

POROUS IDENTITIES IN WHITE ISTANBUL

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Beyaz İstanbul'da Gözenekleşen Kimlikler

Yerküremiz üzerinde Doğu ile Batı ayrımını gösteren somut bir çizgiden söz edemeyiz. Çünkü Batı ile Doğu reel coğrafi alanlar değil, tarihsel ve söylemsel kurgulardır. Batı, kendini Doğu olarak belirlediği bir mekanda kurar. Doğu/Şark "öteki" olarak, hem bir /bilimsel, anlatsal, sanatsal) bilgi nesnesi, hem de (siyasal, toplumsal) mübadele nesnesi olarak işaretlenmiştir.

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We always draft ourselves for other people and design our bodies according to a message we plan to spread to the environment. Therefore we look at ourselves through the eyes of the "other" that we want to attract into a circle of period of influence. Meanwhile we associate with the "other" at the level of thinking and our gazings become single.

Thinking empathically, let's try to see our İstanbul through the eyes of the Westerns. Let's walk down the streets of İstanbul with the impressions when Mr.Hans Jürgen Gawoll, the researcher from the Phylosophy Department of Bochum/Ruhr University, came to İstanbul University in the spring of 1994 to give a series of conferences on Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche.

Gawoll says, "While becoming European limits the absolute straightness of speech, the atmosphere of İstanbul speaks to those who have little in common." And then in order to make concrete of his thinkings, he focuses on Sultanahmet Square which transforms the

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tensions of religions to a definite tolerance. He tells the period of opening to the “other” with a message resolution of the square:

“Sultanahmet Square exhibits a surrealist view with all surroundings by reflecting a psychological climate. The Blue Mosque, which rounds a hypodrome left by Roman Empire, St. Sophia Church, which belonged to Christian world once upon a time, an obelisque from ancient Egypt, a fountain from Germany of Wilhelm period, constitute an energetic togetherness.

Here, Jürgen Gawoll handles the novel “Beyaz Kale” (White Castle) by Orhan Pamuk who describes 17th century Istanbul in his book. Gawoll also appreciates it as an explanation of telling in Turkish literature with a porous identity’s opening to the “other”.

The author also uses the white color of the castle as a reflecting item, makes Eastern master and Western slave identical on symbolic level, and gives opportunity to think once again.

The story in “White Castle” begins with a Venetian who was captured by Turkish pirates and was brought to Istanbul. This slave who was supposed to understand physics, astronomy and painting is purchased by a Turk who is also interested in the same subjects.

There’s a strange similarity between these two guys. The master of slave wants to learn Venice and sciences in the West from his own slave. To meet and to understand thoroughly each other, the master and the slave sit down around a table in a dark room of a house facing to Golden Horn. Their stories and adventures would lead them to the streets of Istanbul where the plague perishes everything, to the dreamy gardens and animals of Child Sultan, to the manufacturing of an incredible arm and finally, to the question which’s “Why am I?”

In the White Castle, at the end of the road, transformation is realized. Western slave is transformed into the East and Eastern master into the West. And they become single in a world where they find loving.

With the power of reflecting light of love, the white demolishes the discrimination between West and East, symbolized by the White Castle.

In this novel, words from every single hero are as follows:

“I liked him. Just like I liked my own tragic, helpless image in my dreams. Just like being drowned in this shameful, angry and sorrowful view. Like feeling shame while a wild animal dies before my eyes. Like feeling angry to a shameless son.

I liked myself with a silly disgust, with a silly joy. Maybe I liked it just like I'm used to moving my hands vainly as if it's an insect. Like knowing the thoughts which gradually fades everyday by echoing amongst the walls of my mind. Like knowing extraordinary scent of my sweat from my helpless body, my fatigued hair, my ugly mouth, my pink fingers that hold the pen. Therefore, they couldn't cheat me."

We can not talk about a concrete line that discriminates West and East on the globe. Because West and East are not really geographic zones, they are historical and fictitious segments. West builds itself in a place where it considers and makes definite as East.

The Orient or East as an "other" is symbolized as both a scientific and artful knowledge object and political, social intervention object.

Production of East is the result of a function that draws a line and discriminates them. East is born with a delay. That means, it's both built and formed and at the same time displaced. It's origin of the knowledge and the source of objection to knowledge.

According to Edward Said, the author of "Orientalism", thoughts, cultures and histories are not understood thoroughly unless their strength or formation of strength is purely scrutinized. Relation between East and West is the relation of a power, a sovereignty which's complex at different levels.

If East is made as East, the reason is, in simple terms, that it's not discovered as Eastern by 19th century Europeans. The reason is that it's accepted as Eastern.

The thing named as Eastern, is an internal concept in the period of identity formation. This is the transformation of identities and histories out of the West, under the Eastern models.

While Western Europe, United States of America, Canada and Japan are considered as Western hemisphere, Eastern Europe and Latin America are seen as a symbol of non-Western world. This geographically paradoxal description can not give us any idea of which country belongs to West or East.

Meanwhile it's highly meaningless that Western world can be limited in its frontiers.

Modernism had been described in a context of pre-modernism. At the same manner, mind is being described against superstition and irrational thoughts.

This partition had been localized in its own place in a symbolic formation of geography where the East and the West meet. And East had become a mirror that the East reflected its supremacy.

If we think identically East-West discrimination can be seen even in Istanbul.

With all the smelling of East, The Covered Bazaar, Topkapı Palace and all of the historic places which the tourists are interested in, are on the peninsula of European side of the city. This peninsula is the main owner of Ottoman relics. Still and video cameras of tourists record all the view belonging to Orient. Views that remind the Western metropolitans and daily life activities are located on the Asian side of the city. This situation shows us how the symbolic power between East and West disappeared. Because the city lives the East on the European side, and the West on the Asian side.

Istanbul, with its current location, rebels against the power of the "West".

The atmosphere of Istanbul calls for frankly openness to those who are intransigent. As for Gawoll, Muslims and Christians, East and West need each other. It's impossible to exist without each other, after a long recognition and acceptance period which took place between the two sides.

So the name of Istanbul might be a symbol of cultural project which's directed to the future that destroyed the centralization of the West by enriching it.

Istanbul can be a White Castle between West and East. Why not?

In the final analysis, a western tourist walking down the streets of Istanbul with a fez on head trespasses to East by living the "other" inside. Doesn't he/she? Set of images knitted in his/her thoughts is demolished. Isn't it?

Love, a common wealth, abolishes all the western walls, built on imaginary level. Istanbul, with all messages of its places, solely assumes this responsibility and becomes the White Castle of porous identities between East and West.

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