

# **Seduced by Modernity: Why Turkey Can Be/Become Europe and Russia Can not?**

*Madina Tlostanova*

*The customer, – one of the shop-keepers said, – does not want to put on an overcoat that he sees every day in the street on the shoulders of mustached, bow-legged and emaciated compatriots. He wants to put a jacket that arrived from a distant unknown country, and that is worn by new and beautiful people. He wants to believe that once he puts on this jacket he will transform himself, her will become a different person...It is for this reason that they invented revolution in dress, shaved off the beards and even changed the alphabet (...). The customers in fact are buying not clothes, but dreams. They wish to buy a dream to be the same as those who wear the European dress. (Orhan Pamuk, Kara Kitap.)*

*A Russian in Europe is like a cockroach. He is running, moving his whiskers, nervously smelling. He is scandalous for Europe's clean surface. Europe can contemplate with interest the exotic insects, it would like some kind of poisonous tarantula or a caterpillar, lady-birds are a touching site for it, but there are no good cockroaches.*  
(Victor Yerofeyev, *Five Rivers of Life*.)

**M**y paper is called “Seduced by modernity” because this is precisely what has happened with both the Ottoman Empire and Russia. But in their respective processes of modernization they reached quite different results which today

allows us to say that Turkey will become eventually a full member of EU, while Russia probably will never do that.

I am certainly not an expert in the Ottoman Empire or modern Turkey and I am not going to make a traditional historical comparison between Russia and Turkey in the past or today. What I would like to do instead is to look at their intertwined histories through the lens of colonial and particularly imperial difference (Mignolo, 2002; Tlostanova, 2003) in modernity that shaped the experience of these two second-rate empires in their complex mutual relations, built traditionally on rivalry and territorial claims, and in their no less complex efforts to carve a space for themselves between the more powerful rivals—the Western capitalist empires of modernity. By imperial difference in this case I mean the hierarchy of differences between various empires that was shaped in modernity and within which the capitalist western empires such as Britain, France, Germany claimed the leading roles, and the second-rate under-modernized not quite Western or European empires such as the Ottoman Empire or Russia had to satisfy themselves with secondary roles in history.<sup>1</sup> I believe that from this logic that is still intact, though slightly reshaped by the new world order and globalization, there comes today's promising positioning of Turkey and less and less promising positioning of Russia.

I would like to point out in this respect my own border and in-between self-positioning, because my ancestors belonged both to Turkic inhabitants of Central Asia, colonized by the Russian empire, and to Northern Caucasus small ethnicity—the Cherkess, that found themselves in the forced exile to Turkey, among other countries, as a result of Rus-

sian colonization. Therefore, as an internal other of the Russian empire and as someone brought loosely on Muslim and Turkic culture, I feel myself much more comfortable in Istanbul than in Moscow where I was born and has lived most of my life. So much for the nation-state ideology and the western idea of the national.

Before we turn to the present configuration creating the difference between Russia and Turkey let us take a very quick glance back in history. The Ottoman Empire and Russia had a lot in common. The Ottoman territorial expansion was stopped early in history because in order to unite with their ethnic and cultural “relatives” in Central Asia the Turks already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century had to (and could not) bypass the Shiite Persia which later on resulted in the clash of Russian and Ottoman interests in the Balkans. The multi-ethnic, multi-confessional and multi-linguistic Russian empire with its extensive principle of conquering the space started to lose its position in the 18-19 centuries in the presence of capitalist Western empires of modernity and had to satisfy its expansionistic appetites mainly in the East and South (i.e. in the locales that were drastically different in ethnic-religious sense from the metropolis). Each of these empires was born in the outskirts of its religious-cultural œcumena but with the passing of time each of them proclaimed as its imperial mission to take the central place: in Russia it was the famous Moscow as the Third Rome doctrine, according to which the ex outskirt of Byzantine empire, that became Christian relatively late, claimed the role of Orthodox Christian center, and in Turkey it was the Central Asian

and hence relatively remote from Muslim centers and shrines origin of Turks, who became Muslim only in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and began to inhabit Anatolia even later, but soon turned into the most powerful Muslim empire—even if for a relatively short period of time. The Ottoman Empire had to correspond to this new role turning from the eclectic in the cultural and religious sense liminal state into the center of Islamic civilization. Embracing Islam the Turks became the heirs of the ancient high Islamic culture and here, as well as in Russia, a complex religious configuration of juxtaposing itself to both Islam and Christianity—was obviously at work. If in the Russian empire it was a juxtaposition with Islam (an other religion) and a contrast between Orthodox and Western Christianity (i.e. an internal Christian difference), then in the Ottoman empire the juxtaposition was done not only along the obvious division into Christians and Muslims, but also within Islam, which was reflected in the rather negative attitude of the Sunnite Ottoman empire to Shiites. Religious identification of both Russians and Turks at that time was relatively perfunctory, syncretic and border, but was presented certainly as the only true religion on the basis of which the Ottoman and the Moscow imperial myths were slightly later created.

In a sense the Ottoman empire and Russia were mirror reflections of each other and sharing the subaltern status in relation to the Western empires of modernity, they each had its own configuration of imperial subalternity—Russia was the quasi Western subaltern empire that in order to survive

had to put on different masks for different partners and the Ottoman empire was a quasi Islamic one that also had to have multiple faces and in a sense, in contrast with Russia, even practice tolerance as the principle of survival. In both cases however paradoxically the hierarchy of otherness was built exclusively in accordance with Western European race, cultural, linguistic and religious norms, which deliberately put both the Ottoman and the Russian empire into the situation of empires-colonies, creating peculiar inferiority complexes and specific transitory, in-between and under-expressed cultural forms.

The concept of imperial difference that I introduced above allows to conceptualize the specific role of such peripheral empires in modernity and understand why they lost in the competition with the Western capitalist empires and why they build their politics today in a particular way that I am going to address later. A British historian D. Lieven, who does not use the concept of imperial difference, intuitively grasps nevertheless the gist of this phenomenon, comparing Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century not with the British empire which was its rival in geopolitical sense, but rather with the British colony of India (Lieven, 2000, p. 122)—and not in the sense of economic development, but in the sense of ideological and intellectual dependency. In both cases European elites (Europenized Russian ruling classes and British Officers) ruled over the peasant masses whose culture was alien and incomprehensible for the elites. But if in case of the British empire it was more “natural”—due to the difference in

language, religion, ethnicity, race, in case of Russia this situation was highly paradoxical because it took place within one people in the form of idealization of the Russian *muzhik* (serf) and projection of certain Rousseau's discourses of noble and unspoiled (by western civilization) savage onto this *muzhiks*—i.e. ethnic Russians. In the Ottoman Empire this complex of cultural dependency was expressed in the different way although parallels with Russia are undeniable. In the in-between the Turkish and the Islamic models Ottoman Empire, as well as in Russia, there emerged the phenomenon of two cultures—the culture of imperial elite (often extremely cosmopolitan and transcultural) and the culture of Turkish people, in this case understood as the underdeveloped in the Western sense population of Anatolia. As in Russia with its blurred division into the colonies and metropolis—in the Ottoman Empire the dominance of the imperial ethnicity remained questionable and unadjusted. Hence the specific restless and hesitant sensibility of the Turks in Istanbul (Constantinople) that is still intact and brilliantly described by a famous modern Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk in his brilliant novel *Kara Kitap* (*The Black Book*, 1997). Pamuk's characters are haunted with the sense of their own defeat, sadness, despair, peculiar stagnation (typical of all inhabitants of defeated empires), and various post and neo-imperial complexes. The writer sees his compatriots as stuck at the border, their modest world lacks a center and is not indicated on the maps, it is everywhere and they are not able either to be themselves or to become someone else. In

Istanbul, as a cosmopolitan imperial center which has always been a criss-crossing of various ancient civilizations, the Turkish culture has never really played the leading role and the Turks themselves could not be considered the main ethnicity in their own empire up to its collapse and the emergence of the Republic in its poorest part—Anatolia. In Russia as well the properly Russian regions have always lagged behind certain territories with vaguely or openly colonial status (like Ukraine or the Baltic) although the situation never became as paradoxical as in case of the Ottoman empire where the Balkans (a colony) acted in many respects as the metropolis.

Usually the Western historians of the Ottoman empire finish telling its story with 1924—the time of its final—in their view—collapse; and the story of the new Turkey, the story of its modernization and westernization is usually regarded bypassing the multiple connections with the previous imperial model of the subaltern empire. However, the political and state form of republic, monarchy or empire is far from being the whole story, what is crucial is the disposition of its inhabitants and powers, the sphere of the political and cultural imaginary and the way the collective self-image is being constructed for themselves and for the rest of the world. And here we find a feature that practically has not changed from the time when the Ottoman empire was seduced by Western modernity, the same way as it has not changed in Russia—either in Soviet or Postsoviet time. In case of Turkey it can be described today as a generally successful adaptation

to its role of the internal other of Europe, under the preservation of certain ethnic-cultural and religious peculiarities, such as today's interesting efforts to combine the revival of Islam with cultural and economic globalization. In case of Russia it refers to the doomed efforts to make Europe and the rest of the world consider Russia as part of it and not an other—without demonstrating any really functioning models of alternative development or alternatives to development, but under the preservation of largely imperial global ambitions even today, when Russia has become a defeated and vanishing empire.

Naturally, it would be nearsighted to explain the Turkish success in the process of European integration by only its own merits and Russian failure in this process—by only its own total insolvency, because both cases are good illustrations of the same phenomenon of “coloniality of power” (as defined by A. Quijano (Quijano, 2000) at work in the conditions of globalization and the new world order. And within the logic of coloniality of power the last word is always that of the West/North. Turkey even today remains to a large extend a small card in the larger game of Western politics and its success depends on the Western club which is ready or not ready to accept it. But still it is evident that in contrast with Russia the possibilities of alternative globalization and the adjustment of the country to the global economic, political and cultural processes are realized in Turkey much better. Among other things it is connected with the sphere of the imaginary and the shaping of subjectivity, which in Tur-

key does not seem to be entirely imperial or post-imperial today and flexibly adjusts itself to the new conditions, finding adequate ways of maintaining its intactness and integration. In Russia the imaginary remains imperial, wondering farther and farther away from reality and no other signifiers of national identification seem to work at this point. E.g. the Russian Orthodox Church can not possibly be even compared with Islam in its influence on the collective or personal identification. The powerful in other cultures ethnic-national element does not work either because it was lost or destroyed centuries ago. The economic factor, as everyone knows, is in stagnation in Russia and there are no efforts at creating any alternative models that would mediate the neoliberal market ideology and the traditionalist values and ethic systems—be they ethnic, religious, linguistic or any other. The two dominant models in Russia in this respect remain the word-for-word repetition of the Western discourses, rapidly going out of fashion today, and the return to the mixture of Russian and Soviet ideology of besieged camp and a doomed idea of survival on its own in the globalized world. This latter sensibility is supported by the artificial reanimation of the Russian/Soviet geopolitical myth of vastness, military power and inexhaustible natural resources of the country. The finer, more nuanced, complex and subtle features, connected with the cultural imperialism, with the ways the opposition same/other has been constructed along the religious, ethnic, racial, linguistic lines—is not even addressed in Russia today, much less interpreted as a

cultural politics and not a cynical blunt manipulation. While in Turkey it seems that the opposite is correct.

And still undoubtedly there are not only internal but also external reasons explaining the fact why Turkey will most likely soon become part of EU and Russia will not. In the article devoted to the analysis of globalization in Turkey two Turkish scholars Ergun Özbudun and E. Fuat Keyman point out:

While Turkey's geopolitical and historical significance in the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia has become increasingly apparent since the 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union has drastically changed its role as a buffer state in the East-West relations. (...) the end of the Nold war created important changes in political culture and the sense of nationalism (...) now Turkish people may come to see themselves once again *at the center of the world emerging around them* (italics mine—M.T.), rather than at the tail end of a European world that is increasingly uncertain about whether or not it sees Turkey as part of itself. (Özbudun, Keyman, 2002, p. 300.)

From this quotation it is clear that after the latest geopolitical re-mapping of Europe as a result of Soviet Union collapse the always problematic status of Russia as part of Europe has become even more problematic. The inclusion of Russia into the EU is a step, logically impossible for the European consciousness. And it is not only the size that matters here—the fear that the enormous disorganized Russia would swallow tiny (in comparison with it) Europe, but also and more importantly that the very change of the world or-

der happened due to the collapse of Soviet Union and consequently, consciously or not, European mind can not agree with the idea of inclusion of the defeated Russian monster into the new and presumably better world order—this would be a logically incorrect conclusion and would contradict the famous principles of Western rationality. It is much more convenient for the West/North to gradually rearrange the power relations in the world in its interests—hence the quite logical Western interest in the ex-colonies and satellites of Russia/USSR, and the revival of the old and in fact never dying out interest in Turkey on the one hand, and deliberate ignoring of Russia itself waiting for its final disintegration—on the other. In this sense a grim historical parallel comes to mind—in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Empire was the famous “sick of Europe,” while the Western and not quite Western states were impatiently waiting for the sick to die and for the opportunity to divide his property. Today this role of the sick—this time not of Europe but of the world—belongs to Russia and the partition of its “property” is already in full swing as we can see in the several minor revolutions going on in the ex-colonies of Soviet Union—Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, etc.

The question of inclusion or exclusion from Europe becomes so painful and acute today because it makes Western Europe itself for the umpteenth time to reconsider its own self-definition, to redefine the blurred or smudged difference in the concept of multiple European identity. Turkey in this case is a typical example of an Islamic but presumably

European country, as well as a number of new Slavic and Eastern European candidates for EU membership, many of whom practice Orthodox Christianity which is in European mind farther from Western Christianity than maybe even Islam. Russia continues to play the role of the distorted mirror and a parody of Europe that the latter naturally prefers not to notice.

This at first site inconsistent play on religion in the definition of European-ness has once again far going historical roots. Starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, the closeness to Western modernization model became automatically the main condition of any state's vitality while other models came to be regarded as once and for all retarded, doomed regimes. In reality both the Ottoman empire and later Turkey and Russian empire and later Soviet Union and contemporary Russia on various stages of their existence in modernity were occupying various position with respect to European model. Thus, in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman empire was much closer to Europe than Russia, more open to European technologies and modernization, while Europe itself considered the Ottoman empire to be its internal other rather than absolute external other, one of the reasons for that being that at that time the construction of the opposition same/other was done still largely along the religious lines and the Ottoman empire possessed territories which Europe considered more Christian than the Russian ones. Later, in the post-enlightenment period, secularization lead to the change of the Christian discourses to civilizing

and modernizing ones and here the Ottoman empire for a while gave the advantage to Russia which embraced (however forcefully and with bloody excesses) precisely the circular variant of Europe-ism. Further development of these two empires went in the opposite directions—further forceful europeization of Russia from the top—according to the typical for it model of a “jerk,” and further drift of the Ottoman ruling elites away from Europe, which was connected both with the loss of the previous role of intermediary in trade between Europe and Asia, with the factual control of Europe over the Ottoman markets, and with the choice of Islam which for some time objectively limited the possibilities of modernization according to the Western model for the Ottoman empire, and with the global victory of Christianity put the Ottoman empire into very unfavorable conditions—in contrast with Russia, which at least for a short time managed to maintain its economic and cultural modernization prestige. In this sense the golden age of the Russian empire is the 18<sup>th</sup> century while today the country goes through a major decline, adopting the role of the “fatally sick,” while Turkey finds possibilities of correlation of Islam and its cultural traditions with globalization.

Both the Ottoman and the Russian empire were forced to accept the asymmetry connected with the direct correlation of the imperial or colonial success with the degree of Westernization. Both empires realized that under the absolute dominance of Western modernity any step aside from the main road of western civilization was dangerous and

lead to political and economic demise. And in geo-cultural sense the Ottoman way drifted from the almost equal division between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam—to more and more pronounced Islamization and non-western element.<sup>2</sup> Today this situation is being corrected historically once again because Turkey is a culturally and geographically a much more compact country and it is also much more homogenous in ethnic-religious sense than in its imperial days.

Why then religious difference seems to be less important in the relations of Europe and Turkey than in case of Christian and thus seemingly more European Russia? As is known, the Christian factor has played a crucial role in the definition of Europe and it even caused a lot of arguments in the recent discussion of the project of European constitution. And yet the religious factor is possible to overcome in case of Turkey's inclusion and seems to remain one of the insuperable differences in case of Russia. The reason lies not only in the notorious double standards in the treatment of Russia by the West that a lot of Russian politicians play upon today. The matter is also the inability of Russia itself to adapt to the changes, to counter movement which would transform modernization in a particular local way. I do not mean here to present the Turkish way of finding a mediating path in globalization and alternative ways in its relations with the West as ideal, but it is certainly more productive in the present conditions than the Russian one.

An important factor that has played its crucial role here is that the Ottoman empire and later Turkey, as well as Ja-

pan, could not have any claims at whiteness or much less Christianity and yet these two ex-empires successfully create their models of not quite western modernization today. This inerasable difference with the West initially brought the Ottoman Empire to completely different discourses of otherness than in Russia, that has been constantly mimicking the West in modernity desperately trying to become White. In Russia even as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century the basis of othering was still in religion, language and ethnicity but not in race as in Western Europe, which was partly connected with the blurred racial characteristics of Russians themselves within the globally accepted Western European racial matrix. The choice of belated modernization that became typical for Russia, starting at least from Peter the Great, lead—on the one hand—to the belated acceptance of the epistemic and cultural assimilation discourses, connected with the civilizing mission, and—on the other hand—to the fact that Russia itself being a subaltern Empire has been and remains a subject of epistemic and cultural assimilation and colonization on the part of the Western Capitalist empires of modernity.

The link with Japan is not an incidental one here, because the Turkish model of adjustment to modernization is today often compared with the South-Asian one. The seduction by modernity may be realized and work in different ways. In case of Turkey as well as in case of Japan (but on a smaller scale) it is based on the preservation of its cultural legacy under the adaptation to western modernity within the

frames, necessary for the successful entering of the global economic, cultural and political space. In both cases, in contrast with Western model, it is the link between the small and medium-sized business and the traditional culture and values, integrated within the community, the family, the religion, that is being stressed. Russia in its turn is also trying today to copy this particular way of modernization, not equal to westernization, but the problem is that here there is no common denominator of religion, family, ethnic culture or community or these values are completely different for different groups of people. Moreover, what is stressed today as a common Russian legacy and the basis for positive self-identification is once again the imperial chauvinistic and racist discourse. Today it is leading to self-isolation and cannot possibly work for the approximation to Europe. Today's Russian almost unanimous rejection of the West that somehow did not meet the Russian expectations ends invariably in bitterness, animosity, aggressive nationalism and not any alternative mediating models of thinking and acting. Russia finds itself excluded both from the "world proletariat" and from the "world capital"—hence the emergence of the specific post-Soviet Russian subjectivity in relation to globalization. Instead of guilt and social apathy of the conscientious Western consumer the post-soviet subject sees himself as a victim of globalization. This sensibility is closely connected with the unresolved duality of the Russian empire and its cultural imaginary as a quasi-western Slavic-orthodox subaltern empire whose subject is loaded with spe-

cific complexes of secondary eurocentrism and exceptionalism which today—in the times of its defeat—is constructed and realized generally as sacrifice and suffering, the idea of a certain spiritual transcendental “victory in defeat.” An ex-imperial subject’s world vision is based on his superiority complex and all of a sudden finding himself in the situation of being thrown out, excluded from the historical process which he used to see and still does within the western frames and categories. Globalization is present in the post-soviet cultural imaginary not as standard exploiting of the world labor by the world capital, but as a forceful and sudden bringing of the culture and its inhabitants to the situation of non-existence for the rest of the world. Moreover, Russia under all its seeming willingness to be regarded as Europe—still claims its own exceptionalism based on completely false grounds. In fact it does not really want to be one of European countries and it does not want to say good buy to its imperial superiority complexes, which is yet another factor that prevents Russia from becoming Europe mentally, even if we forget for a while that Europe will never let Russia become its part. In fact I would say that Russia relishes its own difference with Europe and it gives Russia originality in its own eyes, once again scaring Europe away.

The above mentioned racial difference between the Ottoman Empire and Russia created the important differences in the treatment of cultural multiplicity. This factor is particularly clearly expressed in the well known Ottoman system of imperial integration “millet”—a rather tolerant

form of integrating the religious and ethnic-cultural other, based on pluralism and political loyalty of all subjects of empire to the state which in its turn gave freedom to its citizens in the majority of ethnic-cultural and religious spheres. The ethnic minorities at that were not expelled and negated, as it happened in Russian empire, were not physically destroyed, were not forcefully assimilated but retained their identification. On the part of the Ottoman empire it was a wise politics of survival in the conditions of numerical inferiority and relative political instability of the Turks in their own empire<sup>3</sup> and was also dictated by the economic profit (one had to pay for the right to remain Christian), while in Russian empire such rational arguments were invariably crashed against the disproportionate imperial ambitions. Non-Muslims within the system of Millet certainly were still second-rate discriminated against people but in comparison with the Russian empire which in the time of active colonization of both European and particularly non-European territories—Crimea, Caucasus, Central Asia—practiced its main model of annexation and further driving away from the desirable lands of those people who lived there before—under the complete lack of property and legal guarantees (it is also interesting that the exiled peoples of Caucasus, the Tatars and even the Muslim inhabitants of the Balkans often escaped from Russia to the Ottoman empire in this case), *millet* system was a more tolerant model of intercultural relations and even allowed people of other religions and ethnicities into the power and decision making spheres (Lieven,

2000, p. 148-51; Goodwin, 1998, p. 95, 192). Millet system gave a crack only at the time when the Ottoman empire imported the Western European nationalistic discourses and wider—a successful combination of capitalism and modernizing discourses, which finally lead to the present configuration of power in the world. Thus here—as well as in Russia—the europeization happened not only in the obvious form of economic and military defeats but also in the less obvious but more crucial form of epistemic and ideological colonization by the West which is clearly seen in case of the *Young Turks* and in Russia—in all varieties of both *Zapadniks* (champions of the West) and nationalists, unsuccessfully combining ethnic-national and imperial sentiments in an effort to adjust the Western idea of nation-state to the locales that cannot possibly function according to this model without excesses and conflicts. This artificial and forced process of turning the empire into the nation-state has been particularly painful in the peripheral and not quite Western empires.

Thus, the roots of today's differences between Russia and Turkey are to be found in the history of the two empires, one of them (the Ottoman) accepting its subaltern status rather early in history and making it work to its benefit, and the other (Russia)—never accepting its second rated-ness and fighting for a more privileged imperial position with its Western rivals. The imperial ambitions of the Ottoman Empire were always rather regional and not global in contrast with Russia and hence—more feasible. The Ottoman

Empire realized the modesty of its imperial claims in modernity and it never strove for global dominance. Being interested in controlling the Balkans in contrast with Russia it did not plan to come to Moscow and remove the Orthodox crosses from Saint Basil's Cathedral on Red Square and put a Mosque there instead, while the Russian imperial myth precisely had as its central goal to put an Orthodox cross over Aya Sofia, to say nothing of global imperial tendencies of Soviet time. On the Turkish part Russia was a rival in the war for colonies but not an enemy who had to be completely destroyed and conquered. While the Russian imperial myth was built precisely on the idea of turning Istanbul into Tsar-grad. Today unfortunately there are obvious efforts at reviving this imperial sentiment in Russian mass consciousness by means of mass-media, cinema and popular literature among other things, a good example of which is a recent Boris Akunin's novel and a successful film made after it, retelling the story of the 1877 Russian-Turkish War—*The Turkish Gambit* (Akunin, 2004). Such cultural products are clearly trying to revive or invent the positive sides of Russian imperial identification misrepresenting the Russian-Turkish war as a liberating war against the Ottoman yoke and for the emancipation of “brothers-Slavs.” It is an effort to find in the past of the Russian empire some positive and victorious sides. It is not a chance that it is the Islamic Ottoman empire that acts as the paradigmatic enemy in this case, while the main villain of *The Turkish Gambit* turns out to be not an Englishman and not a Frenchman but... an enlightened Turk whose anti-Russian position is justified as a fight for a

more westernized colonizer and against the country (Russia) that in his opinion prevents the rest of the world from developing according to the western model of modernization. Hence once again we face here not just the opposition of two empires and two religions. It is complicated by the omnipresent shadow of the West as the puppeteer, and the all-penetrating seduction by its modernity, a sentiment that in relation to Turkey is wonderfully presented in Orhan Pamuk's novels. However, Russia as the other side in Aksinin's novel and in the global imperial configuration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, cannot be easily summarized as just retarded and chronically under-modernized counter balance to the West and its satellites. Because Russia at that point is also inescapably seduced by modernity, although it chooses different components of Western epistemology in constructing its own identification. However the logic, within which these two empires clash, remains unquestionably Western, even if Russia formulates it within the Orthodox Christian, Pan-Slavic or Socialist terms and Turkey—in circular nationalist, Pan-Turkist, or Islamic ones. If in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia was still involved in the doomed fight with the Western empires for its regional dominance in the Balkans, today after almost a century and a half Turkey successfully continues to practice its age-old strategy, finding ways at counterbalancing its national interests with the global Western dominance.

In other words, the Turkish imperial claims were better and earlier assimilated to the conditions of Western dominance than Russian ones, and in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and

its nation-state history Turkey managed to relatively successfully transform them into something else, while Russia has not even yet addressed this task of de-colonizing and de-imperializing its mind. A crucial and negative role in this process was certainly played by the Soviet period of global imperial ambitions, which today in the mass consciousness mingle with Russian ones, creating an explosive mixture of dangerous ethnic-religious and social tension. Russia still continues to hysterically whip up imperial-nationalist complexes in its citizens, by means of xenophobia, rejection of everything that is not Slavic and not Orthodox Christian. In other words, we witness today the revival of the ugliest imperial principles of othering in Russia, as one of the most intolerant empires, while Turkey, as I pointed out above, had a different experience of treating otherness and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has gone a much longer road on the way of creating the institutions of democracy and civil society—i.e. once again, on the way of Western modernization. It is particularly clearly seen in the emergence, starting from the 1990s, of various institutes of civil society in Turkey clearly linked with the looming possibility of entering the EU.<sup>4</sup> In Russia the civil society institutes are still the ersatz, most of them being created from the top by the state power and administration and serving exclusively its interests.

It is important to stress that even under general secularization, the religious element remained the most complex and hard to conceptualize in the history of all empires of modernity. And here again Turkey demonstrates today the

successful integration of the religious element into contemporary economic, political and cultural life while Russia once again—is skidding. On the one hand, starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century there emerged the new general logic of circulation and gradual change of the Christianizing discourse into civilizing ones. But in the Russian empire converting of the barbarians or infidels to Christianity and missionary activities were never the basis for imperial discourses as it happened in Western empires, and the idea of epistemic assimilation of colonies and civilizing discourses remained largely foreign. The Russian imperial ideology and epistemology up to the Soviet period was propagated spontaneously rather than as a considered politics. So in case of Russia one can speak not of the secularization of orthodox Christianity (that is something that never happened) but of lack of any elaborate imperial ideology except for pure ideology of force. The failure of the Russian empire in this respect was connected with the lack of realization that economic and epistemic and only then military assimilation is the crucial factor of any imperial project in modernity. Russia will finally understand this and even realize to some extend in Soviet Union when it created the so called national intelligentsia in the Soviet colonies which was brought up on Russian culture and on the humanistic enlightenment values seasoned a bit with Soviet ideology and which not exactly rejected its own ethnic culture but certainly treated it from the position of the champion of modernization as an inferior culture. This was undoubtedly a belated “achieve-

ment" of Soviet imperial cultural politics. But once again contemporary Russia cannot use it today as a control lever for the cultural imaginary. In 15 years the whole layer of ethnic elites has completely lost the ability to express its opinion giving way to nationalism while the Russian empire finally lost its chance at epistemic and cultural dominance.

The Ottoman empire in this respect was also an exception from the general rule of Islamic empires as it had been building its imperial discourses to the least extend on religious basis (at least in the beginning), which among other things was connected with the ambivalent and even ambiguous status of Islam in the Ottoman empire and even among Turks themselves. A relative religious tolerance and lack of missionary activities in the Western sense was due to different reasons in the Ottoman and Russian empires. The Russian empire remained intolerant in the legal, inter-subjective spheres and in general its main tactic was not assimilation and not integration but rejection, alienation, pushing the other into non-being. The Ottoman Empire, as well as the Russian one, was not much interested in the Islamization of its many citizens (with the exception of Bulgaria, Albania, Bosnia) and here consideration of profits played an important part together with the economic and military-strategic weakness of the Turks in comparison with the Balkans.

However, this does not mean that in both empires the religious element did not play any part in the shaping of imperial imaginary. Thus, the Russian empire still regarded itself (not always consciously) as superior in religion, building its

imperial discourse on the exceptionalist attitude toward Orthodox Christianity, opposed to both *latintsy* (Latin Christians) and *busurmane* (Muslims) in purely isolationist way. Both empires retained for a longer time the externally religious justification of territorial usurpations (emancipation from the infidels or revival of the Eastern Christian empire with the Russian Emperor in Tsargrad) even if in reality they often had economic and strategic interests as well as it happened in case of Russia which needed the Black Sea for successful trade. The periphery nature of the Ottoman and Russian empires in the sense of religious and cultural identification generated not only the above mentioned weakness of religious basis and the factual coexistence of many religious beliefs, but also—and that is more important—contributed to the early formation of the certain inferiority complex in relation to the West, later on resulting in the specific nature of Russia as a double-faced empire—having one servile mask for the West and the other—manorial—for the Asiatic colonies. In the Ottoman empire it was at first expressed in the resistance to the West and then in the belated modernization with a haunting feeling of their own remaining syncretism and lack of authenticity, exploding still later in the distorted modernization of Kemal Ata Turk republicanism leaving the after taste of imperial nostalgia, and at the same time intensifying the inferiority complexes. This peculiar contradictory subjectivity and positioning is clearly seen in the two epigraphs I have chosen from Orhan Pamuk and a modern Russian writer Victor Yerofeyev.

In contemporary Russia the religious signifier cannot work as successfully as it can work in Turkey where the importance of Islam grows in both economic and cultural sphere. As Ergun Özbudun and E. Fuat Keyman point out, “Turkish modernization since the 1980s has been increasingly marked by the coexistence (and not polarization—M.T.) of economic liberalization and the resurgence of traditionalism and its appeal to a return to authenticity” (Özbudun, Keyman, 2002, p. 299). Powerful organizations like MUSIAD develop a specific idea of Islamic (business) identity, even juxtaposing *Homo islamicus*—based on the principles of community with its ethical codes (versus individualism and individual moral), trust and solidarity grounded in justice and disinterestedness (versus greedy competition) to *Homo economicus*, based entirely on the general Western capitalist and modern principles. Islam in this case is rather successfully interpreted as able to correlate with free market economy, the ideal of weak state (that began to be promoted in Turkey since the 1980s) and fair competition, and is easily integrated into globalization. The cultural aspect of *Homo islamicus* also rather successfully integrates into the globalized world even if at times at the expense of commercialization and exotization of difference and making a new variant of consumer out of the Islamic individual—thus once again, successfully seducing him with modernity in various ways. This is certainly a contradictory process and if Özbudun and Keyman celebrate it, there are other opinions as well, and not only belonging to some obscurantists, but also

e.g. to Orhan Pamuk who in his mysterious semiotic novel *Kara Kitap* symbolizes in the changing image if Istanbul the creeping signs of cultural modernization and Westernization of Turkey:

A scary city, it is now full of disgusting sights, that before we could see only in the darkness of movie theaters. A miserable crowd, the old cars, the bridges slowly sinking into water, the heaps of cans, the warped pavement, the incomprehensible huge letters, the unclear bill boards, the inscriptions on the walls, the advertisement of alcohol and cigarettes, the minarets, that no one reads azan from, the mounts of stones, dust and dirt... (Pamuk, 2000, p. 169-170.)

Moreover, Pamuk constantly stresses that another possible non-western, less violent and more connected with ethnic-cultural heritage way of modernization, built in the Ottoman Empire, was irrevocably lost. In *The Black Book* it is expressed in the topography of Istanbul that is linked with the topography of the human face and with the symbolic Sufi correlation of the alphabetic letters and lines on people's faces.<sup>5</sup> The change of alphabet in this case is interpreted as a painful amputation of meaning, as a forceful separation of the signifier and the signified which in Pamuk's idea, was the source of the Ottoman empire's defeat: "when a civilization forgets about its mystery, it means negating its own basis of thinking, and every people, copying others and forgetting about their own sources, inevitably die" (Pamuk, 2000, p. 537). If we stretch this metaphor to interpret Russia we will see how important for the imperial

ideologies is the question of alphabetic dominance. Today no one yet in Russia speaks of changing the Cyrillic to Latin because language remains the only factor uniting the collapsing Russian empire together, but language is also a cultural and epistemic code that in Russian case probably acts as the custodian and a source of the eternal Russian whirling, constant miraging and coming back to the same mistakes and dead-ends. In this respect the change of alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin by many post-Soviet Muslim Turkic republics is semiotically loaded as an effort to step outside the vicious circle of Russian bewitched and meaningless stamping on the same place. In a way we can say that Turkey once again agreed with its position of being seduced by modernity and yet it manages to extract from this subaltern positioning some advantages for itself, flexibly adjusting to the new conditions when the revival of Islam easily coincides with generally Western reference system. This kind of religious revival is not possible in Russia today, one of the reasons being that the Russian Orthodox Church is not able to adjust to modernization. Besides it is historically closely connected and even grown into the state power, in fact always acting as the servant of this state power which immediately cuts off all the possibilities of developing within the frame of civil society institutes—bypassing the state. Hence once again we see the powerless snarling and accentuating of the military-Orthodox Christian-Slavic and very aggressive component in the hysterical and unsuccessful efforts at reviving of the Russian identity.

This comparison of the two subaltern empires in their relation to Western modernity and modernization would be incomplete if we do not touch upon the growing influence of Turkey as a new economic and ethnic-cultural regional power that subdues those locales, that were dominated by Russia before. It is precisely because of the existence of alternative adjustment to globalization and successful carving of its space within the new world order that Turkey is more attractive as a new model for weaker ex-Soviet Muslim Turkic (in the linguistic sense) colonies such as Uzbekistan, Azerbajdzhan, as well as Caucasus in general, Kirgizstan, even Tatarstan to some extend (however in this case Russia puts its veto because Tatartstan is geographically and politically inside Russian Federation). In these new coalitions that are supported in Turkey by powerful economic circles such as TUSIAD, we witness the revival of the old myth of pan-Turkism in the economic and cultural sense. But this revival is much less aggressive than in the original variant and is based not on the idea of territorial expansion as such (the old problem of being far away from the Central Asian sources is still there), but rather on more nuanced and deterritorialized ways of dominance, typical for globalization. These ripples in the water in the form of growing Turkish influence on the ex-Russian colonies revive the old Russian imperial fears and once again redraw the imperial-colonial configuration in the border of Europe and Asia, naturally preserving the dominance of the West/North as well as the attractiveness of the very idea of belonging to modernity,

even if this very concept is being reconsidered and reinterpreted today. One of the realistic scenarios for the nearest future in this respect, discussed by a number of Western and also Russian political theorists that I agree with, is the further disintegration of Russia as a state and consequently—the inclination of its different parts to various geo-economic and geo-cultural centers—both Western and non-Western. And if we speak of the Muslim and particularly Turkic parts of Russia—for them Turkey will most probably become such a new role model and maybe paradoxically—a mediator and champion of... Western modernization.

### **Notes**

1. A typical example of this imperial hierarchy at work is seen in the long history of Russian-Turkish wars and particularly of the 1877 war as a result of which Russia won in the military sense but lost in the diplomatic one when Western Europe and particularly France and Great Britain redrawn the new maps of the Balkans at the humiliating for the Russian empire Congress of Berlin in 1878. I am not going to justify any of the sides in this case but what is interesting is the strict and elaborate hierarchy of the empires of modernity that was finalized towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and placed each of the empires on the ladder with only a certain amount of rights in relation to its status in this Western dominated hierarchy. Not much changed in this respect today.
2. An important part here was played by the Ottoman acquisition of Arabic Muslim colonies in Northern Africa and Asia, as even if it possessed the prestigious Islamic sacred places, the control of scattered colonies was becoming more and more difficult because the Ottomans did not have the famous British tools of the empire

among which the central place was taken by the technical achievements of industrial revolution.

3. Moreover, even if the lack of ethnic-racial homogeneity was often seen by the Ottoman administration as weakness and vulnerability—objectively the transcultural nature of the Ottoman ruling elites that combined the Turkic and Arabic, Persian and European sources acted in favour of the Ottoman Empire rather than against it.
4. The Turkish Human Rights Association, Mazlum-Der-Islamic Discourse, Helsinki Vatanda slar Dernegi (Helsinki Citizens Association), etc.
5. According to Pamuk, each line was connected with particular Arabic letter, therefore when Turkey rejected the Arabic alphabet in favour of Latin, it lost the secret code and never acquired a new one instead. Now they need to rediscover the secret, correlating the lines on the human faces with the 29 letters of the Latin alphabet.

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