

Modernization or Americanization of Local Cultures: A Turkish Example

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Abstract

Since the existence of mankind on earth it is with the settlements that we define ourselves and it is by them that we are known. Our values find expression in our life styles and all is displayed under a roof or at an outside setting. Respecting and responding to the traditional norms create a particular unique identity which is today continuously under the pressure of globalization. Globalization is no doubt a cultural phenomenon, as well as a political and an economic one, which causes a change. This new culture not only pollutes the identities but also tries to wipe them out while altering them into something else. Therefore a ceaseless play of differences ensures that there is no fixed point in the process of values. Instead, with a dynamic popular culture we witness a fascinating play of possibilities. Just like in language, there is a dialogic interplay between the past utterances and the new with the absence of things in the decoration of interior and exterior settings of hotels, restaurants, coffeehouses and shops.

The aim of this study is to display and analyze through photographs and video the three layers of meaning which represent a display of the characteristic domination of popular culture's integration with the past, present in the name of so called modernism in Konya. At the same time two different villages Aşağı Çiğil, a very old settlement and a village, Mecidiyeköy of Ilgın region, which migrated from the northeast because of the Russian invasion, is used to support evidence for what has changed in time in ceremonies like marriages and funerals. Interior and exterior decorations are the focus and standpoint to prove the quality of change as the local transforms into the popular and vice versa. Finally, religious souvenirs, ornaments, and posters of Islamic art will also be included in the presentation to emphasize the disharmony and fragmentation in taste. In conclusion, the change in the rural regions takes place in slow motion compared to those in urban settings. An ironic effect as parody is achieved as popular culture violates the unique and the aesthetic. As a result the study demonstrates that there is almost no particular taste or style in public settings in Konya and that, in the name of modernization, an eclectic distasteful, consuming culture occurs.

The ideal approach to culture is that we live and learn it, preserve it, and transfer it to others, but today, its pace is changing. As it is handed over to future generations, its future appears to be threatened by various influences and tendencies. There is a new inclination, in some circles, which seems to be free enough and not to be restricted to any cultural allegiance. The globalization of media inspires the provinces towards a formation of transnational identities and various kinds of cultural hybridism. There arises a fear that our cultural values and together with them our identities are imperiled largely from within.

My paper aims to offer an overview of the major modern tendencies in Konya restaurants and the local interior setting of a country house in a village through photographs. Of course, an endeavor of such a broad scope is bound to be incomplete, but it will at least try to evaluate the

predominance of America as a world power and the emergence of an aesthetic destruction so that it will allow the audience to question the conflict and devastation that we undergo in various levels.

Capitalism becomes a mode of domination, which is no longer associated with a class or a relation of forces but is entirely reabsorbed into forms, signs and modes of behavior around us. There is always energy and a movement in the culture of art and artifacts. Movaists claim that there is a continuous relation between creativity and consuming, as if some kind of a positive and a negative approach exist at the same time (Lynton 1980). Turkey as a country topographically and culturally uniting the East to the West without any doubt bares different cultures. It is natural that, as in any other country, a certain peculiar nostalgic approach to the past is also prevalent in its aesthetic stance. As popular art has visual and psychosocial impact, it challenges the traditional and opens itself up to influences of a larger scale by including and mixing very different and diverse items and objects on the same scale. In consequence, it carries one to different times and animates different emotions. Marcel Duchamp in the end of the 50s declared, “Everything could be art”.

Many of the restaurants and coffeehouses in Konya, which is one of the well-known conservative cities of Turkey in the midst of Anatolia, are non-alcoholic places that almost redefine the metropolitan life in a globalizing world. They have a distinctive social culture where the old and the new outstandingly capture the observer with its genuine display. In such settings many collaborative endeavors central to Turkey’s modern life take place.

My aim has been to exhibit how settings in Konya integrate to an alien taste, so to speak, in a very formative manner in the name of modernization. Centers for socializing become with their decor, places of dreams and ideals. We are constantly aware that a legacy of the old holds its own way to the new and to the so-called modern.

Such places seem to function for its visitors as a surprising world where people would enjoy being at after leaving their simple routinely life at home or at work. Their interesting decoration functions to satisfy the customers as their eyes roll on around with amazement. The contrast between the simple world of the past and the splendor of the chaotic world of the new could not be greater. No doubt that there is an appetite for the new and for the powerful inherited from the old. The new and the old are presented through sharp discords. In today’s world, one can

say that it is important to follow one's own personal path. We all want to try to be original by attracting attention. Modernization in certain parts of Turkey is merely known as something new and fashionable. However, fashion has something fake in it. It has such a subtle way of bearing and expressing things that individuals have to depict what is actually meant through hidden codes.

Everyone naturally tries to say something in his/her own way. We are all aware that there are loads of attention and effort put in to make something look authentic. When we are to consider the things that impress the individual, we become amazed with the results. As people in Konya are not accustomed to enjoy eating outside in restaurants, such places do not have an established everlasting taste. They are newly built places and they pretend to relate to the old as well as the new in the name of modernization. As globalization is an ongoing process of transformation, it expands the gaps and reestablishes meaning. It has a specific kind of interaction with time, which changes the pace according to cultures. It glorifies but does not give the adequate time to enjoy the glamour. In the new settings the eye sets on one object and then on the other. Everything competes with the one next to it. The race therefore is pitiless and nothing completely wins. Bits and pieces, fragments of life exist. The recent past seems to be much plainer than the present for the consuming mentality of today immediately displays whatever it gathers from the past. Therefore, nothing is left for the future. One's inheritance becomes as interesting and as relevant as any innovation. Everything becomes very exciting and a first-hand experience for the observer. In other words, all is meant to set aside the most aesthetic and the most cultured form of art.

Art is a matter of self-expression but it also affects and delights others. Popular art includes implicit connotations of associated artistic banality, which refers to the bourgeoisie. Few could claim that there is a subtle harmony, which defines and appreciates the progress in art. As cities grow into monstrous displays of arrogance and oppression, man's relation with nature and himself is irrecoverably lost. With the technological gift, the world has turned into a single unified habitation. Nowadays, surprise as a crude emotion, has a priority while comprehension has a secondary role. This leads to expressiveness rather than accurateness.

The scenes, do not assert in this case any classical interpretation. They are postmodern. In fact, the postmodern is intrinsically part of the modern. It breaks the rules and sets on a new

grounding. Places become, so to speak, the fulfillment of an ancient desire of humankind to create an imaginary world that would be as believable as the real world itself. Therefore, we have a strikingly unconventional composition in the same settings. They are intriguing because of their unusual arrangements. Briefly, I will present my settings in two categories: those that have the local and popular identities existing together and those that have the local and religious (Muslim) identities in the same setting.

The Sille Köşk Restaurant: Sille is one of the nearest suburbs of Konya and has an ancient site where the oldest churches in caves, and a medieval church structure, which is now under restoration, exist. It is an old Greek village once famous for its vineyards and is actually just a twenty-minute drive from the old city centre where the mystic poet Rumi is buried. A woman and her family who inherited the place from her grandparents run the Köşk restaurant. It is a well-known local and popular spot.

As one approaches the place, the first impression is a jungle of stonework display dating from the 19th century until today. Very different works of masonry are exhibited in a disorganized way. Between marble and cement, the eye catches the iron chains accompanied by a late 19th century wagon wheel, where the rust and the cracks on the single wheel of an oxcart carry us to the end of the Ottoman Empire. It recalls how in these village women took part in the act of loading ammunitions into the ox carts to start the Revolution of the Republic of Turkey.

The plastic umbrella with its Coca-Cola advertisement peers out with its red image through the objects of the past. The design of the spring-water fountain comes in the shape of a tombstone so that the people can drink water and at the same time pray to the soul of the man who has built it. The two-colored slabs covering the wall separated by cement is eye-catching as one steps into the parlor of the restaurant. Small and various sizes of different stone and marble pieces greet the customers at the entrance. The empty and planted pottery on the ground recalls the ancient cities, and the small entrance lamp in black metal has the design of the typical 18th century carriage lantern.

The wood posts of the portico that decorates the entrance-door, normally support the wine shoots in the season so that they can create a shade. A stone washbasin is randomly placed on a stone vase, stone pillars and several spongy stones are displayed merely for attraction. The old wheelbarrow and a new bucket both of the same colour remind us of the labour in the fields

where as next to it, the classical iron gate of the entrance has a resemblance to high barrow settings.

Wood, stone, iron and clay are the four major elements, which maintain a rural and cosy atmosphere especially with the green and flowery plants in the jugs. Rusted iron tools are hung on the stonewall to be exhibited. The wooden wheels on the stonewall prepare the observers for a bike from the 50s. One cannot help imagining its being ridden on the gravel road of Sille. Another stone spring water fountain exists before climbing the stairs. During the Ottoman Empire and still today, for those who are rich it is a custom to donate in the name of the dead person a fountain at spots where people could get tired and thirsty while walking long distances. We have in the early Turkish novels and the films these fountains becoming a meeting place for the city and village people. In villages before the taps had running water and the girls used to chat and have their daily gossip while filling their jugs. Istanbul as the capital of Ottoman Empire was famous for its colossal fountains built by the sultans nearby the mosques.

This sandstone fountain has a tin plated cup hung by a chain and has a brass tab handle. Just next to it there is an old cellar-door highlighted with whitewash paint in order to complete the atmosphere of the traditional. As one stays indoors, the final impression of the outside setting is a combination of slabs and cement walls, bamboo dining tables, iron-fenced windows and wooden posts as shelters from the sun.

The first thing that catches the sight is the two little shelves in the dark corner of the hall crowded with porcelain and copper oil-lamps. The brass and copper jugs and cups with silver-plated teapot and a wax candle in a candleholder are almost crammed in the shelves. The effective backdrop is a wall covered with thin slabs coated with varnish. They also highlight the hand-made embroidery fringed with lace that decorates the top of the windows. Thus, a rustic cosy atmosphere is maintained, but a self-service branch table is such a scene that it immediately appears to be incongruous with the traditional cottage-like atmosphere. We have an incompatible combination of objects, styles and manners that are foreign to each other. The brunch eaten late in the morning was popular during the late 19th century, and the self-service is an American style often adopted everywhere by modern hotels. Traditionally and typically, whether rich or poor, Turkish people were always served sitting either at the table or around a large raised tray on the

floor. The open buffet with its brunch service in the old rural vicinity in Konya is typically considered as modernization.

Straw matted, wood beamed ceilings are typical of the Turkish rural architecture, but the chandelier of a wagon-wheel is an element of decoration in the American rustic style. The wagon-wheel with its white bulbs in the form of fake-candles and with the cowbell hanging from the middle becomes a disparate object.

The mirror with its late nineteenth century frame design and the photographs of our leader Atatürk -the founder of the republic- is intentionally hung to underline that we owe being together –women and men accompanying each other at the same place- to his reforms. Another group photograph of Atatürk praying with his comrades opening the hands upwards is situated under the mirror and is treated in a special way. On both sides, we have the framework decorated with brass whiplash holders. We travel through history and come to see the owners of the place in another photograph, which is lit with a wall lamp from above. The couple existing in such a decoration stands as figures who are conscious of their times. The oil-lamps that are displayed here and there constantly remind the observer of the change and progress of our life-style. When we look at the modern blind hanging over the window, we see that the top of it is paradoxically covered with a traditional hand-made piece of embroidery. The blind with its design can also be read as a reminder of the wooden fences covering the bottom half of the windows through which the women of the harem would be able to look out without being seen during the Ottoman period.

Köşk Restaurant is filled not with luxurious antiquities but with curiosities, objects and junk. Just behind the entrance door, there is a very narrow library where you can find magazines about Turkey and a few best-seller novels on regional life and history and on the top of it, there are two more Atatürk portraits and an old typewriter. The national flag behind the picture reminds a trench scene from war. The military and the civil servant portraits are placed side by side to announce his achievements as a commander and a reformer. The wood carved key-box with beads that evade the evil eye according to folk-superstition is perhaps functional and decorative at the same time. Although to see books is a surprise, today some of the modern coffeehouses display books around tables like bookstores. There are corner shelves at each end filled with traditional hand-made potteries, vases and cups, a radio from the fifties and a wooden handled heavy iron stand for display. There is a copper scythe hung on the wall. From the large slab

covered stonewall we pass to the extension of the kitchen behind a narrow timber post. The work place is half hidden by a brick walling added later. The stainless aluminum shields contrast the earthenware dishes and plates. The clock with its white dial reminds the present time in an atmosphere where the rustic and modern have to exist together. The ready-made coffee and tea containers and the instant herbal tea bags that are exhibited in a wooden shelf case appropriately symbolize the timelessness of humanity. The copper utensils, pots and pans have more of a decorative role against the brick wall. At the end corner of the kitchen, there is a black cabinet full of plates and glassware. The very top of the cabinet is crowded with old beer-bottles from the sixties or eighties and on the wall around the cabinet, there are swords and knives and a pistol that urges one to think of the relation of violence committed because of being drunk. The stove in the middle with its primitive bulky appearance stands like an ugly machine.

The prayer beads around the beer bottle are paradoxical and ironic. It emits a mocking message. The beads around the neck of the beer bottle looks like a chain reminding us that those alcoholic drinks are forbidden in a Muslim society. Among other incongruities, an item tops all the others. The American flag, Obama and The White House in the post-card is placed in front of the bottles as if there is a need to enliven the American dream. There is also a crystal bottle on the same line of the post card that takes us to the glamour and glory of a dream world located on the other side of the ocean.

The fireplace is decorated with three different colored tiles and with traditional bricks. It is seated on a marble platform raised by the height of two tiles from the floor. The ground floor tiles are light brown in color. The pinecones in the fireplace had been burned and left heaped to indicate a fake-original rural atmosphere. The mantelpiece stands as a junk display. A tape recorder, a telephone of the sixties, a memorial plate, a glass corner vase and a copper jug are all randomly placed as if displayed in a fire or a car boot sale. Perhaps they intend to give the sense of the old in the most casual form. One feels that a sense of realism is caught in the present by the displayed photographs of the elderly people who used to live in that village fifty or seventy years ago.

When one is exposed to the old like this, there is the risk of hating it altogether. However, it is a highly popular place for the young generation and they love it, either because they enjoy gazing at such a variety of unpredictable incongruous objects or because they like to find

something familiar that reminds them of the house of their own grandparents. The exhibition of lanterns, door-knocks, keys, locks and pistols all announce that the world we live in has changed. Such places are like teaching arenas for the youth. At least they can touch and imagine the old days or find something to talk about out of the usual.

The wooden staircase that leads to the second floor is decorated in a more authentic way. The main hall at which the rooms open on each side represents the typical Ottoman Turkish architecture of the houses. There are two tables as if prepared for a meal. It looks strange and modern because normally there should be stack pillows beside the walls and low-seated tables as people used to sit on the floor. Each room opening to the hall has a small window used for decorative purposes, as there are heavy iron objects placed in the window cases. The rugs hanging on the walls display either a picture of a story or a symbol of a religious scene. The hall also opens to a larger room where the men gather for a meeting. Their hall is simple and huge, and is decorated with woolen rags, weapons, and bags. The gigantic wooden worry beads are also very popular as ornament in rural areas.

The columns are covered with straw mats and there are bags of rug hanging on them, which recall life in the tents and men on horseback. There are few rifles on the walls, which with its spaciousness imply the simple and wild life on the highlands. The milky white opal lamp shade echoes the American cowboy bar scenes of Texas. A colorful belt with bullet cases, a rifle, a *kilim* and a leather sandal hanging on the wall are typically Turkish. The simplicity and hardship of life on the mountainous areas of Turkey come to mind. A man's world is implied. The next small room is reserved for women to sit and chat. The two radios in the windowsill are their only entertainment. The whitewash paint and lace lined embroideries hung, as curtains with the Koran case at a higher level are well-known decorations. The rugs and the stack pillows decorate the simple room for the women. The opposite room is for the men with the weapons and musical instruments. Again, we have the Koran-case and the beads on the wall and the wooden wardrobe once had been used as a bathroom is popular in villages. An overall view of the restaurant is a local identity example, accompanying the modern under the influence of Americanization.

The main campus of Selcuk University has in its mall complex a huge restaurant called "Akkonak". It has a modern structure. The ceiling is high and the floor is dark green granite-like tiles. The columns are decorated with Islamic Ottoman period blue tiles and brick work together.

The clock is a typical European country style cuckoo-bird clock. The timber framework of the windows is country style. It can be called modern with the ceiling and floor structure. The grey panels surrounding like a frame between the walls and the ceiling with its supportive posts is a traditional design but when colored in plastic-grey it has the flavor of a modern taste.

The decorative display in such a place seems to have no prior preferences. It has a multinational and multicultural design. The classical golden-plated frames have in it a variety of pictures both European and Islamic. The objects displayed around the buffet do not match. The porcelain small cows with the Russian doll as a combination is odd. The French Street tableaux, the Miniature and the bronze like casting are like a concubine, seductively dressed. The American corner with the major icon posters is typical. Masculine prowess of James Dean-the smooth, subtle but physically little size man is not like John Wayne the cow-boy, who represents youth, rage, and inner conflict. Marilyn Monroe with Elvis Presley carries one to the Hollywood-films. This corner contrasts the 19th century British or European style with its dark wood cupboard with the grave looking pictures. The modern cupboard in front of the window with the three objects on it has no relation with each other except the colors matching the backdrop. The gray chandelier matches the wall and so does the bottle vase the tiles. The French plaster clock is all fake but antique style.

American country house cupboard with the Turkish pots and a school bell have no real harmony. The African or Mongolian drum with classical terrace plastic chairs exists at the balcony. Another musical instrument is the organ with the trumpet on it. The new antique designed seat and the magazines on the organ have nothing to do with musical notes but are the Turkish version of national geography. There is an overall view from above. On the main floor, the restrooms are also American style with its colorful and shinny glaze. On the way to the restrooms there is a display of an old school iron, a chest-like luggage, a burner, an old sewing machine and an eastern designed lantern. The multicultural images of African masques and the elephants of Africa with the wind-chime is almost musical. The Roman and Greek warrior of princess Diana is stunning.

The salad-bar, as well as the self-service, are American and they have the wet-bar as in the Manhattan apartments of New York. These do not exist in Turkish dinning tradition. The kebab grill and oven cooking is traditional in all villages and so are the brass-pans. While getting out of

the restaurant there is the shoe-polish stand on which a football advertisement is stamped and right behind it, the fountain, which has an old Ottoman taste with its brass tab, is also odd and absurd. Akkonak is on the second floor, in the entrance to the mall there is another upscale fast-food restaurant called “Taam Yeri”, an old Turkish name. It has an American billboard and ionic columns under the arches. As one can observe clearly, all is eclectic. On the other hand, the Turkish mystic setting restaurants are formal and they have a space for the whirling dervishes to perform. A Sufi-table is set in the middle in such restaurants. They sit on the floor while having dinner and then retire to the back coaches for coffee. Islamic motives on tiles exist.

A restaurant that has Rumi’s quotations on its wall says;

“Those who share the same feeling can understand each other.”
Mevlana calls all the people.
Come! Come again! Whoever, whatever you maybe,
Come!
Heathen, worshipper of idols or fire, come!
Even if you deny your oaths a thousand times, come!
Our door is the door of hope, come! Come as you are!

Rumi

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