

ORHAN PAMUK AND "INFURIATING" TURKISH BOURGEOISIE

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There has perhaps been no other novelist in the Turkish cultural history as controversial as our Nobel Prize laureate Orhan Pamuk. As outsiders to Turkey can easily spot, it is hard to find many Pamuk admirers in Turkey and this has been one of the strangest predicaments in our society. "We are left with the awkward situation that we mostly don't understand our only Nobel laureate, don't like him when we do understand, and he doesn't seem to care about being liked by us, either. Something must have gone terribly wrong..." (Yagci, 2011:5).

One of the main reasons for antipathy towards Orhan Pamuk is the perception that he is too full of himself and his own success. He seems thus too individualistic for the Turkish taste. He is often found unauthentic about the political matters that he appears *engagé* with, as well. According to his own chronicles, he was an apolitical figure, distant to the ideological and class struggles of the 70s. Throughout the 90s, however, he became one of the most ardent critics of the Turkish state and its ideology, Kemalism. He challenged the Turkish official history, and caused a storm when back in 2005, he made a statement to a Swiss publication *Das Magazin* regarding the Armenian genocide and Turkey's treatment of the Kurds and said "Thirty thousand Kurds have been killed here, and a million Armenians...". In March 2011, he was found guilty and ordered to pay 6000 liras (around 3000 euros) for this statement in total compensation to five people for, among others, having insulted their honour. Since then, Pamuk has stayed silent for a while, perhaps due to the fact that those who ran a hate campaign or pressed charges against him have been imprisoned for some time within the framework of an alleged Ergenekon terror organization trial. Recently, however, Pamuk made the headlines of Turkish newspapers once again due to an interview given on the German weekly *Die Zeit* where he stated, "the bourgeoisie [Turkish] infuriates me. Their arrogance and egoism, the hate that they have for the people of their country makes me angry. The upper class is neither upset by military coups nor the ill treatment of Kurds. The majority of them are scornful of headscarved women. All this reminds of the attitudes of the white South Africans towards the black South Africans in the days of the Apartheid".

Although Pamuk's stance on the Turkish history, Kemalism, Kurds and Armenians has thus far created a lively debate within the Turkish society, creating pros and cons, his most recent reflection about the Turkish bourgeoisie did not go further from being a boring *cliché* unfortunately. This is mainly because one does not really have to be a Nobel laureate in Turkey nowadays to spot that the Turkish bourgeoisie has long been

(trans-)forming. It was in fact the secular upper class said to infuriate Pamuk that has called for a democratic solution for both the Kurdish and the Cyprus problem since the 1990s. It was this bourgeoisie who gave its support to the religiously oriented Justice and Development Party, as well. It has incorporated the emerging conservative industrialists, the so-called Anatolian tigers who have a rural and traditional background. It is growingly anti-statist, because it has not been receiving the state or bureaucratic elite backing as the previous bourgeoisie did. Its values towards religion highly differ from what Pamuk depicts, as it supports a more pluralistic approach towards religious identities. It is more and more engaged with human rights issues while on the other hand, the conservative, rural and traditionalist sections of the Turkish society grow increasingly intolerant when it comes to the individual liberties of Alevites, women, non-believers and homosexuals.

All these details do certainly not mean that the secular Turkish bourgeoisie is a revolutionary one and for that matter, deserves praise rather than criticism. However, one needs at least to acknowledge that the bourgeoisie in Turkey, as elsewhere, is of a fluctuating character, prone to (trans-)formation when needed, a fact rather clear to social scientists. If Pamuk scrutinized this trait of the Turkish bourgeoisie a bit more, rather than clinging on clichés and observed more closely the (trans-)formation that the Turkish society has been going through at the moment, he would indeed be inspired to produce even greater masterpieces than he did before.

REFERENCES:

Yagci, Alper (2011) "The perils of 'too successful' marketing, or why Turks don't like Orhan Pamuk" posted online at <http://fikirmahsulleriofisi.blogspot.com/2011/10/perils-of-too-successful-marketing-or.html>, on 4 October 2011