is a siege mentality, a belief that the in-group is encircled by enemies and in immediate need of self-defence." Yılmaz 2021, 14

²²⁰ Ian Lesser. "The Evolution of Turkish National Security Strategy." In, *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity*, eds. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem, and Philip Robins. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010. Pg. 260

²²¹ Such as in the theory, occasionally discussed in Turkish-language historiography, that Atatürk believed the decision would be a boon in negotiations with Orthodox nations prior to the signing of the Balkan Pact in 1934.

²²² Credit for this idea is owed to historian Henry Clements.

²²³ The gambit was not unsuccessful. In 1934, even before secularization had been effected, the same *New York Times* that had some 15 years prior advocated expelling the Turks from Istanbul and reclaiming the Hagia Sophia for Christianity (see footnote 33) wrote that, "nothing could give stronger evidence of the sincerity of the liberal principles of the new Turkish Government" than the decision to uncover the Christian mosaics inside the Hagia Sophia. "St.Sophia." *The New York Times*. Jan 21, 1934. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1934/01/21/94485507.html?pageNumber=62>

held mixed opinions of Atatürk and many of his successors—opinions largely due to Kemalism’s history of repression against minorities and leftists (in addition to his leftist politics, Rojhat’s mother’s family was Kurdish and, while never having identified strongly with his Kurdish roots, he was more attuned than most to Kemalism’s legacy of anti-Kurdish repression). Despite his assessment of Kemalism’s history, Rojhat remained committed to the belief that the Kemalist Revolution was not only compatible with a progressive political program but had provided Turkey a “new beginning” out of the ashes of empire and towards a secular-democratic future, a future that, while never fully achieved, was still worth committing to.

While staunchly secular, Rojhat had voted for the AKP in their historic 2002 victory. Seeing my surprise at this admission, Rojhat explained that he had cast his vote out of intense frustration with extant political parties (particularly with the Kemalist CHP), with the secularist military’s recurrent subversion of the democratic will (officers having staged, or threatened to stage, coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997), and with the legacy of the secular state’s repression of both minorities and leftists. In its early years, the AKP had seemed poised to develop better relationships with the country’s Kurds (the AKP initially received substantial Kurdish support), as well as with other minority groups; and it promised to push forward EU accession talks, in part by enacting a package of democratizing reforms, including the reassertion of civilian control over the military. Indeed, during the early years of what İhsan Yılmaz calls “AKP 1.0” (circa 2002-2010),²²⁴ the AKP improved infrastructure, improved relations with neighbors and allies, forwarded EU membership talks, and constricted the military’s political power. By the end of the 2000s, however, Rojhat had lost faith in the AKP and regretted his vote in 2002; by 2020, he saw his country’s recent history as a procession of disappointment and pain, with the Hagia Sophia’s reconversion culminating a decade of incipient despair.

Like Sena, Rojhat felt a deep affection for the Hagia Sophia. As a young man he had become enthralled with the beauty of the Ottoman past, treasuring its remnants in architecture, in music and art and literature, and in the artifacts of Ottoman material culture. While obviously not of Ottoman origin, Rojhat still saw the Hagia Sophia as a paradigm of Ottoman aesthetics, given that it had had a profound influence on the development of Ottoman architecture and aesthetics. Rojhat’s fondness for the monument had only deepened since he, years prior, had purchased a modest but impeccably decorated apartment near Galata, with a small terrace from which one could look out onto the Hagia Sophia and the adjacent Topkapı palace. A few months after the reconversion was finalized, as he and I sat drinking tea on the terrace, Rojhat reflected on the monument’s modern history: Atatürk’s 1934 decision had indeed been a kind promise (what I called above a “promissory note”) of what the new Turkey stood for and was capable of achieving. It was this promise that Rojhat felt had been increasingly violated over the last decade, with the Hagia Sophia’s reconversion a highly symbolic indication of this violation. Nonetheless, Rojhat did not, unlike many Turkish secularists and a great many foreign observers, assign to Islam or religion the principal responsibility for this broken promise. Instead, he looked beyond the rise of religious-nationalism in the 80s and 90s and dated the decline of Kemalism’s transformational potential to the political tumult of the 1960s, to the political violence and disfunction of the 1970s, and then to the repressions and constitutional changes following the 1980 coup, after which the power of both socialism and a more left of center Kemalism (as embodied in figures like Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit) were marginalized.

Like Sena, Rojhat had grown up around family who attended mosque regularly and melded faith into the architecture of their daily lives. Although broadly sympathetic to popular leftist criticisms of (the sociopolitical role of) religion, Rojhat appreciated the forms of faith around which he had been raised, and he did not view Islam as a monolith. He imagined that if a different government had proposed allowing prayers at the Hagia Sophia on Fridays while leaving it as a

²²⁴ Yılmaz 2021

museum during the rest of the week, framing the decision as an act of national unity rather than of division, then he might not have experienced the reconversion as painful. What made it painful was not the reappearance of prayer, but that the Hagia Sophia was being used as a weapon in a politics of identity that served the interests of Erdoğan and the AKP at the expense of other modes of national consciousness, even patriotism. Rojhat experienced the reconversion as precisely an attempted annulment of Atatürk's flawed but nevertheless necessary vision for the nation, using a marriage of piety and political power to do so. Even as Rojhat recognized that the Kemalist vision had never been realized in practice—and had not irregularly been invoked to justify state violence and repression—he remained committed to it such an extent that he experienced such a highly symbolic attack upon this vision as also an attack on himself.

Rojhat rarely visited the Hagia Sophia, doing so only occasionally if showing foreign friends around the old city. Yet the monument was for him, as for so many others, a constant and sublime presence, its monumentality commanding the skyline which stretches out towards the Sea of Marmara and—on those precious, pellucid days of Covid lockdowns, when the city was divested of smog and the “Sea” took on the proportions of a large lake—towards the snow-capped mountain of Uludağ. Rojhat's mornings and sunsets were inflected by the changing colors of the church-mosque-museum's great dome, the vividness of which would sometimes seep into his body and pour out in watercolor onto paper. In the weeks after the decision was announced, however, Rojhat felt that this view of water and city and sky was somehow diminished, causing in him a discomfort he described as a kind of belly-ache:

“It was hard to look at it for some time, because when I did I would think about the whole condition of this country. I felt a pain in my stomach, like when you see a lover who has left under unpleasant circumstances. The pain is less intense now, but it has not gone away completely... When compared to what else they have done [under Erdoğan's leadership] over the last five, ten years, maybe [the reconversion] is not so important. But it is important to me. Its history is our history, its beauty is our beauty. By threatening the Hagia Sophia we threaten ourselves... Erdoğan is playing a dangerous game.”

In the context of broader social, political and economic turmoil, perhaps the status of the Hagia Sophia was “not so important”: no one had been imprisoned, killed, or brutalized by the Council of State's decision, and Rojhat wasn't so intensely partisan as to believe that the Hagia Sophia's return to religious use heralded its physical destruction (as some indeed did fear). But he did fear that its reconversion heralded the destruction, or at least diminishment, of what the secularized Hagia Sophia had stood for: the national vision, once powerful, now under threat, of a modern, secular, West-facing Turkey. Inseparable from this fear was another, concerning how those outside of Turkey would perceive the decision: more precisely, how the decision would be seen internationally as a further proof of Turkey's regression into authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and anti-Westernism. Well-aware of the Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes through which Turkey has been so often represented in the West, Rojhat was nonetheless pained by how the reconversion was further diminishing Turkey's status in the eyes of foreigners, particularly Europeans. He smarted at the coverage he read in the French press (French, rather than English, being his strongest foreign language), and even though he knew that many of the Euro-American condemnations of the decision smacked of paternalism and Islamophobia, he could not help feeling

a mix of anger and shame at how Europeans in particular perceived his country.²²⁵ He resented this feeling, but could not shake it.

This sentiment was widespread among secular Turks who followed international media. As Merve, a freelance journalist in her 30s, explained, the decision was for her and her friends a national embarrassment, symbolizing the deleterious trends in politics and culture over the past two decades. It was humiliating to feel the country sliding backwards, not only because of what this meant for Turks at home (particularly for liberal journalists like her, who have suffered incredible degrees of state censorship and prosecution), but also because of how the country would be perceived internationally. Merve lamented: “Tayyip has done incredible damage to our reputation around the world...Look at the repression, the journalists imprisoned, the purges, now the Hagia Sophia. What can people think when they look at us? What can people think when so many follow this president, this cross between Putin and the Ayatollah [of Iran]?” When suggesting that similar issues were at play in perceptions of Trump’s America, Merve was unconvinced: “It’s a totally different situation. America is too powerful to be looked down on. Turkey, however, is becoming a joke.” In this context, Merve feared, the reconversion of the Hagia Sophia would be perceived by Navarro’s aforementioned “foreigners who matter” as more proof that Turkey was incapable of becoming, in Merve’s words, a truly “modern country.”²²⁶ The perception of this inability, Merve worried, threatened more than Turkey’s immediate economic and (geo)political prospects. It endangered the credibility of the vision, to repeat, of Turkey as a progressively modern, secular, and West-facing nation—a vision that has for a century been dear to so many, seen as the best—indeed the only—path towards national autonomy, recognition, and progress, but which now, in the eyes of those like Merve and Rojhat (whose politics were otherwise quite distinct) was being intentionally crushed.

III: The Hagia Sophia in the Erdoğanist Paradigm

For its first decades, the Turkish state was a one-party state, dominated by Atatürk and his successors. The 1950 victory of the Democrat Party, which drew support from a range of classes, groups, and interests dissatisfied with years of one-party rule, opened greater space for public criticism of Kemalist projects and policies. The ideological roots of Erdoğanism can be traced to the end of the one-party period, when a new generation of intellectuals, coming to full political consciousness well after Atatürk’s revolution but experiencing the effacement of the Ottoman and the Islamic as a profound loss, advocated a return to this world through a nationalized reinterpretation of the Ottoman-Islamic inheritance.²²⁷ Open criticism of the Hagia Sophia’s secular status began among such intellectuals, like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, and Nurettin Topçu, who advocated the monument’s return to religious use as a repudiation of the dogmatic, Europe-facing, secular statism that they saw as having dominated the country since its founding.²²⁸

²²⁵ Western expressions of dismay, and often condescension, were evinced by various American and European officials and institutions. UNESCO—from whom the Hagia Sophia takes its “World Heritage” status—expressed ‘deep regrets’ over the decision, concerned that the politicization of the building threatened its “universal value.” EU ministers likewise expressed public ‘regret’, and saw it as threatening “renewed division between religious communities.” The US State Department was “disappointed,” and the Greek Ministry of Culture called it an “open provocation to the civilised world.” Religious leaders also commented, with the Pope “pained” and the Russian Patriarch “deeply concerned,” the latter calling the move a “threat to the whole of Christian civilisation.” This alongside a flotilla of critiques, ranging from the indignant to the tearful, appearing in mainstream outlets.

²²⁶ For such anxieties over Turkey’s ability to become or be recognized as fully modern, see, for instance, Döşemeci 2013; Ahıska 2010, 2003; Özyürek 2006.

²²⁷ Aytürk 2014. It is important to note that not all intellectuals of this period who were critical of Kemalism and the effacement of the Ottoman past moved towards religious-nationalism. See, for instance, Sezer 2010.

²²⁸ Uzer 2016; Köseoğlu 2021, 1-10; 210-212; 229; Turgut 2021.

In order to become a truly sovereign and self-confident nation, Turkey would have to return to a living relationship with the Ottoman and the Islamic—a return that the Hagia Sophia’s reconsecration would herald. This return would promise the reconstruction of the foundations of national culture, reorienting the identity of the national subject away from Kemalist principles. As a pivotal figure in the emergence of this “alternate” nationalist ideology, in Çınar’s aforementioned terms, Kısakürek was integral to the re-politicization of the Hagia Sophia, even if it would take decades for his polemics to bear fruit. In a rousing 1965 speech,²²⁹ Kısakürek argued that Atatürk’s decision had made the Hagia Sophia into a “tomb in which Islam is buried,” its secularization an expression of the “virtues of the [Christian] cross” rather than of “the [Islamic] crescent.” By entombing the Hagia Sophia the “soul” or “spirit” (*ruh*) of the nation, animating Turkey’s “essential and true homeland,” had likewise been buried. The monument’s secularization had been like an order to “a million strong army” to “press their rifles to their chests, pull the trigger and commit suicide.” Only when the monument was again opened to prayer would this order be reversed, freeing the national soul from the fetters in which the Kemalists, under Western tutelage and pressure, had placed it. This emphasis on the Turkish nation (rather than on a transnational Islam) is worth pausing over: Kısakürek framed the secularization of the Hagia Sophia, very explicitly, not as an injury to Islam in general but to the Turks—the Turks who, in Kısakürek’s narrative, raised Islam to its historical heights, forging their own “victorious soul” through the conquest, incorporation, and perfection of the second Rome’s great church. The Hagia Sophia was thereby presented by Kısakürek as the inheritance and achievement, not of Muslims, but of the Turks: it was the *Turkish* soul that had been ‘locked behind’ the doors of the Hagia Sophia, and was is the “closed fortune” of the Turks that was to be reopened along with the reopening of the Hagia Sophia to prayer.²³⁰ For Kısakürek, therefore, the restoration of the Hagia Sophia mosque was (to borrow from Çınar’s description of debates over the proposed Taksim mosque in the 1990s) not simply “about meeting the demands of religious practice or about the insertion of an Islamic artifact into a public space, but primarily about the articulation of an alternative national identity.”²³¹

It was a long road from Kısakürek’s 1965 speech to the eventual triumph of his narrative of national history and the Hagia Sophia’s place within it. This narrative had remained marginal prior to the 1980 military coup, which followed a decade of violence between left and right-wing groups, with leftists and Kurds bearing the brunt of beatings, assassination, and torture at the hands of ultra-nationalist factions, sometimes reviving tacit support from the state. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, which triggered both an immense wave of political repression and substantial changes to the constitution, Islamic groups/movements were granted more political freedom in the hope of drawing young people towards religion and away from leftist politics.²³² After the army returned to their barracks and civilian politicians regained formal control of the state, a new generation of charismatic, self-avowedly pious leaders moved to the political mainstream. By the 1990s, newly empowered religious-nationalist parties, expertly mobilizing grassroots activism and providing social services poorly administered by the secular state, found unprecedented electoral success.²³³ At local,

²²⁹ The full text of Kısakürek’s speech can be found here: <https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5048361/necip-fazil-in-ayasofya-hitabesi-sansursuz>.

²³⁰ In his retrospective on the 2020 decision, Hasan Turgut makes this point also: Turgut 2021. “Necip Fazıl Kısakürek ve Yeni Türkiye’nin İnşası.” *Birikim Dergisi*. June 14, 2021. <https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/10643/pirus-zafari-necip-fazil-kisakurek-populizm-ve-yeni-turkiyenin-insasi>

²³¹ Çınar 2005, 115-116

²³² See Arat and Pamuk 2020, Chapter 3.

²³³ Eligür 2010

municipal, and national levels, these parties (significantly, Erbakan's Welfare Party) began to champion a greater visibility for the Islamic and the Ottoman in both political discourse and public space.²³⁴ These moves set off intense debates over the Ottoman-Islamic inheritance, particularly over the "use of city spaces" to commemorate this inheritance and thereby "construct an alternate sense of nationhood."²³⁵ As suggested above, this sense differed from the hegemonic "Turkish-secular national ideology" (i.e., the Kemalist paradigm) and its commitment to "West-oriented modernity and secularism." Against Kemalist nationalism, leaders like Erbakan advocated, with increasing success, for "the national subject" to be conceived as "essentially Eastern, Ottoman, authentically local, and Islamic."²³⁶ Substantial secularist protest in the 90s and 2000s notwithstanding,²³⁷ the curated display of Ottoman-Islamic symbols in urban space continued apace, with the symbolic topography of Istanbul slowly shifting away from Kemalist sites and symbols.²³⁸ By the early 2010s, the AKP had taken up the valorization of the Ottoman and the Islamic previously pushed by figures such as Erbakan, spearheading a string of projects that would have been unthinkable in prior decades.²³⁹ This included the building of mosques in sites dear to the Kemalist imagination like Taksim Square, and the reconversion of other museums—also secularized in the early decades of the Republic—back into mosques.²⁴⁰ These moves took place against the backdrop of the growth of what is often termed neo-Ottomanism (*yeni Osmanlılık*), which, as discussed more in the following chapter, has dominated much political discourse and cultural production in recent years.²⁴¹ In addition to a renewed attention to an idealized Ottoman culture and history, Turkish popular culture in recent decades has been filled with Ottoman-Islamic narratives and aesthetics, from the massive success of Ottoman palace shows such as *The Magnificent Century* (*Muhteşem Yüzyıl*), romanticized depictions of Ottoman pre-history like *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* (*Diriliş*:

²³⁴ Eldem 2015; Göktürk et al. 2010; Büyüksaraç 2004; Çınar 2005 & 2001; Keyder 1999.

²³⁵ Çınar 2005, 102

²³⁶ Çınar 2005, 102

²³⁷ For ethnographic engagement with this period of secularist disempowerment, privatization, and protest, see, for instance, Tambar 2014, Çınar 2005, Navaro 2002.

²³⁸ For studies of 1990s and 2000s contests over public aesthetics, space, and propriety see Navaro 2002, Çınar 2005, Göktürk et al. 2010. Gökarıksel & Secor 2015; Çınar 2008.

²³⁹ In addition to moves against Kemalism's symbolic power, the AKP also pursued less obviously ideological projects that were nonetheless geared at cementing the AKP's domination of urban space. This has included the construction of the enormous "Istanbul Airport" (*İstanbul Havalimanı*) in 2019 (which replaced, both physically and symbolically, the previous "Atatürk airport"). Other projects—such as the multi-billion dollar Galataport project along the Bosphorus, opened in 2021; the massively ambitious (and deeply controversial) "Istanbul Canal" project begun in 2021; the underwater *Marmaray* rail tunnel, connecting the European and Anatolian sides of the city, in 2013—filled out this trend.

²⁴⁰ Aykaç 2019. On the broader context of architectural politics, Dreßler 2020, Batuman 2018, Walton 2010.

²⁴¹ For a broad overview of neo-Ottomanism in Turkey, see Yavuz 2020. In architecture and public space, see Gizem Zencirci. "Civil Society's History: New Constructions of Ottoman Heritage by the Justice and Development Party in Turkey." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 19 (2014); Ayşe Öncü. "Narratives of Istanbul's Ottoman Heritage." In, *Spatial Conceptions of the Nation: Modernizing Geographies in Greece and Turkey*. Eds. P. N. Diamandouros, T. Dragonas, and Ç. Keyder, 205–228. London: I.B. Tauris. 2010; Çınar 2005, and 2001.

Ertuğrul), and big budget films like *Conquest 1453 (Fetih 1453)*.²⁴² Not all Ottoman revivalism in popular culture shares the same ideological bent (the huge success of *The Magnificent Century*, for instance, with its highly sensualized depiction of palace intrigue, did not always jibe with the ruling AKP's cultural agenda). But the glorified depiction of the Ottoman past has both benefited from and been capitalized on by a government push to make commemorations of Ottoman triumphs—such as the increasingly lavish yearly celebration of the conquest of Constantinople—into integral parts of national identity and the yearly cycle of national commemorations.²⁴³ While such commemorations were never totally absent from mainstream political culture, with the 500 year anniversary of the conquest of Constantinople being an important event in 1953, their significance was subordinated throughout the 20th century to commemorations of Atatürk and the revolutionary reforms of the early Republic.²⁴⁴

The growth of neo-Ottomanism, along with the success of the transformation of the symbolic typography of urban space, emboldened calls for the Hagia Sophia's reconversion. At first, many assumed that the reconversion would remain strategically unfulfilled (more effective as a talking point than as a realized achievement).²⁴⁵ Yet as pressure from activist groups and prominent politicians intensified in the mid-2010s, with Quranic recitations and the call to prayer broadcast from the monument for the first time in eight decades, the possibility of reconversion was taken more seriously.²⁴⁶ By 2020, as an already troubled economy was battered by Covid-19 lockdowns and support for the AKP declined, Erdoğan backtracked on earlier expressions of skepticism towards the possibility of the monument's reconversion, seeming to realize that the decision could galvanize his base in the midst of global economic turmoil and a number of domestic political crises.²⁴⁷

The 2020 decision emerged from this contested politics of memory, heritage, and history, demonstrating the slow but determined process by which a fringe ambition can remain sidelined for decades before morphing into a key political objective, ultimately supported (by the time the decision was announced) by likely a majority of the population. To consider the opinions of those who excitedly welcomed the decision, it is useful to begin with Erdoğan's speech confirming that the reconversion would indeed take place. While it is highly likely that Erdoğan's decision to back the reconversion was at least partially motivated by political-economic calculations (with his party's sliding popularity certainly playing a role in the decision's timing) we fail to apprehend the significance of the decision if we ignore how it was framed discursively—especially as this framing was positively received by millions of Turks. In other words, and irrespective of whether Erdoğan

²⁴² Negehan Tokdoğan. *Yeni Osmanlılık: Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm* (New Ottomanism: Resentment, Nostalgia, Narcissism). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları. 2018. Josh Carney. "ResurReaction: Competing Visions of Turkey's (proto) Ottoman Past in *Magnificent Century* and *Resurrection Ertuğrul*." *Middle East Critique* 2 (2019), 101-120.

²⁴³ The celebration for the conquest of İstanbul, falling each May 29th, has for many become a kind of informal national independence day, taking symbolic and emotional space from secularist holidays such as Republic Day (*Cumhuriyet Bayramı*), which commemorates when Atatürk proclaimed the birth of the Republic of Turkey on October 29. "Turkey marks 568th anniversary of İstanbul's conquest." *Daily Sabah*. May 30, 2021; Bozoğlu 2020; Uzer 2020; Bozoğlu & Whitehead 2018; Brockett 2014; Çınar 2001.

²⁴⁴ Bozoğlu 2020, 92

²⁴⁵ See Belge 2020

²⁴⁶ "First Call to Prayer Inside İstanbul's Hagia Sophia in 85 Years." *Hurriyet Daily News*. 07/02/2016. <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/first-call-to-prayer-inside-istanbuls-hagia-sophia-in-85-years-101161>

²⁴⁷ "Erdoğan 'Önce Sultanahmet'i doldurun' dedi, İslamcılar Ayasofya önünde toplandı." *Sol*. 3/16/19. <https://haber.sol.org.tr/turkiye/erdogan-once-sultanahmeti-doldurun-dedi-islamcilar-ayasofya-onunde-toplandi-258665>

really believed in what he was saying, his words resonated with a very substantial portion of the population.

In his speech, Erdoğan tacked between responding to international—namely Euro-American—criticisms and concerns and speaking to domestic supporters and a global Muslim community about the historical significance of the reconversion. Aware of international criticism claiming that the decision would threaten the Hagia Sophia’s “universal” significance (more on this criticism below), Erdoğan stressed that, “like all our other mosques, the doors of the Hagia Sophia will remain open to locals and foreigners, Muslims and non-Muslims, forever.” The building’s “new status,” Erdoğan suggested, did not contradict its existence as part of “the common heritage of humanity.” Rather, the new status promised to preserve this heritage for future generations. Indeed, as Erdoğan emphasized, the conquering Ottomans did not destroy Constantinople’s great church but instead protected and improved it, caring so much for it as to adopt it as their own. This conquest and incorporation was “one of the most glorious pages of all history, especially [Turkish] history.” Unlike the many mosques that were destroyed in the Ottoman provinces of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, Erdoğan reminded listeners that Turkey has consistently protected the cultural artifacts of non-Muslims and non-Turks, and promised to continue to protect the Hagia Sophia, whose value is “common” to all but whose ownership is incontestably Turkish no whose function is incontestably Islamic. In this manner, while the reconversion would be at once “beneficial to our nation, the ummah, and all of humanity,” it was ultimately “about the rights of Turkish sovereignty” and, “on this subject, [Turkey] will take any statement or attitude other than the expression of an opinion as a violation of our independence.” This assertion of the legitimacy and inviolability of Turkish sovereignty over the monument was defended with the contention that Turkey’s right to the Hagia Sophia is (referring to the life of the modern Turkish republic) “not 50 or 100 years old,” but rather “a full 567 year old right” (referring to the 1453 conquest of Constantinople and the span of the Ottoman Empire). If international critics wished to elide this historical right and portray the decision as part of “a debate focused on [religious] faith” (rather than national sovereignty), then these critics should start by attending to the “hostility towards Islam and the hatred of foreigners” that is “increasing everyday around the world.” As this brief gloss illustrates, Erdoğan’s two main responses to international (and specifically Euro-American) critics were twofold. First, the decision “concerns only [Turkey’s] domestic law and historical rights” and thus international opposition to the decision is an affront to Turkish sovereignty and/or an instance of Islamophobia. Second, that concerns over the preservation and accessibility of the building are overblown, and that Turkey will preserve universal significance so often cited by foreign commentators (again, more on these commentaries below).

In the remainder of the speech, Erdoğan pivoted towards a domestic audience. Here, he stressed the illegality and the cultural affront of the 1934 decision even while carefully avoiding any reference to Atatürk himself. (Such conspicuous omissions of Atatürk in AKP rhetoric has long been a part of Erdoğan and the AKP’s discursive strategy of criticizing Atatürk’s legacy without directly impugning him, as direct insults of the country’s founder which still risk alienating much of the electorate).²⁴⁸ “The [1934] decision,” Erdoğan says to his supporters with thinly-veiled contempt for Atatürk’s legacy, “was not only a betrayal of history, but also contrary to the law;” a national “shame” (*utanç*) that should never have been allowed to occur. The reversal of this error promises the “resurrection” (*diriliş*) of both the Hagia Sophia and of the nation’s Ottoman-Islamic heritage, thus “rekindling the fire of hope” of both the Turks and of “all of the oppressed, victimized, repressed, [and] exploited”—a category of oppression for which responsibility is indirectly, but clearly, placed at the feet of Euro-America. Situating Turkey squarely among those oppressed and marginalized by an imperialist West, Erdoğan claims that “the resurrection of Hagia Sophia is an

²⁴⁸ Bozoğlu, 103

expression that we, as the Turkish nation, as Muslims, and as all humanity, have new words to say to the world.” In this manner, “the resurrection of Hagia Sophia is a symbol of the resurrection of our civilization,” a repudiation of a Western imperialism, and a critical step towards the “breaking of the shackles on the hearts and feet” of the Turkish people.

As suggested, running through Erdoğan's remarks is the not-so-tacit allusion to who or what made the Hagia Sophia in need of “resurrection” in the first place. This is clear in Erdoğan's references to Istanbul's occupation by the European powers at the end of WWI, when European soldiers are said to have tried to take control of the Hagia Sophia but were repulsed by Ottoman officers. With this memory of occupation in mind, and with implied reference to those very real Anglo-Greek plots to retake Constantinople, Erdoğan invokes a comment by the midcentury novelist and critic Peyami Safa, for whom the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a museum “did not destroy the ambitions of Christianity on Istanbul,” but rather “increased [Christianity's] courage, provoked it, inflamed it.” In this view, the 1934 change of status was not only a capitulation to ‘Christian ambitions’ but also further “provoked” these ambitions, setting Turkey on path of further subjugation to Western power. In this manner, the reopening of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque is a critical step towards the reversal of that capitulation and subjugation, promising a stronger and more self-confident nation and national future. Indeed, the Hagia Sophia appears here to stand in for and express a broader historical condition and predicament, wherein Turkey's full potential has been artificially limited out of deference to foreign interests. In this way, Erdoğan makes the perceived judgements of a Western audience—of what Çınar, in a related context, calls the “global gaze”—integral to framing the significance of the building's history and thus of its contemporary reconsecration. Supporters of the decision are here called upon to conceive of themselves as pushing back against the influence and condescension of this foreign audience, this Western gaze, and are rhetorically encouraged to view themselves as acting in defiance of a West that has for too long repressed the full expression of Turkish national identity and significance. Thus while the reopening of the Hagia Sophia to prayer is presented as a triumph of Turkish autonomy, and a public assertion of the nation “as authentically Islamic and Ottoman,” its significance for domestic supporters is made—at least negatively—dependent upon the same Western gaze that is ostensibly being defied.

Erdoğan's emphasis on a history of injustice against the Turkish nation on the one hand, and on the ‘rebirth’ of national greatness and pride on the other, was well received by many supporters. One such supporter was Alican, a successful, early-fifties real estate broker in Istanbul's Anatolian-side neighborhood of Üsküdar, who had attended the first Friday Prayers at the reopened Hagia Sophia Mosque (*Ayasofya Camii*)—an event that, despite pandemic restrictions, drew a crowd of perhaps hundreds of thousands.²⁴⁹ Alican's support for the AKP had dwindled in recent years, due to what he saw as wide-spread corruption among party elites. Yet he remained supportive of what he saw as Erdoğan's vision for the country. Like Erdoğan, and Kısakürek before him, Alican felt that the Hagia Sophia's 1934 secularization had left a deep wound—a mark of what Alican called the temporary “defeat” or setback (*yenilgi*) of Turkish “civilization” (*medeniyet*). The reopening of the monument was thus a first step towards healing this wound and overcoming this defeat. Still, unlike those who thought Atatürk's 1934 decision had been executed out of a hostility to Islam or Turkey's cultural past, Alican felt that Atatürk must have felt his hands tied:

“Some people understand the [1934] decision as a kind of treason. They say that the people behind it were traitors, that they lacked respect for the nation. For me, it was not like this. The decision was wrong. But Atatürk thought he was doing what was best for our country. We should understand the pressure he was under, that our nation was under. We should understand that actions [like the secularization of the Hagia Sophia] were gestures towards the English, towards the Greeks,

²⁴⁹ “Ayasofya’da 86 yıl sonra ilk kez kılınan namaza 350 bin kişi katıldı.” T24 News. 07/24/2020.

who still saw Istanbul as a prize...[The decision] was wrong, but this fault should not be placed on Atatürk and his retinue alone. We should remember that they fought for us, that they saved our nation from the fate of our [Arab and Muslim] neighbors. But they had many limitations placed upon them. This should not be forgotten.”

Alican’s views demonstrate a relatively sympathetic, given his political leanings, understanding of the processes of political modernization and cultural Westernization carried out in the early decades of the Republic. While disapproving of the consequences of many of these processes, Alican still felt that Atatürk’s legacy demanded contextualization in regard to the extraordinary position in which Turkey found itself after WWI. Referring to Erdoğan’s refusal, in his aforementioned speech, to mention Atatürk by name, Alican wished that AKP ideologists would press for a more open, constructive national debate over the Atatürkist legacy. Specifically, Alican wanted an accounting of this legacy that more openly placed the blame for the repressions and failures of the Republic’s first decades on an imperialist Europe, against whose colonial ambitions Atatürk and other early Kemalist leaders had had to protect the fledgling nation. (Alican was far less sympathetic to later Kemalist governments after Atatürk’s death, and after the direct threat of Western imperialism had diminished).

Many supporters of the 2020 decision held harsher views of the Kemalist legacy, however. Enes, a lawyer and former mid-level AKP functionary, acknowledged the benefits of the Kemalist revolution in terms of industry and education, and took pride in Atatürk’s victories during WWI and the Turkish War of Independence. Nevertheless, Atatürk was for Enes the agent of a kind of internal or self-colonization of the country, which had placed the national future in the hands of Europe and then America (a charge that is hardly without any merit, given the incredible political and economic pressure placed on Turkey, especially during the Cold War, and the hardly unbelievable allegations of CIA involvement in a number of Turkish coups—a subject that has been basically taboo in American media).²⁵⁰ In this historical context, Enes saw the museumification of the Hagia Sophia as a victory for Western imperialists, who had used the principles of secularism as a kind of ideological cover for a civilizational struggle against Islam in general and the Turks in particular—a struggle that had not ended after Lausanne. Referencing a popular conspiracy theory on social media that the American government had bribed Atatürk into secularizing the building (a theory for which I have found no evidence), Enes argued that the secularization had been not only a betrayal but part of a traitorous gambit to ingratiate Turkey with a rapacious West. Paraphrasing from memory Kısakürek’s 1965 speech, Enes asked rhetorically: “did they [those who supported the 1934 decision] not understand how the West has treated us? Did they not pay attention to how they would never accept us, no matter what we do? We sacrificed the most precious parts of our inheritance, of our culture and history, and we received nothing in return.”²⁵¹ The 2020 reconversion was therefore a repudiation of this treacherous—and failed—policy of appeasement. And it was a testament to how contemporary Turkey was becoming more in tune with its authentic self, more confident and less willing to capitulate to foreign pressure.

Alican and Enes’ sentiments, despite differing on their assessment of Atatürk’s legacy, help clarify a critical aspect of the reconversion: it was framed by the government, and welcomed by

²⁵⁰ The reluctance of American media to at least *consider* the plausibility of so-called “anti-American” statements made by foreign leaders—and of democratic countries at that—is a fact that never ceases to amaze. See, for instance, “Turkish Minister says U.S. Behind 2016 Failed Coup.” *Reuters*, February 21, 2021.

²⁵¹ The quote from Kısakürek’s that Enes referenced is: “Do you not pay attention to how this West, from whom we claim (in those infamous terms) to have become so Westernized, civilized, liberated, treats us?... The Westerner never counts us as one of his own.” (“O kadar Batılılaştığımızı, (mahut tabirlerle) uygarlaştığımızı, özgürleştığımızı, kendisinden olduğumuzu iddia ettiğimiz Batı’nın bize muamelesine dikkat etmiyor musun?... Batılı bizi asla kendisinden saymıyor.”)

most supporters, in terms that made piety and prayer appear as inextricable from, or at best secondary to, the assertion of national autonomy and pride. Neither Enes nor Alican, indeed, and despite their full-throated approval of the reconversion, spoke much about religion or Islam when justifying the decision—apart, that is, from suggesting that the ability to pray at the Hagia Sophia was, precisely, a marker of national pride and self-assertion. This view was so prevalent that even those who did *not* think of themselves as particularly pious, and who would likely never attend prayers at the Hagia Sophia Mosque, could still take pride in the reconversion as heralding a more self-confident nation and revitalized national culture. As Yağmur, a late 30s banker at my neighborhood branch, with whom I would meet sometimes for coffee, told me:

“Understand, I am not a very religious person, but I was very happy when the opening was confirmed. I never thought about [the Hagia Sophia’s status] much before, but why should we not be able to pray there? It’s ours, isn’t it?...Nothing will change for those who want to visit it as a museum, and there is no necessity to pray there. But I think we should be able to enjoy and feel pride in our inheritance (*miras*) and history.”

Yağmur was not strictly correct in his assessment that “nothing will change” for touristic/non-Muslim visitors.²⁵² But his position is still important for understanding the popularity of the reconversion among less pious Turks. Having grown up in a fairly secular family, Yağmur attended mosque occasionally and then only for the sake of his more observant in-laws. Over tea in Cihangir’s main tea garden, two weeks after the decision had been announced, Yağmur doubted that he would ever attend prayers at the Hagia Sophia Mosque—although perhaps he would visit for the yearly celebration of the conquest of Constantinople, a commemoration that has become far more popular under Erdoğan’s tenure, and for which the Hagia Sophia is a key symbol.²⁵³ Emphasizing that he revered Atatürk and supported the secular principles of the nation’s founding, Yağmur insisted that the reconversion was not an issue of secularism versus religion. Rather, it concerned national pride. Yağmur felt strongly, therefore, that the monument’s reconsecration ought to be appreciated by secular and pious, liberal and conservative, Turks alike. Yağmur, moreover, didn’t feel any real animosity towards Atatürk’s 1934 decision, viewing it, like Alican, as understandable within the sociopolitical context of the Turkish Republic’s first decades. In fact, Yağmur felt that the 1934 secularization “was probably the correct decision at that time,” given Turkey’s domestic and geopolitical exigencies during that period. Reassessing this context today was for him not about condemning the past but about understanding that times change—that decisions made in response to the demands of yesterday may be inappropriate for confronting the demands of today: “This is a hard time for our country; we don’t have much good news anymore...The opening [of the Hagia Sophia] brings us back to ourselves; it reminds us of what we have accomplished in the past and what we still can accomplish. It should be a source of pride, something living, not like a fossil kept behind glass in a museum.”

Despite their differences, Enes, Alican, and Yağmur all shared a sense that the reconversion’s principal significance stemmed less from its return to religious use as such than from how this return signified the empowerment of the national self and embrace of an “alternate” source of national identity and pride. They were, likewise, also largely in agreement on the subject of the decision’s perception outside Turkey. For Enes, the blustery disapproval registered by many Western leaders and institutions was both part and confirmation of the decision’s importance. Over coffee in his office in Istanbul’s Merter neighborhood, Enes smiled when recounting the list of foreign officials/institutions who were declaiming the decision: “They [i.e., Europeans and Americans] disapprove. Fine. They have no authority. They have no right to control how we determine our own affairs. Let

²⁵² Tourists are still allowed, and now for free, but the rules of propriety and attire for entering mosques is incumbent upon all, and the Christian iconography is covered during prayer times.

²⁵³ See Gür 2021 and

them condemn [us]; we do not listen.” The fact, however, was that Enes *was* listening (it was from him that I first heard about many of the Western condemnations of the decision), and what he heard was satisfying.

What he heard, primarily, were indignant criticisms from Western leaders and pundits. Much of this criticism was reported in the Turkish press and cited in social media. While this criticism was painful for those like Rojhat, it was it was pleasing to those like Enes, who understood this criticism as proof of the decision’s importance. While not speaking much English, Enes and I discussed the kinds of criticisms expressed in major Anglophone newspapers like *the New York Times*, whose editorial pages warned that the decision threatened the Hagia Sophia’s “exceptional significance to all humanity,” referring to the building as both bearer and beneficiary of “a deep overlay of the histories of East and West, Christianity and Islam.”²⁵⁴ For such commentators, Erdoğan’s politicization of the monument was nothing more than a cynical effort to “feed his nationalist base” and divert attention from domestic problems. While not denying that the decision would help bolster AKP support, Enes was struck by how little consideration Western media paid to the history of the Hagia Sophia, including the history of European efforts, as described above, to take the Hagia Sophia from the Turks and return it to Christian control. While occasional reference was made by Western outlets to the fact that many Turks had found the monument’s status as a museum to be a “humiliating foreign imposition,” almost never was any context or explanation provided for these views. The decision was simply a “sad reflection on the state of Turkey’s democracy,” wherein “a monument of such global importance and value [has] become an authoritarian leader’s political tool.”²⁵⁵ This highly limited frame through which the reconversion was considered by Western commentators was at once amusing and insulting—amusing because of its ignorance of Turkish history; insulting, not only because it sidestepped the role of the West in the Hagia Sophia’s politicization, but also because it seemed to view the Hagia Sophia as less of a Turkish monument than a “universal” one. Implied in these opinions, widely held by the Western commentariat, was the argument that Turkey did not have the right to decide the Hagia Sophia’s fate since the monument “belongs to the world,” and thus “its fate is not just a matter, as Erdoğan defensively insists, of Turkish sovereignty.”²⁵⁶ Yet this sovereignty was precisely at issue for those such as Enes and Alican, and Western claims to contrary merely reinforced their conviction that reconversion was necessary to repudiate a history of Western attempts to deprive the Turks of their patrimony and culture. The idea that “Erdoğan’s shortsighted, cynical campaign” was an “assault” on the “cosmopolitan traditions that make [Istanbul] and Turkey itself a crossroads for the world” was, for supporters like Enes, absurd: Turkey’s history and culture was not a “cosmopolitan” inheritance but a Turkish one. To argue the contrary was, as Erdoğan likewise suggested in his aforementioned speech, an attack on Turkish sovereignty. The insult of such opinions was reinforced by official statements by American and European officials and institutions. UNESCO—from whom the Hagia Sophia takes its “World Heritage” status—expressed ‘deep regrets’ over the decision, precisely on the grounds that reconversion threatened the monument’s “universal value.”²⁵⁷ This line was reiterated, in various ways, by American and European officials, who likewise made reference, either to the monument’s

²⁵⁴ “The Hagia Sophia Was a Cathedral, a Mosque and a Museum. It’s Converting Again.” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/opinion/hagia-sophia-mosque.html>

²⁵⁵ Ibid

²⁵⁶ Judith Herrin. “Converting Hagia Sophia into a Mosque is an Act of Cultural Cleansing.” *The Washington Post* July 15, 2020.

²⁵⁷ “UNESCO Statement on Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.” July 10, 2020.

“universal” significance, or to its Christian history, as grounds for opposing the reconversion.²⁵⁸ Among such responses, what was more or less constant was the judgement that the decision was a cynical effort by an authoritarian government to subject what ought be recognized as possessing universal, or at least pluralistic, value to the whims of an increasingly undemocratic, populist, and “Islamist” political culture—the implication here being that contemporary Turkey had degenerated from the promise of the Kemalist revolution, the sorry state of contemporary Turkish “identity politics”²⁵⁹ symbolized by the populist desecration of what had been a testament to Turkish secular modernity.

As a counter to Western criticisms, Enes referenced statements by Turkish government officials that messages of support for the decision had poured in from Muslim countries from the governments of Malaysia, Qatar, Iran, Pakistan, Oman, and elsewhere, as well as from officials in the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.²⁶⁰ Indeed, great fanfare was made in the Turkish press of outpourings of support among Muslims worldwide, who (it was claimed) saw Erdoğan’s move as “a new conquest of Istanbul” and as an “historical step” towards (as Erdoğan promised in his speech announcing the move—a promise removed from English summaries of the speech) the “emancipation” of Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa mosque.²⁶¹ These sentiments, as Yağmur pointed out, were widespread on social media, with Muslims around the world offering support for the reconversion. Still, there was no consensus among majority-Muslim nations about the decision: responses from Arab states and commentators were, in fact, quite mixed, often reflecting extant geopolitical tensions between Turkey and other majority-Muslim countries. Scholars at Cairo’s Al-Azhar, for instance, condemned the move as un-Islamic, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE evinced suspicion that Erdoğan’s decision pandered to Muslims worldwide while threatening increased Islamophobia in Euro-America, interfaith tensions in Arab states, and Turkish interference in the internal politics of other Muslim states.²⁶² Such concerns (that the decision would drum up anti-Muslim sentiments in Europe, that it smacked of Turkish ambitions to develop its soft power in the region, or that it ran against an Islamic tradition of respect towards Christian and Jewish holy sites) were common among Muslim commentators outside Turkey, with some Islamic scholars reading the decision as further proof of “the rise of religious nationalism and the decline of religion,”²⁶³ or as driven by a desire for “imperial glory embodied in an absolute ruler [i.e., Erdoğan]” rather than in keeping with Islamic jurisprudential precedents.²⁶⁴ That these perspectives came alongside others that praised the move—

²⁵⁸ Jonathan Stearns. “EU Urges Turkey to ‘Reverse’ Hagia Sophia Reconversion Plan.” *Bloomberg* July 13, 2020; Guy Davies. “Thousands Gathers for 1st Prayers After Hagia Sophia’s Controversial Conversion into a Mosque.” *ABC News* July 24, 2020.

²⁵⁹ David Gardner. “The Hagia Sophia Decree is About More Than Religious Chauvinism.” *Financial Times* July 14, 2020.

²⁶⁰ “Çavuşoğlu: Ayasofya’da Geri Adım Olmaz.” *Sputnik Türkiye* July 9, 2020.

²⁶¹ “Mescid-i Aksa’nın avlusundan Ayasofya mesajı!” *Sabah* July 24, 2020.

²⁶² “Al-Azhar Sheikhs: Turning Hagia Sophia Back into a Mosque is Forbidden by Islam.” *Memri* July 21, 2020. Özcan Hıdır. “Ayasofya’nın Camiye Çevrilmesi Kararı ve Teo-Politik Tepkiler.” *Anadolu Ajansı* July 17, 2020.; Lauren Holtmeier. “Arab Media Calls Erdogan Hypocrite, Says He Supports Extremism on Hagia Sophia Move.” *Al-Arabiya English*. July 16, 2020. Talal al-Torifi. “By Changing the Status of Hagia Sophia, Erdogan is Playing to Extremists.” *Al-Arabiya English*. July 16, 2020.

²⁶³ Ramazan Kılınç. “Why is Hagia Sophia’s (Re)Conversion into a Mosque Bad for Muslims?” July 23, 2020.

²⁶⁴ *The New York Times*, July 22, 2020.

and which agreed with those like Enes and Alican in calling out the history of Euro-American imperialism and paternalism—confirmed the unsurprising fact that there was no consensus among Muslims or majority Muslim nations about the significance or rightness of the Hagia Sophia's reconversion.²⁶⁵ There was a real satisfaction in going against the patronizing rhetoric of those Western Mandarins who had for so long, and with such paternalism, dictated the terms of cultural propriety and political progress. Going against Western preferences carried a kind of thrill—a thrill that was inseparable from the feeling of national pride that the reconversion elicited.

It was the framing and reception of the decision around themes of national pride, self-assertion, and defiance that led to relatively muted criticism from domestic politicians. With the notable exception of the left-leaning and pro-Kurdish HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, or Peoples' Democratic Party), the opposition parties (and in particular the traditionally Kemalist Republican People's Party, or CHP) had largely ignored warnings that Erdoğan and the courts might actually authorize the move, seeming to believe that Erdoğan saw the promise of the Hagia Sophia's reconversion as more effective as an unfulfilled talking point (whose incompleteness could be blamed on the opposition) than as a realized achievement.²⁶⁶ Once the decision was confirmed, the leaders of the two major opposition parties (the CHP and the aforementioned İYİ Party) gave the move circumspect (in the case of the CHP) or more full-throated (in the case of the İYİ Party) support. This lack of criticism among the opposition was in part due to the general suppression of dissent since the 2016 coup attempt and the routing of the CHP's institutional power over the last two decades. But it was just as much due to opposition leaders who feared alienating those in their coalition who supported the move. To this end, some leading opposition politicians, such as former CHP presidential candidate Muharrem İnce, publicly attended prayers at the newly opened mosque, while others, such as the CHP mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, were careful to neither fully support nor oppose the decision.²⁶⁷ As one journalist at an online newspaper, who did not want their outlet to be named, told me: "Akşener and Kılıçdaroğlu [the respective leaders of the İYİ Party & the CHP] know they have to be careful here, there are many people who do not support [the AKP] but who welcomed the [Hagia Sophia] decision." Before the decision was confirmed, the journalist suggested, such politicians were free to ignore calls for the Hagia Sophia's transformation, not needing to take up a position on such an established precedent. Once the transformation was a *fait accompli*, however, it was too late to build a case against it that would not alienate at least some supporters and fragment an already fragile opposition coalition. This is likely a primary reason why the İYİ Party, while nominally Kemalist (although more right-leaning than the CHP), refrained from real criticism of the decision²⁶⁸: the sentiments used to justify the decision were simply too widespread, even among critics of Erdoğan and the AKP, to make it worth risking the alienation of supporters over the issue.

²⁶⁵ Soumaya Ghannoushi. "Was Erdogan Right to Declare the Hagia Sophia a Mosque?" *Middle East Eye* 15 July 2020.

²⁶⁶ See Murat Belge "Ayasofya." *Birikim* 12 July 2020. https://birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/10200/ayasofya?fbclid=IwAR1kUFo5_6Z6maF9KbLe5UdO8eO8MKHDr0y3KT7RngbKuqKvmT640LqPUog

²⁶⁷ "CHP'li Muharrem İnce cuma namazını Sultanahmet'te kıldı." 24 July, 2020. *Hürriyet*. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/chpli-muharrem-ince-cuma-namazini-sultanahmette-kildi-41571728>; "İmamoğlu'ndan Ayasofya için ilk yorum." July 13, 2020. *Birgün*. <https://www.birgun.net/haber/imamoglu-ndan-ayasofya-icin-ilk-yorum-308070>

²⁶⁸ "Akşener'den Ayasofya yorumu: İlk defa yanıldım." *Sözcü* 07/11/2020.

In an essay on the 2020 decision, historian İpek Kocaömer Yosmaoğlu wonders what kinds of compromise could have been possible for the Hagia Sophia, compromises that could have given space not only to Muslims but also to Christians and secularists. As she writes,

“One would hope that there were a few...[who could] imagine what it would mean to the Greek Orthodox to be able to observe Easter Mass under Hagia Sophia’s dome for the first time after nearly six hundred years. A simple arrangement could in fact have made that possible: Hagia Sophia could open its doors for religious observance on Eid and Easter, on Friday and Sunday. It could still continue to serve the secular public and there would have been no fight over which endowment, will, or registry should prevail. It would come back to life as a spiritual space open to all.”²⁶⁹

This is a beautiful sentiment. In a sense, it is redolent of Sena’s wish, for the Hagia Sophia to be returned to the status of a “whole,” rich and multifarious enough to accommodate the meanings assigned to it on “Eid and Easter,” by the religiously observant and “the secular public.” Yet, as I have been trying to suggest, Yosmaoğlu’s “hope” for a “simple arrangement,” wherein the Hagia Sophia would be opened to various claims and communities, rests on the presumption that at issue with the 2020 and 1934 decisions is a contest between secularism and religion, and secondarily between different religious traditions. I do not wish to deny that sentiments perceived in terms of religion and/or secularism did not play a role in the decision and in its reception among supporters and critics. Rather, my suggestion is that issues of religion and secularism were not the most salient issues at play, and in many ways were secondary ones, covering over a more polarizing and intense antagonism over where to situate the Hagia Sophia, and by extension Turkey, within the poles of Said’s “imaginative geography.” The Hagia Sophia’s wholeness has not been fractured by a debate over religion vs. secularism: it has been so by the enduring tensions generated out of the end of the Ottoman Empire, the early decades of the Turkish Republic, and then later 20th and early 21st century contests over the representation of Turkish history and identity in the face of the power of this “imaginative geography.” To do examine these contests in more detail, I now turn more directly to the place of “geography” in Turkish politics and society today. From here, I will return to the issue of Occidentalism through the concept, popular in contemporary political discourse, of “geography is destiny” (*Coğrafya Kaderdir*).

²⁶⁹ Yosmaoğlu 2021, 241

Chapter 3: The Occidentalist Frame: Geography, Destiny, and Orientalism in Contemporary Turkey

In this chapter I take a single phrase, widespread in Turkish political and popular discourse in recent years, and use it to describe three perspectives on Turkey's sociopolitical present, past, and possible future. The phrase, "geography is destiny" (*Coğrafya Kaderdir*), is notable not only for its pervasiveness, but also for the way in which it is regularly voiced by Turks holding significantly different political positions to make distinct claims about Turkish history, identity, and contemporary life. I argue that these three perspectives are premised on what I call a shared geohistorical picture, within which "the West" is a central coordinate for determining Turkey's own 'geographic' position. Within this picture, relying on a distinction between West and East redolent of what Edward Said termed "Orientalism," contests over Turkey's history and future have often been framed through comparisons with the West, even while these comparisons are a source of widespread frustration and pain. To demonstrate this, I rely on ethnographic engagement with three informants, analysis of contemporary political discourse and modern Turkish political history, as well as both Said's concept of a "geographical imaginary" and Wittgenstein's concept of a "picture." By analyzing the way a geohistorical picture inflects how the identity and future of the nation are imagined by Turks holding distinct beliefs and political commitments, I pose the question of the fatedness or fixity of this picture, its role in perpetuating certain impasses in Turkish politics and social life, and its utility for theorizing the relations between Orientalism and Occidentalism within Turkish politics and society.

I: Escape

On an impossibly clear April afternoon, some six weeks after Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the first wave of Covid-19 lockdowns, I sat with a friend of a friend in a park overlooking the Sea of Marmara and the Golden Horn. Those days, as the weather warmed and spring's arrival was nightly announced by the amorous cries of cats and seagulls (which, along with the reliability of the *eğan*, had taken over much of the city's pandemic soundscape), the sky in Istanbul had begun to shimmer. With weeks of lockdown freeing the sky of smog, the distance between the Anatolian and European sides of the city appeared smaller, and the horizon line of the Sea of Marmara, usually threaded just behind the Princes' Islands off the city's southeastern coast, had begun to dissolve. As Aysun and I sat, masked, on opposite sides of a bench, the "sea" seemed instead a very large lake. We looked out at the splotched houses on its far shore and, some 70 miles—as the seagull flies—beyond them, at the snowcapped mountain of Uludağ.

Sitting on that bench in Cihangir's Sanatkarlar park, Aysun seemed less upset by the curfews and growing economic anxiety than deeply frustrated that she had agreed to return to Turkey rather than stay in Berlin. At 26, she had moved to Germany just months before the pandemic was declared, having secured a six-month internship at a publishing house to work on translations of Turkish fiction. But when Europe and Turkey began to close their borders in March of 2020, her mother insisted that she return to the family apartment in Istanbul's municipality of Beyoğlu. Her student years had been spent at Istanbul University, the large public university across the Golden Horn, which had once housing the principle darülfünun (House of Sciences) of Osman's empire and was reopened as a university (üniversite) during Atatürk's modernizing reforms in the 1930s. Studying modern Turkish literature in a department whose first chair was held by novelist Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, and whose halls once housed the exiled German-Jewish philologists Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach, Aysun had managed to get on an Erasmus program to Vienna for a semester prior to graduation. Aysun hadn't needed to study much in Austria, and in the evenings she had liked to walk along the Kärntner Strasse or The Graben and watch the other passersby. The bustle

reminded her of İstiklal Caddesi, Istanbul's famous thoroughfare, whose waning popularity among Turkish Istanbulers in recent years is made up for by all manner of foreign tourists. Yet unlike life along the Istanbul streets she knew so well, in Vienna Aysun had felt a sense of possibility and excitement about the future that she had never felt in Turkey. When the program had finished, she had felt almost angry that she had no choice but to return to Istanbul.

Upon returning to Turkey from Vienna, Aysun had felt depressed for weeks. After a friend had jokingly told her that she had “post-Erasmus syndrome” (a not uncommon affliction, I found out later, and much discussed on online forums), she had committed to finding a way to leave Turkey and return to Europe. As she had worked towards this goal over the subsequent years, the Turkish economy had stagnated and the consolidation of power by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's increasingly repressive government had chilled the political hopes of many young people. After the 2017 constitutional referendum that extended Erdoğan's ability to remain head-of-state, and the subsequent 2018 election that maintained his hold on power, Aysun felt certain that “there was no life for her,” that there was “no way to live” in a country that, to her mind, was proving beholden to the worst versions of itself. There was nothing to be done, she felt, except to leave.

Aysun's frustration and desire to leave Turkey was not unfamiliar. Nor was the fact that her criticisms of her country were often made through comparisons with Europe—comparisons that almost always left Turkey wanting (strong family ties and community was one of the few issues that young people wanting to emigrate often cited as being better in Turkey). I had heard similar sentiments many times from the young, largely secular, Turks whom I had gotten to know in Istanbul: that life in Turkey was “intolerable” (*dayanılmaz*), that there was “no future” there (*gelecek yok*), that (to borrow the essayist Cemil Meriç's parody of such sentiments) “one cannot live in this country!” (*yaşanmaz bu memlekette!*).²⁷⁰ Europe or the West (*Avrupa, Batı*), on the other hand, was (in the words of one Turkish friend riffing on Beckett) seen by many young people as the place “where things are badly *not* wrong”—where, despite the well-known (if not always well-understood) inequality, racism, and moral hypocrisy of Euro-America, one could not only fantasize about the future but realize one's hopes; where one could possess more agency and control over one's life; where life was not perfect but nonetheless offered more possibilities for freedom and individual advancement than life in Turkey.

Aysun was part of a generation of Turks who had grown up knowing only the government of Erdoğan and his *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, hereafter abbreviated as “AKP”). She had, moreover, been too young to remember much of the first ten years of Erdoğan's tenure, during which time the Turkish economy had expanded, infrastructure had greatly improved in Istanbul and other cities, and many Turkish liberals (despite their suspicion of Erdoğan's public invocations of piety) were pacified by the AKP's commitment to the continuation of EU membership talks. Aysun's formative years, however, had taken place after the AKP had become—in the minds of almost all Turkish liberals and secularists, and even for a not insignificant number of former AKP supporters—authoritarian and corrupt. Aysun's political consciousness had thus developed in the aftermath of the government's brutal response to the Gezi Park protests of 2013 and, subsequently, during the campaigns of purges, show trials, and paranoia that swept the country after the 2016 coup attempt. Younger Turks like Aysun had little direct experience, therefore, of Turkey's 20th century history, during which time the nation had been largely controlled by a Kemalist and broadly pro-Western (at least in terms of geopolitics) political, military, and administrative elite. Especially in the country's first decades, this elite had labored to make Turkey accord, at least outwardly, with the norms and forms of Western political modernity, in the process marginalizing, albeit never totally, the country's Ottoman, Islamic, and ethnically/religiously diverse past. After the end of the Turkish War of Independence (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*), when the armies led by

²⁷⁰ Meriç 2020, 97

Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk) drove European powers and their proxies from the country's western and eastern flanks, Turkey's republican founders strove to transform the Anatolian territories of the now defunct Ottoman Empire into a homogenous nation-state, modeled on the sociopolitical structures of West European countries. Many of the processes of modernization and Westernization enacted in the early decades of the Turkish Republic were—in the words of one scholar discussing the language reforms of the 1930s—“a catastrophic success,”²⁷¹ precipitating massive and lasting change and massive and lasting disorientation over the relation between past, present, and desired future. These processes radically transformed Turkey from a religiously, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (as well as a largely illiterate and rural) population into an outwardly homogenous, highly-educated, and reasonably prosperous nation-state, committed to (in the words of Atatürk) “appropriat[ing] all the works and ways of Western civilization.”²⁷² As Turkish historian İlber Ortaylı notes, the policies of nationalization and Westernization (from the Turkification of Ottoman Turkish and the adoption of the Latin alphabet to the restrictions on public displays of piety, from the subsumption of religious authority into state bureaucracy to the adoption of European legal codes) proceeded, for the first decades of the republic, with relatively little direct opposition.²⁷³ Yet, as Ortaylı and a great many others have argued, they left lasting scars on not only national politics but also on the psyche or soul of the nation.

To prepare the ground for further ethnographic exploration of these issues, allow me to briefly reiterate some historical points, some of which I have made in previous chapters but which will be central to my arguments in this one.

Throughout the 20th century, many secular Turks embraced Atatürk's vision of making Turkey adopt identities and institutions that (it was believed) would help move the country towards European sociopolitical models and acceptance within European institutions. This embrace of Western norms and forms was complex and occurred alongside an awareness of threats posed by European bigotry and imperialism. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the aftermath of empire the threat of European colonization was real, and Atatürk and his retinue clearly viewed Westernization as a means for securing Turkish autonomy, self-determination, and relatively non-exploitative relations with the West.²⁷⁴ Faced with a Europe that had for centuries imagined the threat of ‘the terrible Turk’, had denigrated the late Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe,” had briefly occupied Istanbul after WWI, and had originated a burgeoning racial science that placed Turks among the “yellow” races—confronting such threats, the Westernization pushed by early Turkish elites was driven as much by anxieties over Turkish territorial integrity and European Orientalism and racism as by admiration and desire for European norms and institutions.²⁷⁵ Indeed, the new nation's position in the eyes of many Europeans was conditioned by the same Orientalist structures that Edward Said discussed in his classic work. As such, long before the question of Turkey's EU membership again brought these Orientalist structures into international view, Turkey was forced to confront not only the demands of modernization but also the construction of a national image that could repulse Western social, cultural, and racial hierarchies, and which could

²⁷¹ Lewis 2002

²⁷² Döşemeci 2013, 42

²⁷³ Ortaylı 2019, 18

²⁷⁴ As Kadioğlu writes, Turkish nationalism in the 20th century largely combined both “hostility toward and imitation of Western civilization,” in line with Atatürk's own view that Western modernity was both threatening and empowering. Kadioğlu 2011, 45.

²⁷⁵ Ergin 2008, 833. For accounts of the historical longevity of European stereotypes towards Turks, see Kumrular 2008. See also MacMillan 2013, chapter two.

cast Turkish civilization (*Türk medeniyeti*) as equal to, if not a genetically linked to, that of the West.²⁷⁶ The rapid and repressive project of top-down Westernization of the 1920s and 1930s must be seen, therefore, as in part geared towards escaping from the weight of Western stereotypes and their potential to precipitate economic and territorial exploitation. The aspiration for transformation towards Western norms and institutions was, in this manner, never totally separate from the project of escaping the fate of Turkey's Arab and Muslim neighbors, almost all of whom suffered the full force of 20th century imperialism and Orientalist interpellation.

It was both desire for and anxiety over being exploited and judged by those same “works and ways of Western civilization” that pushed many secular and/or liberal Turks²⁷⁷ to tolerate Turkey's anti-democratic coups (in 1960, 1971, 1980, as well as the “postmodern” coup of 1997), the last of which was directly targeting burgeoning non-secular political movement friendly towards religion and the Ottoman past. This anxiety/desire often led such Turks to rationalize campaigns of repression against religious conservatives, leftists, Kurds, and other ethnic and religious minorities, on the grounds that the pro-Western, secular-nationalist vision of the nation's founder had to be protected from the ostensibly dangerous and divisive forces of communism, religion, and ethnic/linguistic heterogeneity. Indeed, for a substantial—if minoritarian—number of Turks growing up in the middle decades of the last century, what was essential was the preservation of Atatürk's secularist, European-facing vision for the nation, which was seen as under constant threat.²⁷⁸ It was only later that opposition to the “Kemalist” (the ideology attributed to Atatürk and his supporters, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) vision of a secularist and Europe-facing Turkey began to gain mainstream electoral traction and a more prominent presence in cultural production.²⁷⁹ After the 1980 coup, secularist military leaders allowed for amendments to the Turkish constitution that relaxed restrictions of Islamic schooling, expressions of piety, and Islamic political and philanthropic activism. Such changes were apparently intended to foster a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” that would combat Turkey's then robust leftist movement by encouraging young people towards Islam rather than towards socialism. Yet these moves had the likely unintended effect of allowing a whole generation of future Muslim leaders to not only enter the political and economic mainstream but challenge key elements of what we referred to above as the “Kemalist paradigm.”²⁸⁰ While many of the parties that flourished in the late 1980s and 1990s were banned by Turkish high courts or constrained by threats of military intervention, their growing popularity led ultimately to the victory

²⁷⁶ Although Said largely omitted Turkey and the Ottoman Empire from *Orientalism*, as he wrote elsewhere, “Throughout the classical period of European culture Turkey was the Orient... For centuries Turkey and Islam hung over Europe like a gigantic composite monster, seeming to threaten Europe with destruction.” Said 1983, 6. For broader engagements with the historical specificity of the early Turkish republic's relation to Orientalism, see, Ahiska 2010, Eldem 2015, and Szurek 2015.

²⁷⁷ Secularism and liberalism should *not* be seen as necessarily complementary in modern Turkey. While perhaps most Turkish liberals are secular, there have been powerful secularist right-wing, and even neo-fascist, forces, and the secularist “deep state” rarely respected liberal principles in practice—even if they paid formal deference to them. To be fair, however, this is hardly unique to Turkey: the descriptor “liberal” in America, at least since the 1970s, has had little to do with adherence to classically liberal principles. Most American “liberal” politicians are thoroughly illiberal in their policies and programs.

²⁷⁸ A number of ethnographies, reflecting on Turkey's political climate around the turn of the last century, have documented some of these aims and desires of a now older generation of Turkish secularists. See, for instance, Navaro 2002, Çınar 2005, Özyurek 2006.

²⁷⁹ For the development of oppositional narratives of Turkish identity and politics among more pious Turkish muslims, see Eligür 2010, Silverstein 2011, and White 2012.

²⁸⁰ Eligür 2010, chapter 3; Arat and Pamuk 2019, chapter 3.

of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AK Party in 2002, and to the slow disempowerment of the traditionally secularist military and the Kemalist bureaucratic, intellectual, and economic elite.

The long (and often repressive) hegemony of a secularist and largely West-facing state structure was something that Aysun's generation could hardly remember; even the cautious optimism that had been held towards the AKP by some liberal Turks in the early 2000s had diminished by the early 2010s, departing totally after 2016 and then after the constitutional referendum in 2017, which some Turkish liberals supported only to rue this support in subsequent years. After the AKP's wave of purges, arrests, and consolidations of state power in the media, judiciary, universities, and army following the 2016 coup attempt, much of Aysun's generation felt little expectation that Turkey as a whole could be anything other than it now appeared to many of them as being: repressive, unsafe, corrupt, conservative, patriarchal, insufficiently secular, and certainly not "Western." Many of those who might once have wished Turkey to be more European now turned to thoughts of how to leave Turkey for Europe.²⁸¹ What Aysun had achieved with her position in Germany (the possibility of a life outside Turkey, with the hope of transforming her internship into a permanent position and German residency) was rare. It was the recent collapse of this hope, along with the crashing value of the Turkish Lira in respect to the dollar, the unemployment crisis, and the unknown course of the pandemic, that accounted for some of the intensity of Aysun's feelings on the day of our first walk. Still, even in better times she felt little hope for the future in Turkey, and even less hope that there was anything she could do to influence what this future could be. The only possibility she saw was escape from Turkey to Europe, a possibility that she had briefly realized and then suddenly lost.

As we talked that day in April 2020, we strolled from the hills of Cihangir to Bankalar Caddesi, whose stately *Beaux-Arts* buildings, designed by French and Greek architects of Ottoman extraction, had once headquartered the banks and insurance agencies that had helped fund the growing republic. Now many of them were empty, the banks having long since traded the fin de siècle architecture of the 19th century for the skyscrapers of the 20th. I asked Aysun,

"Are you sure that life in Germany, in Europe, would be better than here? I've lived in Europe and in the US, and I don't know if most people there are any happier, or if they feel that they have any more control over their lives than you do here. Or, people there don't seem to ever stop finding faults with where they live, finding things that are wrong or painful or not as they should be. And many of those things—intolerance, sexism, conservative politics, religion, the economy, corruption—don't seem very different from what you feel makes life so difficult here."

Aysun thought for a moment, and I felt she was pursing her lips behind her mask.

"I know it's not perfect there. Everyone knows that. But how many Americans, how many Europeans or Canadians, do you know who are so sick of their country that they want to leave? Even if they are struggling, do they want to leave? Do they think leaving is the only answer to their problems? I know that nowhere is perfect. And obviously there are many problems for Turks in Europe or America. But still, life would be better there than here."

She went on: "Anyways, let's say it wasn't like I imagined, that I left and somehow everything was just the same as it is in Turkey. I don't believe it would be, but still: if I lived in Germany, in England, in Canada, wherever, at least I could stop imagining, stop comparing (*karşılaştırmak*) life there with here. If things were bad they'd be bad there, not here—I wouldn't have to compare it to anywhere else, or not in the same way. And it hurts to always be imagining that a different kind of life is possible, to be constantly comparing life here to other places when you know that nothing is going to change."

²⁸¹ I do not make any major distinction in this chapter between "European" and "Western" as adjectives, as these terms were used often interchangeably by my interlocutors when speaking of a distinction between Turkey and Europe (*Avrupa*) and/or the West (*Batı*).

“So if you moved to Europe and everything was the same, or if you found out that the thing you were comparing Turkey to didn’t really exist, it wouldn’t be disappointing?” I asked.

Aysun laughed.

“Of course it would be. But at the same time, its like I said: If I saw that life there wasn’t like I imagined, that nothing I’ve imagined really existed... Then there wouldn’t be anything to compare anything to anymore, there wouldn’t be anywhere else to be.” She paused. “Anyways, it doesn’t matter. I’m trapped here. I know that this country is never going to be what I want it to be. Geography is destiny. If I could accept that then none of this would hurt so much.”

Later, I asked: “If geography is destiny, what’s the difference between this destiny and history (*tarîh*)?” Aysun tried out a few answers before getting to one that she felt was right:

“History is still happening. Geography is fixed [*sabit*]. That’s the difference. Geography is fixed.”

I will parse the themes of this conversation in greater depth below. For now, what I want to note is Aysun’s sense (common among many young, secular Turks in cosmopolitan areas like Istanbul) that Turkey’s fate has shown itself as bound to a set of conditions or characteristics that appear “fixed” and inhospitable to certain desires and ways of life, often coded as Western or European. Whereas in the early decades of the Republic, and indeed well into the 21st century, a significant portion of the population had believed in Turkey’s transformative movement towards the West, and in the progressive strengthening of the norms and lifestyles seen as coincident with Western institutions and values, this historical progression now appears to many as having revealed itself as a mirage. In light of this, previous commitments to the development of such norms and lifestyles within Turkey have often given way to fantasies of escape, usually to an imagined Western elsewhere. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that such fantasies have as much to do with escaping from a world picture that we can meaningfully call Orientalist as they do with escaping the political and economic conditions of life in Turkey²⁸²—or, less aggressively, that this picture and these conditions cannot be neatly disaggregated. While it would be naive to deny the huge political and economic problems facing many Turks today, it would also be naive to understand these problems as distinct from how they are interpreted in regards to a sense of Turkey’s distance from or proximity to the West—especially given that life in much of Europe and America has become, especially at the time of writing, just prior to the financial collapse that will be likely with us by the time this dissertation sees the light of day. In this manner, in order to understand politics and personal aspirations in Turkey today we must take seriously Aysun’s suggestion that leaving Turkey, even if leading to a life worse than expected, would be still worthwhile if this life was less dominated by painful comparisons between life in Turkey and the West. We should consider, in other words, that Aysun’s fantasies of escape are not only about concrete possibilities for a materially better life, but also about getting out from under the weight of a world picture wherein (life in) Turkey is constantly assessed and questioned in regards to its apparent difference from (life in) the West. It is this picture that I argued can be described in terms of Occidentalism—and not merely Orientalism—in that 1) it presupposes a clear, rigid, and determinative distinction between what is and is not part of Europe or the West (what Said called an “ontological and epistemological distinction” between “Occident” and “Orient,” “East” and “West”) and, 2) it interpellates Turkey in such a way that Turkish identity, history, and contemporary politics and society are called upon to articulate and assess themselves in

²⁸² Turkey’s economic situation is dynamic and often confusing to both foreign and domestic observers, in part because of the huge swings in the value of the Lira in regards to the dollar and other reserve currencies. It is worth noting, however, that when we look at GDP in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)—simply put, the domestic purchasing power of the average person—Turkey’s economy holds up very well against many European ones. Using 2022 numbers, closest to the period of my fieldwork, Turkey, according to recent World Bank data, ranks 11th in terms of PPP, ahead of all of Europe save Russia, Germany, France, and the UK, and higher than Canada (15th).

regards to this distinction.²⁸³ It is this second element, as suggested in prior chapters, that is characteristic of the “Occidental frame” introduced above.

Said used the concept of “imaginative geography” to describe such structures of geohistorical conception and interpellation, seeing in them both a general human tendency towards ascribing human meanings onto “raw reality” and, as in the case of the imaginative geography of Orientalism, as the way in which this tendency can become enmeshed in projects of power, exploitation, and ideological projection.²⁸⁴ While Said’s concept of geographical imaginaries is helpful, in this chapter I will call this structure of presupposition, interpellation, and conceptual discrimination a “picture.” While I use the term “imagination” and “imaginary” often in these pages, invocations of the imagination can sometimes over-emphasize the power of individual subjectivities in shaping how the world is collectively organized and perceived.²⁸⁵ It is in part to avoid this that I will experiment with the concept of a “picture” in this chapter. More importantly, however, I choose to work with the concept of a picture here because what I describe in this chapter is, I think, best grasped by how Ludwig Wittgenstein’s described pictures in his later works.

A picture, for the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*, referred to a context or “frame” that provides the background against which representation, reflection, and even criticism takes place.²⁸⁶ In the philosopher Charles Taylor’s gloss, Wittgenstein’s concept refers to how “what was once one possible construction among others” becomes “part of the unquestioned background, something whose shape is not perceived, but which conditions, largely unnoticed, the way we think, infer, experience, process claims and arguments.”²⁸⁷ A picture is therefore not itself a “system of ideological fictions” (as Said described Orientalism), although it may provide the “unquestioned background” such a system can point to when generating and defending its claims and presumptions. Instead, what a picture fosters is a ‘way of seeing’, akin to what Wittgenstein called a “pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at,” which “it never occurs to us to take...off.”²⁸⁸ Pictures can become b(l)inding, therefore, without their ‘inexorability’ either reaching the level of conscious awareness or appearing as wedded to any particular worldview or fixed ideological position. This unproblematic obviousness persists, Wittgenstein suggests, because so many of our common sense assumptions and communicative habits rely upon and therefore systematically reproduce the picture’s main features, such that this picture becomes what Wittgenstein called an “ideal in our thinking”; something—in the words of one Wittgenstein scholar —“not subject to rational review” but that nevertheless “shapes the way we subject other matters to

²⁸³ Said 2003, 2. Although the tendency to articulate Turkey’s position in regards to the term “the East” (*Doğu* or, in an older idiom, *Şark*) is less common today than in the early and middle decades of the 20th century, the questioning/positioning of Turkey’s identity in regards to the term “the West” (*Batı*, or *Garp*) is as prevalent now as at any time over the last century.

²⁸⁴ For an extended examination of this concept, see Said 2003, 49-73.

²⁸⁵ This, of course, is one of the arguments that has been leveled against Said, who (for such arguments) paid too much credence to the power of individual agents and too little to impersonal structures. C.f. Clifford 1988.

²⁸⁶ In dealing with pictures, “one thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.” Wittgenstein 2009, 53, prop. 114. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had famously developed the opposite view in his ‘picture theory’ of language, in which language works to generate pictures that “model” reality.

²⁸⁷ Taylor 2018, 565.

²⁸⁸ Wittgenstein 1958, 45

rational review.”²⁸⁹ A picture, in this sense, can “hold us captive” to the extent that we ‘cannot get outside it’, “for it [lies] in our language and language seem[s] to repeat it to us inexorably.”²⁹⁰

In the remainder of this chapter, I will attempt to provide ethnographic and historical evidence for the existence and power of such a picture, as it both orients and constrains three distinct ways of making sense of, and acting in regards to, the Turkish past, present, and future. I characterize ways with three figures²⁹¹ of movement: “escape” (*kaçma*), “return” (*dönme*), and “transformation” (*başkalaşım* or *dönüşüm*), with these terms partially borrowed from literary critic Nurdan Gürbilek.²⁹² I have already introduced above the figures of “escape” and, in regards to the Kemalist project of pushing Turkey towards Europe, “transformation.” I will take up these figures again after examining that of “return” in the following section. In examining these figures, I will try to show that each movement directs itself to a different future, a different conception of the past, and a different relationship to both “home” and “homeland” and to what Nurdan Gürbilek (speaking of similar figures within Turkish literary narratives) calls the pull of “foreign geographies.”²⁹³ But I will also argue that each movement is oriented within a *shared* geographical picture, within whose frame conceptions of self and nation are compelled to articulate and define themselves in regards to the West—whether this West is what is emulated, moved towards, or recoiled from. In the final section, I will argue in more detail why the Orientalism of this picture can also be conceived as an Occidentalism. It is the destiny, fixity, or ‘inexorability’ of this Occidentalist picture, along with its effects on politics and the national psyche, that I aim to bring into the foreground.

II: Return

Over the year following my first walk with Aysun, I heard many versions of the phrase “geography is destiny.” In political speeches opining on the uniqueness of the Anatolian heartland and the exigencies of Turkey’s geopolitical position; in editorials on Ottoman cosmopolitanism; in reflections on the fluctuating fortunes of the Turkish lira; in nationalistic attestations of Turkey’s world-historical importance; in popular YouTube documentaries about conditions of life in the majority Kurdish city of Diyarbakır—in sarcastic tweets lamenting why possibilities for life in Turkey feel so paralyzed to so many. While it is difficult to determine the precise origins of the phrase’s popularity over the last decade, the beginning of its increased use around 2012 coincides with its entry into many of Turkish president (then prime minister) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s speeches, who has invoked it recurrently over the last decade. Take for instance a line from Erdoğan’s address to the city of Rize’s AK Party congress in 2017, concerning Turkey’s regional interests and responsibilities: “The fate of Turkey and the Turkish nation is to hold the burden of this whole geography—from the Balkans to the Caucasus, from North Africa to Central Asia—on our shoulders. Yes, geography is destiny and we will not run away from our destiny.”²⁹⁴ Or, from a 2015 awards ceremony: “...As a nation, we do not have the option of escaping from this destiny,

²⁸⁹ Egan 2011, 69.

²⁹⁰ Wittgenstein 1958, 48

²⁹¹ I use the term “figure” here, in part to follow Gürbilek’s use of a similar word in Turkish, but also to indicate that these movements have a figurative quality that has, as Gürbilek, made them particularly relevant for narrative—whether these narratives are literary, political, biographical, etc.

²⁹² Gürbilek 2020

²⁹³ Gürbilek 2020, 31

²⁹⁴ “Coğrafya Kaderdir Kaçmayacağız.” *Netordu*, 19 November 2017

this responsibility, that history and geography has placed upon us.”²⁹⁵ Or again, from a 2018 speech: “The terror attacks, regional humanitarian crises, and even natural disasters that fill Turkey’s agenda are certainly not our preference. [But] in Ibn Khaldun’s words²⁹⁶ [sic], geography is destiny. We will consent to our destiny and do whatever is necessary to survive here.”²⁹⁷

These are, of course, statements geared to buoy the sentiments of Erdoğan’s base by asserting national defiance and exceptionalism in the face of overlapping crises. They also emphasize Turkey’s centrality to what Erdoğan often refers to as “the Islamic world” (“*İslam alemi*”) and promote the greatness and singularity of the Turkish people (“*balk*”) and nation (“*millet*”). More specifically, however, what Erdoğan suggests here is that this ‘consenting to’ and refusing to ‘escape from’ geographic destiny has been something *lacking* in modern Turkish history. By emphasizing that “we” must now accept the fate given by geography, Erdoğan implies that some other “them” has tried to flee from this fate in the past. More specifically still, Erdoğan is making tacit reference to Turkey’s Republican founders and the subsequent generations of secularist elites who had worked to construct an image of Turkey’s past and future as unburdened by, and as distinct from, the Ottoman-Islamic past, as well as from the Arab peoples who had once lived under Ottoman rule. By contrast, Erdoğan’s statements indicate a determination to “consent to,” rather than to try to “escape” from, Turkey’s complex geographical inheritance, with geography here meaning not merely topography but a whole panoply of cultural, social, religious, etc., connections between the peoples once living within the Ottoman world. Moreover, if Turkey’s secular elites had once interpreted Turkey’s difference from, and lack of full acceptance by, the West as a problem demanding resolution (namely, by proving Turkey’s closeness to Europe and its ability to embody European norms and values so as to gain more favorable economic and geopolitical relations with the West), in such speeches Erdoğan suggests this perceived difference and lack of acceptance is to be recast as a “destiny” that, if embraced, will renew and empower the nation.²⁹⁸

This discursive and geopolitical pivot from a West-facing political culture and foreign policy can be read as part of the AKP’s well-documented embrace of what is often termed “neo-Ottomanism” (*yeni Osmanlılık*), in which Turkey’s imperial legacy is idealized and used to promise the possibility of Turkey again being a major world power and, as when the caliphate was centered in Istanbul, the heart of the Islamic world.²⁹⁹ Neo-Ottomanism is here partly a response to early Republican and Kemalist attempts to construct what Behlül Özkan has called a “national spatial consciousness,” wherein a broad geohistorical inheritance (of the Greek, Balkan, Caucasian, Arab, and North African portions of the Ottoman Empire’s quondam reach) was excluded to facilitate the

²⁹⁵ “Güçlü Olmazsak ve Güçlü Bir Duruş Sergileyemezsek Bizi Bu Coğrafyada Bir Gün Bile Barındırmazlar.” *Türkiye Cumhuriyet Cumhurbaşkanlığı*, December 3, 2015.

²⁹⁶ The attribution of the phrase “geography is destiny” to Ibn Khaldun is as incorrect as it is widespread. The rationale for Erdoğan and his supporters attributing the claim to him is likely a consequence of efforts to hold up the 14th century polymath as founder of the kind of “Islamic social science” that the AKP has tried to foster through institutions like the titular Ibn Khaldun University, founded with state support in 2015. Likely due to the frequency with which Erdoğan and others attribute the phrase to Khaldun, the error has been widespread.

²⁹⁷ “Erdoğan: Coğrafya Kaderdir Kederimize Rize Göstereceğiz.” *Cumhuriyet*, August 30, 2018.

²⁹⁸ Erdoğan’s statements about the West are generally tailored to specific contexts. He is far more hostile to the West in speeches aimed solely at a domestic audience, especially to his base, while often striking a more positive, conciliatory tone in addresses geared towards foreign audiences. This, indeed, has long been part of Erdoğan’s strategy of maintaining close economic and geopolitical ties with Western states, particularly America, while also using long-standing resentments towards the West among his base to solidify support.

²⁹⁹ For recent work in English on the influence of m in contemporary Turkish politics and popular culture, see: Yavuz 2020. Saraçoğlu & Demirkol 2015; Elçi 2021; Ergin & Karakaya 2017; Uzer 2020; Erçetin 2021.

notion that the Turkish homeland (*vatan*) had always been fundamentally Anatolian.³⁰⁰ The construction of this spatio-historical consciousness, limiting communal identity and geographic belonging within the borders of a supposedly homogeneous nation state even while working to distinguish Turkey from the majority Muslim nations to the east and south, facilitated claims of Turkey's independence and distinction from the Middle East and broader "Islamic world," thereby also supporting Turkey's claims of eligibility for Euro-American institutions (e.g. NATO, the European Economic Community, and then the EU).³⁰¹ Today's neo-Ottoman glorification of empire, along with emphasis on this empire's geographical scope and (for many) its essentially Islamic identity, subverts earlier efforts to curate the contours of national identity within the limited territorial frame of the nation-state. By doing so, this altered relationship to the Ottoman-Islamic past valorizes elements of what is retroactively recuperated into "Turkish" history and culture (given that there was no real sense of Turkish nationality prior to the late Ottoman period, and even then it was limited in scope and interest) and thus criticizes the suppression of this past under Kemalist rule. Neo-Ottomanism thereby offers a critique, not only of the Kemalist legacy, but also of the Orientalist structures that long interpellated Turkey as either inferior to Europe or as equal to it only insofar as Turkish culture and political organization demonstrated a willingness to accept Western hegemony and emulate the sociopolitical structures of powerful Western states. At the same time, neo-Ottomanism has tended to provide narratives of the Turks as the descendants of, and the rightful heirs to, something greater and grander than what had been promised by Atatürk: the inheritors not simply of a nation, but of an entire "geography," stretching—as quoted from Erdoğan above—"from the Balkans to the Caucasus, from North Africa to Central Asia."

In the 2000s, there were many aspects of neo-Ottoman discourse that appeared to redress the religious and ethnic exclusions enacted by the country's Republican founders and subsequent secular-nationalist governments. In particular, neo-Ottomanism's emphasis on returning to the legacy of the pre-Republican period, when the empire was an undeniably multi-ethnic and multi-religious political unit, seemed linked to the AKP's initial support for loosening restrictions on the articulation of Kurdish and Armenian identity, as well as to the AKP's less combative stance against recognition of the Armenian genocide.³⁰² There were, moreover, aspects of neo-Ottomanism supported by those not otherwise aligned with AKP ideology, who saw the efforts to reintegrate an awareness of the Ottoman legacy as a necessary corrective to decades of pedagogic marginalization of Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic past.³⁰³ By the mid-2010s, however, neo-Ottomanism had become

³⁰⁰ Özkan 2012

³⁰¹ For an account of 20th century discursive and institutional efforts to position Turkey as eligible for entry into European organizations, especially the European Economic Community, see Döşemeci 2013.

³⁰² Arat and Pamuk 2019, 98. The politics of recognizing the Armenian genocide are complex, and it is important to note that Erdoğan has never denied the immense violence directed at Armenian Ottomans in the Empire's final decades. The point of debate is both terminological—what or who should be held accountable for this violence, and whether it was part of a deliberate strategy on the part of Ottoman leadership—and geopolitical. There has long been a sense among many in Turkey that a double standard is applied to Turkey, whereby European and North American states are not demanded to recognize their own genocides, even though they committed many crimes during and after the colonial period that could easily fit the technical definition of "genocide."

³⁰³ In addition to the discourses of "Ottoman cosmopolitanism," earlier attempts to reengage with the Ottoman legacy prior to the AKP had been, as M. Hakan Yavuz notes, part of efforts to build a post-Kemalist, secular, pluralism in Turkey after the 1980 coup. For center-right Prime Minister Turgut Özal, for instance, whose Motherland party held power for much of the 1980s, "neo-Ottomanism was a search for post-Kemalist cosmopolitanism," a way to overcome the ethnic and anti-religious chauvinism that had dominated Turkey for much of the 20th century. See, Yavuz 2013, 6.

linked to a Schmittian distinction between “us” (*biz*) and “them” (*onlar*) often used by Erdoğan and his allies. In this discourse, those who are seen as looking towards the West, rather than embracing the greatness of the Turkic-Ottoman inheritance and/or idolizing the West, are often portrayed as either traitors or dupes.³⁰⁴ These strategies of demonization, and the mobilization of an anti-political logic of us versus them is not unique to the AKP. In many ways, these strategies are redolent of the vilification of leftists and pious Muslims by secularist governments and state institutions throughout the 20th century, as well as of contemporary American (and much European) politics. Yet while the demonizing rhetoric of earlier governments had taken leftism or religious-nationalism as scapegoats while largely reinforcing Turkey’s pro-Western alignment, the updated version of this rhetoric in Erdoğan’s second decade in power tends to attack the excesses of Westernization and secularization, question (hardly illegitimately) the intentions of Western actors, and evince deep skepticism of those who are seen as having remained—either naively or maliciously—committed to nominally Western ideas and values, despite these idea/values having by now revealed themselves as both practically and morally bankrupt.

These positions are not unrelated to the influence of the now-banned Gülen or Hizmet (service) movement, led by exiled scholar-preacher Fethullah Gülen, whose teachings (despite Erdoğan’s break with Gülen in the early 2010s) were instrumental in forming the ideology championed by Erdoğan and other leading politicians today. For Gülen, modern Turkey has to be reimagined out of the Kemalist narrative of a secular, Western-facing, nationally-bounded republic, and into a broader construct whose identity is at once Ottoman, Islamic, and Turkish, and whose roots extend beyond the boundaries of Turkey’s official borders. In ways largely identical to Erdoğan’s own rhetoric, the Gülen movement (in the words of its leading interpreter in English) “seeks to restore the Turkish-Muslim nation by “remembering” its past rather than “forgetting” it, and [it] calls upon people to rediscover the self, which has been embodied within Islam and the Ottoman past”—a remembering which requires “the reconceptualization of the nation and its cultural connection with Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans.”³⁰⁵ While this remembering, for Gülen, is by no means premised on a simplistic repudiation of ideas or institutions of putative European provenance, it does imply an altered view of Turkey’s geohistorical position, and the need to understand how Turkey’s moral and cultural traditions differ in critical ways from those of Euro-America.³⁰⁶

Erdoğan’s use of “geography is destiny” is, similar to Gülen’s invocation of a geographically expanded nationalist vision, an incitement to reimagine the possibility of Turkey’s greatness as contingent upon the acceptance of its “authentic” identity, embodied in what is regularly framed as a “return” to the Ottoman past.³⁰⁷ Yet despite this promised return and its repudiation of Western influence, the West remains a critical coordinate, even for those rhetorically pushing a national reorientation away from the West. As Erdoğan reflected at a 2019 ceremony at Marmara University, Turkey is still “accounting for why its springs of knowledge and science (*ilim*) do not flow powerfully,” and is still working to recognize that its “past crises are not attributable to [its own]

³⁰⁴ For analysis of Erdoğan’s, and the AKP’s, use of this ‘us-them’ language in recent years, see Erçetin 2021, and Elçi 2021.

³⁰⁵ Yavuz 2013, 57

³⁰⁶ Yavuz 2013, 108

³⁰⁷ For more on the Turkish politics of authenticity, see Devrim Sezer, “The Anxiety of Cultural Authenticity in Turkish Communitarian Thought: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Peyami Safa on Europe and Modernity,” *History of European Ideas* 36 (2010): 427–437; Nurdan Gürbilek, “Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102: 2/3 (2003): 599–628.

nation and culture.” Turkey’s relative weakness (to Erdoğan’s mind) in contemporary intellectual and cultural production, as well as its past and present “crises,” is rooted not in Turkish culture and identity but rather in the chronic denial and demeaning of the true scope and richness of these, largely in favor of Western approval: “The reason for what has befallen us over the past few centuries is a loss of self-confidence, a prostration before the West, a disrespect for our own culture—a mentality, which has fallen upon us like a nightmare, that, instead of producing its own knowledge, turns mimicry into a science.” Against those who “look at life” from the “window” of “Western civilization” and see the “ancient values and beliefs of the nation” as “the biggest obstacle on the path to civilization,” Erdoğan reminds his supporters that Turkey’s “geography possesses a culture of embracing every opportunity, every value, every accumulated resource, so long as its sensitivities of confidence and faith are not violated.”³⁰⁸ Turkey, Erdoğan suggests, has allowed its true self to be “violated” in the attempt to transform towards and “mimic” the West, thereby denying its “destiny,” its “ancient values and beliefs,” and allowing the wealth and reach of its true inheritance to lie fallow. That this rhetoric is politically calculated to appeal to Erdoğan’s base does not mean that it is without merit.

The contemporary themes of neo-Ottomanism as a project of returning to a purer and more powerful past extend well back into modern Turkish history. Many of its elements can be traced to the essays and literary works of early to mid-century intellectuals such as Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, Peyami Safa, Yahya Kemal, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and, later, Cemil Meriç, all of whom thematized the need for reconstituting a national identity that was at once Turkish, Ottoman, and Islamic, and which redressed the harms inflicted on the national psyche by the collapse of empire and decades of relentless westernization. Some writers such as Tanpınar, Safa, and even Meriç in his own way, emphasized the need for a kind of “synthesis” (*terkip*) between the traditions of “West” (*Garb*) and “East” (*Şark*), desiring a return to the resources of the Ottoman past through the lens of what Tanpınar called “westernized understanding.”³⁰⁹ Others such as Kısakürek, however, militated against the depravity of Western norms and forms, seeing in westernization a moral and spiritual rot (it is worth noting that many of the most intensely anti-Western, for lack of a better term, Turkish intellectuals of the last century had spent significant time in the West, as Kısakürek did during his studies in Paris). Especially after Gülen’s movement was driven underground in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt, it has been Kısakürek’s binarized understanding of a corrupt West and a suppressed but spiritually superior Islamic and Ottoman tradition that has become more predominate among supporters of the AKP and related parties. This understanding is relevant here not in how it aptly or erroneously characterizes “the West” (*Batı*) as a “brute reality,” but rather in how it enshrines the rigid distinction between the West and what Kısakürek called “The Great East” (*Büyük Doğu*) as fundamental for interpreting Turkish history and identity.³¹⁰

It was while researching such rhetoric by Erdoğan and other political figures that I first met Enes, a lawyer and former mid-level AKP functionary who had recently changed his party

³⁰⁸“Marmara Üniversitesi Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Külliyesi Temel Atma Töreni.” *Memleket*, 29 November, 2019. <https://www.memleket.com.tr/marmara-universitesi-recep-tayyip-erdogan-kulliyesi-temel-atma-toreni-1940634h.htm>

³⁰⁹ Tanpınar 2016, 233

³¹⁰ Many of Kısakürek’s ideas were serialized for his journal “*Büyük Doğu*” (“Great East”), in articles such as “*Doğuya İnanalım*” (“Let’s Believe in the East”) or “*Kendi İçinde Doğu*” (“The East in of Itself”), as well as in his many poems, novels, and plays. For Kısakürek’s influence on contemporary Turkish right-wing thought, see Singer 2013. For a more expansive account, see Duran 2001.

membership from the AKP to the more conservative Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party).³¹¹ During a short hiatus between national Covid-19 closures in spring of 2021, as we ate baklava and sipped strong Turkish tea, and between conversations about the scholar and polemicist Cemil Meriç and other conservative Turkish intellectuals, I asked Enes what he thought Erdoğan meant by the phrase “geography is destiny.”

“Well first, when he says “geography is destiny” he’s not talking about the weather in Konya.” Enes smiled. Erdoğan was instead referring to “what is tied to our feet, the ground (*toprak*) that we stand on, not about topography but “heart geography” (*gönül coğrafyası*)...He means that the bonds (*bağlar*) between soul (*ruh*) and place (*mekan*) are the foundations of our lives and fate.” This bond, which Enes referred to as “heart geography” (perhaps best translatable as something like “heartland” in English) was something “more than the physical geography of our country,” and the “bond” that it established between place, life, and identity was emphasized by Erdoğan to stress the connection between earlier eras in Turkish history (particularly the Ottoman and Seljuk periods) and the present.³¹² This connection was stressed to “wake up” (*uyandırmak*) Turks who had been conditioned by decades of Kemalist rule and reform to forget or denigrate the value and relevance of these earlier periods, as well as their importance for understanding the identity and historical trajectory of Turkey today. In this sense, Enes thought, the problem that Erdoğan was getting at with his statements about geography and destiny was this: “

“There are too many people who feel that the foundations (*temeller*) of our nation, our culture, and our past, which have allowed us to become who we are, are not worth knowing or protecting. These people think that these foundations are rotten and should be replaced or demolished.” This denial and desire to repress the nation’s foundations was nothing new: “This has been our predicament for two hundred years. Even Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]—he saved this country from imperialism, and we are grateful to him for what he did in industry, in education. But he often thought in this harmful way, and the people who followed him were worse. These people can’t understand that when we forget [our foundations, our destiny], when we do not accept ourselves, our biggest resources become our biggest prison.”

Enes had, like Erdoğan, grown up in the traditionally conservative municipality of Fatih, whose borders encompass the monuments of Ottoman government and culture (Tophane palace, the Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, the Grand Bazaar) as well as the headquarters of “The Community of İskenderpaşa” (*İskenderpaşa Cemaati*), a branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order whose followers include Erdoğan, former Turkish Prime Ministers Turgut Özal, Süleyman Demirel, and Necmettin Erbakan, as well as Enes’ family. Enes, also like Erdoğan, had for a time attended an İmam Hatip school (an educational institution in Turkey, grown out of Atatürk’s banning of the *madrasa* system, in which students gain training in Islamic theology and Quranic recitation) and like Erdoğan spoke in a Turkish peppered with words, largely of Arabic and Persian origin, less used by younger generations. This language was itself, Enes insisted when I mentioned that his diction reminded me of Erdoğan’s, a commitment to the kind of interpretation of geography and destiny glossed above. For Enes, the richness of Ottoman Turkish, incorporating a greater number Persian and Arabic derived words and grammatical structures, had been denuded during the development of modern Turkish in the 20th century. Such words, sometimes omitted from contemporary

³¹¹ Both the Saadet Party and the AK Party were outgrowths of the Islamist political renewal in the 1990s in Turkey. Both emerged out of the Refah and Fazilet parties, which were banned, under threat of military coup, in 1998 and 2001 respectively. Both parties were likewise deeply influenced by former prime minister Necmettin Erbakan, with the AK Party initially styling itself as a reformist version of Erbakan’s brand of politics and the Saadet party promising a more orthodox commitment to Erbakan’s pan-Islamic political philosophy of *Milli Görüş* (“national vision”).

³¹² For studies on the use of the concept of “Gönül Coğrafyası,” both within AKP discourse and more broadly, see Bölükbaşı 2021 and Alpar 2019.

dictionaries, and actively suppressed by the language reforms of the 1930s, still regularly appeared in the work of post-Ottoman, midcentury novelists such as Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar and Sabahattin Ali, whose commitment to an older vocabulary led to some of their contemporaries to (falsely) view them as reactionaries. In Enes' view, the language reforms had slowly restricted Turkish's lexical breadth and depth, creating a popular vocabulary that was needlessly simplified and shallow. Such lexical attrition was one source of what Enes, like Erdoğan, saw as Turkey's relative weakness in intellectual and cultural production, and for him it had made younger generations more susceptible to borrowing European terms rather than exploring the wealth of their own linguistic inheritance. (Enes, like many right-wing politicians in recent years, whole-heartedly supported the still unrealized campaign to make the study of Ottoman mandatory in state schools). These continuing linguistic struggles were therefore one part of the likewise ongoing struggle with the flaws of Westernization, and what Enes referred to as the "forgetting" of who "we" are. On these issues, Enes (along with most of the politicians of the Saadet Party that he now supported) and Erdoğan were at least rhetorically aligned, even while Enes saw Erdoğan's party as having, in recent years, allowed for a reprehensible degree of corruption and two-facedness. Too many AKP members, in Enes' view, used calls for renewed attention to the foundations of Turkish culture, and for opposition to the diminishment or denial of those foundations in favor of "Western understanding," as dog-whistles for exploiting, rather than for correcting, the country's preexisting ideological divisions. Despite the AKP's official rhetoric, Turks today were even more "addicted" to Western cultural products than they had been prior to Erdoğan's rise to power in 2003. Regardless of the sincerity of his sentiments, too many of Erdoğan's policies had ended up serving the interests of those "external" forces (to which Enes included Gülen's movement) that sought to keep Turkey subject to foreign influence. If Erdoğan and the AKP had come to power, in part, by advocating a return to the nation's foundations and a reframing of its Ottoman past, those such as Enes had come to see AKP elites as themselves ignorant of, uncommitted to, or incapable of realizing this project. Crucially, this failure on the part of the AKP was attributed by Enes to a structure of corruption (both material and moral) that had too long infected the state and which in fact stemmed from the very same sources as those which had kept Turkey in a subservient position throughout its modern history—especially a base materialism, long seen by intellectuals like Kısakürek as having entered Turkey through the promotion/adoption of Western values.³¹³

Enes's views on his country's problems sometimes trended towards the conspiratorial and the chauvinistic: accusations that were certainly plausible but unproven (such as CIA involvement in the failed 2016 coup attempt), that were highly dubious (such as the power of the Freemasons in global affairs), and sometimes anti-semitic (such as the enduring crypto-power of the *dönme*, Ottoman Jews who converted to Islam in order to, as the story goes, infiltrate society and government).³¹⁴ Nonetheless, Enes' commitment to the revitalization of Turkish identity and national glory, and his sense of grievance and antipathy towards the forces of European modernity that he felt had suppressed the full expression of these throughout the 20th century, was a reaction to the very real history of homogenization and repression enacted by the secularist statism that, as referenced above, largely dominated Turkey until the early 2000s. After nearly a century of obdurate

³¹³ This notion of the amoral materialism of Western civilization, and its corrosive effect on Turkish society, has long been a theme of Turkish conservatism, and a *bête noire* of Muslim Turkish intellectuals. See Uzer 2016, esp. chapter 5.

³¹⁴ Baer 2013. It is important to note that the Ottoman Empire was vastly more hospitable to Jews than European states were. The Ottomans accepted large numbers of Jews fleeing persecution in nominally Christian Europe, especially during the Spanish Inquisition and mass expulsion of Iberian Jews in the late 15th century. Turkey also accepted large numbers of Jews during and prior to WWII. As throughout the Middle East, such conspiracies regarding Jews are principally a product of the latter half of the 20th century, inseparable from the conditions of Israel's founding and subsequent actions against the Palestinians.

Euro-centric modernization, global economic marginalization, coupled with waves of anti-democratic repression by successive secularist governments, Enes saw Turkey as long overdue for a reversal of orientation and a return to its true foundations—a return that, for Enes, would require national unity through a reconception of Turkey’s Ottoman past and position within the “Islamic world,” as well as a repudiation of Turkey’s historical tendency to appease and (negatively) compare itself with the West. Indeed, as Enes told me on the phone a few weeks later: “The struggle is the same as it has always been for our country. First, we have to reunite the Islamic world, and as Turks it falls on us to lead this effort. Second—and without this we will never achieve unity in this geography—we have to stop comparing ourselves with Europe, with the West. We’ve been looking to the West for guidance and praise for centuries, but how has this ever benefited us? What have we gained but weakness (*zayıflık*) and a lack of self-confidence (*özgüven eksikliği*)? A constant feeling of powerlessness (*güçsüzlük*) and impotence (*yetersizlik*)? This is a strong country, a beautiful country. We must be proud of it and of who we are.”

At the start of the summer of 2021, I met Enes at the office of my lawyer, Devrim, along with Devrim’s nephew Ali, a junior lawyer at Devrim’s firm. In the months following our first meeting, Enes had begun to consult on a legal case I was then fighting against the Turkish government, which had indicted me on false charges some 6 months prior. After together editing a statement I had written for an upcoming appearance in court, Enes and Devrim turned the conversation to national politics and the possibility of early elections in response to the worsening economy and growing popular discontent. As we talked, Ali and I sat and drank tea on the sofa while Devrim and Enes stood in the corner of the office, smoking out the window. After listening to them discuss the political leanings of local municipal police, with whom both Devrim and Enes maintained close contacts, I asked them what they thought the key issues would be in the coming national elections, then still slated for 2023.

After emphasizing the economic instability, along with growing accusations of corruption against the AKP, I pushed the conversation towards issues of history and identity.

“We are just beginning to confront the history of the last 100 years,” Devrim said. “We are just beginning to examine carefully what has gone wrong, the mistakes that have been made, and to search for the path (*yol*) that will bring us out of the patterns that have been repeated so many times in our history.”

This path, Enes clarified, was that of overcoming what he, like Erdoğan, called “imitation” (*taklitçilik*), a term often used to describe a recurrent pattern of negative comparison and emasculating emulation of the West that, if not broken, would continue to hobble the country. To stop on this path now would be “suicide” (*intihar*), and while Erdoğan himself might need to be replaced it was still necessary to maintain the path he had begun to chart during his two-decade tenure. “It is not possible to turn away from this path now,” Enes said. “We cannot stop.”

I asked if this walking this path was exhausting.

Enes gave me a soft smile. “Yes, it’s tiring. But it’s like what we discussed about “destiny.” It is the only path (*yol*) forward, and we will stay on it as long as necessary.”

Enes’ emphasis on Turkey’s inheritance of, and centrality to, an Islamic geography, stretching beyond Turkey’s modern borders and rooted in “bonds” between identity and a geography encompassing much of the territory of the Ottoman Empire, along with his insistence on promoting authentic expressions of national identity rather than mimicking norms and values seen as of Western import, constitutes an important critique of Kemalist interpretations of, and interventions in, modern Turkish history. While Enes’s views are not representative of all Turkish religious-nationalist thought today, his articulations of Turkey’s historical predicament is illustrative of a broader trend among many Turks, for whom the political struggle of recent years crucially includes reframing Turkey’s 20th century efforts at Westernization as a *departure* from the authentic foundations of the nation. Even for those more committed to a pan-Turkic (or “Turanist”) than to a

pan-Islamist or neo-Ottoman view of Turkey's inheritance and future (such as the ethno-nationalism of the Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP), there is still an abiding concern that the country's real geohistorical inheritance has been suppressed by attempts to position Turkey with or within the West—and that this inheritance must now be returned to.³¹⁵

This attitude, and the path of return that it advocates, is, in part, an effort to get out from under the kind of Orientalist world picture referenced above, within whose frame Turkey has been chronically interpellated (and perhaps nowhere more so than *within* Turkey itself) as deficient in regards to, not yet caught up with, or as at best a forced simulacra of, the West.³¹⁶ The Ottoman past, prior to the humiliations of imperial collapse and submission to the raw deals and decidedly mixed blessings of Westernization, appears here as itself an imagined geography: as the “heart geography” invoked by Enes. By returning to the Ottoman-Islamic past and reclaiming this geography, Turkey could finally empower itself to the point of finally shrugging off Orientalist interpellation and the Western economic, cultural, and geopolitical hegemony that has sustained it. If this hegemony worked alongside and through what Said called “the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority;” if the West, by constructing and then globalizing this civilizational hierarchy, helped precipitate what Meriç called “the castration of the [historical] memory of the Turkish people”; if this, then both this “castration” and this sense of “inferiority” can be overcome by restoring (which is to say, creating, as, to repeat, there was no sense of national identity prior to the very end of the Ottoman period) a national selfhood prior to and unmarked by these wounds.³¹⁷ In this context, the assertion of geographical destiny *both* naturalizes this selfhood by appeal to the givenness of geography *and* binds it to the ineluctable force of fate. By doing so, Turkey modern history of Westernization can be portrayed as both unnatural and, by contravening fate, destined to fail.

Despite the explicit repudiation of the West and Westernization contained in this view, I want to make an argument about it that may appear at first counter-intuitive. The appeal to geographical destiny is not only a critique of a perceived denial of the nation's authentic foundations, and of the futility of (and the misery incurred by) the West-facing agenda that underpinned it. The appeal is also, perhaps paradoxically, a *recommitment* to the West. Why? Because the assertion of Turkey's unique geographical inheritance is only possible by defining this geography *in regard to* the West: it is only in regard to the unquestioned quiddity of the West's geographical integrity that Turkey's own geography can be articulated. This is not simply because of the sheer rhetorical centrality of “the West” to neo-Ottomanist and other non/anti-Kemalist discourses, a centrality that itself seems to belie the apparent intention of this discourse: to push Turkey to liberate itself from a material *and* psychological dependency upon the West, thereby abolishing the compulsion to make comparisons between Turkey and the West (comparisons in which Turkey is often seen as falling short). No—the primary reason why the assertion of an Ottoman-Islamic “heart geography” reiterates the West as the North Star for imagining the future and defining the self is that the discursive labor performed by appeal to the West not only provides means for identifying and critiquing historical processes and pressures (of European colonial ambitions, of American economic hegemony, of the globalization of Euro-American cultural products and social

³¹⁵ For an excellent analysis of the differences between the major right-wing and conservative political parties in Turkey see Bora 2017.

³¹⁶ For a few (there are many) trenchant examinations of domestic anxieties over the question of Turkey's insufficiency or ‘belatedness’ in regards to the West (and in regards to a ‘modernity’ often used as a temporalized synonym for the West) see Ahiska 2003, Gürbilek 2003, and Ertürk 2012.

³¹⁷ Said 2003, 42; Meriç 2021, 295. It is worth noting, as I discuss elsewhere, that Meriç's views on the possibility of such a restoration were much more complex than those generally espoused by Erdoğan and his supporters.

norms, etc.) but also becomes *itself* a kind of pressure, compelling the articulation of competing visions for the nation to remain framed in regards to the West. If the Kemalist “paradigm” has often tended to make the West a point of comparison in regard to which Turkey is still ‘catching-up’, the “Erdoğanist” view changes the hierarchy of comparison while retaining the same terms. To put it another way, here a position is taken that *reverses but also preserves* the West’s centrality to much Kemalist, liberal, and secular discourse of the last century. The secular nationalist ideal of the West, as that which (whether out of admiration, self-preservation, or resignation) demanded emulation and progressive pursuit, appears here to have indeed been (to borrow Navaro’s language in a related context) “assum[ed], internaliz[ed], revers[ed], and uph[eld]” by many religious-nationalists.³¹⁸ The West here remains a reified coordinate, but—to repeat—instead of a loadstar towards progress it serves as a largely fixed point to be navigated away from and/or used to generate charged comparisons that, even while presenting the West in a largely negative light, still make the West central to the conception and articulation of national identity, history, and purpose. What remains constant, between secular-Kemalist discourses of transformation towards the West and contemporary assertions that the path towards the future must run through a return to a past prior to Westernization, is that the path towards both futures is one that is not only oriented, but to a significant extent *defined*, in regards to the West. In this manner, the picture of the world, and of Turkey’s contested place within it, that held such power over Atatürk and his ideological descendants has not been abandoned in the new order established by the AKP and its fellow-travelers. Rather, this picture and its key coordinates have been preserved, reversed, and reentrenched, still providing “the unquestioned background” against which political debates, interpretations of the past, and hopes for the future become intelligible and persuasive.³¹⁹

III: Transformation

After the end of Covid curfews in the summer of 2021, I met Aysun for drinks with our mutual friend, Gülşah. The city was returning to life, and we smoked and drank cold Turkish beer, watching the hipsters, European expats, and occasional Turkish celebrity stroll down Cihangir’s main street of bars and cafes. The atmosphere was excited and happy, disguising the anxiety and economic pain that suffused even relatively well-off districts like Cihangir. Gülşah lived in Kadıköy, on the Asian side of the city, but she had been in Cihangir a few weeks earlier, when the government had walled-off half of Beyoğlu to prevent Istanbul’s yearly LGBTQI+ rally, planned to take place in Taksim Square. A not-so-small army of police (on the day, a thousand cops had seemed pressed into a half-mile radius) had forced Gülşah and other rally-goers into Cihangir, where for a time they were allowed to chant and jump and sing in protest against government policies. Gülşah, unlike Aysun whose father was an AKP supporter, came from a family that had supported the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People’s Party, or CHP) for generations. The CHP, which had unilaterally dominated Turkish politics for 12 years after Atatürk’s death, and had then retained a predominance of power until the AKP’s victories in the early 2000s, had, as referenced above, employed or condoned many of the same tactics of repression, demonization, and censorship now used by the AKP. While the CHP had for the last two decades suffered a marginalized status, it remains broadly committed to Kemalist principles, even if its most popular politician, Ekrem İmamoğlu, at times seems like an Erdoğan clone: different specific policies, but same affect and, one assumes, same sympathy towards a state structure willing to crackdown on forms of dissent seen as threatening to the ruling party. For young Turkish secular progressives such as Gülşah, the CHP is tarnished by its repressive history and by its failure, in the eyes of people like Gülşah, to adequately include feminist,

³¹⁸ Navaro, 42

³¹⁹ Taylor 2018, 565

Kurdish, and LGBTQI+ voices. Indeed, Gülşah saw the Kemalist project, and the CHP as its offshoot, as having been often patriarchal, dogmatic, and repressive. But she also believed in a cluster of ideals that she associated with Euro-American democracies, and that she believed had been fostered, albeit inconsistently, in Turkey through the processes of Westernization set in motion by Atatürk and his supporters. The failure of these ideals to adequately translate into practices and policies, as for similar failures in West, was for her not due to a flaw in the ideals, but rather in the personalities and flawed motivations of the persons who had attempted to execute them. In this way, Gülşah's politics, as she told me in other conversations, turned on reoccupying the ideals of the Kemalist revolution towards liberal, democratic, and secular values, while also rectifying the exclusionary and repressive ways in which this movement had historically developed and operated. The flaws and tragedies of Turkish modernity, for Gülşah, should not be read as necessitating a return to the past; they demanded a *recommitment* to the project of progressive transformation set out by Atatürk's revolution but inadequately realized by it.

As we drank and talked and people-watched, and after reminding Aysun of our conversation a year prior, I asked Gülşah what she thought about the phrase "geography is destiny." Gülşah thought for a moment and put out her cigarette.

"Every day things happen here that make me want to say that 'geography is destiny'. Sometimes I think, 'there are all these things I want to do, I want to live my dreams, but I can't do them because geography is destiny'. But that's all absurd isn't it? We often say things like that because we want an excuse for how things are, because we want to make all our problems seem normal and inevitable. We don't want to take responsibility for our lives and for this country...Geography isn't destiny: it's the people who live here that are a destiny for each other. If people change 'destiny' changes also. And people can change. It's hard, but it's possible."

"Do you really believe that?," Aysun asked. "Do you really believe that it's possible to change our geography? That it's possible for people here to change?" Laughing, she added: "If you really believe that it's possible can you tell me how? Then maybe I could believe it too."

"This geography isn't cursed, you know," Gülşah replied. "And it's not blessed in Europe. It's us, not destiny that makes choices."

Aysun looked momentarily upset, and then replied: "I know it's necessary to overcome that phrase. But can I do it? Can we do it? I don't know. I want to say fuck [my] destiny, but I don't think that will change the situation. The geography won't change. People won't change. I want them to change but they won't. It's grief (*keder*) to say otherwise."

Gülşah and Aysun were largely aligned in their politics, ideals, and concerns, particularly in regards to women's rights, economic opportunity, and a distrust of the political uses of religion. Their vision for how they wished Turkey to be was largely the same. Where they differed was on the possibility of its realization, on the possibility of change. For Aysun, this possibility was a cause for sadness or "grief" (*keder*). It existed for her as something unreachably far and yet somehow intimate, both despaired of and longed for. To believe that "geography is destiny," and to associate that destined geographic identity with those parts of Turkey society that frightened or offended her, was for Aysun to try to exile the felt presence of that possibility, to unmoor the ache of other, unrealized futures. For Aysun, therefore, "geography is destiny" was not merely a rationalization of a perceived status quo, and a conception of this contemporary condition as expressive of Turkey's (non-)proximity to Europe or the West (i.e., geography is destiny, and therefore Turkey, imagined as lying outside the geographical boundaries of the West, will never be sufficiently European). Rather, for Aysun the phrase was an attempt to *deadend* the hope that the kind of life she wished for was possible in Turkey, and that her country could change in such a way as to make this life possible in the future. By invoking the phrase, a longed for way of life and future was not only written off as structurally unobtainable within Turkey but also taken as obtainable only through escape from one

geography into another. If such escape was *itself* impossible, as Aysun increasingly felt after the loss of her German internship, then this predicament could likewise be said to be the result of the fixity of geography. The only consolation for this fixity and stuckness would be in the belief that there was nothing to be done to change this situation: that it was fated, transcendent of individual hope or agency.

For her part, and despite her appeal to a principle of historical change and progressive politics, Gülşah had herself been considering leaving Turkey for years, and had in fact spent much of the lockdown studying for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) in preparation for applying to graduate school in Canada and the U.K. Her faith in the possibility of persons and societies to make their own history—her commitment to the possibility of the possibility of change—did not mean that she had much optimism for Turkey’s short or mid-term future. Turkey was, in her view, becoming increasingly autocratic and Islamist, and she was unsure of whether the social will existed to push the country towards the liberal-democratic political model that she wished for. As for “destiny,” Gülşah’s opposition to the term was primarily political: She chaffed at what she saw as the religious “fatalism” (*yazgıcılık*) inhering in the concept of destiny, diagnosing the contemporary popularity of the phrase as a consequence of the triumph of the superstitious and the irrational within Turkey in recent years. The fact that the phrase was also popular among more secular-liberal Turks was for her a sign of defeatism among that demographic, although she also understood the roots of this pessimism and shared it also in her darker moments. While Gülşah dismissed the idea of destiny, she nonetheless felt a deep sense of political stagnation, and interpreted this stagnation as the result of Turkey’s pre-Republican traditions, the power of which had for a time been repressed through the tutelary violence of the state and secularist elites, finally bursting free. What Gülşah saw as the contemporary resurgence of these traditions, rooted for her in Islamic and patriarchal forms of life, was not inevitable. It could be mitigated or even defeated through social and political struggle. Nonetheless, Gülşah saw the idea that Turkey was—or was becoming—a Western country as wishful at best and delusional at worst: Turkey remained far from realizing the nominally Western ideals that those like Gülşah, even while not unaware of Western states own failures to realize these same ideals, passionately supported.³²⁰

Aysun and Gülşah’s perspectives here can, I believe, be mapped onto an axis of what I want to call the figures of “escape” and “transformation,” respectively. While these figures, and their relation to how Turkey is imagined within geographical space, have long animated Turkish politics and cultural production, their respective salience has undergone significant alteration (especially among more secular Turks) over the last two decades, with hopes of transformation increasingly replaced by fantasies of escape.³²¹ To see the contours of this shift, we can again consider anthropologist Yael Navaro’s 2003 ethnography, *Faces of the State*. In that book, Navaro wrote of the political climate of 1990s Turkey that, “every representation of Turkey’s region was situated. In this highly polarized politics of culture, the meaning of region was not stable, set, or evident, but rather indeterminate.”³²² This indeterminacy, Navaro suggested, was organized around debates over Turkey’s relative distance or proximity to “the West” and tended to catalyze attempts to turn the question of this proximity into a site of cultural and political contest. To articulate this contested politics, Navaro drew on an informant, Fatma, to illustrate one side of Turkish debates over what

³²⁰ This view of Turkey’s potential status as a European country as having dissolved over the last decades is reflected, as Soner Çağaptay notes, in the now dominant view among Western policies makers that Turkey is a “Middle Eastern” country—a view that was less fixed in earlier years. Çağaptay 2019, 284.

³²¹ For an extended discussion of the figures of transformation, escape, and return in Turkish culture and political life see Gürbilek 2020.

³²² Navaro 2003, 66

Navaro called “region” (*bölge*)—a term whose 1990s usage, as described by Navaro, maps onto the uses of “geography” I have been describing here. For Fatma, a child of the Kemalist elite growing up in the middle decades of the last century, Turkey’s Middle Eastern, Ottoman and Islamic “heritage” was something to be either ignored or transcended so as to continue the nation’s movement towards European norms and institutions. When considering her family-tree, Fatma identified with her maternal side’s ancestry in Greece and the Balkans while showing little interest or affiliation with her paternal family’s roots in Iraq; when imagining both the best and the future of Turkey, Fatma and her family identified with that which helped to “identify Turkey regionally with the West.”³²³ Even as Fatma chafed against the growing power of religious-nationalist parties in the 1990s, who successfully channeled anxiety over globalization into antipathy towards practices and values coded as of Western import, in Navaro’s telling Fatma retained a degree of confidence that Turkey’s ‘regional’ integration with the West was still possible.

As Navaro’s discussion of 1990s debates over “region” shows, contestations over the contours and scope of Turkey’s position vis-a-vis Europe and the West on the one hand, and the Islamic world and the Ottoman past on the other, were as intense in the 90s, as the balance of political power was truly beginning to shift in Turkey, as they are today. Decades later, Turkey’s dominant institutions (particularly the military, judiciary, and much of the media) have been stripped of most of the Kemalist elements that once controlled them. In this contemporary reality, the conviction that Turkey’s “region” lies with or within Europe strikes as a relic of an older generation and a different world. It is, instead, Turkey’s geographical position *away* from the West that, for a sizable minority of Turks today, has taken on the appearance of something approaching fatedness. Still, even as earlier aspirations for transformation towards, and for cultural proximity with, Europe have increasingly given way to pessimism and fantasies of escape, the geographical picture within which these sentiments are articulated remains largely the same: the picture of the world as self-evidently divided into Western and non-Western segments, with Turkish identity, history, and potential necessitating orientation in regards to this division, regardless of whether this orientation is affinity and proximity or difference and distance.

The sensibilities animating these movements of escape, transformation, and return have as much to do, I argue, with getting out from under the weight of the constant comparisons and felt deficiencies that this picture facilitates as they do with realizing or opposing institutions and values coded as of Western import. In this sense, we see that Aysun’s fantasy of escape to the West is also a fantasy of a place where she would be free of the kinds of painful comparisons with Europe that life in Turkey provokes in her; that Enes’ desire for a return to national authenticity and greatness free from Western hegemony is also for a place where “mimicry” of the West would be absent and therefore life lived in a more authentic fashion; that the Europe-facing drive for social transformation on the part of earlier generations of Kemalists, and preserved to a degree in the sentiments of those such as Gülşah, is grounded in a desire to protect Turkey from the dangers and humiliations of placement on the far side of the West/rest divide. Each of these movements, in their capacity as distinct apprehensions of and responses to a shared problem (the “East-West problem, the problem of the Occidental frame) can be seen as attempts at freeing the self from the power of a hegemonic world picture—a picture wherein the position of the West is both self-evident and definitive whereas Turkey’s position in regards to it is contested and unsettling.

Despite the sense that the comparisons generated by this picture are stultifying, efforts at escape, return, or transformation tend to reiterate this picture’s basic coordinates, among which what Orhan Pamuk has called “an ideal of the West” continues to exert a kind of gravitational force: the path towards transformation, towards escape, and towards return all find direction and affective

³²³ Navaro 2003, 61

charge in relation to the West's position within an idealized geographical space.³²⁴ It is the persistence of this picture that, I submit, occasions statements about the destiny of geography: a destiny that here refers (for Aysun as for Enes) to the ineluctability of the distinction between West and rest, and therefore also to Turkey's fate as necessarily being on one side of this division or the other.

In light of this, I want to return to the question of geography and destiny. Not the question of Turkey's "regional" position, nor of the limits of its authentic borders, nor of its brute topographical position in regards to what Paul Valéry called that "little promontory on the continent of Asia."³²⁵ The question, instead, of the destiny, fixity, or fatedness of this geographical *picture*, of this Occidentalist frame, of its principal coordinates and distinctions, and whether these are the only ones through which Turkey's identity and future, and the path that can bring these into aspirational connection, can be imagined. To pose this question is of course complicated by the fact that it is incredibly difficult *not* to invoke these coordinates and distinctions when working to make sense of the Turkish political present, at either the level of theoretical reflection or of sociopolitical praxis. As this chapter has itself demonstrated (relying upon the very distinctions it is trying to problematize), to push against the tendency of the West to become central to debates and speculations over Turkish identity, history, and futurity runs the risk of reiterating this centrality; just as the three movements I have described tend to do, and just as, as described in Chapter 1, Said himself did. The question is further troubled by how this picture has allowed, and continues to allow, certain problems, culpabilities, promises, and threats to be conceptualized and critiqued. In other words, the question is made complex by how this picture is *both* repressive *and* productive, at once limiting *and* energizing the mind in its conception of self, nation, and world. For such essentializing discourses about East and West have served not only Eurocentric and imperialistic aims, but also anti-colonial and emancipatory ones. Indeed, to encourage the abolishment of the picture described here risks limiting the ability of those such as Enes to criticize the influences and interventions that have helped bring the present and past into being, just as it threatens to leave those such as Aysun with no promised elsewhere towards which to aspire and dream, and those like Gülşah without a key term for articulating visions of a more just society. Nonetheless, to leave this picture in place may leave these criticisms and hopes destined to remain perpetually exhausted, unsatisfied, pained.

³²⁴ Pamuk 2007, 209

³²⁵ Valéry 1962, 31

Chapter 4: Towards a Theory of European and Turkish Literary Modernity

Here we reach the point of diversion, pausing our ethnographic examinations to consider the history of literary modernity, first in Europe, and then in Turkey. It is a wager of this chapter that these digressions into literary history and theory will help cast new light on certain dynamics treated in the previous chapters, as well as to set the stage for the final chapter below.

In both sections, I plot some key moments in the development of literary modernity in Europe and Turkey, focusing in particular on the movements of a set of binary pairs within the development of the modern novel, and in modernity more broadly. “Modernity” and “tradition” will be the primary distinction attended to, but with an eye towards how this distinction opens out onto others, including the East/West division—or, viewed otherwise, how the East/West division opens out onto the tradition/modernity one. Understanding how the tradition/modernity division has developed strikes me as hugely important to understanding the East/West one, and it seems to me that pursuing these from the lens of fiction and narrative can be particularly fruitful. In pursuing these distinctions, I am not interested in making claims about what “traditional” societies were “really” like, just as I am not interested in the “brute realities” of East or West. In discussing the modernity/tradition polarity, and the various distinctions/disjunctions that often operate as synecdoches of or variations on it (including West and East), I am concerned with a modern *story* about modernity’s other and alleged antecedent, just as I am concerned with a modern story about the West’s other and—in many versions of the story—alleged antecedent.³²⁶ It is this story or narrative that is relevant, because it is through this story that our modern world has been built and rebuilt—and, consequently, because it is within this story that all the world has been forced to make its home. Just as we ought avoid the trap of inquiring into the “brute reality,” the pre-representational quiddity, of “East” and “West,” we likewise ought to treat “modernity” and “tradition” as narrative *fictions*, which are no less powerful and impactful for being fictions. We remember that the etymological root of “fiction” is simply that which is ‘formed’ (and, specifically, formed by human artifice) rather than that which presents to us as already fully formed prior to human ingenuity and effort. Consequently, the opposite of fiction is not reality but reification. It is in this sense that we can call tradition and modernity, East and West, religion and the secular, etc., as narrative fictions (human constructs) that can neither be understood apart from one another nor analyzed in-of-themselves apart from the stories we tell about them. What follows is one version of such a story.

I: A Theory Literary Modernity in Europe

To draw on Edward Said’s (often overlooked) study of modern literature, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, the protagonist of what Said called the “classical” novel (a designation more-or-less referring to the novels of early-mid 19th century Europe, particularly to the *Bildungsroman*, that genre that most thematizes the process of individual development within a modernizing world) is caught between two opposed forces. First: the authority of tradition, of the cyclical and the dynastic, of the power of fathers over sons, of the continuity and necessity (rather than the discontinuity and contingency) of historical events and social norms. Second: the willfulness of the hero, who desires to inaugurate their own beginning, striving for self-determination and free expression amid the

³²⁶ Stories of Europe as founded by exiles or pioneers from Asia go back millennia: to Europa being taken by Zeus from Tyre (now Lebanon) to Crete, her name later used for all of the European “continent,” to Aeneas founding Rome after fleeing Asia Minor, to the Eastern Jew Jesus becoming—nominally, as what we now call “Western civilization” has little if anything to do with Christ’s teachings—the spiritual symbol of Western Europe. This pattern connects even to the movements of the heavens, with the sun’s “rising in the East and setting in the West” taking on powerful connotations in the imagination of centuries of European thinkers.

determinations of “traditional” authority.³²⁷ Over the course of the narrative, such a protagonist (a Pip, an Ahab, a Julien Sorel, a Clarissa Harlowe, a Jude Fawley, a Tom Jones, a Madame Bovary—to list a few of Said’s examples) strikes out to “father” themselves, auto-poetically liberating themselves from the determinations of the world in which their story begins and supplanting the authority of inherited tradition with the authority of the autonomous will. Said argues that this tension between what the literary critic Franco Moretti calls “individual autonomy and social integration”³²⁸ (again, a tension generated by a drive to create oneself, and perhaps one’s world, outside the strictures of inherited norms and necessities) persisted throughout the novel’s development from the late 18th century and into the 20th. The narrative treatment of this tension, however, changed alongside shifts in socioeconomic conditions. When the forces of modern capitalism and bourgeois morality were still nascent—as when Fielding, Goethe or Austin wrote their first novels—the tension is ultimately shown as generative and “benign.”³²⁹ Here, the audacity, individuality, and creative passion of an Elizabeth Bennett, a Wilhelm Meister, or a Tom Jones is fuel for the plot, setting the protagonist on a journey of self-realization. The path of this journey, however, is from the protagonist’s desire for autonomy and self-creation to her eventual disillusionment with their possibility or promise.³³⁰ Ultimately, this disillusionment must result in the hero’s reconciliation of her “individuality” (her desire for the freedom of new beginnings; for the possibility of “a new life”; for a freer, more “modern” mode of existence) with the inherited norms and expectations that she initially spurned.³³¹ In this manner, the hero’s journey does not lead to the triumph of willfulness over convention, imagination over normativity, modernity over tradition. Nor, however, does it lead to (as we will explore in the following chapter) a paradigmatically *modern* form of tragedy, in which the hero is ruined in the attempt to subject world to idea, to make reality conform with desires of profit and/or autonomy. Avoiding the outcome of being crushed by life in the effort to change it, the hero of the “classical” novel eventually abandons the drive to autonomous self-realization beyond the extant order of things, finally returning to this order a changed—wiser, happier, less rebellious—person. The happy endings of what Moretti terms the “classical *Bildungsroman*” escapes tragedy and obtains happiness by “grow[ing] weary” of the desire for autonomy and new beginnings *before* they are destroyed by the pursuit of these.³³² The protagonist avoids inevitable self-destruction by realizing that their idealism and individualism are features of but one stage of human development, a stage often framed as part of “youth,” which must be eventually renounced for the stability and rootedness of what Moretti terms “maturity.”³³³ Indeed, as characters such as Elizabeth, Wilhelm, or Tom realize by the end of their narrative arcs, the attainment of a good life requires giving up part

³²⁷ Said uses the words “tradition” and “traditional” often in his account. He does so out of a long discursive tradition of humanist and social scientific thought, going back well beyond Weber’s writings on “traditional authority” to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment critiques of inherited institutions, norms, and pieties. I can not determine when exactly the “modernity-tradition” dyad became central to humanistic and social scientific thought; but it is undoubtedly one of the most powerful such dyads to emerge within modernity, alongside “East and West” and “religion and secularism” and, secondarily, “history and myth,” “reason and passion,” etc.

³²⁸ Moretti 1987, 80

³²⁹ Said 1985, 114

³³⁰ Disillusionment is a key theme in the study of the modern novel, with Lukács’ characterizing the 19th century novel as concerned with “Romantic disillusionment” (the sense that the fullness of one’s individual self is both grander than and improperly recognized by the “reality of the outside world.”) *Theory of the Novel*, 112

³³¹ Moretti 1987, 59

³³² Ibid, 59; Said 1985, 11

³³³ Moretti 1987, 26

of the freedom (to pursue one's desires, to buck sociofamilial norms and expectations) that these characters first struggled to achieve. This renunciation or "exchange" (novelty for convention, individuality for family, youth for maturity, excitement for contentment) is, by the novel's end, revealed as both necessary and redemptive. But this renunciation, this beginning negation, leads to a final synthesis: the drive to autonomous self-determination, and the irreverent disobedience and discontent that this drive entails, is a precondition for returning to, and finally recognizing the benignancy of, the reality and normativity of what initially spurned. Without the aspiration for autonomous individuality and (in the time of a Goethe, an Austin, or a Fielding) for a kind of proto-modernity (given that these novels are appearing in the gloaming of the Enlightenment and in the morning light of modern nationalism, imperialism, and capitalist expansion) there is no plot. Without the final renunciation or at least domestication of this aspiration, however, the plot is unable to bend the narrative arc towards what Moretti calls "happiness."³³⁴ In this manner, the classical Bildungsroman valorizes what literary critic Jed Esty terms the "ability to reconcile narrativity and closure, youth and adulthood, free self-making and social determination,"³³⁵ providing a kind of parable for, in Moretti's terms, "how the French Revolution could have been avoided."³³⁶ The classical novel, in other words, offers a path for living within a post-revolutionary world (a world in which revolution is now conceivable as a goal, something that can be desired and pursued), in which a revolutionary drive to overthrow inherited constraints (whether national-political or familial) is indulged only *up to the point* of risking revolution, whether this means definitely defying one's family, the sociocultural norms within which one lives, or the political system in toto. By taking up rebellion against tradition so as to drive narrative and self-discovery, but then eventually abandoning the project of "free self-realization" so as to return to tradition a changed man or woman—by following this narrative arc of a beginning rejection of tradition and an ultimate reconciliation with it (now by choice rather than passive necessity) the hero finds happiness and balance is restored to the normative order of things. (A paradigm here might be Elizabeth Bennet, who begins by rejecting the requirements of social normativity and familial expectation, only to eventually reconcile herself with these at the end. What happens to Elizabeth over the course of the novel is that, while at first she feels that to submit to the inherited order of things *is* a submission to external authority, her work of rebellion brings her to embrace this order willingly rather than under duress. Elizabeth, we assume, does not cease being opinionated simply because she has otherwise embraced the patriarchal order she initially withdrew from; by the novel's end, she accepts this order as if on her own terms, and this feeling of autonomously choosing to accept normativity makes all the difference).

In the classical Bildungsroman, appearing after revolution has become an option but before the revolutions of modernity get into full swing, this reconciliation (between free self-making and submission to an inherited order of things) is very often symbolized by marriage and procreation, as we see in many of Austin's novels.³³⁷ Marriage and children are presented as solutions to the problem of how to "convince the modern—'free'—individual to willingly limit his freedom,"³³⁸ squaring the demands of social conformity with the desire for autonomy and individuality, the desire to one's own idea/ideal of how the world ought to be (no matter how the world actually is). What

³³⁴ "...the classical *Bildungsroman* plot posits 'happiness' as the highest value, but only to the detriment and eventual annulment of 'freedom'." Ibid, 8.

³³⁵ Esty 2012, 4

³³⁶ Moretti 1987, 64

³³⁷ "...the classical *Bildungsroman* 'must' always conclude with marriage." Ibid, 23

³³⁸ Ibid, 22

Said calls the classical novel's "procreative enterprise"³³⁹ therefore works to bring the prodigal hero's willfulness and desire back into accord with the traditional norms that they had previously rejected. The protagonist's willfulness and desire are transmuted into a conservative principle (passion into marriage, sex into children, rebellion into responsibility), renewing the legitimacy of the norms and institutions that had at first seemed stultifying. While marriage is the most common solution for resolving this tension, it may also be solved by participation in super-familial institutions, such as Wilhem's Society of the Tower, which likewise symbolize "the happy acceptance of bonds": the "merging" of individuality with normativity.³⁴⁰

This acceptance, narratively speaking, is precipitated by the frustration, what Said calls the "molestation," of the protagonist's attempt to substitute their own authority and originality for that of established values, obligations, institutions, etc.. This frustration may result in a variety of concluding compromises. Yet what is generally depicted is a *demystification* of the hero's power to unilaterally impose their ideas and desires upon external reality, with the hero ultimately recognizing that the drive to exercise such power is an expression of pride (or prejudice). This is so *even though* the desire to replace what is inherited with what is autonomously willed must be first experienced before it can be finally rejected, or at least revised. For it is precisely *by means of* a beginning surge of passion, longing, and frustration that the plot gets going. At the danger of repetitiveness (but this point must be underlined and understood before moving on): *before* the drive for radical self-determination can be *voluntarily* renounced, the hero must first commit to this drive, to believe in its possibility of success: they must attempt to realize the fantasy of subjecting world to idea *before* they can recognize the self-destructive impossibility of this enterprise. They must learn to accept the "limits" of social reality; learn to accept it not as a punishment or burden, but as the very ground on which happiness and well-being may be built. Through this narrative progression from the rebellion of "youth" to the reconciliations of "maturity," the classical Bildungsroman thereby suggests that the achievement of "happiness" demands the "exchange" of individual autonomy and freedom for sociofamilial normativity and constraint.³⁴¹ It is this exchange or "compromise" that Hegel, following Goethe's title and writing on the early modern novel, calls an "apprenticeship" in life: "For the end of such apprenticeship consists in this, that the subject sows his wild oats, builds himself with his wishes and opinions *into harmony* [or we could say into synthesis] with subsisting relationships and their rationality, enters the concatenation of the world and acquires for himself an appropriate attitude to it."³⁴²

Yet this concluding pact between "individual and the world,"³⁴³ between autonomy and normativity, freedom and constraint, "youth and maturity," proves unstable. As Moretti writes, "the definitive stabilization of the individual, and of his relationship with the world - 'maturity' as the story's final stage - is fully possible only in the precapitalist world"; it works only while the forces of modernity are still nascent, and when there are still spaces (the sitting rooms of aristocratic English estates, for instance) not yet dominated by capitalist productivity and bourgeois consciousness.³⁴⁴ As such forces intensify, what Moretti terms "youth" can no longer locate—either intentionally or through the Hegelian "cunning of reason," here working at the scale of individual rather than

³³⁹ Said 1985, 137

³⁴⁰ Moretti 1987, 27

³⁴¹ Ibid, 28

³⁴² Said 1985, 142; Hegel 1975, 593 (emphasis added)

³⁴³ Moretti 1987, 135

³⁴⁴ Moretti, 28

national or global history—a path to “maturity”: in a system of rapid and rapacious flux, wherein all ‘that is solid melts into air’, there can no longer be a final maturity that brings the story of a life to contented completion. A “Bildung is truly such,” in Moretti’s terms, “only if, at a certain point, it can be seen as concluded: only if youth passes into maturity, and comes to a stop there.”³⁴⁵ But there can be no ‘coming to a stop’ in the crucible of what Esty calls modernity’s “endless revolution.”³⁴⁶ Even within what Esty calls the era of the Bildungsroman’s “prime” (again, roughly 1790 to 1860) the ability of given norms and institutions (not to mention plots) to contain the longing for more novelty and freedom, less fixity and constraint, strains and buckles under the rapidity of the sociological shifts occurring in the same period. As early as Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* in 1809 (although Goethe was here, as in most things, a pioneer) the classical “marriage plot” struggles to facilitate the resolution of narrative tensions. Instead, marriage can now *begin* the narrative, precipitating the very tensions that it once worked to resolve.³⁴⁷ While the classical marriage plot remains powerful throughout the 19th century, it can now be portrayed not as a *concluding synthesis* but as a *beginning problem*: the excitement of engagement that concludes the story turns into the boredom of marriage that commences it; fidelity turns into adultery, love to divorce; family into a prison of disappointment and regret, and the promise of “happiness” is overrun by the incessancy of desire and the longing for less enclosed spaces. The growing prevalence of this pattern—a pattern that once led the critic Tony Tanner to the conclusion that “adultery” is the modern novel’s principal theme³⁴⁸—suggests that the concluding reconciliations of individuality and normativity, modernity and tradition, are no longer possible, or at least not in the same way.

Beyond the family, other institutions/conventions organized around traditional authority begin also to unravel, progressively deconstructed by what we would now identify as paradigmatically modern (more on this in a moment) ideas, sensibilities, and fantasies of fulfillment. As capitalism, driven by the extraction of carbon and the exploitation of labor in both colony and metropole, transforms the infrastructure of everyday life and the estimation of value; as political revolution undoes the perceived immutability of inveterate institutions; as the call to Enlightenment and its correlative rationalities spreads a methodical skepticism of established epistemologies and inherited forms of life; as secular and bourgeois sensibilities challenge clerical, aristocratic, and monarchical power; as European imperialism and incipient globalization erode faith in custom and continuity in both periphery and center—as such modern processes intensify, the self-evidence and stability of inherited norms, values, institutions (and indeed narrative plots) begins to weaken. What Moretti calls the “the acceptance of limits” becomes more “problematic” as these limits begin to “degrade,” to borrow sociologist Lucien Goldman’s description of this process. It is in the destabilizing wake of these shifts that new forms (political, sociological, literary, devotional, libidinal, etc.) of synthesis, compromise, and closure become necessary—for the insurance of social stability, but also for the prospect of “happiness.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ Moretti 1987, 26

³⁴⁶ Esty, 4

³⁴⁷ Moretti 1987, 22

³⁴⁸ Tanner 2020

³⁴⁹ Moretti 1987, 28. Moretti borrows the term “problematic” from Lukács, who uses it to contrast modernity and its aesthetic forms from those “integrated” (“rounded”; complete-in-themselves) modes of being that preceded them. “Problematic” suggests a condition wherein meaning is not given, but must be—with difficulty, with peril—attained or constructed in a world that has been “abandoned by God.” Lukács 1974, 92. As Lucien Goldmann (1975) writes on Lukács, the ‘problematic’ protagonist of the modern novel is engaged in a “search for authentic values in a world [that is] itself degraded,” meaning that the protagonist is searching for an authenticity of meaning in a world where such meaning is absent.

It is for understanding these shifts that Said's figures of "filiation" and "affiliation" are particularly helpful. For Said, "filiation," organized on the model of "natural continuity between one generation and the next," characterizes "pre-modern" norms and institutions, grounding what Goethe's Faust calls Gretchen's "little world." Tragically unprepared for the force of Faustian "creative destruction," this is a world of inherited norms and traditional values, whose rhythms of time and sociality repeat, generation by generation, to the tolling of church bells.³⁵⁰ Within this "pre-modern social arrangement," to borrow philosopher Agnes Heller's term for describing such "little worlds," a "natural artifice"³⁵¹ predominates: the artifice that the social order mirrors what Heller calls the "the order of nature,"³⁵² such that roles, rights, values, obligations, even representations,³⁵³ appear to be secured by a kind of "natural continuity," conceivable as either divinely mandated or in "biological terms."³⁵⁴ In this "filiative" arrangement, if "one receives...one's fate simultaneously with one's life" it is because social position (and much else besides) is determined by conditions of birth. If a sense of historical contingency or cultural relativity is constricted here, it is due to a normativity that is itself secured by what Lukács called "transcendental points of orientation": grounding, orienting, points of reference that permit the unification—or at least interdict the radical disjuncture between—"fact" and "value," word and thing, reality and representation, Good and Evil.³⁵⁵ In such "traditional" societies, indeed, a division between fact and value, Good and Evil, etc., can only appear in the form of error. It has not yet been valorized, as it will be later, as constitutive of modern conceptions of (human) being and freedom. Why "error"? In part because, for the "pre-modern social arrangement" that obtains prior to the emergence of what Foucault calls the "modern episteme," language possesses not only a mimetic power (as in what Foucault calls the "Classical Age"), but also the capacity to ontologically participate in that which it nominates (as Foucault characterizes the pre-"Classical" era, which Foucault sees as culminating with Cervantes).³⁵⁶ These pre-modern powers of language are secured by what Foucault calls the "sovereignty of a primal discourse"³⁵⁷ (what the critic Jale Parla, speaking of the authority of the Sultan-Caliph of the Ottoman Empire, calls the authority of an "absolute text"³⁵⁸), whose originary authority genetically

³⁵⁰ See Marshall Berman's analysis of Goethe's *Faust* as a prophetic parable of modernity, and of how the Faustian themes narrate the collapse of 'pre-modern' (filiative, traditional) social worlds. See Berman 1988, chapter 1.

³⁵¹ Heller 1999, 59

³⁵² Heller 1999, 60

³⁵³ For the salience of a filiative, genetic metaphor in securing representational veridicality prior to the "modern episteme," see Foucault's discussion, in *The Order of Things*, of the breakdown of the "classical" (roughly, 1600-1800) representational paradigm.

³⁵⁴ Said 1983, 17

³⁵⁵ Heller 1999 56; Lukács 1974, 40

³⁵⁶ We ought not to take Foucault too literally here: he is telling a story, as I am also, of how earlier periods are viewed through a modern lens. His epochal designations, in other words, should be taken as expressing the structure of modern thought far more than of how people really lived and thought in such earlier periods.

³⁵⁷ Foucault 1970, 298

³⁵⁸ Parla 1990, 28

(or, to use Said's term, filiatively) grounds the possibility of meaning and value.³⁵⁹ It is in this sense that the institutions of pre- or proto-modernity are regularly interpreted by modern thinkers as having been organized through a genetic, hierarchical, structure: a structure validated through the presumptive claim of direct descent from a "unitary origin," whose power to secure the abiding order of things possesses "a certain unavoidability, or at least...approaches necessity."³⁶⁰ The authority of such a "unitary origin" provides what Lukács, in his description of traditional or pre-modern literary modes, calls "the transcendental conditions" for securing the stability of inherited meanings and values. It is this stability that will eventually collapse under the weight of the "historico-philosophical dialectic,"³⁶¹ in Lukács' term, of what Heller calls "steamroller modernity."³⁶²

The breakdown of this "filiative" model is the first stage in what Said calls a "three-part pattern," characteristic, in his view, of the socio-epistemic transformations of the long 19th century.³⁶³ From this breakdown comes the "second part of the pattern," which develops out of a "pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships." In this passage towards what Heller terms "the modern social arrangement," the question becomes, in Said's words: "if biological³⁶⁴ reproduction is either too difficult or too unpleasant, is there some other way by which men and women can create social bonds between each other that would substitute for those ties that connect members of the same family across generations?"³⁶⁵ The answer, Said argues, is the development of forms of solidarity, coherence, and continuity founded on the "elective," (i.e., "affiliative"), contingent (i.e., historically, rather than naturally or divinely, determined), and "secular"³⁶⁶ (i.e., independent of transcendental foundations) federation of discrete individuals and groups, who freely associate on the basis of their differences and in regard to shared interests, rather than on the basis of natality or tradition. In this "second" stage of the "pattern," bonds of filiation

³⁵⁹ In modernity, by contrast, the meaning-making power of language becomes predicated upon "difference," wherein—as for modern theories of culture society—words and elements of words take their meaning from their affiliation with one another, with this affiliation predicated on the individual specificity and difference of one word, morpheme, etc., from those with which it comes into largely stochastic affiliation.

³⁶⁰ Foucault 2007, 63

³⁶¹ Lukács 1974, 10

³⁶² Heller 1999, 51

³⁶³ Said's "pattern" here is similar to a number of influential theories of the sociological consequences of modernization. The figures of "filiation" and "affiliation" mirror, as Said himself notes, Ferdinand Tönnies' theory of the shift from "*Gemeinschaft*" to "*Gesellschaft*." They mirror also, to a significant degree, Durkheim's distinction between "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity, with the former a "solidarity based on similarities" (including, critically, the similarities passed down hereditarily) and the latter a solidarity grounded on individual differences, which complement one-another in an 'affiliative' fashion. This latter form is, of course, for Durkheim the basis for the 'division of labor'—one paradigm of the affiliative model of modernity.

³⁶⁴ This should likewise be read as a synonym for "filiative"—in that both are rooted in chains of causality that are passed down and determined by a necessity transcending human wants and will.

³⁶⁵ Said 1983, 17

³⁶⁶ For Said "secular" stands most directly for a mode of sociality and thought that makes no appeal to transcendental foundations. Said did not intend the term to refer to any particular religious tradition or practice, although such traditions/practices might be examples of the more broad designation of "religious" as he uses it. I have addressed Said's conception of religion—and the ways in which *both* Said's followers *and* Said himself misunderstood this concept—elsewhere. See, Balboni 2022.

are replaced by bonds organized on the model of what Heller terms “contract.”³⁶⁷ In this model, prefigured in the first steps of liberalism taken by Hobbes and Locke, social relations are understood as grounded in the contingent and contractual comings-together of autonomous persons—what Marx saw as the “association” of “free” individuals.³⁶⁸ The grounds of social solidarity and individual flourishing are thus predicated upon the revisable and federative structures that individuals make and remake in concert, without appeal to “transcendental points of orientation” or what Heller calls “traditional [modes of] legitimation.”³⁶⁹ The legitimacy of familial, social, and political institutions becomes, therefore, premised not on God, heredity, or what Said calls “objective nature,” but rather on the worldly activity and free consent of autonomous individuals.³⁷⁰ As such, social norms and institutions are increasingly theorized as not *given* but *made* through historical movements of affiliation and re-affiliation, with these movements imagined as occurring at definite (albeit, as for Hobbes, Locke, Vico, or Rousseau, speculative and undatable) moments in historical time. Because grounded on nothing apart from the collective will of the emerging categories of “the individual” and “the people,” these norms/institutions are, in theory, always open to the possibility of de-legitimation, annulment, and renegotiation.³⁷¹

This secular-liberal theory of contract between discrete, nominally autonomous individuals presupposes a fundamental *difference* between the parties/persons who come into contractual, affiliative relation (because these parties/persons must be seen as different from one another prior to the contract if the contract is to make any sense), thereby instantiating difference as one of modernity principal values. This theory likewise supposes a world absent transcendental foundations, where it is not the unitary authority of nature or God that grounds the legitimacy of social norms and institutions, but rather the affiliative and re-affiliative comings-together and breakings-apart of federations of autonomous individuals—federations which take on the appearance of unity only through the concatenation of individual wills into a unitary collective. By grounding authority, legitimacy, and the possibility of change in such federative, contractual structures, affiliation comes to appear as the modern world’s ever-renewing source of alterity, possibility, and hope.³⁷²

This shift to the *fraternal* order of affiliation from the *paternal* law of filiation is increasingly registered across the sociopolitical imagination of modernizing 19th century Europe. By the early 20th century, ideals of free association and self-determination become increasingly hegemonic—not only in social and political theory, but in how institutions are organized and values/norms are rationalized. It is the climacteric shift from a society premised on the law of the Father to one authorized through the compact between brothers (I leave the term intentionally gendered) that

³⁶⁷ Heller 1999, 14. For Heller, the figure of contract grounds all “modern political philosophy,” in that contract presupposes the a priori freedom of individuals to collaboratively and autonomously enter into provisional federation—provisional as the federation, and the modes of legality stemming from it, are theoretically contingent upon the terms of the contract being upheld. The presupposition of contract is thus affiliation, conceived—just as for Said—as the autonomous coming-together of individuals, relating and creating on the basis of shared differences rather than on the authority of an “unitary origin.”

³⁶⁸ “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Marx & Engels 2012, 94.

³⁶⁹ Heller 1999, 98

³⁷⁰ Said uses the phrase, when discussing Vico’s treatment of Descartes, to refer to that which is “impenetrable” to the mind, and thus—following Vico’s formula—not available or relevant to human knowledge. Said 1985, 359.

³⁷¹ Heller 1999, 14

³⁷² This is even more so today, in our so-called “postmodern” world, as individualism and affiliation (which are really two sides of the same coin, for the reason glossed above) have become not only freedoms to be enjoyed but injunctions to be obeyed.

makes Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, in which humanity passes into history when the ur-father is murdered and his authority is reapportioned between his sons, what Lacan termed "perhaps the only myth that the modern age was capable of."³⁷³

For Said, this shift can be read as a "transition" from "a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that...provides men and women with a new form of relationship."³⁷⁴ The consequences of this transition, Said suggests, are central to the establishment of modernity—but with a caveat: although affiliative, contractual models become dominant, they still tend to be "re-presented" through "the vestiges of the kind of authority associated in the past with the filiative order."³⁷⁵ If social, cultural, political, etc., authority can no longer be authorized through forms of what Heller calls "traditional legitimation," and if a society totally absent such legitimation threatens, as Durkheim feared, the growth of social *anomie* (the breakdown of social solidarity, of moral and epistemic normativity), then new models/modes of legitimation and authority will be required. These modes will carry with them more than merely "an aspect of tradition"; they will reproduce "traditional" modes of authority, collectivity, and distribution even as they rhetorically repudiate these modes, projecting them instead onto peoples and regions deemed as existing in an earlier stage of historical development, which European societies are portrayed as having already overcome.³⁷⁶ This is, of course, the slight of hand *par excellence* of modernity: modernity's promise of autonomy and freedom, and of the justification of authority and normativity by appeal to autonomy and freedom, is in practice wedded to the de facto allocation of power, position, and capital through inherited (filiative) structures of hierarchy, patriarchy, and custom. Modernity is thus split between promise and reality, "is" and "ought," word and referent. The promise of modernity claims that sovereignty should be grounded in autonomous individuals acting as a democratic, transpersonal will; that individual wealth and social status should be determined by individual talent and un-coerced labor time; that career and character should be determined by a record of free choices and equal opportunities; that profit and privilege should not be reserved for any one class, ethnicity, or interest group. That none of these promises is realized in practice does not, however, seem to impede to modernity's perpetuation. In fact, the maintenance of a gap between modern promise and modern reality is essential to the functioning of "steamroller modernity." The disjunction between modern promise and modern reality generates an endless series of "crises," which are responded to by efforts at re-affiliation, at drawing up new contracts, at reconfiguring the federative organization of individuals. Paradoxically, the crises of modernity function to reanimate modernity's legitimacy, as these crises are portrayed as consequences of insufficient modernization, rather of modernity itself. When modernity fails to produce promised outcomes, when what has been presented as following modern, affiliative principles turns out to follow "traditional," filiative ones—in such cases, the only solution is a re-commitment to modernity and affiliation and a renewed hostility to tradition and filiation. So long as we continue to believe that our problems—and the gap between modern promise and modern reality from which these problems emerge—can be resolved by more modernity we maintain the polarity between affiliation

³⁷³ One wonders, however, why the seminal myths of Rousseau or Hobbes or Vico (or Durkheim, for that matter) did not merit Lacan's designation. Lacan 1992, 176.

³⁷⁴ Said 1983, 19

³⁷⁵ Said 1983, 19

³⁷⁶ Heller's example here is that of the modern constitution, which, on the one hand, is very much a modern, affiliative creation (in that it is created at a particular moment in historical time through the coming-together of various individuals whose collective act of creation brings something *new*—the nation—into being) even as the legitimacy of the constitution depends upon the incorporation of a pre-given "cultural background"—a *gemeinschaft*—that "lend[s] traditional legitimacy" to the constitution. Heller 1999, 99

and filiation, modernity and tradition (along with the family resemblance polarities of religion and the secular, East and West, etc.) which is itself at the root of our modern predicament.³⁷⁷

What Said calls this “third part of the pattern” concerns this point that modernity relies upon and reproduces filiative patterns in practice even as it repudiates these patterns discursively.³⁷⁸ As Said writes, “the affiliative order...surreptitiously duplicates the closed and tightly knit family structure that secures generational hierarchal relationships to one another.” As a consequence, affiliation “becomes in effect a literal form of *re-presentation*” of “natural bonds and natural forms of authority.”³⁷⁹ This “surreptitious” duplication is itself an attempted “synthesis” between opposing forces; by reproducing filiation under the mantle of affiliation, thereby reincorporating negated forms under the sign of the agent of their negation, modern institutions (the state, civil society, the family, the division of labor, etc.) are able to invoke affiliation rhetorically even while they preserve themselves from unfettered attempts at re-affiliation and re-constitution.³⁸⁰ This third part of Said’s pattern solidifies what I called above a “disjunction,” or what Heller calls a “discrepancy,” between the “normative concept” (what I have called a “promise” or “ideal”) of such institutions (their modern, secular, affiliative character) and what Heller also calls their “reality” (their reliance on traditional, filiative modes of legitimation).³⁸¹ The obfuscation of this discrepancy or disjunction is a tool of domination, integral to modern ideologies of power. Nevertheless, the discrepancy drives the ever-renewing struggle to recognize, respond to, and overcome this discrepancy: to strive, again and again, towards the victory of the modern promise; towards the overcoming of filiation, of tradition, of religion—of all forms of authority seen as in contradiction with the modern promise of autonomy, freedom, self-determination, etc.

This struggle is integral to the development of the nation-state. The nation-state appears, more than any other modern institution, to root the demands of progress, openness, freedom, self-determination, etc., within a unitary structure of authority, on that upholds inherited structures of hierarchy, power, continuity, and identity even as it appears to transcend them. The apparent synthesis between modernity and tradition, filiation and affiliation, provided by nation-state is characterized by what Homi Bhabha calls “an ambivalent tension.”³⁸² This tension, as Bhabha and many others have argued, arises as the nation is authorized through ideas of custom and closure *and* of progress and openness; of past *and* future; of passion *and* reason; of the freedom of the individual to make and remake herself *and* the necessity of her *a priori* circumscription within fixed structures of identity and belonging. Most of all, the tension is embodied in the simultaneous representation of national identity as a quasi-genetic inheritance *and* as an affiliative concatenation

³⁷⁷ The claim that the disjunction between reality and promise is incidental rather than integral to modernity, and is resolvable through new modes of affiliation, is also the driver of modern politics: this person or party is seen to have failed to realize the promise, and so another person or party is given a mandate to fail next. Put differently, the “crises” generated by the disjunction between promise and reality creates ever new possibilities for re-affiliation (the reform of institutions, the replacing of own set of leaders for another). That these possibilities inevitably fail does not stop them from keeping the steamroller’s engine running—including the engine of much modern progressive thought.

³⁷⁸ Said 1983, 19-20

³⁷⁹ Ibid

³⁸⁰ Take the modern corporation, for instance: corporations present themselves as—at least in the West—not only existing within but contributing to a democratic order. This presentation offers ideological cover for an institution that runs on totalitarian principles, with the employee—employer relationship far more structurally akin to autocracy than to democracy.

³⁸¹ Heller 199, 60

³⁸² Bhabha 1990, 2

of habits and responsibilities that are learned (‘performed’, to use Bhabha’s Austinian phrase) rather than given by natality or tradition. This tension is well described by literary scholar Pericles Lewis, who writes eloquently on the centrality of the nation—not only as an institution but as a specific and synthetic narratological form—to the development of modern novel. In Lewis’ terms, this “ambivalent tension” can be described as “the problem of whether the nation should be understood as a legal and political unit, defined by the voluntary membership in it of individual citizens, or as an ethnic and social unit, defined by a shared culture, history, and (perhaps) biological inheritance.”³⁸³ This tension between the nation as filiative or affiliative, traditional or modern, ethnically/racially or contractually grounded, has at times seemed reconcilable through a kind of liberal nationalism, through which the nation-state would embody the rational reconciliation of opposing forces. The nation, synthesizing modernity and tradition, individuality and collectivity, would signify a new mode of “maturity” for societies which, “Janus-faced,”³⁸⁴ look at once ‘forwards’ towards modernity and progress and ‘backwards’ towards tradition and continuity; the nation, in what Bakhtin called its “chronotopic” specificity (its rootedness in both a universal, secular, “developmental” temporality and in a particular, un-generalizable locality) would offer “the historical referent” for the “adulthood” to be realized after the “youthful” passion for unlimited autonomy is restrained.³⁸⁵ If “youth,” as we have seen above, is associated with drive to modernity, and if “adulthood” signifies “the happy acceptance of bonds” (the voluntary acceptance of traditional authority), then the nation likewise signifies the maturity” of this “happy acceptance”: the correct synthesis of the progressive energy of youth with the sanguine fatality of adulthood. As Esty writes on this point, and in correction of Moretti:

“...if [the] standard novel of socialization figures modernity’s endless revolution in the master trope of youth, then what is the historical referent for the counter-trope of adulthood? If capitalism never rests, what symbolic equivalence can explain the capacity of adulthood to put the brakes on developmental time, preventing the bildungsroman from becoming a never-ending story? Here we arrive at a possibility that remains somewhat oblique in Moretti: that the discourse of the nation supplies the realist bildungsroman with an emergent language of historical continuity or social identity amid the rapid and sweeping changes of industrialization. *What Moretti’s model leaves unexplored is the crucial symbolic function of nationhood, which gives a finished form to modern societies in the same way that adulthood gives a finished form to the modern subject.*”³⁸⁶

In this manner, Esty argues, the nation increasingly provides the mid-late 19th century novel—and particularly the Bildungsroman—with new narrative models for synthesis, maturation, and closure. In Lewis’ words, the novel comes to locate “both the fictional and real worlds within a conceptual “horizon” that is “clearly bounded” by the extent of the nation.”³⁸⁷ The narrative forms and ideological foundations on which the nation relies (for instance, the narrative of a collectivized individual subject—‘the people’—developing within an open temporality nonetheless rooted in the

³⁸³ Lewis 2004, 6

³⁸⁴ The description of the nation-state—in its ideological constitution—as “Janus-faced” is a common trope. For an influential articulation of this trope, see Nairn 1975.

³⁸⁵ See, Bakhtin 1986

³⁸⁶ Esty, 4 (emphasis added)

³⁸⁷ Lewis 2004, 27

closed specificity of place, tradition, ethnicity, and culture),³⁸⁸ along with the nation's developing legal, economic and political structures, appear to generate a certain synthesis: that between "the unbounded time of capitalist modernity and the bounded or cyclical time of tradition,"³⁸⁹ which Bhabha calls the nation as "a priori presence" ("the cynical time of tradition") and as ongoing "performance" ("the unbounded time of capitalist modernity").³⁹⁰ For the literary protagonist, to follow the developmental path figuratively paved by the nation is to grow into maturity in a way that marries an open-ended temporality (a life-time that is open to autonomous self-creation and free expression) to a closed normativity that both *constrains* and *secures* the pursuit of self-actualization. In the same way that citizens ought pursue what Kant called their "public" (what we would now call private) reason within the limits imposed by the state, so too must literary protagonists come to develop their freedom and individuality through external ("heteronomous") structures of constraint.

The 19th century novel will progressively thematize the move from filiative to affiliative structures of authority and constraint, depicting a modernizing society and burgeoning nation-state structure that, in Kant's terms, ought to afford "room to let [one's] free spirit expand to the limits of its capacity" even while also demanding total obedience to the "duties of a citizen."³⁹¹ Freedom through constraint; autonomy through heteronomy; openness through closure; the performative affiliation of individuals through the a priori force of an essential unity—such are the tensions that the nation appears to hold together and that the 19th century novel increasingly confronts. And yet, unlike for the "classical" novel, these confrontations and attempted syntheses appear less and less successful as we enter into the period of what Said termed the modern novel and Foucault called the "modern episteme." Such modern novels (and we are, again, dealing principally with novels of the latter half of the 19th century) result in narratives, *not* of affirmation and triumph, but of "disillusionment," frustration, and "failure"—narratives of disaffection and dashed hopes in which, unlike in the "classical" Bildungsroman, "synthesis" and "happy endings" are no longer possible.³⁹² Instead of the hero finally learning to reconcile individuality with normativity, modernity and tradition, freedom and constraint, protagonists now tend to remain unreconciled to the end. Such characters (we may think of a Stavrogin, a Bazarov, a Julien Sorel, a Lucien de Rubempré, a Madame Bovary, or, a bit later, a Jude Fawley) refuse or are unable to find a place for themselves in society; they refuse to 'give ground to their desire', to borrow the Lacanian phrase and so, unable to find any synthesis between their own willfulness and social normativity, they are destroyed.³⁹³ Something has shifted, such that these characters are incapable of either accepting either the "cyclical time of tradition" *or* the "unbounded time of capitalist modernity," which has become itself a structure of inherited constraint.

This narrative shift, where plots that move from rebellion to reintegration are replaced by ones moving from rebellion to self-destruction, of course concern changes in the socioeconomic

³⁸⁸ For an account of nation as a narrative construct, see the essays contained in Bhabha's *Narrating the Nation*. *Narrating the Nation*. Ed. Homi K Bhabha. London: Routledge. 2000 [1990].

³⁸⁹ Esty 2011, 5

³⁹⁰ Bhabha 2000

³⁹¹ Kant 1992

³⁹² Moretti, 217. See also, Stevic 2020

³⁹³ This tragic pattern, as Moretti argues, is only really deviated from by the great English novelists of the period—Elliot is Moretti's only exception—who tend to tread lightly on the theme of "failure," continuing to provide characters the possibility of a happy endings though the acceptance of normativity, of a quiet life. As Moretti writes, "Besides being by far the finest nineteenth-century English novel, *Middlemarch* is also the only one which dares to deal with the major theme of the European Bildungsroman: failure." Moretti, 216

structure of 19th century Europe—changes only glossed above but which can be examined elsewhere.³⁹⁴ What I am trying to indicate, instead, is something of the epistemic and existential-experiential structure of this shift. Understanding this shift requires apprehending what I will call modernity's two principal problematics, a term I use not in the precise Althusserian sense but rather to refer to a space of questioning and debate that revolves an underlying tension or problem, generally expressing a contradiction between seemingly opposed positions, values, etc. Both problematics concern the aforementioned disjunction or discrepancy between modernity's promise and its reality, but thematize the disjunction in different ways. The first problematic concerns how modern norms/institutions, while valorized on the grounds of their ability to promote emancipation from old inequities and progress towards "life, liberty, and happiness" for all, are recognized to be just as oppressive as, if not more so than, those "pre-modern" institutions that are ostensibly being left behind. As critics of modernity from Rousseau onwards will argue, modern society does not adequately provide the freedom and happiness that its advocates promise. The working class, women, the colonized and the still enslaved—none of these groups seem to sufficiently benefit from the radical transformations of politics, economy, and society and modernity heralds. In modernity, as so many of modernity's critics have long argued, life in modernity becomes oppressive/repressive in new ways. It does not do away with tyranny, extraction, and alienation, but rather reconfigures them: the old forms of stultification may no longer be tolerated in a secularizing, nationalist, and capitalist society. But, as in the third part of Said's pattern, they can be re-presented as consequences, not of the authority of a singular, readily identifiable persons or institution, but of faceless, amorphous, seemingly acephalous forces that can be perhaps mapped but not overthrown or held to account without changing the entire organization of social, cultural, economic, and political life. The oppressiveness of modernity, driven by increasingly incomprehensible forces against which struggle seems futile at best and insane at worst, even strangles the bourgeoisie, the class which materially benefits most from a modernizing society, and which most intensely proclaims the superiority of modern norms/institutions. Instead of milk and honey, anxiety and ennui become the predominant sources of nourishment for the bourgeoisie, which increasingly suffers from a neurotic, sentimental (rather than moral) nihilism, sensed by Nietzsche and treated by Freud.

The first problematic emerges from the recognition that modernity does not live up to its promise, and is even perhaps (as in the eyes of some of modernity's more vociferous critics) a machine for negating this promise in practice. The recognition of modernity's failures has tended (in 19th century Europe as much as in Atatürk's Turkey or contemporary America) to create two different ways of theorizing both this failure and the possibilities for its resolution. The first way focuses on the alleged tenacity of traditional, filiative, and/or religious forms. Just as many today blame fundamentalism or sexism on the inadequate dissolution of religious or patriarchal authority, so too have generations of critics lamented how pre-modern economic hierarchies are preserved under capitalism (whether this preservation is blamed on capitalism or government intervention in the free market); how the divine right of kings is preserved in the political dynasties of liberal-democratic states; how "traditional values" continue to pervert the morality of even the most modernized societies; how the march of freedom flounders when putatively non-modern, "backwards," "uncivilized," "reactionary," forms are allowed to endure (all of these being also the dominant descriptors of "the East" in Orientalist discourse). This alleged persistence of traditional forms is usually blamed on the *incomplete* modernization, rationalization, or secularization of society. Thus, for the evangelists of modernity, the fact that modern institutions continue to generate outcomes that run counter to modernity's promise is a consequence of our not yet becoming sufficiently modern. More modernity is therefore the solution for modernity's ills.

³⁹⁴ See, for instance, Esty 2011, Said 1994, Williams 1975

This discrepancy between modern promise and modern reality has also been understood in the opposite way, however. In this second response to modernity's first problematic, modern norms and institutions are diagnosed, not as preserving certain tradition inequities, but as in fact *more* oppressive than those claimed to be left behind. The oppressiveness of modern norms/institutions is here seen, not as an *externality* of, but as *integral* to the organization of modern life. In the most radical form of this argument (which can be gleaned, for instance, in Nietzsche and later Foucault), the inequities and oppressions generated by "steamroller modernity" will never be reformed away so long as modernity endures. Indeed, in this view "reform" merely reinforces the problem by deluding people into believing that the contradictions of modern society are incidental rather than essential to modernity. In this view, present in much 20th century social and political theory, the promise of modernity (along with its characteristic socioeconomic forms, e.g., capitalism) is in fact an ideological mystification: the same modernity that adorns itself with the mantle of freedom, equality, and progress is indeed a machine for producing the opposite of what it purports to value. At the risk of over-generalizing, these are the two responses to disjuncture between modern promise and modern reality. First, that the negative outcomes of modernity are meliorable hangovers from pre-modernity; second, that these outcomes are in fact inevitable consequences of modernity's core dynamics. Yet, for both camps, the work of making sense of this discrepancy is of immense importance. We have not ceased to be preoccupied with this issue: the question of why the modern promise has not been adequately delivered, along with the corollary question of who or what should be held responsible for modernity's successes, excesses, failures, hypocrisies, etc. After centuries of attempts to engage this question, we have yet to get a handle on it.

Despite the intensity of the first problematic, it is the second that proves more influential on the perception and experience of modernity (especially among intellectuals and artists). At issue in the second problematic is not whether modernity's dynamics are more or less violent, exclusionary, hierarchical, etc., than those that preceded them, although such questions inevitably arise. Rather, the second problematic draws a different question from the experience of disjunction between promise and reality. This disjunction—opening a gap between what is, what was, and what could be or have been—raises the question about *how* the present has come to be as it is, as well as how the present differs, or has been made to differ, from what preceded and may follow it. This is the paradigmatic question of the modern historical consciousness: not the question of why there is something rather than nothing, nor the question of whether this or that thing (this institution, this law, this value, this form of life) is desirable or undesirable, good or evil, in service to or corrosive of human flourishing. Rather, the question is why there is *this* thing, this present and actually existing state of affairs, rather than something else, some other state of affairs. This paradigmatically modern question (which at root is the question of historical necessity, contingency, and change, and of the human being's role in these processes) addresses more than whether the present is an improvement on the past, or whether any given norm or institution should be understood as negotiable or infrangible. It concerns, from a vantage "beyond good and evil," how the current "order of things," in Foucault's terms, has come to be as it is. This question is predicated on the supposition that the how and the why of the emergence of the present *is* a question; the supposition that the path from past to present, and from present to future, is not fixed or pre-determined but *open*, contingent, and malleable through *human* effort and ingenuity.³⁹⁵ These suppositions require, of course, a retreat of "transcendental points of orientation" and the conviction that, however we have reached our current epochal predicament, we have done so through the work of human will unfolding over historical time. To answer the question of modernity, therefore, demands answering the question of human, historical, agency and responsibility: how have *we* brought the present into being? How

³⁹⁵ Even when this question is resolved by invocation of historical "laws" or "teloi," these secular-transcendentals exist (I use the tautology intentionally) must nevertheless be grounded in *human* action and intention, rather than on the authority of a divine or natural order.

might *we* reshape the present for the future? What is it in and about *us* that has made the past what it was and the present what it is?

Such questions become increasingly pressing over the 19th and into the 20th centuries. As nature and religion become readable as the mute pre-conditions for (nature) or the socio-symbolic products of (religion) human ingenuity, Vico's dictum, that "man makes his own history," becomes triumphant. With Marx, this dictum is taken up as a sword against fetishism, used to expose entities or forces that *appear* to transcend the powers of human mind and labor as in actuality the exteriorized, alienated, manifestations of human will. Appeals to trans- or super-human agency, and indeed any social fact that appears to possess ontological independence from human will (individual or collective), can be exposed as *contingent* products of human mind and effort (rather than the reverse).³⁹⁶ Human history thus becomes a story about human freedom actualizing itself in dialogue with what it has itself made and out of a struggle with its own historical or "concrete" (rather than transcendental or "abstract") limitations. Through this history, humanity will progressively realize its radical autonomy, will shake off inherited heteronomies—but only once it has totally liberated itself from the determinations of biological existence (the 'passage' from nature to culture), from uncritical consciousness (the emancipation of secular reason from religious superstition), and from the "pre-modern" mistaking of the products of human ingenuity for objectivities existing independently of human labor/thought (the overcoming of "fetishism" and "alienation").³⁹⁷ If in modernity or "the modern episteme," as Foucault famously argued in the final chapters of *The Order of Things*, "human existence" comes to be "called into question on its own account," then this is because the conditions of social, economic, political, cultural, etc., life (the separation of domains or fields is itself a consequence of this process) become visible as *internal* to the concrete (historical) modality of human existence, rather than as issuing from any absolute, transcendent, extrinsic source.³⁹⁸

All of this can be described, again, as a process of human being becoming readable as a purely *historical* formation, grounded in nothing but its own activity over secular time. Because of this, human being becomes the sole measure of itself and the sole source of historical agency, and therefore also of *responsibility*. In modernity, we are *solely* responsible for who we are and who we will become. It makes little philosophical difference that, traditionally, this responsibility has been usually pinned by the Right on individuals, and on society by the Left. In either case, we are presumed to have no transcendental support to help carry our often inexplicable responsibility ("inexplicable" because the world we live in is so interconnected and complex, and because our inner lives—our wants and drives—are no less so). It is for these reason that the argument that "Man" or the human becomes "de-centered" in modernity is absurd: in modernity, (and even more intensely in what is sometimes called postmodernity, which is nothing but modernity "on life support," to borrow Noreen Khawaja's lapidary phrase³⁹⁹) it is *us*, and us alone, who create and ground our forms of life and thought (or, rather, this is the ideological position). We do this in ways that are, again, *solely determined* by the sociohistorical inputs and upshots of our efforts. As a consequence, we come to believe that we possess the capacity, the authority, and the obligation to remake ourselves and our world in ever new ways—a maxim that will be enshrined in the existentialist postulate that

³⁹⁶ For an extended treatment of this theme, see chapters three ("Beginnings with a Text") and four ("*Abeceedarium Culturae*") of *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. For a classical standalone polemic on these themes, see also Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."

³⁹⁷ See *Beginnings* Chapter 5 ("Conclusion: Vico in his work and in This"); See also Levene 2017, esp. Chapter 3 ("Artificial Populations"). See also Balboni 2022.

³⁹⁸ *The Order of Things*, 311/312 (check)

³⁹⁹ Khawaja 2016, 292

“existence precedes essence” and will continue in contemporary left-liberal scholarly commitments to the (apparently) omnipresent possibility of “unsettling” the inherited and the extant in service to the imagined possible (what anthropologists like to call, with bathetic reverence, “the otherwise”: that amorphous possibility of affiliative goodness, the invocation of which can pass these days for actual argument, speculation, and prescription). Out of this paradigmatically modern way of conceiving human life in/and time comes the sense that “God is dead”; that “the past [by which de Tocqueville meant the sacrality and cyclical temporality of tradition] has ceased to shed its light upon the future”; that “all that is solid melts into air”; that the world has become “disenchanted,” a phrase that Weber made famous but was hardly the first to feel. If for so many theorists of modernity it appears that the only *arche* (transcendental foundation) on which human life and history can be built is internal to humanity itself (all the circular chatter about ‘groundless grounds’ and similar tautological wish-fulfillments), then this is the appearance apprehended by the recognition of the second problematic: that the fundamental form of our lives is neither derived from nor grounded in any source or authority apart from what *we* do and think and make, individually and in concert.⁴⁰⁰

The ideas emergent from contemplation of the second problematic have been liberating for many. These ideas have seemed to open self, society, and history to the ever-present possibility of reform or revolution by freeing human life, individually and in common, from the determinations of the forms of filiative, religious, patriarchal, unitary authority criticized by secular modernists like Said: since we are the sole source of historical authority and agency, we can dispel all those reifications and deifications that have duped humankind into believing that the order of things is authorized or determined by forms of necessity beyond human comprehension and control.

Yet the ideas following from recognition of the second problematic have also been paralyzing.⁴⁰¹ The paralysis stems from the way in which modernity’s repudiation of transcendental foundations deprives it, and those who inhabit it, of any workable ground on which modernity—along with its institutions, values, and norms—might be conclusively affirmed, negated, or reformed. Modernity’s lack of presuppositions, the consequence of grounding all authority and agency in human finitude (both ontological and epistemological), opens up an unlimited questioning of modernity and of the institutions/values/norms that it both allows for and relentlessly reorganizes. In its lack of foundations, in its inability to *either* hold together the “is” and the “ought” or *to* hold apart the distinction between “Good and Evil” (which falls to Nietzsche’s historicizing hammer, although only because it was already bleeding from a thousand cuts), modernity generates the endless interrogation of whether or not it lives up to its own promise. But given its lack of foundations (to repeat the above point in slightly different terms), modernity also deprives us of what Arendt called a “banister” that could steady us we engage in such interrogation.⁴⁰² This lack of foundations, and the interminability of questioning—the “hermeneutics suspicion”—that it precipitates, risks what Hegel called “bad infinity,” or what Nietzsche called “passive” nihilism: a

⁴⁰⁰ “What is conveyed in the immediacy of the original is, therefore, that man is cut off from the origin that would make him contemporaneous with his own existence; amid all the things that are born in time and no doubt die in time, he, cut off from all origin, is already there. So that it is in him that things (those same things that hang over him) find their beginning : rather than a cut, made at some given moment in duration, he its the opening from which time in general can be reconstituted, duration can flow, and things, at the appropriate moment, can make their appearance.” *The Order of Things*, 332

⁴⁰¹ As Foucault writes, “as soon as it [modern thought] functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites; *it cannot help but liberate and enslave*.” This is because in modernity thought is always “a certain mode of action”—a will to power that operates by imposing one perspective against another, while also finding itself grounded in nothing other than what Foucault will later simply call “power.” Foucault 1970, 328.

⁴⁰² Arendt 2021

moral-epistemic paralysis, born of unfettered questioning or negation without possibility of synthesis, closure, certainty, or repose.

That the threat of nihilism and paralysis *and* the promise of openness and emancipation stem from the same source is more or less self-evident. Less obvious, perhaps, is that the lack of foundations that generates both promise and threat rests, paradoxically, on one particular foundation, which is in effect the antithesis of all foundations. This anti-foundational foundation is freedom. Modern freedom is best characterized by Vico's credo that human beings make their own history, even as clarified by Marx (that this making takes place within conditions not of our choosing). Human freedom, whether manifested through "labor," "spirit," "will," or "reason," is the justification for *and* the anti-foundational foundation of modernity: all foundations that do not give way to freedom must be progressively negated.⁴⁰³ This does not mean there is clarity about how freedom is to be realized, however. Instead, it is precisely *because* freedom is the sole foundation of modernity that there can be no fixed grounds on which the meaning or value of freedom can be definitely formulated. The progressive and the reactionary, the capitalist and the worker, the abolitionist and the slave holder—all have framed their struggle as one for freedom.⁴⁰⁴ Because of its fundamental groundlessness, however, the contest over the meaning of (and over the conditions necessary for the realization of) freedom is one of modernity's core tensions. A driver of its "endless revolution" as much as of its class antagonisms, the ambiguity of freedom, and the struggles that this ambiguity generates, is at the core of the dynamism of modernity's moral-political life. Modernity is, in this manner, liberating in that it promises the progressive negation or amelioration of any institution or norm that constrains autonomy and self-determination (even if, to repeat, it is precisely the emphasis on autonomy and freedom that makes consensus on the path to progress impossible). Yet it is also paralyzing, as its promise or principle implies that we alone are responsible for whether or not we realize what we aspire to.⁴⁰⁵ In a world dominated by the commitment to freedom and self-determination, but deprived of transcendental support, there can be no consolation for our actual unfreedom: our actual inability to become who we wish to be, to achieve what we wish to achieve, to obtain the kind of life that society has promised. Once the modern ideology that "man is born free" seeps into the collective consciousness, the fact that "everywhere he is in chains" becomes not only tragic but a catalyst for self-reproach: if we are existentially free (if, as Arendt writes, our freedom to always 'begin again', to open the world to new

⁴⁰³ This affirmation of modernity as the royal road to fully actualizing the potential of human freedom is not without loss and suffering (the brutality of capitalism is, for Marx, the necessary precondition of communist utopia; modern freedom is what we realize, as Hegel suggested, only by giving up those socio-poetic forms that cannot be assimilated within modernity's dialectics) yet these sacrifices are necessary for the progress of humankind. As Heller writes, Hegel saw that modernity (and in particular modern freedom) required the abandonment of a great deal of what had once made human life beautiful, meaningful, and poetic: "...this very strong legitimating and underpinning of modernity does not prevent Hegel from recognizing losses. Where everyone is free there is no longer any heroism, any tragedy, any grandeur. Modernity is not just the end of history, but also the end of philosophy and art... The modern age is darkness. This is the age in which we merely recollect the past and paint "gray in gray."'" Heller 1999, 20.

⁴⁰⁴ See, for instance, Stovall 2021; De Dijn 2020; Patterson 1991.

⁴⁰⁵ For Heidegger of *Being and Time*, the freedom of human being or *Dasein* stems from the existential human condition of being responsible for 'authentically' actualizing (i.e. self-determining) ourselves *within* the limited possibilities provided by our "thrownness" (the socio-historical a priori's of our existence). While this notion of human freedom comes from *Being and Time*, Heidegger's ideas on human freedom appear to change in his later work, particularly as he shifts towards a concern with technology and a more direct opposition to humanism. Heidegger, 2008.

beginnings, stems from the form of our “natality”⁴⁰⁶) then our actual unfreedom must be something for which *we* are responsible.⁴⁰⁷ Modern freedom thus comes with the implication that, in Zygmunt Bauman’s words, one has “no one to blame for one’s own misery” save oneself: one must locate “the causes of one’s own defeats nowhere except in one’s own indolence and sloth, and loo[k] for no remedies other than trying harder and harder still.”⁴⁰⁸ Even when certain human collectives are rightly accused of being oppressors and despoilers (agents of unfreedom), this accusation does not really remove the feeling of failure or guilt. As Hegel suggested in his parable of master and slave, the domination exercised by one person or group over another is recognized by both modernity’s defenders and critics as grounded in a *a posteriori* imbalance of power, courage, or tact, rather than as expressing an *a priori* and/or transcendently determined inequality. (The slave, in Hegel’s parable, is not born but *becomes* a slave when he is not willing to risk his life to preserve his freedom—thus his enslaved condition is founded in nothing destined or divine, nothing natural). In this manner, the recognition that the unfreedom of one person or collective has been authored by another never adequately liberates the former of the feeling that they are somehow responsible for their position in the world, for their sense of stunted autonomy, their inability to realize a vision of freedom and fulfillment. Again, Bauman: in modernity, “impotence is felt to be all the more odious, discomfiting and upsetting in view of the empowerment that freedom was expected to deliver.”⁴⁰⁹

II

The effect of the recognition of, and struggle with, both problematics is monumental for the development of the modern novel. The first problematic (that modernity has not ushered in a world of sweetness and light), could be expressed as more or less tolerable, more or less crushing, depending on one’s social position and attunement to the suffering of others. Nevertheless, the violent realities of the colony, the factory, and the boudoir permeated the canonical literary works of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whether these realities were backgrounded or explicitly thematized.⁴¹⁰ It was the second problematic, however, that became most integral to the literary imagination. This was, in part, because it was only through the second problematic than the first could really come into view. For it is with the instantiating of the second problematic that all of the aforementioned polarities/tensions (modernity and tradition, individuality and normativity, religion and the secular, etc.) become recognized as *internal* to the structure of human life and history. As Foucault argued of the modern episteme, when ontology (what is) and epistemology (how we know) become inseparable, there can no longer be an external “Other” that does not, behind whatever

⁴⁰⁶ See Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Second Edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 1998.

⁴⁰⁷ This implicit responsibility is likewise reflected in the occasional liberal tendency to justify the unfreedom of certain groups, nations, etc. on the grounds that those groups are not yet ready for it—that they must first complete the work of *Bildung* necessary for making good on their potential for autonomy and self-determination. This posture is perhaps most famously found in Mill’s writings on democracy and self-rule in India: the Indians were not ready for it, and therefore British colonialism was as a kind of paternalistic oversight of a child’s development towards the future fullness of their capacities.

⁴⁰⁸ Bauman 2000, 38

⁴⁰⁹ Bauman, 35

⁴¹⁰ For an excellent account of a growing awareness of the violence and uneven development generated by colonialism and empire and the impacts of this awareness on late-19th century narratives of *Bildung*, see Esty 2012. For a different vantage on similar themes, see Said 1994.

mask, have the same face as ourselves.⁴¹¹ In the late 19th century novel, and then more fully in the early 20th, this shift is registered in narratives that examine how the limits on the protagonist's will and desire may be intrinsic to themselves, or to the structure of their society, rather than functions of an external, ineluctable structure of authority or truth.⁴¹² At this point, the engine of classical narrative (the tension between the willfulness of human ingenuity and the implacable, but ultimately redemptive and benign, origin and order of things) begins to break down, demanding (by the time of *Madame Bovary* or *Jude the Obscure*) an altered sensibility towards the relationship between human life and that which guides or constrains its flourishing.⁴¹³ If our lives are not as we wish them to be, if our willfulness and desire and hope are impeded, if our path to self-actualization runs headlong into a wall—well, to what will we attribute this failure? Will we rationalize it as an expression of the order of things, of a naturalized social hierarchy, of a divine plan? Or will we, as Nietzsche raged into madness, recognize that “man's deepest reality” is that “*he* [rather than nature, or God] is a problem,” and that only he can rectify or be held responsible for his problematic existence?⁴¹⁴

It is with the developing recognition of the second problematic, and the shift towards interiority and immanence that it catalyzes, that we arrive at what we have come to call literary modernism: indeed a “reaction against the modern” (to borrow Horace Kallen's early definition of modernist painting⁴¹⁵), but a reaction in the sense of a felt need to *do something* to reconcile the promise and the paralysis, the freedom and the nausea, of the modern world. Modernism, while undoubtedly modern in its ideals, made the thematization of the disjuncture between modern promise and modern reality central to both its content and its form. Modernism (and I speak here primarily of literary modernism, although I think that these remarks hold good for other modernist forms) thus constituted a flowering of a hope—a hope largely abandoned today—that the promise of modernity could be preserved and decoupled from the horrors and hypocrisies of modern life as actually lived. For the great literary modernists—and we ought to include figures like Freud, Durkheim, and Malinowski here—modern society appeared as wounded, corrupt, “out of joint,” even if the causes of and solutions for this predicament were imagined and articulated in varying ways. Not all modernist writers would have agreed with Pound's exclamation, “I want a new civilization” (especially insofar as Pound's hoped-for civilization seemed increasingly fascistic). But most of them, seeing that the modern world appeared ‘sick’ and ‘discontented’, wanted civilization (and here was meant primarily Western civilization—what Valéry called “the mind of Europe”) restored to wholeness and health. Some, like Spengler, saw the degeneration of Western civilization as inevitable (with the irony that the idea of “Western civilization” emerged into popular parlance precisely as those such as Spengler foresaw its decline). Yet most all believed in the necessity of bringing modern society back into health (this is the basic drive of early French, British, and American sociology and anthropology: healing social “anomie” and individual neurosis)—regardless

⁴¹¹ As Foucault famously predicated, the age of “Man”—by which Foucault meant modernity—would end in the “explosion of man's face in laughter” and the “return of masks.” His predication, for reasons we cannot address here, has not borne out. Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. Pg. 384.

⁴¹² When, with the coming of modernity, “man became lonely and could find meaning and substance only in his own soul,” this ‘journey inward’ came to include the sense that what is “problematic” with life and world is a consequence of “man” (as individual protagonist or as a existential type) himself rather than of the “immanent meaninglessness” of external reality. Lukács, 103

⁴¹³ Said, *Beginnings* 77; 137-159

⁴¹⁴ Said, *Beginnings*, 159

⁴¹⁵ Cited from Menand 1996, 554

of whether the treatment necessary was to come through sociology, history, anthropology, poetry, fiction, religion, myth, or all of these combined on the psychoanalyst's couch.

It is of course true that the modernist concern, and not irregularly contempt, for the morality and aesthetics of the modern world sometimes resulted in flirtations with 'a return' to an aggrandized and largely mythic past, not irregularly through fantasies of pre-modern Aryan vigor: of the old gods of aristocratic virility and violence.⁴¹⁶ Yet the proto-fascist fetishization of a return to a patriarchal, mono-ethnic, and aristocratic past was but one strand of the modernist critique of modernity.⁴¹⁷ At its best, the modernist skepticism towards and critique of modern society was rooted in a sense that the fate of this society was staked on an ability to marry the open, affiliative, individualist, progressivism of modernity with the closed, filiative, collectivist, traditionalism of inherited forms—this is to say, to make the 'return' to the past and the leap into the future part of a single, therapeutic, and ultimately redemptive movement.⁴¹⁸ This—as we see in the works of Joyce, Elliot, Durkheim, Freud, and so many others—was the only way by which to bring modern promise and modern reality into closer compact. This would be possible, however, only if this return was also a *self-conscious reinvention* of the past: a return that was also a movement forward; a reinterpretation of the past, cast through the perspective of the present, aimed at the realization of a less disjointed future. For modern society to find stability and health, in other words, it would have to make return and reinvention, filiation and affiliation, secularism and religion, freedom and normativity, autonomy and heteronomy, modernity and tradition, rhyme.

The challenge for the modernist project of reconciling such divisions (or, rather, for exposing how not only the division between the terms, but the very terms themselves, were modern constructs) lay in how one of the terms was being progressively delegitimated. How could tradition be valorized without also threatening the promise of modern freedom; the promise of the omnipresent possibility of transformation and new beginnings; of the right to reject inherited norms in pursuit of the new and the different; of the conviction that human beings are essentially autopoietic creatures? How could a revitalized commitment to traditional authority, inherited identities, collective values, and the like, be sustained within a modern world built on the systematic negation, or at least the radical questioning, of anything "solid," as Marx had it? Consciously or subconsciously recognizing the urgency of these questions, modernists tried to determine how we can stabilize ourselves and society in a world where identity, authority, and truth are made and remade, performed and re-performed—rather than are given and grounded by a force or authority transcending the flux of human history in a secular key.

Likewise concerned with these issues, however, were nationalists, who confronted the same problems in the political sphere. How can we create modern, post-revolutionary sociopolitical structures that can, despite their modernity, be nevertheless presented as grounded in, and emergent from, archaic (or at least very long-standing) identities and traditions? The answer was found in the seemingly paradoxical idea of the "invention of tradition"⁴¹⁹— *the creation*, rather than the inheritance, of that which undergirds, and thus secures, the autonomy and cohesion of our collective and individual selves. Drawing on a variety of (largely syncretic) cultural, linguistic, religious, and historical materials,⁴²⁰ nationalizing states of the late 19th and early 20th centuries

⁴¹⁶ Bell 2011; Perl 1984.

⁴¹⁷ For an analysis of the relations between modernism and fascism, see Griffin 2007.

⁴¹⁸ Pearl 1984

⁴¹⁹ Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983

⁴²⁰ These sociological divisions—culture, society, religion, politics, economics, family, etc.—are of course themselves modern, and emergent out of then same kinds of processes/dynamics that we are investigating here.

strove towards what we might call the *creative consolidation* of tradition—a phrase that, more than “invention,” best acknowledges how no tradition emerges *ex nihilo*: that every tradition is a product of synthesizing, curating, codifying, reinterpreting, inherited materials. Central to the success of the nationalist effort to create the impression of inveterate and organic national identities was what Bakhtin, speaking of the national contexts within which the Bildungsroman developed, called the “assimilation of real historical time”: the ability to establish ‘necessary connections’ between the present and an imagined past which, while perhaps never having ‘really’ existed, could provide workable bits of material (oral or written histories; folktales; inherited aesthetic modes; local customs, etc.) usable for wedding this or that place, society, institution (or creative work) to an empowered, cohesive, trans-historical identity. It is this identity that can then be presented as having persisted up to the present in what Bakhtin called an “unbroken line of historical development”; something having existed from the first, preceding and grounding the present rather than the reverse.⁴²¹ That this “unbroken line” is fictional is precisely the point: it is *created* out of available but heterogenous materials; it is not discovered, lying in wait, under a rock or the ruins of a temple. Once this unbroken line is established as the basis of national identity, members of the nation can be interpellated (by force, when necessary) into this identity, regardless of their preceding sense of identity and belonging. Once this identity is established, furthermore, it can be presented as a simultaneously filiative and affiliative structure: filiative, in that it is natally inherited and is claimed to possess an “unbroken line” of development that resists efforts at reinterpretation and re-affiliation; affiliative, in that those who do not inherit this identity natally can be sometimes allowed to adopt it affiliatively (the term most often used for this process in English—“naturalization”—is indicative of the kind of conceptual field that animates the nationalist imaginary).

When recognized as a kind of fiction—in the literal etymological sense of something *made*—the act of creative consolidating a filiative identity for the nation can bring a community together in bonds of love and hope and commitment, while providing paths for incorporating foreign persons, ideas, cultural forms, etc. When the fictiveness of the act is forgotten, and the identitarian product of the act is reified, however, the consequence is the masquerading of national identity as an inveterate and inviolable fact, with inflexible limits on who or what can be included within the national fold. When recognized as fiction, in other words, the metaphysical tension between an “unbroken line of historical development” and the omnipresent flux of becoming (like the sociopolitical tension between the flux of modernization and the stability of tradition; or the biographical tension between individual willfulness and social normativity) could be resolved without denying the tension or burying it under layers of ideological obfuscation.⁴²² Instead, this tension could be—as in *Ulysses* or the Eliot of *the Waste Land*—the very subject of the narrative, a narrative that is *not* made to be definitely resolved (as in the “classical” works of the past century) but rather to be *kept open* for continual retelling. By denying the existence of the tension, however, nationalists borrowed modernist strategies but mystified them to produce filiative identifications far more radical and absolute than anything produced in the “traditional” world left behind. The best of European literary modernism worked to develop narratives of historical becoming that preserved and reproduced filiative identifications (perhaps first among them the identity of “Europe,” of what would come to be called “Western civilization”) while tuning these narratives in a mythic key, permissive of re-imagination, openness, and inclusivity. Nationalists, by contrast, made these narratives reified and positivistic: rooted not in fiction but in (historical, ethnic, racial, genetic, sociocultural, etc.) fact.

It was the dangers posed by the ideological function of historiography and historicism that Nietzsche, whose philosophy presaged much modernist thought, inveighed against in his comments

⁴²¹ Bakhtin 1986, 33

⁴²² For a discussion of this process in modernist literature, see Brooker 1994

on the “advantages and disadvantages of history for life.”⁴²³ By attacking his nationalizing epoch’s “consuming historical fever,” Nietzsche did not aim to discredit history or historiography as such.⁴²⁴ Rather, at issue was the diagnosis of how history was ‘abused’ at the cost of human flourishing, both individual and collective. This abuse manifested, in Nietzsche’s view, in the trifurcation of the historical consciousness into forms that, when separated from one another, stultified rather than served the purposes of “life.” The first form (“monumental history”) dealt with the past too romantically, pushing contemporary society to look back to the imagined glories of earlier epochs, usually contrasted with an image of a fallen, corrupted present. The second form (“antiquarian history”) treated the past and its artifacts too reverentially, placing uneven value on the past vis-a-vis the present. While these two forms might overlap or diverge (an antiquarian might not aim for a return to the past because they don’t see it as having ever departed), the third form (“critical history”) was different. Critical history saw the past with a surfeit of detachment and skepticism—with an objectifying intent that found in the past only “dead” data, usable as “item[s] of knowledge” but lacking any “powerful live-giving influence.”⁴²⁵ In a healthy mind or society, Nietzsche suggested, each form could exist simultaneously and in a complementary fashion: the remembered greatness of the past provides exemplary models for the present and future, while the inheritances of the past are honored and not discarded without first passing the test of Chesterton’s fence.⁴²⁶ At the same time, the critical consciousness and the possibility of interpretive detachment (“critical history”) could be maintained, but not excessively indulged, so as to sometimes question inherited verities and test them against present needs. The healthy historical consciousness was therefore one that holds the past in a degree of reverence, that can return to it for nourishment and guidance, but which can also treat it with salubrious skepticism, reinterpreting and even repudiating it when contrasted with the interests of the present, or, more specifically, the needs of “life.” To serve life, the historical consciousness must be able, to paraphrase Bakhtin, make the connection between past and present a *living* connection; one in which the past is judged on the basis of its capacity to enliven and preserve the possibility of what Nietzsche calls “a happy life”—not on the basis of its capacity to accord with “facts” or serve the interests of a national or transnational ruling class. In this way, the healthy historical consciousness, aware of the “plastic power” of both mind and of history, could recognize that the deification (monumental), mummification (antiquarian), and objectification (critical) of the past are just as ‘disadvantageous’ to life as the honoring, preservation, and judicious critique of it are ‘advantageous’.⁴²⁷

Nietzsche’s essay, as Michael Bell puts it, is “effectively a manifesto” for the historical sensibility of modernism. It is a critique of *both* the reification of the past *and* of the decomposition of the past into pure contingency; into ‘dead data’, content without form. Concerned with the cultivation of the capacity to engage the past creatively, constructively, and with an awareness of the “plasticity” of mind and of history, Nietzsche aimed at the pursuit of human flourishing: what, as we will see in the next chapter, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar called “*ferdi saadet*.” In this effort, both modernity (as the injunction to critique and question the inherited and the extant in the interest of an imagined possible) and tradition (as the reverence for and, if possible, repetition of inherited

⁴²³ The text is sometimes translated as “the uses and abuses of history for life.”

⁴²⁴ Nietzsche 1980, 8

⁴²⁵ Nietzsche 1980, 14

⁴²⁶ This referring to G.K. Chesterton’s principle that an inherited form, institution, tradition, habit—or piece of fencing—should not be destroyed or replaced until its original function, why it came into being in the first place, is understood.

⁴²⁷ Nietzsche 1980, 10

norms and forms) are equally necessary: the former facilitates the possibility of change, of reinterpretation, while the latter preserves coherence, continuity, and stability. With these lessons in mind, when Stephen Daedalus writes that “history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake,” he does not mean that he wishes he could forget or do without history; he means that he wishes for a history that could heal and animate the fractured present, rather than wound or fetishize it. To discover a version of history that could be truly ‘advantageous’ for life thus meant, for Joyce as for many of his peers, inventing it—or, rather, *rewriting*, *retelling* it in light of the needs of the present.⁴²⁸ To advance forward, to create new forms of life and avenues of thought and action (i.e., to be truly modern) thus necessitated a “return” to the past; not to bring back this past in a fossilized and fetishized form, but to *redeem* it: to ‘blast it out’,⁴²⁹ as Benjamin wrote, of extant historical narratives and place it in the service of an less wounded future. Indeed, as the literary scholar Jewel Spears Brooker comments on these themes, for modernists such as Joyce or Nietzsche “securing the future mean[t] redeeming (in the literal sense) the past.” Only through this redemption could we “escape” the “nightmare” of both past and wounded present, ‘returning’, like Odysseus, to a future which resembles the past but has benefited from the journey of homecoming. In Eliot’s words, “And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.”

This modernist conception of the “uses and abuses” of history⁴³⁰ was eventually destroyed, broken—for reasons I cannot detail here—by the soul crushing realities of the first and second world wars, and then by the reactionary thrust of postmodern thought in politics, economics, religion, cultural production, and psychology. This thought, supported by the American security state,⁴³¹ spurned wholeness as inherently totalitarian, embracing “difference” and multiplicity as inherently emancipatory, thus destroying the possibility of counter-hegemonic solidarity and non-nationalist political imaginaries. Nevertheless, modernism achieved many successes, not least of which by producing literatures of hope, wherein the split between tradition and modernity that modernity inaugurates might be brought into fruitful, life-affirming synthesis, one that did not destroy or repudiate modernity, but brought it into closer accord with its own ideal. Nietzsche’s “eternal return” is precisely such a hope: for the past to be redeemed in, for, and from the present—a present which, by redeeming the past, finds itself *having become* the past, just as the past, by being redeemed, finds itself having become the present.

European modernists only achieved these successes, however, because they had access to inherited resources that could not be easily discredited by the steamroller. Modernism’s successes depended upon the existence of a “canon”: a European or Western tradition that could accommodate Plato and Marx, Zeus and Jupiter, Moses and Paul, the Reformation and the Renaissance, the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Rome. When one reads a work like the *Wasteland* or *Ulysses*, one is immediately struck by the immensity of references to this tradition; by Eliot and Joyce’s ability to build new forms out of a dazzlingly array of inherited materials. Likewise, when one considers the great philosophical figures that just preceded and occurred within the

⁴²⁸ Nietzsche 1980

⁴²⁹ For Benjamin, in his famous essay that is also a key text in the modernist historical consciousness, the task of the “materialist” historian is to “blast open the continuum of history” (the *filiative* chain of events) and in so doing open up the possibility of a ‘redeemed’ (*re-affiliated*) relationship to both past and future. Benjamin 1969.

⁴³⁰ I am very aware that there are intensely competing programs and visions within literary modernism. Nevertheless, there are certain features about which we can generalize. See Perl 1984 and Bell 2011.

⁴³¹ See Gabriel Rockhill, “The CIA Reads French Theory: On the Intellectual Labor of Dismantling the Cultural Left.” *The Philosophical Salon* <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-cia-reads-french-theory-on-the-intellectual-labor-of-dismantling-the-cultural-left/>

modernist movement—say, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, or Weil—one sees works animated by the figures, references, and concepts of this tradition: Abraham and Isaac, Dionysus and Apollo, Moses, Socrates, and Jesus Christ. All of these varied materials could be drawn upon to build syncretic, synthetic forms, powerful enough to cast modernity in a different light without being destroyed or delegitimized in the process.

In sum, European literary modernism worked to reconcile what had been broken apart by steamroller modernity. Unlike nationalism, it did so by thematizing the very tensions that the nationalists tried to (awkwardly, but effectively) paper over. Modernists could only do this, however, because they were able to draw on traditional materials that retained a surfeit of cultural power that could not be easily discredited by the forms of thought emergent from the recognition of modernity's two problematics. It was precisely such materials—a plastic and powerful tradition or canon, whose authority could not be easily undermined—that Turkish modernists were deprived of. Why? In a word, Orientalism, and the Occidental frame that secures Orientalism's enduring power.

II: A Theory of Literary Modernity in Turkey

As suggested above, European modernists had access to resources through which to at least *attempt* to creatively consolidate an “unbroken line of development[s]” that could bind past and present, tradition and modernity, filiation and affiliation, together within a synthesis conducive to what Nietzsche, in his aforementioned essay, called the purposes of “life.” By tapping into an imaginary of a trans-national cultural inheritance, usually identified with a broad conception of European or Western civilization, the greatest works of European literary modernism labored to succeed in what Simone Weil called “the search for roots” within expeditiously modernizing and secularizing societies—the collective identities, values, institutions, etc., of which were in a process of radical reformation. Marshaling inherited cultural, historical, and spiritual resources (many of which were not only centuries but millennia old) to address and hopefully heal the disorientations of the present, many European modernist texts became themselves canonical within the very traditions they relied upon, thereby extending the life of these traditions.

The Ottoman Empire possessed an incredibly rich and syncretic set of cultural traditions, both that of the metropolitan elite and of the various ethnic/religious groups that co-inhabited the empire under the *millet* system. Yet the generation of Turkish writers coming to maturity after 1923 were largely deprived of the inherited resources of the Ottoman world, blocked from accessing the kind of rich tradition from which European modernists could draw comfort and inspiration. This does not mean that Turkish writers were not inspired by European works: Tanpınar, for one, was deeply impacted by French modernism, and the literary milieu he operated in was better read in European letters than most Europeans. Nevertheless, there was—as there most often is—a difference between inspiration taken from societies perceived as other to one's own versus inspiration from works perceived as internal to one's own cultural or national tradition. Turkish writers could be inspired by European writers. But they could not easily incorporate their works into a sense of cultural continuity or national or civilizational tradition. Because of this, Turkish writers in the early Republican period struggled far more than their European counterparts in working to construct counterweights to the creative destruction of steamroller modernity, and to provide a disoriented society with a sense of cultural, historical, and spiritual rootedness. This was not the fault of these writers, but rather a consequence of the conditions out of which and into which the Turkish Republic emerged. In the decades following the foundation of the Republic in 1923, so many of the materials that *could* have been used to construct an “unbroken line of development”—which might have secured a sense of collective cultural-historical-spiritual rootedness, continuity, and coherence—were either effaced, marginalized, or locked behind museum glass: transformed, like the Hagia Sophia, from elements of a living culture into artifacts of an effectively dead one. Why? In a word, and building on arguments presented in previous sections, because the Ottoman-Islamic

tradition (or, more specifically, the multiple traditions that made up the highly diverse and syncretic Ottoman Empire) was seen as an impediment to the success of the Kemalist project in particular, and to the viability of Turkish nationality and nationhood more generally. While local traditions were of course not destroyed (especially as in the 1920s the vast majority of the population was agrarian and illiterate), the newly nationalized Turkish public was forced to embrace newly devised and hastily packaged Kemalist narratives of identity and culture, which placed the Ottoman-Islamic heritage in a marginal position. Modern Turkey was thus subjected to modernity and modernization without the benefit of a deeply rooted and broadly venerated cultural canon, out of which resources could be drawn to center the self (both individual and national-collective) within the immense transformations catalyzed by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic. As noted, European modernists could pull—justifiably or otherwise—from Rome, Athens, and Jerusalem simultaneously, claiming a fundamental and proprietary connection to two and a half millennia of sociocultural production, whose inherited resources might approximate those “transcendental points of orientation” that had been overturned through the processes of modernization and secularization in Europe.⁴³² Even as Europe secularized, for instance, the spiritual resources of Christianity could still, even in the secularized form of the Bible “as literature,” provide a degree of cultural orientation and continuity to the disoriented and, after 1914, war-weary populations of Europe. Had post-Ottoman Turkey had easy access to such traditions and points of reference, the trajectory of modern Turkish politics and society might have been very different—or, at least, there might have been more successful attempts to stage the kind of “synthesis” between the Ottoman-Islamic past and the national-secular present that many artists and intellectuals aimed to realize.

The Ottoman-Islamic inheritance was increasingly made unavailable for these purposes in the years after 1923, however. There were many reasons for this, but arguably the two most important concerned, 1) the resistance of the Ottoman past to nationalization, given the ethnically diverse and culturally syncretic character of the Ottoman world, and 2) the association of the Ottoman world with European discourses of Oriental inferiority and Islamic heresy. These problems catalyzed Atatürk’s government to make a concerted effort in the Republic’s early decades to cut the population off from its Ottoman-Islamic roots by means of a variety of “reforms,” including the radical transformation of Ottoman Turkish and regional dialects into modern standard Turkish, written, after 1932, in a Latin script that made all Ottoman textual production difficult if not impossible for younger generations to access. Progressively cut off from the intellectual, artistic, and historical “canon,” Turks were forced to confront modernity without the benefit of what Arendt called “a banister”: without the benefit of inherited “transcendental points of orientation” that could resist “steamroller modernity” and the leveling force of Western imperial, capitalist hegemony. The Turkish experience, indeed, shows the absurdity of Arendt’s aforementioned positive assessment of modern thought as ‘thinking without a banister’. Why was this assessment absurd? Because Arendt and her contemporaries had banisters at every step, leading directly (if imaginatively) from ancient Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome to modern Paris, Berlin, and New York. The high priests of “postmodernism” and “poststructuralism,” who would dedicate themselves to the affirmation of modernity’s lack of foundations and “grand narratives” (many of whom were, directly or indirectly, supported by the CIA and corollary institutions for their adroitness at pivoting leftists away from Marxism and anti-imperialism),⁴³³ presuming that tradition, filiation, and the drive towards universality were all intrinsically inclined towards authoritarianism and repression. These

⁴³² The intervening century or so, we should note, has made great strides in destroying the viability of this restraining force, with—sad to say—postmodernism and poststructuralism, inevitably but unwittingly, helping to inject a capitalist logic of incessant overturning into the very heart of progressive intellectual production.

⁴³³ See Rockhill 2017

postmodernists (who have made careers out of endlessly rehashing the dual problematics of modernity outlined above, and who have maintained a stranglehold over much of the American academy) would have done well to remember just how deeply rooted their own thought was in the moral and epistemic traditions of not merely the Enlightenment, but of millennia of cultural production that the West claims—again, justifiably or not—as its own. Bracketing the issue of the West’s relationship to tradition and filiation (an issue treated in the above digression into European literary modernity), I want to argue that the marginalization and often outright effacement of tradition in Turkey’s early decades produced not only profound and enduring social and political tensions but also forced the country to confront modernity *without* a viable, life-giving but also constraining, tradition or “canon” (as I will call it in dialogue with literary critic Murat Belge), one which could steady the self within rapid sociopolitical change.

As Belge has argued, the birth and development of the Turkish novel is inseparable from the “East-West Problem,” or what Belge calls the “East-West problematic” (*Doğu-Batı Sorunsalı*). For Belge, to repeat from this dissertation’s introduction, the “East-West problematic” can be understood in terms of 1) the simultaneous necessity and insolubility of the question of where Turkey fits, or ought to fit, between the poles of Said’s “imaginative geography,” and 2) the sheer magnitude of concern and discursive production that this question has generated and regenerated. As Belge writes, the East-West problematic is “something like a cradle into which what we call “modern” Turkish literature was born. This cradle influenced and shaped the child born into it in a variety of ways during the process of development, and these influences continue to a significant extent even after the child has grown up.”⁴³⁴ In other words, although this problematic emerged from a specific set of conditions affecting the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic, it has persisted long after these original conditions have passed away and/or been significantly altered. Nevertheless, these original conditions within late Ottoman society must be understood—as I have suggested throughout these chapters—in order to grasp how and why the East/West problem has endured in Turkey.

If we remember, one of the principal features of 19th century Ottoman society was the feeling of being outpaced by Europe in terms of economy, military, and science, but also in terms of modes of cultural production—such as newspapers and modern literary forms—that were coming to play an increasingly central role in the management of European societies and the manufacture of popular consent. Nevertheless, Europe’s rise was disorienting: Western Europe had been a geopolitical backwater when the Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453, and for centuries the Ottomans had not only kept pace with the major European powers but regularly overpowered them, ultimately controlling a massive chunk of southeastern Europe in what was once called Rumelia. Having for centuries been a major global power, the Ottoman Empire of the early 19th century was not accustomed to anxieties over its status in regard to Christian Europe. These anxieties grew, however, as the empire lost most of its Greek territories at the end of the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829), suffering further territorial losses throughout the century—in no small part due to the ambitions of the major European empires, who, more or less overtly, encouraged Ottoman Christians to seek political autonomy.⁴³⁵ By the time of the Tanzimat or “Reform” period (1839-1876), what Belge calls the “weapons” (*silah*) of the West were seen as

⁴³⁴ Belge 2009, 94. My translation.

⁴³⁵ It is worth noting that the Greek War of Independence, while fought between the Greeks and the Ottomans, was heavily influenced by the major European powers (the British and the French, as well as the Russians), which provided the Greeks military and diplomatic support. This support is often described as an early instance of European “humanitarian” interventionist—though it can just as easily be described as an early instance of Euro-American (the Americans were also involved, in a minor capacity) war by proxy. See Heraclides & Dialla 2015.

possessing a power that Ottoman analogues could not match. These “weapons,” as Belge notes, included not only those of metal and steam but also of paper and ink. Literary genres imported from Europe (and specifically from France⁴³⁶) in the mid to late 19th century were recognized as possessing a sociological power that extant Ottoman literary forms could not match: specifically, the power to speak to a broad readership and shepherd public opinion.⁴³⁷ It is this sociological ‘soft power’ of modern literary forms that, Belge suggests, is key to understanding the trajectory of the adoption⁴³⁸ and development of European literary genres within late Ottoman society. Indeed, many of the first Ottoman novels, which began to be published at the end of the Tanzimat, aimed to respond to debates over the rise of European imperial power, over the benefits and risks of opening the Empire more fully to European influence, and over how European norms and forms might be integrated into Ottoman society so as to empower, rather than diminish, the stability of Ottoman cultural traditions and the legitimacy of Ottoman political forms.⁴³⁹ These novelists began their work, furthermore, within a burgeoning Ottoman reading public that had begun to develop alongside the expansion of modern printing technologies and the growth of European-style newspapers.⁴⁴⁰ As this reading public grew, more and more European literary content entered Ottoman high society (in both translation and in European languages, mainly French), influencing not only artists and intellectuals but also Ottoman military officers who—given that European influence was particularly prevalent in the military, which early on began to employ European commanders as advisors—were often most familiar with European ideas and institutions.⁴⁴¹

As in France or Britain or Russia, the genre conventions of the novel provided a social realism capable of not only representing but influencing society and popular opinion. The power of literary realism (which was not available in extant high Ottoman literary genres, such as the esoteric—albeit incredibly rich and syncretic—*Divan* poetry) allowed Ottoman novelists to speak to a

⁴³⁶ French literature and thought were particularly well known in the late Ottoman period, with French being the most popular European language among the Ottoman elite. For those less fluent in French, there were, for instance, 60 translations of Victor Hugo’s works into Ottoman Turkish by 1885. Aksakal 2014, 31.

⁴³⁷ The most important Ottoman high literary form was poetic, and is sometimes referred to as *Divan* literature. This poetic literature combined linguistic resources from three languages (Arabic, Persian, and Turkish) and had developed a highly complex style and cache of imagery by the 19th century—so complex that it was often very hard to understand save by careful students of the genre. Apart from this elite genre, there were a number of ‘folk’ (*halk*) literary traditions, that revolved around genres of folktale, popular theater (particularly the *Karagöz* shadow plays). These ‘high’ and ‘low’ literary traditions had little influence on one another, and it was the latter that became important to the creation of a ‘purified’ Turkish language in the early 20th century and to the consolidation of an idea of ‘Turkish’ (rather than Ottoman) culture. For a synoptic account in English, see Halman 2011.

⁴³⁸ The term “adoption,” or even “import,” does not seem to me to be problematic here: to adopt something does not mean that one’s subsequent use or refinement of that thing is ‘derivative’ or ‘imitative’ of whomever first developed that thing. One does not say that the Russian novelistic tradition is derivative of the French, just as one does not say that Dickens is derivative of Cervantes—at least not if “derivative” is being used to suggest unoriginality. Aesthetic forms, like all things, come from somewhere; yet, as Nietzsche taught us, we err when we wed present identities too completely with their origins.

⁴³⁹ For an excellent English-language survey of political thought during these last decades of the 19th century, see Mardin 2000.

⁴⁴⁰ Kabacalı 2000; Baykal 2019.

⁴⁴¹ This fact that would become particularly important in the aftermath of WWI, with many of modern Turkey’s figures, including Atatürk and his second in command, İsmet İnönü, having served as officers in the Ottoman military. Ahmad 1993, chapter 1.

broader segment of educated Ottoman society.⁴⁴² This allowed the Ottoman novel to develop as a highly pedagogical genre: an extension of sociopolitical programs and debates by other means. For Ottoman novelists such as Ahmet Mithat Efendi, Şemseddin Sâmî, or Namık Kemal, the novel became a tool for instructing Ottoman society on the necessity of simultaneously *reforming* and *preserving* Ottoman-Islamic traditions and Sultanate authority. This task—of reforming the empire through the adoption of Western forms *while also* preserving Ottoman political and cultural autonomy from European encroachment—was a central concern of Ottoman intellectuals in the decades before and after the turn of the century.⁴⁴³ The urgency (and difficulty) of this task permeates the novels of the period, which often narrate a tension between, on the one hand, the felt necessity (and indeed excitement) of adopting/utilizing forms of European provenance and, on the other hand, an concern that this adoption could undermine “traditional” (*geleneksel*) forms of identity, authority, and normativity.⁴⁴⁴ As such, and as Jale Parla argues in *Babalar ve Oğullar* (“Fathers and Sons”), her influential study of the “epistemological foundations of the Tanzimat novel,” Ottoman novels were not attempts to uncritically embrace “Western culture.” They were, by and large, efforts to “translate” aspects of this culture in ways compatible with “the empire’s foundations in the areas of morality, law, and Islamic thought.”⁴⁴⁵ As Parla argues, this effort to “translate” Western forms in the interest of preserving the “continuity” (*devamlık*) and “authority” (*otorite*) of Ottoman tradition/authority resulted, in the literary sphere, in works that aimed to provide a “father’s guidance” within a changing world.⁴⁴⁶ This pedagogical aspect manifested in the thematization of questions concerning how to take from Europe what was necessary for the perpetuation and empowerment of Ottoman society and imperial authority while also avoiding the danger of Western forms undermining the foundations of this society/authority.

Despite the affinity that writers like Ahmet Mithat Efendi (1844-1912), one of the most famous and influential intellectuals of the late Ottoman period, had for aspects of European culture, Parla argues that novelists like him remained largely committed to an “absolute Islamic culture and epistemology.”⁴⁴⁷ In order to pursue “correct” Westernization (*Doğru Batılılaşma*)⁴⁴⁸—i.e., a prudent and partial Westernization, which would enrich rather than undermine Ottoman society and government—writers like Ahmet Mithat tended to focus on how to preserve the continuity/authority of “old values” while also acting as “judges” of which “new” (Western) values ought to be taken up and which ought to be rejected.⁴⁴⁹ Ahmet Mithat’s *Felâhî Bey ile Râkım Efendi* (1875),⁴⁵⁰ one of the most famous Ottoman novels alongside Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem’s *Araba Sevdası* (“The

⁴⁴² Parla 2008

⁴⁴³ As Parla writes, the Tanzimat was an effort to “secure” the “social, cultural, and philosophical foundations of the empire” rather than to replace or dismantle these. Parla 1990, 11

⁴⁴⁴ Belge 2009; Parla 1990

⁴⁴⁵ Parla 1990, 13

⁴⁴⁶ Parla 1990, 15-20

⁴⁴⁷ Parla 1990, 20

⁴⁴⁸ Moran 1983, 32-33

⁴⁴⁹ Parla 1990, 61

⁴⁵⁰ The title is usually left untranslated, as “Bey” and “Efendi” are honorifics attached to the proper names “Felâhî” and “Râkım.” The contrast between “Bey” and “Efendi” could be very approximately translated as “Mr.” and “Sir.” The contrast between the connotations of “Bey” and “Efendi” are not incidental to the novel’s moral. See, Ahmet Mithat Efendi 2016.

Carriage Affair,” 1898), is emblematic here. The over-Westernized and under-fathered Felâtun Bey is contrasted with the rooted, responsible Râkım Efendi, the former exemplifying the “laziness and waste” associated with Europe and the latter the “diligence and thrift” embodied in traditional Ottoman values.⁴⁵¹ Râkım and Felâtun therefore represent, in the eminent critic Berna Moran’s words, “correct” and “false” (*yanlış*) modes of Westernization. By personifying these two alternatives and pushing them into narrative contrast, Ahmet Mithat aimed to “wake up readers” to the dangers of “Westernism” or “alafranga-ism” (*alafrangalık*), a term applied to habits, values, tastes, etc., of perceived European provenance; this in contrast to “alaturca,” referring to that which is associated with traditional values, practices, etc.⁴⁵² The dangers of Westernism, often represented through stories of young men corrupted by the consumerism and prodigality associated with modern European society, were framed as threatening to the “paternalistic”⁴⁵³ authority of “Turkish-Ottoman traditions,” and particularly to the authority of the Sultan and Caliph (both titles embodied in the same person).⁴⁵⁴ While Râkım Efendi is a “suitably Westernized man” (he has a French mistress, is on close terms with a British family, demonstrates a knowledge of and a fondness for European art, and even appears to be quietly writing a novel of his own) his lack of profligacy and respect for the “spiritual values of Islamic civilization” show him to possess a salubrious (that is, a discerning and temperate) relationship with “Western civilization.”⁴⁵⁵ In this manner, Râkım Efendi is a pedagogical construct, whose primary purpose, in the literary scholar Talat Halman’s words, is to “cautio[n] [Ottoman] modernizers regarding the risk of losing their authentic identity”⁴⁵⁶ and to thus exemplify an ideal that Ahmet Mithat summarized elsewhere:

“If we try to Europeanize only for the sake of becoming European, we shall lose our own character. If we, on the other hand, add the European civilization to our own character, we shall not only preserve, perpetuate, and maintain our character but also fortify and refine it.”⁴⁵⁷

This position, that “European civilization” should be ‘added’ to Ottoman civilization in such a way that the latter would be empowered rather than undermined by the former, was a paradigm of “correct Westernization”—an effort to create a “synthesis” between Ottoman and European, East and West, which would place the sociocultural forms associated with latter *in the service* of the health of the former. In this synthesis, Westernization would allow for material empowerment and sociopolitical reform, while the preservation of “old values” and forms of authority would protect against sociopolitical degeneration, spiritual rot, and consequent vulnerability to European influence and intervention.⁴⁵⁸ In this sense, such a synthesis is embodied in the character of Râkım Efendi: a thoroughly admirable Ottoman subject, steeped in what Moran calls “Turkish-Ottoman traditions,”

⁴⁵¹ Moran 1983, 28

⁴⁵² For extensive commentary on the theme of “alafranga” in the late Ottoman novel, see the contributions to Ringer and Charrière 2020, especially Levi 2020. The term literally means “Frankish,” i.e., European, and is contrasted with “alaturca,” the former—especially in cultural and aesthetic matters, but also more broadly in terms of sociocultural sensibilities and habits—indicating a perceived Europeanized attitude versus a traditionally “Turkish” one.

⁴⁵³ As Parla demonstrates, the promotion of a healthy “paternalism” (*babacılık*) is central to the late Ottoman novel.

⁴⁵⁴ Moran 1983, 31–33

⁴⁵⁵ Moran 1983, 31

⁴⁵⁶ Halman 2011, 75

⁴⁵⁷ Cited from epigraph to Ahmet Mithat Efendi 2016.

⁴⁵⁸ See footnote 112.

who is capable of borrowing judiciously from the West so as to revitalize and secure an Ottoman form of life.⁴⁵⁹ If Ottoman society at large were to become like Rakim Efendi, Ahmet Mithat's novel suggests, the foundations of Ottoman tradition and authority would be "fortified and refined," rather than undermined and corrupted, by the 'adding' or 'translating' elements of "European civilization" into the Ottoman world.⁴⁶⁰

As Parla suggests, late Ottoman intellectuals like Ahmet Mithat were still firmly grounded in the "epistemological" and ethical "foundations" of the Ottoman world, which had not yet been overtaken by movements for nationality and nationalization on the European model of ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc, homogeneity—a model that ran counter to the structure of the Ottoman Empire, an amalgamation of multiple peoples and traditions, many of which held partial autonomy under the *Millet* system. It was, indeed, the preservation and empowerment of Ottoman *Empire*, rather than the creation of an ostensibly homogeneous nation-state, that was at issue for writers like Ahmet Mithat. By the early 1900s, however, nationalist ideologues such as Ziya Gökalp could begin to develop a new, nationalized conception of Turkishness, the cultural roots of which stretched beyond the Ottoman-Islamic past to connect to pre-Muslim, proto-national, Turkic roots.⁴⁶¹ For early nationalist intellectuals like Gökalp, whose thought would become important to Atatürk's nationalist movement, a nationalized conception of Turkish identity and history fit uncomfortably within the sociopolitical organization of the Ottoman world. The Ottoman Empire was (to repeat) too ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse to support the manufactured homogeneity demanded by the nation-state structure.

Discomfort with, and sometimes outright antipathy towards, the Ottoman world also stemmed from European Orientalism becoming increasingly familiar to the Ottoman intelligentsia in the 19th century.⁴⁶² The Ottoman Empire's 19th century decline and eventual collapse in 1918 seemed—and not only in Europe—to corroborate European ideas of Ottoman-Islamic backwardness and the superiority of Western civilization.⁴⁶³ Freeing the new Turkish Republic from the stain of Orientalization was thus, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, a key element of Atatürk's program after 1923. To bypass Orientalist connotations and help foster a sense of national homogeneity from Ottoman pluralism and syncretism, alternative cultural-historical resources were required to foster a national identity that would both fit what Anderson calls the "modular" forms of European nationalism and inure Turkey from the full force of Western Orientalism. There was a need of a conception of national identity, in other words, that was less corrupted by Orientalist imagery and that could therefore foster a sense of national pride less threatened by the West's cultural hierarchies, globalized alongside the expansion of European (and then American) imperialism. By seeking out non-Ottoman cultural resources and marginalizing the Ottoman past, Republican Turkey might accomplish both of these goals at once: foster a sense of national unity that bypass both the memory of Ottoman cultural/ethnic/religious heterogeneity and resist

⁴⁵⁹ Moran 1983, 32

⁴⁶⁰ For an extended consideration of the theme of "translation" vis-a-vis the late Ottoman novel and its engagement with (Western) modernity, see the essays in Ringer and Charrière 2020.

⁴⁶¹ Berkes 1998, 345-51

⁴⁶² Makdisi 2002, Deringil 2011

⁴⁶³ Debates over the causes of Ottoman decline were common in the Ottoman Empire's final decades, with the question of the West's role in the decline (as its agent, its remedy, or an impediment to its reversal) central to these debates. See Berkes 1998, 348-51.

Orientalization and threats to national sovereignty, and not merely personal pride, that Orientalization threatened—threats discussed in greater detail in the Introduction and Chapter 2.⁴⁶⁴

One significant problem for this project of creating a conception of nationality could bypass much of the Ottoman-Islamic past was that few non/pre-Ottoman resources were readily available for creatively consolidating an “unbroken line” of Turkish national identity. There were, in other words, limited materials for “inventing”—or, to use the phrase introduced above, “creatively consolidating”—a sense of national tradition powerful enough to dispel any sense that Turkish national identity began only in 1923. Many of the most high-profile attempts to construct such an unbroken line were tenuous in the extreme, however. Efforts were made to claim that the Turks were the true fathers of Sumerian and Hittite civilization, and thus the real source, through cultural diffusion, of ancient Greek civilization (implying that ancient Anatolian civilizations were Turkic, a claim for which no real evidence has been offered—which is not to say that many Anatolians may be able to trace lineages back before the Turks first entered Asia Minor in the 11th century). Likewise, the government promoted theories that the Turks were the creators of humanity’s ur-language, as in the “Sun-Language” or *Güneş-Dil* theory, and were in fact “descendants of white (Aryan) inhabitants of Central Asia” (as in the “Turkish History Thesis,” *Türk Tarihi Tezî*).⁴⁶⁵ Such theories were quickly discredited. The problem was that, apart from fantastic, and at that point poorly evidenced, theories of archaic Turkishness, there was simply not much available evidence from the pre-Ottoman past that could be used to construct a “monumental” and/or “antiquarian” historiography (to borrow Nietzsche’s aforementioned term) that could securely root a newly nationalized Turkishness within a pre-Ottoman past.⁴⁶⁶

The upshot of the manufacture of such a conception of Turkishness, and of the corollary effort to decouple Turkishness from the Ottoman-Islamic inheritance, was a national society that, by the late 1930s, had been violently jerked out of Ottoman life worlds and pushed into a nationalized identity that was totally novel for the majority of the population, especially in the Anatolian

⁴⁶⁴ There are many accounts in English of this marginalization of the Ottoman during the early decades of the Turkish Republic. See, for instance, Berkes 1998 (esp. chapter 16); Özyürek 2007, 1-16; Philliou 2011; Gürpınar 2013. While it is important to remember the extent of this marginalization—and the extent to which it has endured into the 21st century—it would be a mistake to say that the Ottoman was never recognized, discussed, or symbolized in public performances, education, political discourse, etc. Nevertheless, when the Ottoman was publicly discussed, taught, commemorated, etc., this was done in what Sönmez calls a “Turkified and secularized” way: a way that reinterpreted Ottoman triumphs as expressions of an essentially Turkic identity/spirit and denigrated its failures as the consequence of the forgetting or perversion of this spirit. Sönmez 2021, 756.

⁴⁶⁵ Zürcher 2017, 191-92.

⁴⁶⁶ The difficulties were compounded by the historical ambiguity of who qualified as a “Turk.” This was because, to repeat, no powerful conception of Turkish national identity appears to have existed prior to the late Ottoman period. This is in one sense unsurprising, given that the concept of the nation, in the sense we now understand it, is a child of Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment. But it also indicates that any collectivized sense of “us-ness” organized around a conception of Turkishness, if it existed at all, was totally tertiary to categories of religious, regional, linguistic, etc., commonality. Even on the grounds of race or ethnicity, themselves thoroughly modern concepts, Turkishness was hard to homogenize. The majority of Turks (today as in 1923) descend, not from the 11th century Turkic tribes who migrated into Anatolia from Central Asia, but rather from West Asia and Southeastern Europe, with some studies estimating a higher percentage of modern Turks descending from South Asia than from the Turkic homelands of the Central Asian steppes. Even after the slaughter of Armenians during and prior to WWI, and after the massive “population exchange” between Greece and Turkey after 1923, the peoples of Anatolia, Rumelia, and the Aegean coast remained extremely ethnically and phenotypically diverse. This would not be a problem for a conception of national identity that eschewed appeals to ethnic uniformity and direct descent from archaic Turkic groups.

heartland.⁴⁶⁷ Because of the paucity of materials for building a national identity rooted in sources/materials prior to the Ottoman period, the Kemalist revolution would *itself* become the grounds of a national “invented tradition.” Yet the replacement of the Ottoman-Islamic world with narratives of an archaic Turkic past and/or with secular Kemalist symbologies would prove insufficient: there simply was not enough ‘there there’ to succeed in creatively consolidating a powerful national identity within which the majority of the population could feel at home, irrespective of piety, ethnicity, language, class, geographical location, etc. Instead, the attempt to root the nation, not in the Ottoman past but in archaic Turkic roots and/or in the tradition of the Kemalist revolution and the “cult of Atatürk,”⁴⁶⁸ left many disoriented and with a deep sense of loss, especially in regions of the country that had little say in how Turkish national history and culture would be narrated and performed. (At least until the end of the one-party period in 1950, the majority of the population, especially in the countryside, in had little to no political agency). While most metropolitan intellectuals, for their part, embraced the Kemalist project with little public criticism, it is difficult to determine whether this was out of sincere ideological commitment or because criticism of this project was broadly suppressed until 1950.⁴⁶⁹ There were, indeed, very few forums in the 1920s and 30s in which critical discussion of the Kemalist revolution and its aftermath could take place, and intellectuals who opposed or had reservations about Kemalist “reforms” were forced to either self-censor, make their criticisms allegorical, esoteric, and indirect, or suffer the threat of exile, imprisonment, or death.⁴⁷⁰

Perhaps for this reason, many of most important critical voices from the early Republican period were artists, particularly novelists and poets. Some voices, like the great poet and socialist, Nazim Hikmet, made their criticisms directly and were thus forced into exile.⁴⁷¹ Others, like Sabahattin Ali, were likely assassinated for their views. Despite these risks, fiction was a way to express the frustration, uncertainty, loss, and pain that many felt in the years and decades after 1923.

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, in one of his early essays, described this experience of loss and disorientation in terms of “a man who loses his mind on a crowded street.”⁴⁷² The metaphor of ‘losing one’s mind’ was apt: for those who felt the violence and disorientation of the marginalization and mass forgetting of the Ottoman world, this loss was mingled with a sense of uncertainty about what exactly had been lost: an ambiguity about how one was to relate to the new, furiously modernizing Turkish nation, and to the Ottoman world that had been seemingly left behind. For

⁴⁶⁷ For an excellent survey of this early Republican process of ‘Turkification’, see Yılmaz 2013. On the creation of a the idea of Turkish “homeland,” see Özkan 2012.

⁴⁶⁸ Navaro 2002

⁴⁶⁹ As Şerif Mardin quips, “In the early days of the Republic, and, indeed, up to the 1950’s the majority of educated Turks were willy nilly followers of Kemalism; for them the enemy was religious ‘obscurantism’,” with Ottoman symbols and traditions generally lumped together with this Orientalized specter of cultural backwardness. Mardin 1978, 231-2.

⁴⁷⁰ On the absence of textual evidence of criticism of the Kemalist project in Turkey’s first decades, see Philliou 2011.

⁴⁷¹ While those with real or imagined ties to communism were among the most targeted intellectuals of the republic’s first decades (this association driving the poet Nazim Hikmet into exile, and precipitating the assassination of the novelist Sabahattin Ali), anyone who spoke too outwardly and too negatively against the Kemalist narrative of national history could find themselves imperiled, and there was certainly much self-censorship during the one-party period (roughly, from 1927 to 1950). For one account of intellectual opposition during the Republic’s early years, see Christine M. Philliou. *Turkey: A Past Against History*. Oakland: University of California Press. 2021.

⁴⁷² Tanpınar 2016, 230

those such as Tanpınar, Ali, Hikmet, or Peyami Safa, all born into the Ottoman world but who came to maturity after it had already ended, the spectral presence of this world was felt in monuments, ruins, non-Muslim communities expunged of their former residents, and the increasingly unintelligible (because of the replacement of the Arabic script for the Latin one) Arabic alphabet inscriptions covering the graveyards, archways, and facades of modernizing Turkish cities. For those who remembered something of the Ottoman world, here was a catastrophe that had been insufficiently mourned and that seemed to have split the soul in two. In the words of Mümtaz (Tanpınar's existentially harried protagonist in *Hüzür*), "How strange...I have two worlds [...] I am between two worlds, two loves. It means I am not a whole! Could we all be like this?..."⁴⁷³

In the long aftermath of empire, writers and artists who confronted this insufficiently mourned, partially obscured loss faced multiple challenges. Of these, an exemplary difficulty concerned what we, following Belge, might call the "canon" (*kanon*).⁴⁷⁴ For novelists who held a melancholic (in the precise Freudian sense of something lost but unable to be properly mourned and thus moved beyond) attachment to the Ottoman past, such a canon appeared increasingly ambiguous and unavailable—in no small part because the tools necessary to appreciate it (tools including, first and foremost, linguistic competency) were not being taught to younger generations. For writers like Tanpınar, therefore, the national canon would have to be constituted out of a mass of traces and fragments.⁴⁷⁵ In this way, the intellectuals and artists who grew up in the aftermath of empire, but who were unable or unwilling to submit to the state sponsored project of what Elif Shafak has called "collective amnesia,"⁴⁷⁶ or what anthropologist Esra Özyürek calls "administered forgetting,"⁴⁷⁷ were forced to work without the support of a living tradition from which to draw creative succor and intellectual orientation.⁴⁷⁸ Despite what Tanpınar called the "conspiracy of silence"⁴⁷⁹ imposed against the Ottoman past (and himself as its anamnesis), some artists/

⁴⁷³ Tanpınar 2010, 284. Mümtaz is here discussing his doomed relationship with Nuran, his object of desire and self-acknowledged fetishization, but his sentiment—like his relationship with Nuran in general—speaks to a broader predicament of Turkish society in the aftermath of empire.

⁴⁷⁴ Belge 2009, 81-93.

⁴⁷⁵ For a Derridian account of the fragmentation and obfuscation of the Ottoman linguistic-cultural inheritance, see Nergis Ertürk. *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011.

⁴⁷⁶ "Elif Shafak: 'Turkey is a Country of Collective Amnesia'." *Al-Monitor* January 14, 2014. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2014/01/elif-shafak-novelist-turkey-politics-identity.html>

⁴⁷⁷ Özyürek 2007

⁴⁷⁸ See Çınar 2005, esp. Chapter 4. To understand *but a sliver* of the pain that this forgetting precipitated in artists/intellectuals such as Tanpınar, one may think of the pain George Steiner felt when seeing that an allusion to "Roncevaux" in *The Sun Also Rises* had, in a new edition, been marked with an explanatory footnote for readers not familiar with *The Song of Roland*; poor Steiner, confronting this footnote within an intellectual culture that still maintained a largely coherent idea of 'the Western canon', would not have survived the relentless forgetting and footnoting that occurred in the Turkish Republic's first decades. It is notable that newer editions of classic midcentury works, such as Ali's *Madonna in a Fur Coat*, which were still written using many Ottoman words and references, now come with ample footnotes for the contemporary Turkish reader unfamiliar with these words/references.

⁴⁷⁹ Tanpınar used the term *Sükut suikast* to describe his feelings of marginalization among Turkey's educated class; yet it also suggested the state-sponsored suppression of Ottoman tradition, as Tanpınar's relative obscurity during his life was due, in no small part, because of the resistance of his prose and themes to the state-backed efforts of Turkifying culture and language. Making use of an Ottoman-era vocabulary and weaving critical themes into his poetry, polemic, and fiction, Tanpınar's work often clashed with the agenda of state-sponsored institutions, even as his work was never so controversial—as Nazim Hikmet's was, for instance—to be at risk of imprisonment or death.

intellectuals nevertheless attempted to reconstruct what had been lost, such as in Tanpınar's own attempt to lay out and concretize one part of an inventory of Ottoman literary history in his *19th Century Turkish Literary History*.⁴⁸⁰ Artistically, the attempt to sit with this loss, to consider the fullness of its social and psychological impact, could take the form of literary reflections on the palimpsestic layers of cultural history sedimented in the old cities of the new Turkey (as in Tanpınar's novel *Huzur*, or his nostalgic paeans to place in *Beş Şehir*), or in the satiric plays of Refik Halit Karay,⁴⁸¹ or in the novels and short stories of Sabahattin Ali, who portrayed the cultural drabness and intellectual mediocrity of 1930s Turkey in novels like *Madonna in a Fur Coat*, and the consequences of ethnic homogenization and the loss of Ottoman pluralism in stories like "Çirkince."⁴⁸² In such works, the preservation and possible reconstitution of some of what had been lost, along with the work of mourning that which was irrevocably gone, seemed necessary *before* the canon could be (re)constructed. It is a peculiarity of Turkish literary history that the attempt to represent and sit with loss has itself become canonical, with the mood and tenor of such mid-century classics becoming themselves canonical reference points for later novelists like Pamuk.

Other intellectuals, capitalizing on hefty resources provided by the state, would respond to the fragmentation of the Ottoman canon through the attempt to create a new, deeply Europeanized, canon—such as through the massive translation project, spearheaded by the state Translation Bureau (*Tercüman Bürosu*), which attempted to bring a dazzling array of "classics," predominantly Western, into a newly constructed (i.e., de-Ottomanized) Turkish vernacular.⁴⁸³ Yet despite his fondness for European literature (Shakespeare was, apparently, his favorite poet), and his broad support for institutions like the Translation Bureau,⁴⁸⁴ Tanpınar still seemed to feel that, without a clear sense of a specifically *Turkish* canon—a sense that would be possible only by understanding and making peace with what had been lost—writers like himself would remain in the painful position of having to confront modernization and Westernization with only a fragmented grounding in the traditions that existed prior to the arrival of these processes (and that could potentially act as a counterweight to them). Without such a canon or corpus as ground or guide, the simultaneous promise and threat of European modernity could not really be gauged from a specifically Turkish perspective: how could "we" judge what of European modernity is compatible with "our" society and traditions, Tanpınar often suggested, without a solid, compelling narrative of the trajectory and composition—the *Bildung*—of this "us"? Without such a narrative, could Turkey's position in regards to the West (or to anywhere else) be adequately determined? How could such questions even be *posed*, let alone answered, when the national self, the very corpus of the nation, was still undergoing a process of radical reformulation, with no "banister" to lean on?

To summarize the above, if late Ottoman writers like Ahmet Mithat were able to inhabit a more or less firmly grounded life-world and cultural-discursive tradition, which could be differentiated from and therefore potentially reconciled with, even enhanced by, European modernity, then the generations coming to maturity after 1923 did not have access to such a

⁴⁸⁰ Tanpınar 1988

⁴⁸¹ For an extended treatment of Karay's 'oppositional' writings vis-a-vis what Philliou calls the "Kemalist paradigm," see Philliou 2011 and 2021.

⁴⁸² This element of Ali's work is often missed, although it is blatant in the opening chapters of *Madonna in a Fur Coat*. Ali's stories such as "Çirkince" and "Sırça Köşk," furthermore, along with elements of other novels like *İçimizdeki Şeytan*, can be read as pointed social critiques of Turkish society in the 1930s. Ali, a leftist, was assassinated in 1948, for reasons now generally accepted as having been political, perhaps directly orchestrated by members of the Kemalist establishment.

⁴⁸³ Gürçağlar 2008

⁴⁸⁴ Konuk 2010, 77

tradition; or at least not in anything like the way their predecessors had. For Tanpınar's generation, a stable and coherent tradition (which could either ground the critique of the West and/or provide the second term for a 'synthesis' between the Turkish and the European, the Eastern and the Western, the modern and that which had preceded it) was *itself* something that had to be either created or laboriously pieced back together out of a mass of fragments. There needed to be some ground on which to build a coherent and persuasive conception of what the (national) self was, where it came from, and where it was going. Without a narrative of national continuity and coherence, a narrative of what we will call *Bildung* in the following chapter, the construction and consolidation of national identity would remain an unfinished project, unable to firmly distinguish itself from other traditions and provide members of the nation with sufficient resources through which to build a shared sense of "imagined community."⁴⁸⁵ Without such a narrative, one which could project this community backward and forwards in "national-historical"⁴⁸⁶ time, an "ontological" uncertainty⁴⁸⁷ regarding nation, state, and identity would endure.

⁴⁸⁵ Anderson 2016

⁴⁸⁶ Bakhtin 52

⁴⁸⁷ Çapan & Zarakol

Chapter 5: Bildung, Modernism, & The Tragedy of East and West

I: Oblomovluk

Narmanlı Han, located at the Şişhane end of İstiklal Caddesi, near the hill that slopes down to Galata, was built in the 1830s to house the Russian Embassy. Designed by the Swiss-Italian architect Gaspare Fossati, whom Sultan Abdülmecid would later appoint to renovate the Hagia Sophia, Narmanlı Han's grand columned façade was, by the early 2000s, approaching dereliction. In the preceding century, the Han had been known for the kind of cheap lodgings that appealed to artists and writers, housing for a time the novelist and critic Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962), the painter and poet Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu (1911-1975), and the engraver and painter Aliye Berger (1903-1974). In the early 2010s, after private funding was secured for renovations, the complex's interior was paved with granite, the inner courtyard's greenery and resident cats were expunged, and the pension rooms and family businesses were replaced by global coffee chains, cosmetics shops, an "Irish pub," and a "museum of illusions." Excluding the months of lockdown, and despite the outpouring of criticism on social media that an architectural and historical landmark had been destroyed for profit, the new Starbucks in the Han's renovated courtyard was consistently packed with Turkish twenty-somethings, willing to pay the chain's relatively high prices in exchange for its Instagramable aesthetics. Sometimes I would meet Ceyda there, when the Han's closeness to the Şişhane metro stop, or Ceyda's desire (for which she always jokingly scolded herself) for a caramel latte, overrode my dislike for the American chain. Ceyda was one of my Turkish tutors, and before the lockdowns we would meet twice a week to chat, correct my grammar, and discuss the most recent visa travails of her boyfriend, a receptionist at a luxury hotel in Istanbul, who had been trying for the last few years to be transferred to a hotel in the U.S.. Ceyda had graduated from Istanbul University, where she had studied Turkish literature, and our conversations tended to drift towards literature and etymology. So on a bright, bracing, November afternoon, after Ceyda had finished a lesson with a diplomat at the Dutch consulate, we met in Narmanlı Han's courtyard Starbucks and talked about the books we had been reading.

I told Ceyda that I had been exploring the work of Stefan Zweig (the once world-famous Austrian-Jewish novelist, whose life ended in exile and in suicide in 1942), having noticed how massively popular Zweig had become in Turkey, a popularity contrasting with his relative obscurity these days in America). After consulting national book-sale rankings (rankings that Zweig's works have dominated from the 2010s to the time of this writing), I had decided to read two of Zweig's bestselling stories in Turkey: "Chess Story," and "Letter from an Unknown Woman." Having finished them both a few days before our meeting, I told Ceyda that I had honestly enjoyed neither story, and was perplexed about Zweig's contemporary popularity among younger Turks.

"I haven't read "Chess Story," Ceyda said, "but I remember I liked "Letter from an Unknown Woman" when I read it in high school. It made me cry. But I think its a very Western kind of tragedy, the kind of thing you get in Shakespeare."

I told her I didn't quite understand what she meant.

"Well, why is the story so sad? What's the disaster? The tragedy is that the woman wanted this man, whom she barely knew—she wanted him so much. She dreamed of him every day and every night; the idea of him filtered through everything in her life as she tried to make him notice her, to realize her fantasy of him. But of course she can never have him because it was always just a fantasy...she sacrifices herself for a fantasy that she tries to make real. The girl is very foolish, but the story is moving. Well, it moved me. Anyways...the point is that I think this structure is the structure of tragedy in the West: a man (*bir adam*) dreams, he wants, he tries to have what he wants,

he commits himself to realizing it, and when he is inevitably ruined [by the pursuit of his object of longing] we cry for him.” She smiled. “In this case its a woman who is the one dreaming and wanting, but you know what I mean.”

This was, it seemed to me, as good a summary of “Letter from an Unknown Woman” as any (a story which begins with a young girl falling in love with her parents’ rakish neighbor, and subsequently follows her doomed efforts to realize a fantasy of obtaining his recognition and love).

“But that is the pattern isn’t it?” Ceyda continued. “Sometimes I think that it’s the foundation of most modern literature, I mean European novels but then Turkish ones, too. As soon as the hero has a dream or a big desire, then it’s “game over,”” she said, switching to English for the final phrase. “The fantasies (*baya*) of the hero is what makes everything start moving, but you know where it will lead. Disaster. I don’t think we had this in our old [Ottoman] literature, this way in which fantasies and desires make *so much happen*, but also lead to disaster... I feel like before Western literature, I mean before we started writing modern novels like those of, I don’t know, Proust or Dostoyevsky—before those novels began influencing us, a dream or a desire was still something to be contemplated, some source of pleasure. It didn’t make anything happen other than give pleasure... There was no need to do anything with it but to find in its appearance a kind of joy (*zevk*).”

Ceyda continued: “I think it’s in *Oblomov* that someone says that Europe is where everyone tries to fulfill their dreams but this makes them miserable; in the East [by contrast] dreams are something enjoyable but also pointless—they don’t make anything happen. Something like that. But we are all like European characters now, chasing fantasies and being miserable—or, if we aren’t like that, then we are like Oblomov: we swim in dreams but can’t get off the sofa.”

I had to buy a copy of *Oblomov* at a bookstore off İstiklal Caddesi and spend the better part of the evening skimming its pages to discover that the line Ceyda was referring to wasn’t in the novel, but was rather part of the introduction to the first Turkish translation. In the introduction, the translators Sabahattin Eyüboğlu and Erol Güney describe the characters of Oblomov and Stoltz (Oblomov’s hard-charging, pragmatic friend and foil) as respective representatives of an “Eastern” and a “Western” consciousness. Eyüboğlu and Güney write:

“Europe is the country of people who work to realize their fantasies. There, the unrealized fantasy is a source of pain, a subject of tragedy. As for the East, fantasies there are a pleasure, an occasion to escape from reality. The Easterner creates fantasies that begin and end in themselves, aimless and without purpose. The dream that replaces reality for Oblomov is for Stolz the preparation, the first step, of an enterprise.”⁴⁸⁸

In the “East,” the translators suggest, life once had a wholeness and a continuity that kept fantasies in check. Fantasies were pleasurable rather than ‘painful’: they provided an “escape” from the reality of material existence; they did not foster the desire to radically alter the conditions of one’s life. In the East, one could fantasize about other worlds, other selves, other kinds of life, without feeling the need to actualize these alternatives. In “the West,” by contrast, fantasies cannot remain in the imagination without becoming painful. They must be *acted on*—they must make something *happen*. The function of fantasy⁴⁸⁹ in the West is, in this manner, not pleasure or

⁴⁸⁸ Gonçarov 2006

⁴⁸⁹ I see no reason why the terminology here need be so precise: we can substitute “fantasy” with “dreams,” “imagination,” even “fiction”—any term that implies a contrast between what exists in *in potentia* in the mind and what already exists in actuality.

diversion. It is to imagine alternatives to, variations on, the world as one is already positioned within it, with these possible alternatives serving as models for changing the conditions of one's world. In other words, for the Westerner the aim of fantasy is not enjoyment but action. This is true whether the fantasized thing is riches or prestige; whether it is creating a 'key to all mythologies', building a communist utopia, or harnessing the energy of the sun. At issue is taking what was once only in the mind and attempting to manifest it in reality. If the ability to do this is, as Eyüboğlu and Güney suggest, the standard of Western success, the inability to do so is the root of Western "tragedy."

The tragedy of Oblomov, however, is *not* that he is unable to realize his fantasies; or, at least, this is but one element of his predicament. Oblomov's tragedy is not that he tries and fails to alter the conditions of his existence, in pursuit of profit or progress. His tragedy is that he cannot adequately participate in—and cannot even really understand—what in Ceyda's view is the paradigmatically Western attitude to fantasy and desire. For Oblomov is not quite a Westerner. A paradigm of the Russian "superfluous man," Oblomov is, as Eyüboğlu and Güney suggest, an essentially "Eastern" soul living in the rapidly modernizing, and thus Westernizing,⁴⁹⁰ society of mid-late 19th century Russia. While an heir to a modest estate (which he has nevertheless allowed, by inaction rather than maladroitness, to go to seed), Oblomov has become existentially homeless. Oblomov longs for the world of his childhood (the edenic town of Oblomova), but can neither return to this world nor adapt to the new one being built around him. Trapped between two worlds—which, again, Eyüboğlu and Güney refer to as East and West—Oblomov is paralyzed. Unlike Stolz (whose very name connotes a Germanic industrialism totally inaccessible to Oblomov), Oblomov cannot bring himself to even *try* to advance his position in the world, although he sometimes tries to convince himself that he ought to do this. Instead, what he really wants is the continuity, stability, and languid temporality of a world that has been lost. Although Oblomov sometimes rages against his inability to act (his inability to turn his dreams into 'the first step of an enterprise') these rages are not enough to compel him to even tie his shoes. And so, unable to rise to the demands of the new world being built around him, Oblomov remains on his sofa, encased in the cocoon of his dreams and memories, eventually ministered to by his landlady turned wife, who ministers to him as his "Oblomovitis" progresses towards death.

Oblomov, Eyüboğlu and Güney write in the late 60s, has received relatively little attention "in Europe." The reason, they argue, is precisely that Oblomov's "Eastern" attitude is too alien to Western readers. What they call "*Oblomovluk*" (a rendering of the Russian "Обломовщина," what we would call "Oblomovism" in English) has been difficult for Westerners to understand as anything other than indolence, depression, or darkly comic sloth. On the other hand, the translators write, *Oblomov* can be expected to "find a great understanding" in Turkey because "the conditions that created Oblomov [both the character and the attitude] *have been within us until very recently*."⁴⁹¹ For Turkey is one of those "Eastern nations on the path towards Europeanization" wherein "Oblomovism will not very easily be removed from [the people's] souls."⁴⁹² For the people of such countries, *Oblomov* is a monument to their own sense of loss: the loss of a non-Faustian consciousness and society,⁴⁹³ in which dreams and fantasies could be enjoyed as an escape from or an embellishment of life, rather than as fillips to live differently, to change reality, to hold apart what is and what might be, to bring something new or improved into existence. The fact that *Oblomov* has

⁴⁹⁰ Given that modernization in Russia, as most elsewhere, meant working to replicate many of the new economic, affective, intellectual, and sociopolitical structures of Western Europe.

⁴⁹¹ Gonçarov 2006, 13 (emphasis added)

⁴⁹² Ibid

⁴⁹³ Seiden & Louria 1969

been and remains (judging from both sales data and personal observation) far more popular in Turkey than in the English-speaking world may be germane to Eyüboğlu and Güney's point.

This perspective on the difference between "East" and "West" is not particular to the translators of Goncharov's portrayal of a man caught between a "traditional" (*geleneksel*) world that is dying and a modern (*modern*) one that is in the process of actualization. Many of the great works of Turkish letters since 1923 have examined such insufficiently modern, insufficiently Westernized types, who are fated to live among the fragments of one world and on the margins of another. Sometimes, these characters are presented as tragic heroes; other times they are made into representatives of a backwards consciousness that must be reformed away or stamped out. Perhaps most often, however, these characters are portrayed as *both* heroic *and* dysfunctional, romantic *and* "superfluous." In particular, such characters have been regularly used to thematize a tension between, on the one hand, what is sensed to be the lost fullness and stability of an "Eastern," pre-modern, Ottoman-Islamic world and, on the other, the dynamic and relentless Faustianism of Western modernity. This lost world often appears as a kind of edenic whole, which once gathered together all of life within an all-embracing, vivifying totality or "whole" (*bütünlük*). Assured by the at once life-giving and life-constraining force of normativity and tradition, within this wholeness the demand for perpetual transformation could not take root, with the principal function of fantasy being to provide pleasurable diversions from reality, rather than injunctions to change it.

This contrast between East and West appears Orientalist, in the most basic sense of presupposing a rigid division—what Said called an "ontological and epistemological distinction—between West and East. This does not necessarily mean that this contrast is inherently imperialist, however. In fact, a similar view about the difference between East and West appealed to Said himself. As he wrote in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, within this nominally "Eastern" world (Said speaks of an "Islamic world-view") there is no "desire to create an alternative world" in the imagination and then "modify or augment the real world" through reference to the imagined one.⁴⁹⁴ By the late 19th century, however, this nominally Eastern world was breaking down in the face of European imperialism and the demands of globalizing capital, with what the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty calls "Western political modernity" first encroaching upon other forms of life and then forcibly restructuring them around the sign of modernity and the fact of Western power.⁴⁹⁵ Through this process, in Oblomov's Russia as in late Ottoman Turkey, a tension was introduced into the relationship between imagination and reality, such that the discrepancy or disjunction (as discussed in the previous section) between the contents of the former and the actualities of the latter became problematic, even painful. As traditional (here simply meaning that which existed, or is imagined to have existed, in the past but that is now designated as fundamentally *other* to modernity) forms of life were attenuated, a specifically modern type of tragedy was also globalized. This was not Faustian tragedy, in which the hero must be willing to risk the sacrifice of her soul, of her sociofamilial relations, of the values and people once loved but now appear as impediments on the path of progress. No, this is not Faustian but what we might call "Oblomovian" tragedy: the tragedy of a person (whose life is usually a synecdoche or allegory for society at large) who is unable to take up a properly modern attitude towards fantasy and desire and who is thus lost between an old world that is disappearing and a new one that is still (in Russia at the time of *Oblomov*'s publication and in Turkey in the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s) under the process of construction. It is in this that the

⁴⁹⁴ Said 1985, 81. Said is here specifically talking here about why modern literary genres such as the novel and the memoir did not exist in Islamic societies prior to the late 19th century, when westernization and colonization brought these genres—and the social structures and psychological habits that are conducive to them—into these Islamic societies.

⁴⁹⁵ Chakrabarty 2000

Oblomovian protagonist can be said to occupy a state of “transcendental homelessness,” to borrow the phrase (if not quite the exact meaning) proposed by Lukács.

To gain another vantage onto this framing of the difference between West and East, we can consider an early essay by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar. Tanpınar, much of whose oeuvre can be seen as an extended meditation on the legacies and losses of modernization/Westernization in post-Ottoman Turkey, was preoccupied with the relationship between the world introduced by Western modernity and the world that modernity seemed to have murdered or marginalized. For Tanpınar, the problem of modernity and the question of how to relate to the Ottoman past were inextricable from the aforementioned “East-West Problem.” In an essay simply titled “East and West” (*Şark ve Garb*) published in the journal *Yeni Adam* (New Man) in 1937, Tanpınar begins by assuring the reader that he understands that “the terms East or Eastern civilization have no meaning on their own,” and that there is no “single East” available for investigation.⁴⁹⁶ The “problem of East and West,” Tanpınar writes, has been seen by many as the issue that will “resolve life”; a topic about which “conversation cannot be abandoned,” and which is often taken up as a kind of “sport” for intellectuals and artists to play amongst themselves.⁴⁹⁷ When confined to the “world of pure thought,” the “problem” of the difference between East and West was a kind of game, an ever renewing prompt for speculation and debate. Much of this speculation/debate was, for Tanpınar, facile, vague, and over-generalizing. Nevertheless, he thought that *some* generalizations about East and West were possible, provided that one remembered that whatever the word “East” referred to it was always “a synonym” for a kind of “civilization” (*medeniyet*) or “mentality” (*zihniyet*) that was “fundamentally different” from the civilization/mentality of “the West.”

The most critical difference between Eastern and Western civilization was to be found in the value each placed on what Tanpınar called “*ferdi saadet*,” a term that can be translated as “personal happiness,” but which Tanpınar seems to use in the sense of something between “well-being” and “joy,” perhaps akin to the Greek concept of *eudaemonia*. For Tanpınar, *ferdi saadet* concerned the way in which society provides for and prioritizes the well-being of its members.⁴⁹⁸ In the East, society guided the individual towards happiness and well-being by constraining both the freedom of choice and the kinds of fantasies of fulfillment that the unfettered mind may invent for itself. Western civilization, by contrast, placed at best a “secondary” (*tali*) value on happiness, with “even communism” being chiefly concerned with “justice” (*adalet*) rather than happiness. Western civilization was undoubtedly preoccupied with the “human being” (*insan*), a concern that Tanpınar connected (somewhat tenuously) to the Christian doctrine of original sin.⁴⁹⁹ Yet this paradigmatically Western concern had developed, not into a preoccupation with happiness or well-being, but into a compulsion to treat one’s life as a “duty” (*vazife*) or a “test” (*imtihan*). This duty was not to promote happiness. It was to rethink and remake the world as one finds it, to become someone other than

⁴⁹⁶ Tanpınar 2016, 221

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 222

⁴⁹⁸ We should understand the individual here simply as a specific person, and don’t unduly freight it with the assumptions European liberalism, which Tanpınar was undoubtedly aware of but is not here writing in dialogue with.

⁴⁹⁹ “Eastern man does not feel the painful value of being the product of the sin of Christian birth” Tanpınar 2016, 224. This connection is somewhat misleading, if only because there is of course a “Eastern” Christianity, and Christianity did not begin as a “Western” religion. The understanding of the doctrine of original sin has, in fact, been quite divergent between the Eastern and Western churches, with the latter historically far more insistent on a draconian, punitive conception of sin and punishment. Tanpınar’s hypothesis therefore seems more appropriate for consideration of Western “civilization” than of Christianity as such—or, in other words, we might consider whether it was Western civilization that impacted the conception of sin in Christianity within the West, rather than the reverse.

who one is by dint of inherited sociofamilial relationships (i.e., to reject determination by “filiation,” by the circumstances of birth). It is to charge towards the realization this or that imagined possible, regardless of whether the pursuit of this possible violates established norms and traditions, risking progressive alienation from the world and ultimately tragedy. This risk is taken as necessary, however, since unlike “Eastern man” the “Westerner” is primed to never be satisfied with the world as he or she finds it, with the lot he or she has been assigned from the beginning. Accepting this lot is, indeed, progressively marked as a sign of sloth, weakness, timidity, or even immorality (insofar as a willingness to take risks and pursue profit without concern for sociofamilial relationship is highly moralized in modern Western societies). It is these dynamics that led Tanpınar to observe that the Westerner is possessed by a “searching soul, a life unsatisfied and ceaselessly unhappy with present limits and necessities, a mind that forces the door of all problems, and finally a man who never uses the phrase “*“felekten bir gün çalmak”*”—a phrase that literally means “steal a day from destiny,” but suggests the attitude of one willing to pursue a day of pleasure or diversion, without the compulsion to mobilize all available time and resources in pursuit of yet unrealized aims and profits.⁵⁰⁰ In short, unable “to steal a day from destiny,” the Westerner understands life as a ceaseless task to obtain a good or goal present in the mind but not yet realized in external reality. Happiness (*saadet*) is at best a “secondary” value here, something to be readily “sacrificed”—or at least deferred until the next life—in order to bring the imagined possible into existence, no matter how much harm this effort may cause to others and ultimately to oneself.

“In the East,” by contrast, “personal happiness is taken as the purpose of life,” even to the almost paradoxical extent that “out of concern for this happiness the individual person will be destroyed without hesitation.” While the Westerner sees themselves as having a purpose more important than happiness or well-being, the Easterner prioritizes these above all else. Because of this, certain desires must be censored and certain expectations curtailed out of a concern for their destabilizing effects on the possibility of *saadet*. Conditioned to respect the inherited order of things, the Easterner is constantly reminded that, “your sufferings are the product of your desires, remove them and you will be happy.” In this fashion, Tanpınar writes that all of life in the East has historically been organized in the form of a great “codex,” one that provides the individual with a clear guide as to which fantasies or desires are acceptable or harmless and which must be interdicted for the good of both the desiring individual and of the community of which they are part. In other words, specific desires or aspirations are proscribed out of an uncompromising commitment to *saadet*: “the Eastern mind is able to renounce any thing. But it cannot accept the unfortunate phrase... “Happiness is not an ideal worthy of humankind.””⁵⁰¹

It is on these grounds that Tanpınar proposes that the distinction between West and East lies in the “fact” that “the Easterner accepts life as a voyage prepared for them by a series of accidents,” with “accidents” here meaning not randomness but a kind of providentialism that can only be consented to, even if we cannot comprehend it. Rejecting the possibility of such providence and the reality of limitations on our knowledge and desire, Westerners open the door to tragedy by “understanding [the “voyage” of life] as a mission, a test,” something to be taken control of, scrutinized, redirected, but never accepted as end in itself. It is this felt need to question and transform what has been given, and the inevitable feeling of failure and loss that arises when one cannot do this, that leads the Westerner to tragedy. It is precisely this difference, Tanpınar suggests, that explains “why tragedy is not found in Eastern literature.”⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ Tanpınar 1970, 226

⁵⁰¹ Tanpınar 1970, 224

⁵⁰² Ibid, 222-228

In this account of the essential difference between West and East, Tanpınar does not differentiate between post-Enlightenment (or post-Renaissance, depending on one's dating) Europe and the forms of life that existed, even until quite recently, among much of the agrarian and working-class population of Europe. But we can impute a distinction between the modern West's (if the term "modern West" isn't oxymoronic⁵⁰³) "Faustian" consciousness and the "traditional" forms of life which this Faustian consciousness would come to destroy throughout *both* Europe *and* its colonies—even if the latter, in most cases, suffered far worse than the former.⁵⁰⁴ In any event, and laying aside the question of whether what Tanpınar calls the "consciousness" of modern West is inveterate or thoroughly modern (i.e. whether we should attribute this consciousness to the beginnings of "Western civilization," or whether it developed later in Western history), we should note that Tanpınar does *not* propose what the English introduction to *Oblomov* calls an "anecdote to the endless striving of Faustian man."⁵⁰⁵ In other words, Tanpınar does not offer up the "Eastern mentality" as superior alternative available to the exhausted Westerner, who is always thirsty but never satiated. To my knowledge, indeed, Tanpınar never argued that one of these two civilizational "mentalities" is superior or inferior, better or worse. Even so, what he *does* repeatedly suggest, in this essay as elsewhere, is that while the Western mentality may be more productive, dynamic, and prone to technical advancement, the Eastern one is more conducive to well-being and happiness.

For this reason, Tanpınar, throughout his oeuvre, suggests that a specifically Turkish "synthesis" or "composite" ("*terkip*")⁵⁰⁶ of these two mentalities was necessary for Turkey succeed. What might this synthesis look like? It would consist, Tanpınar suggested, in a compromise between the "Eastern" prioritization of happiness through normativity and constraint and the Western demand to reimagine and remake both world and self. The opposition to be synthesized, in other words, would be between a world in which limits are placed on the subject's desire and will-to-power for the sake of both individual and communal happiness/well-being, versus a world in which such limits are taken as obstacles to be overcome in pursuit of hypothetical goods, profits, enjoyments, ideals, etc.. Such a synthesis might not have been needed in the past, when "the Eastern" world still composed what Tanpınar called a totality (*bütünlük*). But now, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the processes of intense modernization and Westernization that followed, such a synthesis was required to save Turkey from Oblomov's fate: the fate of being unable to live in *either* East or West, to fully adopt the "mentality" of *either* "civilization," to follow the injunctions of the latter or return fully to the former (both because the former has been thoroughly marginalized, and because there are elements of the latter that those like Tanpınar wished to retain). This mode of tragedy is thus a more intense version of the modern, Western, Faustian, one: not the tragedy of being unable to subject world to idea, to force reality into accordance with one's fantasies, but the

⁵⁰³ Both insofar as "the West," in its prevailing meaning today, is a thoroughly modern concept; and insofar as it is unclear whether the sociocultural features of Western countries prior to, say, the Enlightenment have much organic connection to the sociocultural features of those countries today. In other words, the question of whether "modernity" is the product of a pre-existing "Western" culture/world/civilization, or whether it abolishes and washes its hands of these pre-modern modes, is very much an open one.

⁵⁰⁴ My implication here is not to diminish the suffering of the colonies. Far from it. Rather, it is to suggest how brutal the transition to modernity was within Europe, and how many of the techniques of subjugation and exploitation developed in the colonies were exported back to metropole and used to exploit the working and agrarian classes. While, in the post-colonial, neo-imperial period since WWII, the West has continued to brutalize and exploit much of the formerly colonized world, it has also progressively immiserated its own populations, mobilizing tactics of repression and control not dissimilar from those used by Western governments against non-Western states.

⁵⁰⁵ Goncharov 1978, 15

⁵⁰⁶ The Turkish word *terkip* can be translated in a number of ways, such as "composition," "combination," "amalgamation," or "synthesis."

tragedy of being unable or unwilling to take up the attitude necessary to do this. The tragedy, not of trying and being crushed by the attempt, not of risking one's soul to the devil in order to triumph, but of being *incapable* of selling one's soul, no matter how much one might, at moments, wish to do this. In other words, Oblomov's tragedy is *not* the paradigmatically Western one described by Ceyda and echoed by Tanpınar: Oblomov is not a tragic figure because he fails to succeed by the standards of a modernizing, Westernizing society. He is a tragic figure because, to repeat, he can *neither* bring himself to take up the "Western" "mentality" *nor* adequately recreate or restore the "Eastern" one that is being progressively bulldozed. Nor still can he work out a means by which these two mentalities might be brought together into a new synthesis, which might offer a third way out of the impasses of modernization and Westernization. This is what crushes him. And this is what, in the end, has crushed so many Oblomovs around the world, including in Turkey. The central features of Oblomovian tragedy, therefore, are these: a felt inaccessibility of the past, a seemingly insuperable alienation from the present, and a feeling that one will never succeed in reconciling the two so as to forge a third way beyond the polarities of past and present, tradition and modernity, East and West. One cannot live within *or* without either pole, and one cannot transform what appears as a zero-sum choice into an opening onto what Tanpınar called a "new life" that is "real and commanding." It is to this apparent impossibility of synthesis that we now turn.

II: The Turkish *Bildungsheld*

The question of a "synthesis" between East and West, tradition and modernity, has been, as addressed in Chapter 4, an important theme in Turkish letters since at least the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. What is often missed, however, is that this felt need for synthesis is *also* an important theme in European literature and criticism, as discussed in detail in Chapter 4. For Europeans also, the advent of modernity brought with it a perceived need for a synthesis between a pre-modern world, in which normativity and tradition were valued⁵⁰⁷ for their promotion of stability and well-being, and a modern world, in which normativity and tradition must constantly make way for the manipulation of reality and the perpetual transformation of self and society. As we saw in the Chapter 4, the novel has been a key site in which the struggle for synthesis has been thematized. This has been particularly the case, as Moretti notes, in the "Bildungsroman," or novel of personal development, one of the most influential genres of 19th century European literature, even if the features of the genre are debated, and which novels should be included as instances of it is not always clear. The Bildungsroman, as Moretti and others have argued, is that literary genre in which imagination and reality, autonomy and normativity, and, implicitly, modernity and tradition are most in conflict: it is the genre in which the tragedy of those who cannot achieve their dreams, who are crushed by life in the attempt to change or control it, is most thematized. It is therefore highly relevant for us here.

In a provocative article that takes up the question of "synthesis" in Turkish literary modernity, and in the Turkish Bildungsroman in particular, literature scholar F. Meltem Gürle describes the hero of the Turkish Bildungsroman as "wandering on the peripheries" of life; torn between "reality" and "ideal" and unable to adequately "locate" either the grounding force of "tradition" or a "telos" by which such tradition could be revitalized, recreated, or overcome.⁵⁰⁸ For Gürle, the hero of the Turkish Bildungsroman is paralyzed between "modernity" and "tradition," "future" and "past," "imagination" and "reality," individual autonomy and social normativity. Most of all, the Turkish "*Bildungsheld*" (the protagonist of a Bildungsroman) encounters these oppositions as threaded through a perceived and painful distinction between East and West—a division that Gürle also

⁵⁰⁷ As noted in chapter 4, the question of whether the past 'really' existed in this "traditional" fashion, or rather it is merely viewed as such from the standpoint of modernity, is one that I cannot treat here.

⁵⁰⁸ Gürle 2013

suggests, as we have repeated through these pages, is inseparable from the modernity/tradition one. Stuck between these poles, the Turkish *Bildungsheld* is, Gürle writes, unable to do much save dream and dwell in memory, without possibility of making these dreams a reality or of returning to a the kind of life lived in the past—whether one’s own life, or the life that one’s predecessors, such as denizens of the Ottoman Empire, are imagined to have once lived. More specifically, and unlike what Gürle sees as the position of the European protagonist (who, Gürle argues, operates and ultimately triumphs within the modern “cult of success and achievement”) the Turkish protagonist is uncertain which path to take.⁵⁰⁹ Unsure of how to escape a feeling of what Gürle also refers to as “transcendental homelessness,” Gürle argues that the Turkish *Bildungsheld* is unable to decide between the world of dreams and the world of reality, between the memories of a lost or broken past and the promises and exigencies of a wounded present.⁵¹⁰ At the same time, the Turkish hero is unsure whether some “synthesis” between these apparent alternatives is possible, or even desirable.

To make her argument, Gürle takes the novels of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962), Oğuz Atay (1933-1977), and Orhan Pamuk (1952-) as guides, although we can add the name Sabahattin Ali (1907-1948) to Gürle’s list, given that Ali’s works (particularly his *Madonna in a Fur Coat*) share many of the same themes treated in the writings of Atay, Tanpınar, and Pamuk. Considering these novelists, Gürle argues that the Turkish *Bildungsheld* is indeed incapable of realizing a synthesis, not only between East and West, but between what literary critic and translator Erdağ Gökner, in an echo of Belge’s “East-West problematic,” calls the “modernity/tradition problematic.”⁵¹¹ The most iconic protagonists brought to life by such authors (to which we could add Sabahattin Ali, among others) struggle not merely to *locate* something that has been lost but to provide an adequate *account* of what has been lost—a *narrative* of what this loss really consists of, what it means, and what might fill the felt “absence” (what Tanpınar referred to as a *boşluk*) that it has left behind. Characters like Tanpınar’s Mumtaz (*A Mind at Peace*), Atay’s Selim (*The Disconnected*), Ali’s Raif Efendi (*Madonna in a Fur Coat*) or Pamuk’s Kemal (*The Museum of Innocence*) search to reclaim or re-experience a lost world or period, usually through flights of memory and imagination that are precipitated by encounters with objects, songs, places, books, diaries, etc., associated with this loss. Yet it is precisely the preoccupation with loss, with the past as a melancholic object of longing, that makes it impossible for these characters to live comfortably in the present. Worse still, the memory of what has been lost appears increasingly difficult to access, even in the imagination. Torn between a lost world or period (again, whether an earlier period in one’s own life or in one’s society) that can be accessed only through memory and fantasy—and even then only obliquely, from a temporal and often spatial distance—and a contemporary world within which they cannot feel fully at home, these characters ‘wander on the peripheries,’ as Gürle puts it.

Unlike Oblomov, however, these characters usually *can* get off the couch. As for Ali’s Raif Efendi (who retreats from the vivifications and romance of 1920s Germany only to be condemned to a slow death of the soul within the drab bureaucracy of 1930s Ankara, working expertly but without enthusiasm or praise as a translator), these characters can live and work within the contemporary world. Yet they remain inwardly alienated from it, no more successful than Oblomov in accommodating their psyche or soul to it or in restoring, or simply making peace with, what has been left behind. The tragedy of Mumtaz or Raif Efendi is, therefore, *not* that they fail to achieve a desired good that exists in the mind but not yet in external reality, as Ceyda (and Tanpınar) characterized “Western tragedy.” The tragedy of these Turkish characters is not that they chase a goal so relentlessly that they destroy themselves and those they care for. Their tragedy rests in how

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, 99

⁵¹⁰ Ibid

⁵¹¹ Gökner 2009, 479

they are so bound up with fragmentation and loss, so unable to process it or decide how to confront it, that they are pressed further and further into the consolations of memory and imagination, leaving them progressively divorced from the world around them. Unlike for, say, Joyce's Leopold Bloom or Stephen Daedalus, or for Proust's Narrator, there is no possibility of recovering what has been lost through an act of what I called above "creative consolidation," whereby past and present are brought into life-giving synthesis.

Compare this to the situation of Bloom, Daedalus, or of Proust's Narrator, who begin their novels in search (knowingly or unconsciously) of something from both their individual and cultural past that will redeem both past and present, opening the possibility of an altered future. Seeking out this lost object by descending deeper and deeper into memory, such characters emerge triumphant by the novel's end, able to say, as Molly Bloom concludes *Ulysses*, "yes" to past, present, and future. The difference between the fate of Joyce's Bloom and of Tanpınar's Mumtaz, for instance, is a redemptive homecoming on the one hand and a soul-crushing one on the other: Bloom ends the novel with a renewal of marital intimacy and the promise of a surrogate son in Stephen, freeing Bloom from his melancholy over his long dead son, Rudy; Mumtaz ends his novel having lost both his beloved Nuran, his friend and nemesis Suat, and his beloved cousin and father-figure Ihsan, all as world war looms. Raif Efendi ends his novel with his narrative of the past already written (in the form of diaries), but with this past lacking any living connection to the present save as a monument to lost time. Just before his death, surrounded by a parasitic family who loathe him, Raif bequeathes these diaries to the nameless narrator, who will presumably preserve and cherish them. but who will be unable to render them as anything but a beautiful monument to the tragedy of Raif's life. Compare this to Proust's Narrator, who ends his massive novel by leaving us with the presumption that the novel we are reading was in fact written by him, and that this process of narration has reconnected present and future to "lost time," transforming loss into art and healing the Narrator's sense of temporal entropy and biographical disorientation. For protagonists like Mümtaz or Raif Efendi, by contrast, there is little save an progressively veiled past, an increasingly drab and lifeless present, and a future that seems unlikely to redeem or restore what has been lost.

This predicament, Gürle argues, is inseparable from Turkey's experience of modernization and Westernization, as the new Turkish nation "found itself in the wake of Western modernity... engaged in a constant reconstruction of the image of the "West" as well as an effort to regenerate the long lost "East.""⁵¹² Just as post-Ottoman Turkey had been, in Gürle's reading, unable to either adequately embrace (Western) modernity or authentically revitalize its (Ottoman-Islamic) traditions, so too has the Turkish *Bildungsbeld* teetered between a "homesickness" for a lost past and a "longing" for an elusive modernity.⁵¹³ As for the Turkish nation as a whole, at the core of this predicament is a series of anxious questions, trending sometimes towards paranoia, sometimes towards melancholy, sometimes towards despair. Is the protagonist, as both an individual and as a metonymic stand-in for society writ large, powerful enough to reconnect with the absent presence of the past, with the void or emptiness that the past has left in its wake? Can the hero grasp the promise of the modern future on their own? Can they reject it on their own? Does the collective possess this power of affirmation or repudiation? Or is the collective the source of the uncertainty about where to stand, where to look? Did the longed-for past really exist in the way it is dreamt of? Are the vaunted promises of modernity, of what Ahiska calls "the imagined idea of 'the West'," obtainable?⁵¹⁴ Or does pursuing these promises inevitably lead to failure, humiliation, and tragedy? Finally, is there some way to bring together the fractured parts of self, time, and society, one by which past and present might be

⁵¹² Ibid, 98

⁵¹³ Ibid, 106

⁵¹⁴ Cited from Gürle 2013, 108

affirmatively united in a kind of “eternal return”? Before the weight of such questions, and uncertain of where to turn and on what to stand, the Turkish *Bildungsbeld* appears paralyzed before the very tensions that her European counterpart is (again, in Gürle’s reading) able to ultimately ‘reconcile’ or ‘synthesize’.⁵¹⁵

Indeed, Gürle argues that the Turkish protagonist, unlike his⁵¹⁶ European counterparts, is ultimately “overcome by the dichotomy of tradition and modernity,” unable to complete the “journey in search of authenticity” that is necessary to become either properly “modern” or authentically “traditional.” By contrast, Gürle argues that the paradigmatic European hero manages to complete this journey, ultimately able to reconcile this “dichotomy” without allowing the former to become “stuck” on the “periphery” of the latter (or vice versa).⁵¹⁷ In contrast to the European protagonist’s success, the Turkish protagonist’s failure to accomplish this journey suggests not only the distinctiveness of Turkish literary modernity: it implies, for Gürle, something important about Turkish modernity *tout court*, indexing how the “Janus-faced nature of [Turkey’s] project of modernization”⁵¹⁸ rendered future and past, ideal and reality, modernity and tradition, into “abstract ideal[s],” difficult to experience as anything other than ‘externalized’ objects of contemplation, longing, or nostalgia.⁵¹⁹ Gürle’s comparison of Turkish and European literary forms here is not unusual. Similar arguments can be found in the work of other Turkish literary critics, who have likewise flagged the apparent paralysis of Turkish protagonists in the face of a rapidly changing world that they seem unable to affirm or repudiate, live within or without.⁵²⁰ Orhan Pamuk, for instance, has made a career out of characters who “wander on the margins” between a melancholic past and a wounded present. This past may be beautiful, even intoxicating. But it is available only as something in memory, imagination, or a museum—not as something living in the present.⁵²¹ Such characters wander, in melancholic reverie, despair, or denial, along paths limboed between times and places, pouring their souls into memories, fantasies and, frequently, the everyday objects in which images of lost wholeness are stored and out of which they occasionally erupt. Modernity and tradition, future and past, like East and West, exist in Pamuk’s novels as both oppressively real and awfully elusive, with the protagonist lost somewhere between them.⁵²²

Gürle’s argument is far more nuanced than a mere recapitulation of old tropes about the alleged “failure” or “incapacity” of Turkish modernity to either adequately adapt to Western models or, alternatively, to forge an “authentic” (non-dichotomizing) culture of its own. At the same time, Gürle has been accused of precisely this reiteration of tired tropes.⁵²³ This criticism may have some merits, especially given that Gürle, as in my recapitulation of her argument, relies heavily on a

⁵¹⁵ Gürle 2013, 98; 110

⁵¹⁶ The protagonists of all of the novels cited by Gürle are male, and she uses the male pronoun throughout her article. The gender dynamics of these novels, and of the issues Gürle treats, are important. Unfortunately, I am unable to give them attention here.

⁵¹⁷ Gürle 2013, 96

⁵¹⁸ *ibid*, 97

⁵¹⁹ *ibid*, 109

⁵²⁰ See, for instance, Gürbilek 2003

⁵²¹ The museum is an important theme in Pamuk’s work, animating one of his most beloved novels, *The Museum of Innocence* (Masumiyet Müzesi) and serving as inspiration for an actual museum in Istanbul based on the novel.

⁵²² See, for instance, Özgül 2017.

⁵²³ See Hemmat 2017

language of incapacity and failure. Yet the primary issue with Gürle's argument concerns, in my estimation, the *comparison* she makes between Turkish and European literary modernity. Put bluntly, the "success" Gürle attributes to the Western *Bildungsheld*—that the European protagonist ultimately succeeds in reconciling themselves with the demands of modernity—is highly misleading. As indicated in Chapter 4, *Failure*, not success, is the guiding theme and primary pedagogical mode of both "Classical" and modern European letters, even if Classical protagonists tend to recognize the error of their ways before being crushed by them. Specifically, Gürle is mistaken about the "cult of success and achievement" that she projects onto the European novel, and about the successful syntheses she suggests that the characters of such novels realize. Because of this, and despite her nuanced and compelling argument (so compelling that I have devoted multiple pages to it), she seems to miss a key dimension of the difference between the Turkish case and the European one.

To see this point clearly, let me briefly recapitulate Gürle's argument: in her reading, the hero of the European Bildungsroman manages to achieve a reconciliation, or at least to adequately tolerate the tension, between past and future, modernity and tradition. By contrast, the Turkish protagonist "fails" this attempt. Unable to realize his fantasies of fulfillment (in part because he is not sure what they are or ought to be) the Turkish hero becomes mired in "a permanent delusion about himself and the world,"⁵²⁴ unable to locate a livable reality between a "nostalgia for the past" and an "impossible yearning for the modern."⁵²⁵ At the same time, the Turkish protagonist is unable to work out her relationship with the society of which she is a part, uncertain of whether the dichotomies of her lived existence are the consequence of her own weakness, of social-cultural disfunction, or of some external imposition that, if lifted, would clear the path to a better future. The European protagonist, by contrast, is suggested to succeed where the Turkish one failed. In actuality, however, and as discussed in Chapter 4, the European protagonist "succeeds" only in the Classical novel—with success defined as, to paraphrase Hegel, "sowing one's wild oats" (rejecting the normativity into which one was born) only to eventually recognize the folly of this attempt and come to voluntarily re-affiliate with the filiative, traditional, order. This apparent success, however, is largely a consequence of modernity's incomplete revolution: as for Elizabeth Bennet ultimately deciding to accept the filiative, patriarchal order (although she ultimately does so with a sense of volition and love rather than of obligation and constraint) the "traditional" world has not yet been fully dismantled in the time of Austin or Goethe. Later on, however, as steamroller modernity charges through the 19th century, this return to the traditional order becomes progressively impossible, with the protagonist of, say, *Jude the Obscure* or *Crime and Punishment* unable to reintegrate with society (although Raskolnikov receives a sort of divine pardon, reintegration into a higher truth, even as he remains separated from society). It is only with the rise of modernism that a reintegration into the world, through a reconciliation of past and present, tradition and modernity, becomes again possible, for the reasons and in the manner described in Chapter 4: principally, by a perilous descent into the past, followed by a return to the present armed with lessons/resources from the past, which are then used to reconcile past with present within a sense or narrative of "unbroken continuity." The modernist mode of synthesis doesn't always work, and there are many examples of characters from novels associated with modernism who are totally crushed by life, without much hope for salvation (take many of Conrad's works, for instance). Nevertheless, the theme is clear: failure is at the heart of the European novel. Failure is the default position, and it is only sometimes avoided and even then only after many chapters spent in the wilderness. When it is avoided, it is not by better embodying a "cult of success and achievement" (this "cult" is almost always shown, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, as a pathway to self-destruction) but by reintegrating oneself within inherited norms, traditions, symbols, values, etc.

⁵²⁴ Gürle 2013, 108

⁵²⁵ Ibid, 106

Gürle is undoubtedly correct in identifying Turkey's particular experience of modernization/Westernization as the key to understanding the predicament of the Turkish *Bildungsbeld*. The question is what element of this experience is most critical here. There are surely many candidates, a number of which have been detailed above. But one element that is perhaps insufficiently noted is the aforementioned absence, or at least marginalization, of the inherited resources of the past to temper and perhaps heal the wounds inflicted by steamroller modernity. As previously stressed, European modernists had a huge trove of resources to draw from, stretching back to ancient Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome. They encountered modernity with the most sturdy and ornate "banister" one could imagine—which is not to say that their task of holding onto this banister, of using it to navigate the relentless convulsions of the modern world, was an easy one. Indeed, the steamroller has by now driven this banister into disrepair, attenuating it so much over the past 70 odd years that it is questionable whether modernist strategies could succeed if attempted today. We in the West are too detached from these inherited resources to benefit from their potentially grounding power: we have, in a sense, entered into a position analogous to the one once occupied by Tanpınar, cut off from the past while bewildered by and increasingly estranged from the present.⁵²⁶

The tragedy of the Turkish *Bildungsbeld*—Oblomovian tragedy—can be seen here as a consequence of being cut off from the inherited resources of the past, from the "canon," from a living relationship with the past. This past and its resources are rendered unavailable in any way but through memories, dreams, fantasies, a few surviving objects, diaries, etc.. Even then, these connections to the past are limited, partial, opaque, locked behind—like the Hagia Sophia—"museum glass." Bereft of these resources, this connection to the past, the Turkish *Bildungsbeld*—like the authors who brought them to life—is forced to confront modernity without a banister. Of course these characters can hardly stand. Of course they "wander on the peripheries," with so little to guide and stabilize their "search for lost time." And why did this predicament obtain in Turkey but not in, say, France, or even in Ireland, itself a former colony? The answer is clear: the legacy and threat of Western empire and, as a means for managing this threat, the systematic delegitimization of all that smacked of "the East," of everything that risked conjuring Orientalist disdain and thus imperiling national autonomy and a relatively privileged position in regard to the West. In a word, the predicament of the Turkish *Bildungsbeld* is a consequence of empire and Orientalism—which is to say Occidentalism.

⁵²⁶ I cannot enumerate the reasons for the post-modernist estrangement from tradition and canon, and whether these reasons are justified by concerns of Eurocentrism or patriarchy, for instance. I simply note that the Eurocentric, elitist, and frankly reactionary arguments in favor of canon by figures like Harold and Allan Bloom (no relation) need not be the only ones on offer. There are, it seems to me, quite "progressive"—and anti-imperialist—arguments for the necessity of tradition, canon, filiative authority, etc. alongside paradigmatically modern values like affiliation, openness, fragmentation, etc.

Conclusion: The East/West Problem Today

According to the literary critic Nurdan Gürbilek, the first use of the phrase “geography is destiny” in modern Turkish was in a 1945 essay by the novelist, poet, and academic Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar. Reflecting on the war that had just ended (but prior to a broad awareness of the Shoah), Tanpınar wrote in the journal *Ülkü* (“Ideal”) that the war was a consequence of Germany forgetting something simple but ironclad: Geography is a destiny” (“*Coğrafya bir kaderdir*”)—a variation on the Erdoğanian version, the significance of which I will return to below. What had doomed the Germans, Tanpınar wrote, was that they had failed to understand their geographical position within Europe and the limitations that this position ‘fated’ them to. Although Germany had “wanted to be Rome,” to become something more than one European nation among others, it had failed to understand that Europe’s fate was to remain “a fractured Rome,” with no new imperial center possible. Blinded by resentment and fascistic hope, Germany had tried to deny the “stipulations” of the destiny given to it by geography, ultimately discovering that “misery is the fate” of whomever attempts this.⁵²⁷

Tanpınar struggled with ideas of geography and destiny throughout his life.⁵²⁸ As indicated in chapter 5, Tanpınar consistently returned—in his fiction, essays, letters, and dairies—to questions of Turkey’s peculiar position between “East” (*Şark*) and “West” (*Garp*), and to how Turkey might forge a more “authentic” relation between the “two worlds” to which Tanpınar saw Turkey as simultaneously belonging.⁵²⁹ Tanpınar’s reflections on the question of Turkey’s position with Said’s “imaginative geography” of East and West came, as referenced above, during the decades following the founding of the Turkish state in 1923. During this period, if we remember, most of the Turkish intelligentsia was (whether out of opportunism, fear of state censure, or sincere ideological commitment) aligned with the priorities of Atatürk’s government. From 1923 to 1950, when political debate became more possible, much of the ink spilled on the question of Turkey’s position vis-a-vis East and West tended towards comparisons between, on the one hand, the perceived stultifications of the Ottoman and the Islamic and, on the other, the benefits of West-facing modernization. Intellectuals more sympathetic to Turkey’s “Eastern” orientation, such as Peyami Safa, often advocated for a “marriage” of the East’s ‘spiritual’ superiority with the material, technological adroitness offered by “Western civilization.”⁵³⁰ For Tanpınar, a marriage or synthesis was indeed necessary, but it would occur through the revitalization of the aesthetic, intellectual, and moral

⁵²⁷ “Coğrafya bir kaderdir. Bu demektir ki bunun gereklerini kabul etmek, ona ayak uydurmak şartıyla onunla iyi kötü uzlaşılabilir. Fakat bu şartları büsbütün unutanlar için perişanlık mukadderdir.” (“Geography is a destiny, which means that if one accepts its requirements, if one accommodates oneself to it, one can more or less come to terms with it. Misery, however, is the fate of those who fully forget these stipulations.”) Tanpınar 1970, 88.

⁵²⁸ The following gloss of Tanpınar’s relationship to, and the centrality for him of, the “East-West problem” (*Şark ve Garp Meselesi*) is most influenced by comments on Tanpınar in Moran 1983, Belge 2009, and Gürbilek 2003, 2004, & 2020, along with close reading of Tanpınar’s personal writings, particularly the diary entries compiled in Tanpınar 2013.

⁵²⁹ For accounts of the centrality of the problem of authenticity to Tanpınar’s fiction and critical prose, see Gürbilek 2003. See also Moran’s chapter on Tanpınar in *Türk Romanına Eleştirel bir Bakış*.

⁵³⁰ For an instance of this material-spiritual dualism, broadly popular in early 20th century non-European thought, see the prolific Turkish intellectual Peyami Safa’s comments in his “Şark-Garp Münakaşasına bir Bakış” in Safa 2000, pgs. 186-201. For Safa, Western civilization possessed superior rationalistic and materialist faculties, whereas the East possessed an essence that was spiritual and contemplative. Turkey, being at the meeting point of East and West, seemed, to Safa and others, capable of combining the best of both.

resources of the Ottoman (“Eastern,” in Tanpınar’s phrasing⁵³¹) world *through* the incorporation of the best of European ideas, art, and literary forms.

Tanpınar, like most of his contemporaries, was deeply influenced by European ideas and artistic styles, valuing in particular the aesthetic and philosophical contributions of French modernism. But he agonized over the great forgetting of Ottoman knowledge and artistic patrimony, gained over centuries, that had occurred first slowly, during decades of Westernizing reforms in the 19th century and then all at once, concretized by Atatürk’s sudden banning of the Ottoman alphabet in 1932.⁵³² For Tanpınar, this forgetting was both tragic (“we have seen a whole way of life and understanding collapse inside us”) and absurd: “we slowly cut the ties to our old culture and suddenly—like a man who loses his mind on a crowded street—remained that way.”⁵³³ Most of all, it was unnecessary: the best that had been known and thought in the Ottoman world could be not merely returned to but *revitalized* through judiciously exploiting the best that had been learned from Europe. In other words, if Turkey “were to return to those [Ottoman cultural resources] with [our] current mentality and westernized understanding...[we] would find many wonders that had not even passed through the brilliant minds of the creators of these works.” This “discovery” would be “one-hundred times more beneficial to [our] soul than those rich continental discoveries of geography.”⁵³⁴ Geography, in this sense, might be “a destiny,” but its discovery (or rediscovery) demanded willfulness and work, with this as true for the discovery of the “heart geography” of the nation as for the “rich continental discoveries” of Ottoman, Arab, or European explorers.

The program for this rediscovery was complex, however. Too much had occurred since the beginning of “Westernization” (“*Garphlaşmak*”) in Turkey to return totally to the forms of life and culture that had existed prior to the Tanzimat and the founding of the Republic. At the same time, the fervid adoption of Western styles and attitudes could not continue apace, as this process had resulted in a mechanical reproduction of European fashions, styles, and values that, for Tanpınar, lacked either dignity or depth.⁵³⁵ What was necessary was a return to the Ottoman inheritance *by means of* the tools and perspectives provided by Westernization. By engineering this return to “the East” via the vantage of “the West,” Turkey would “recreate” itself, willing itself “out of the ashes” of its “past” (*mazî*) and into new “forms of life” (*hayat şekilleri*) that would synthesize the best of both “civilizations” or “mentalities.”⁵³⁶ Only in this way would the specificity of a uniquely Turkish culture and identity, and the means for fostering and protecting it, come into view. Only through transformation towards Western modernity could Turkey successfully return to its Eastern roots. At the same time, only by returning to these roots could Turkey succeed within modernity without sacrificing its “true self.” Turkey needed to recognize that it would only develop a form of life that was “real and commanding” once it embraced its unique position between the Eastern and the

⁵³¹ It is notable that Tanpınar, to my knowledge, usually uses the term “Eastern” to refer to pre-Republican, Ottoman-Islamic past.

⁵³² The “language revolution” (*dil devrimi*) is comprehensively overviewed in Lewis 2002. It is approached from a Derridean—and thus predictably esoteric—vantage in Ertürk 2011.

⁵³³ Tanpınar 2016, 230

⁵³⁴ Tanpınar 2016, 233

⁵³⁵ See, for instance, Tanpınar’s half-disparaging, half-melancholic, reflections in *Beş Şehir* (Five Cities) on Istanbul’s first thoroughly Westernized district of Beyoğlu, whose efforts to ‘imitate Paris’, to swap Turkish *kıraathane* for Parisian and Viennese style cafes, and to embrace a freewheeling, gaudy nightlife, struck him as both tasteless and fake. Tanpınar 2017.

⁵³⁶ Tanpınar 2016, 232

Western “world” (*alem*); once it had accepted that its “principle inheritance” was “a life at the nodal point between [these] two worlds that do not understand one another”; once it learned to benefit from a “double movement” between the vantage provided by one “world” on the other, and vice versa. By recognizing both its fate and the “blessings” that this fate could provide, Turkey would “attain the great role that history and [its] particular geography” had bestowed upon it. Although this “nodal” position bestowed its share of “hardships,” the work of its “elaboration” and “acceptance” would “compensate” for these difficulties with a more powerful nation and national identity.⁵³⁷

Despite his optimistic and often deeply moving sense of national destiny, however, Tanpınar never seemed able to locate himself satisfactorily between the geographies of an encroaching West or of what the critic Nurdan Gürbilek, describing Tanpınar’s work, has called the “lost” (*kayıp*) East.⁵³⁸ Rather, as Gürbilek writes elsewhere, Tanpınar continued to return (in his letters, diaries, poetry and prose) to the feelings that his life was built on an impossible position; that he existed on a divided terrain, at the center of which was always something missing—an emptiness or absence at the very center of his soul. As Tanpınar wrote in a line that serves as the title of one of his major essay collections, he felt “always the same absence” (“*hep aynı boşluk*”), the same indeterminacy.⁵³⁹ Over this absence Tanpınar vacillated between two positions. On the one hand, a struggle for “transformation” (*başkalaşım*), towards creating himself anew and realizing what Gürbilek calls a “second life” (*ikinci hayat*). This struggle for self-transformation was most often associated with writing: specifically, a need to create an authentic “work” [*eser*], the wholeness of which would fill Tanpınar’s own sense of lack.⁵⁴⁰ The desire for self-transformation was also connected, however, with an intense desire to travel to Europe (and particularly France, the home of many of Tanpınar’s most treasured poets, novelists, and philosophers), a trip that, when he finally took it later in life, seems—going off his diary entries from the period—to have been crushingly disappointing.⁵⁴¹

At the same time as he longed to transform himself, however, Tanpınar also yearned to see himself as he already and “truly” was—to “return” to his true self, thus substituting self-transformation for self-discovery and self-acceptance. The harder Tanpınar pushed towards one position, however, whether transformation into a “second life” or the discovery of the truth of his first one, the more he seemed to encounter the need for the other. In order to “create [himself]” anew, Tanpınar felt that he would first have to return to himself as he authentically was. At the same time, in order to “become [himself]” he would have to “escape [himself] to somewhere else”—to go “outside himself” in order to see himself clearly, with this “somewhere else” repeatedly associated with Europe.⁵⁴² Until the end of his life, Tanpınar vacillated in this fashion, swaying between a belief in his ability to “create himself,” to “become other than himself,” and a melancholic sense that he would “never reach the new,” that he would “fall into decrepitude” before reaching his goal. Sometimes he felt that the wind was at his back, that he was buoyed by forces that he could channel but ought not oppose. Other times, he was gripped by fear that the sheer weight of the past, along

⁵³⁷ Tanpınar 1970, 48-49

⁵³⁸ Gürbilek 2017

⁵³⁹ “Boşluk” literally means “emptiness,” but in the sense of something missing—an absence, lack, or void.

⁵⁴⁰ Said diagnoses a very similar dynamic at play in Joseph Conrad, in which self-creation and writing were inextricable—as were failure to write and failure to maintain a cohesive sense of self. See Said 2008.

⁵⁴¹ See Tanpınar’s comments on the difficulties of writing and the longing to go to Europe (where he believed his writing might more easily progress) in Tanpınar 2013, esp. pages 127-147. For example, on page 127: “The novel just isn’t progressing. All my hope is in France.” (“Roman bir türlü ilerlemiyor. Bütün ümidim Fransa’da.”)

⁵⁴² Quoted material from start of paragraph from Gürbilek 2020, 124-130.

with the freneticism of contemporary change, would suffocate him as he searched for more fulfilling versions of himself, and of his country. Indeed, just three days before his death in 1962, Tanpınar was reflecting in his diary that his life had been lived within “a mass of contradictions” (“*bir yığın tezat içinde yaşadım*”). In his final days he was still questioning whether or not he was a Muslim (“*tam Müslüman mıyım, bilmem*”), asserting in one line that he was “a Westerner” (“*Garplıyım*”) only to question that identification a few lines later (“*burada kendi kendimle aşıkâr şekilde tezattayım*”).⁵⁴³ Until the end of his life, there was neither a sense of fundament or destiny strong enough to resolve the felt tension between apparently contradictory identifications, nor a sense of personal agency powerful enough to allow him to autonomously determine who he was or wished to be. And so Tanpınar flowed backwards and forwards, between identifications, hopes, and despairs, as if buffeted by what Gürbilek refers to as a “tide”—one that always returned him to the same sense of absence, the same felt concurrence of drive and incapacity, the same feelings of longing and loss.

In light of this, I would like to repeat the words of my writer friend from Chapter 1, which in many ways have provided the foundation for this entire dissertation:

“For us the West is the place we never stop wanting to go to and never stop wanting to return from; we run towards it and away from it, back and forth, endlessly...[But] most of all the West is the place that makes it impossible for us to be where we are.”

The West, along with the other that it summons (whether this “other” is called East, “the developing world,” or simply “the Rest”), appears here, as it did for Tanpınar, as that which makes “being where one is” immensely difficult. The “imaginary geography” that coalesces around the West instantiates a wound within the experience and understanding of both nation, world, and self. This wound—a fissure between self and other, at the scale of both the collective and the individual—seems never to heal, and the treatments attempted to repair it seem only to reopen the wound, to make it fester. Why? Because attention to the wounds caused by this imaginary tends to reconstitute the very splitting of humanity into opposing, hierarchically ordered, camps that opened the wound in the first place. In the Erdoğanist version of the link between geography and destiny, this splitting appears ineluctable. The difference between Erdoğan and Tanpınar’s rendering of the relationship between destiny and geography, however, offers some hope: the indefinite article which Tanpınar inserts (“geography is *a* destiny”) suggests that there may be other destinies on offer, ones less corrosive, less humiliating or self-aggrandizing, and more generative of “forms of life” (*hayat şekelleri*) that encourage both commonality between peoples *and* rootedness in local and national cultures, histories, and so on. If the geographical destiny of Turkey since 1923 has been to be split between the two poles of Said’s imaginative geography, never accepted by the one and never quite comfortable with full identification with the other, then perhaps this destiny of exclusion from the West may be superseded by another destiny: the destiny to become solely what one is, nothing more, nothing less; to exist on one’s own terms—which does not mean staying the same—and to stand on ground that one claims and defines for oneself, regardless of how one is interpellated by others.

The difficulty of following this alternate destiny of self-determination should not be trivialized. Doing so demands nothing less than a revolution in the “world picture” within which we—from Tehran to New York to Jakarta to Beijing—have all been enframed. As in a child’s map in which countries are drawn in outline only, allowing the child to fill in the shapes with whichever colors they wish, this world picture may be shaded in different hues. The West may be golden or blood red. But its outline is the same, regardless of how it is perceived. This world picture has undoubtedly harmed some vastly more than others: Turkey less than Yemen, Palestine more than Saudi Arabia, Japan less than Mexico, etc. But this imaginary *has also* harmed “Westerners” themselves, imprisoning them within an imperialist imaginary of identity and difference that has

⁵⁴³ Tanpınar 2013, 291-311. As he wrote in his diaries, “despite these conditions I will create myself” (“*bu şartlara rağmen kendimi yapacağım*”) but at the same time, “I will never be able to reach the new” (“*yeniye hiç yaklaşmıyorum*”).

stripped part of the humanity from everyone who has been acculturated into positive identification with the West, ignorant of the imperialist supremacism inherent in this identification. So long as the “idea of the West” retains its gravitational force, so long as it allows, to cite Coronil from Chapter 1, “representations of cultural difference” and “worldwide Western dominance” to exist in a relationship of symbiotic support—so long as this, we will never be free of Orientalism, of empire, and of the West’s hegemonic and rapacious tutelage.

And yet, the West today is no longer what it once was. Its GDP, represented by the G7 countries, has been overtaken by the BRICS+ nations, whose ranks are poised to swell massively, with even Turkey indicating an intention to join. America has failed to win any major war since WWII, and is insufficient to keep up with Russian arms manufacturing. America and the collective West cannot even stop one of the poorest countries in the world, Yemen, from impeding shipping traffic through the Red Sea as a protest against Israel’s war of annihilation. Western countries are almost unimaginably indebted; their populations are restive, grossly unequal, and increasingly sick, and, at least in America, killing themselves at obscene rates from drug overdose and other “deaths of despair.” Faith in government and major social, political, and economic institutions—including the “mainstream” media—has cratered. Spengler may have predicted the West’s decline a century too early. But we would be hopelessly naive, dupes of what Said called a “textual attitude,” in which we view the world solely through the prism of how those in power represent it, if we were to fail to recognize the magnitude of threats now facing the collective West. Barring a nuclear war—which, according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, we are now closer to than at any point since the Cuban Missile Crisis—these threats will not destroy the “brute realities” of Western societies: the lives, loves, hopes, and dreams of ordinary people. But they may destroy the “*idea*” of the West and thus the power of the West, exposing this idea for what it has always been: a fiction of empire, a tool of imperialism, a fantasy of unchecked power.

It is unlikely that academics, and even less likely that anthropologists, will lead the charge in undoing the idea of the West. There are, as I outlined in Chapter 1, reasons for maintaining it, even if these reasons are primarily that the idea of the West is necessary as a subject capacious enough to hold culpability for the endless crimes of empire. But this is not why most academics have been unable or unwilling to challenge this idea: those who read and learned from Said’s *Orientalism* took up the struggle against Orientalism in “textual” ways, waging intellectual, usually theoretical, battle against Orientalist discourses, patterns, ideas, etc. Yet these efforts have functioned, by and large, to reiterate the West, to reinvest it with epistemological legitimacy and ontological coherence. It may be that the only way to fully dismantle Orientalism, however, is not textual or theoretical but economic and geopolitical. God willing, it will not take another world war to dislodge the “idea of the West” from its hegemonic position within our conceptions of self and society, geography and history, past and present. This may be, however, and regardless of how desperately we may wish to prevent it, the inevitable denouement of centuries of Western supremacism: the conclusion of a very long story, in which all those systematically excluded from, repeatedly demeaned and abused by, “the West” will unite under the banner of this shared exclusion, putting aside their myriad differences and embracing their “Easternness” to finish what Western Europe started.

As I write these words, things may be changing faster than anyone could have predicted when I commenced my PhD in 2016. Turkey, having once spent decades trying to join Europe, will now likely join BRICS, inevitably pulling them away from the “Western” sphere of influence and towards the “Eastern” one. In my estimation—on the grounds of my own analysis and intelligence from friends closer to the powers centers in Ankara—there is a non-trivial chance that Turkey will soon announce intentions to exit NATO, perhaps recognizing the eternal truth of Henry Kissinger’s alleged quip: “it is dangerous to be America’s enemy, but even more dangerous to be its friend,” a lesson that, when we peer back at the last three centuries of European and then American global

hegemony, can apply not only to America but to the collective West, of which America has become the de facto sovereign.

The world is changing. Our conceptions of collective identity and difference, solidarity and opposition, promise and threat, are shifting. The Occidentalist frame will not endure forever. How it will be eventually dismantled, however, is an open question. Let us pray that the means of its deconstruction will not resemble those through which it was formed: centuries of violence, cruelty, exploitation, and dehumanization. As Said stressed at the end of *Orientalism*, the solution to the chauvinistic reification of “the Orient” is not the achievement of a similar operation against “the Occident.” The corrective to the Occidentalist frame is, likewise, not the construction an Orientalist one. The answer must not be the toppling of the West from its throne of bones and broken lives only to crown the East in its place. Instead, let us hope for what Coronil called for: new “geohistorical” categories, ones which neither elide difference nor elevate it into the grounds of hierarchy, exclusivity, and violence—violence at once symbolic, spiritual, and fleshy. I have provided no map towards such categories here. But I am of the belief that they exist, somewhere. And that Turkey, as Tanpınar believed, can play an integral role in their discovery.

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