Introduction

… And from the other side, it is also the case that the most earnest and heartfelt efforts to imitate some foreign model can never entirely succeed in eliminating tell-tale traces of older, traditional local patterns of human interaction. The modern history of Japan, Russia and Turkey should suffice to tell us that.

William McNeill, "A Defence of World History"

In 2006, while I was working on an earlier draft of this book, Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk won the Nobel Prize for Literature. What should have been a joyous occasion for the writer and for Turkey, however, was instead marked by histrionic public accusations of treachery against Pamuk. He was vilified in the Turkish press. Several months before the announcement of the award, Pamuk had been interviewed by a Swiss newspaper, and in response to the reporter's characterization of Turkey as a country having difficulty in facing its past, he had emphasized his own willingness to discuss the Armenian genocide and the plight of Turkey's Kurdish minority. Even though Pamuk's transparency had been partly motivated by a desire to defend Turkey (against the implied charge that Turkey cannot deal with its problems like an "adult" and therefore does not deserve to join the European Union), when this interview was later covered in the Turkish media, many Turks decided that Pamuk was either a traitor or, at best, a sleaze. Official charges were brought against him for denigrating "Turkishness" (the charges were later dropped). Some even argued that if Pamuk were an honorable man, he would return his prize, which was surely given to him for political reasons. It was suggested that by accepting the Nobel Prize he was playing into the hands of the Westerners, whose sole motivation in their dealings with Turks was to make Turkey look bad.

I suppose everything about this episode looks ridiculous to an outsider. Here is a country that has bent itself out of shape for almost a

century to join the Western world, while at the same time holding on to the worst kind of paranoid suspicions about Western intentions. Turks accuse Westerners of portraying Turks always in an unflattering light (and rewarding those native sons, such as Pamuk, for playing along); yet their way of dealing with this perceived injury is to act in the most petulant way imaginable, giving credence to those who like to portray Turks as brutish. Even to sympathetic observers, Turks' general tendency to fly off the handle when confronted by any ugly facet of their country, their strange laws protecting "Turkishness," and their inability to break out of groupthink when it comes to narratives of Turkish history seems like nationalism run amok. And there is some truth to that assessment.

I hope I do not come across as an apologist, however, if I suggest that the exaggerated sense of pride and the persecution complex exhibited by Turkish nationalism today is not an inherent tendency of "Turks," but rather the unfortunate consequence of Turkey's place in the international system. This is not to say that Turks are justified in acting in this manner or cannot help but act in this manner. Nonetheless, however responsible Turks may be for their conduct, the underlying causes of such behavior can be found only in the interactions between Turkey and international society throughout the last century.

Orhan Pamuk is a writer who personifies Turkey's greatest aspirations and anxieties. He was able to achieve a level of international recognition that most Turks believed would never be accorded to a Turkish citizen; but he did this by writing (and speaking) evocatively about things that Turks find embarrassing while simultaneously ridiculing things that Turks lionize. Many Turks believe that Pamuk was rewarded for confirming the West's worst perceptions of Turkey, from the Armenian genocide to the fact that some Turkish women wear headscarves.[1] And they are partly right.

The nationalists are obviously wrong about Pamuk being a traitor, but in all of the misdirected anger at him, there lies the justifiable (or at least understandable) frustration with the fact that Pamuk gets recognition because he often writes about what is different about Turkey.

[1] This is one of the subject matters of Pamuk's *Snow*. "'Isn't it bad for us if American readers find out from this book that some Turkish women wear headscarves?' asked a worried boy, who had told me he learned his excellent American English by chatting on the Megadeth fansite. 'Won't they think we're … like Iran?'" From Gloria Fisk, "Orhan Pamuk and the Turks."

Turks (or, at least, the secular, urban, establishment Turks) want what they cannot get: to be recognized simultaneously for what Turkey has in common with the West (i.e. as an ordinary, "normal" country) and for the super-human effort Turks have put into creating that common ground (i.e. as an extraordinary, "special" country). The realization that the West cares more about what lies beyond the Westernized Turkey Turks have worked so hard and sacrificed so much to create is an existential kick in the gut.

National identity and stigma

Are the nationalist Turks irrational? Perhaps. Their frustration is not that different, however, than that of a blind person who has spent a lifetime developing skills to function as well as a "normal"[2] person, only to find time and time again that people cannot but see him as a blind person, that whatever he does, he cannot shed the label of blindness as the primary marker of his identity. Being rewarded for one's handicap is in some ways worse than being shunned for it – a person is thus deprived also of the righteous indignation of the deliberately victimized and has difficulty justifying his anger.

In their reactions to Pamuk's award as well as in their other seemingly irrational behavior, Turks, as a group, are acting very much like an individual who carries a "stigma" and who is trying to hide it. Erving Goffman describes "stigma" as "a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity."[3] If the stigmatized individual assumes that "his differentness is known about already" he is someone who is "*discredited*"; if he assumes that his stigma "is neither known … nor immediately perceivable" he is someone who is "*discreditable*." Modern Turks continuously live with the fear of becoming discredited; they worry about being forever stuck with their "stigma(s)": Eastern, backward, Asian, Muslim, uncivilized, barbaric, etc.

One of the distinctive features of having to endure life with a stigma is feeling the need to be always "on," "having to be self-conscious and calculating about the impression [one] is making, to a degree and in areas of conduct which [one] assumes others are not."[4] In stigmatized

[2] "We and those who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue I shall call the *normals*." Goffman, *Stigma*, p. 5.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 3. [4] *Ibid*., p. 14.

collectives, the same need to be "on" seems to manifest as the emergence of an officially sanctioned group self-narrative that is quite stifling of individual members' ability to express themselves honestly to the outside world. Actions such as Pamuk's are perceived as a betrayal of the highest order, and in some ways they are: by undermining the sanctity of the group narrative, they spoil the identity of the group and therefore threaten its very existence.

One of the underlying arguments in this book is that stigma has the same effect on states that it has on individuals: it colors and therefore motivates every subsequent interaction. Not being of the "West," being behind the "West," not being "modern" enough, not being developed or industrialized or secular or civilized or Christian or democratic enough – these are examples of designations (and, later, self-evaluations) that have essentially functioned as stigmas for states. To treat such labels as if they were only objective assessments of the facts on the ground is to miss entirely the social dynamics of international relations. By drawing attention to the stigma-like properties of seemingly objective assessments in international relations, I want to draw attention to the socially constructed nature of the international system – it is only in a social, comparative, relative setting that various physical conditions become problems to be managed or overcome. After all, it is the norm of sightedness that makes blindness a stigma, something much more than an individual attribute.

Stigma is not at all the same thing as discrimination, although there is considerable overlap between the two in practice. Goffman said that in order to understand stigma we need "a language of relationships, not attributes."[5] Stigma, in essence, is a socially shared ground between the "normals" and those who are being discredited: "The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do" and "the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he ought to be."[6] Stigma, then, is *as much the internalization of a particular normative standard that defines one's own attributes as discreditable*, as it is a label of difference imposed from outside.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 3. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Apart from a few states which have chosen total isolation (and even those may not be completely free), most in the world today still evaluate themselves according to the ideals and ideas of modernity.[7] Many people all around the globe continue to equate modernization with progress, development with improvement, and they hardly ever question that these are the rightful missions of a state. Even if their own particular state does not embody those ideals, most feel that it should, and feel disappointed, and perhaps even humiliated, when it falls short.

This is why Orhan Pamuk's books, which deal with the existential issues of being trapped between the East and the West, resonate with readers in the "East" as much as they fascinate Westerners. In an interview with *The Believer* magazine, Pamuk remarks:

> I'll tell you something. I have just come back from Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taipei. And you know what they say? This is very peculiar … No one thinks his country is completely East. In China, they say, "Yes, Mr. Pamuk, we have the same East/West question here." They think that they are also torn between the East and the West, the way we are here in Turkey. They don't consider themselves in China or in Tokyo completely "East." They think that they have some part of the "West" and "East," you see? … And they will tell you this, and then they will smile – knowing the strangeness of it. There is no place, perhaps, in humanity, where the subject considers himself completely Eastern.[8]

What sets Turkey apart from the West, much to the consternation of secular Turks who want to pass as ordinary Europeans, unites it in a common fate with the majority of states in the modern international system. Most communities in the world exist in a constant state of identity struggle. While it is extremely difficult to live up to the standards of modernity – which, despite its universal language, has undeniable Western origins and therefore carries certain assumptions about proper social and institutional configurations – without feeling inauthentic, it is also almost impossible to be authentically non-Western.

[7] See Meyer and Jepperson, "'Actors' of Modern Society," 105, for a further elaboration of this point.
[8] Rockingham, "Interview with Orhan Pamuk."

Modernity and the international system

The lack of attention given to the particular cultural and historical origins[9] of the modern international system may just be the most glaring oversight in mainstream International Relations (IR). The emotional price that the majority of peoples around the world have had to pay as a result of joining a system of states with very specific cultural origins – the rules of which they did not create, the norms of which were unfamiliar at best, the major players of which judged and explicitly labeled them as inferior, and the ontology of which convinced them that they indeed were lacking in some way – is swept under the rug as being irrelevant to international affairs.

People who have grown up in countries whose modernity has never been in question may not fully understand how all-consuming[10] the stigma of comparative backwardness may become for a society; how tiring it is to conduct all affairs under the gaze of an imaginary and imagined West, which is simultaneously idealized *and* suspected of the worst kind of designs; or how scary it is to live continuously on the brink of being swallowed by a gaping chasm of "Easternness," which is simultaneously denigrated *and* touted as the more authentic, the more realistic choice. No amount of hostile bravado disguised as nationalist rhetoric of pride can cover up the fear people around the world feel when they think about their place in the international system. Let me turn to Pamuk once again:

> What literature needs most to tell and investigate today are humanity's basic fears: the fear of being left outside, and the fear of counting for nothing, and the feelings of worthlessness that come with such fears; the collective humiliations, vulnerabilities, slights, grievances, sensitivities, and imagined insults, and the nationalist boasts and inflations that are their next of kin … We have often witnessed peoples, societies and nations outside the Western world – and I can identify with them easily – succumbing

[9] See Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization*, pp. 114–20, as well as Blaney and Inayatullah, *Problem of Difference*, Introduction, for an extended discussion of this critique.

[10] "The awareness of inferiority means that one is unable to keep out of consciousness the formulation of some chronic feeling of the worst sort of insecurity, and this means that one suffers anxiety and perhaps even something worse, if jealousy is really worse than anxiety." Sullivan, as quoted by Goffman, *Stigma*, p. 13.

to fears that sometimes lead them to commit stupidities, all because of their fears of humiliation and their sensitivities. I also know that in the West – a world with which I can identify with the same ease – nations and peoples taking an excessive pride in their wealth, and in their having brought us the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and Modernism, have, from time to time, succumbed to a self-satisfaction that is almost as stupid.[11]

To be torn between the East and the West as a state, as a society, as a nation, is to exist in the international system with the dilemmas that are faced by stigmatized individuals in everyday interaction. The individual with stigma may accept that he has a stigmatized attribute and try to improve his life within the bounds of that awareness – but that choice implies resigning oneself to second-class status. Bringing oneself to that kind of resignation is extremely difficult, even in cases where it may unavoidable.[12] Or the individual may try to act as if he does not have a stigma or convince himself that it may be overcome with the right measures, but that course of action relegates one to a lifetime of dissonance, and does not necessarily guarantee success.[13]

Just like individuals, some states have coped with potentially stigmatizing labels more calmly than others. Turkey is not one of those countries. The emotional trauma inflicted by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which came toward the tail end of the century in which Turks internalized modern standards and their own stigmatization, has made Turkey, at least thus far, a state that is obsessed with international stature, recognition, and acceptance. Much like an individual who attains a stigma attribute later in life and blames it for everything that goes wrong after that point, modern Turkish identity was constructed around the notion that the only thing keeping Turkey

[11] Pamuk, "My Father's Suitcase."

[12] Goffman quotes the account of a newly blind girl visiting an institution for the blind:

> Here was the safe, segregated world of the sightless – a completely different world, I was assured by the social worker, from the one I had just left … I was expected to join this world. To give up my profession and to earn my living making mops. I was to spend the rest of my life making mops with other blind people, eating with other blind people, dancing with other blind people. I became nauseated with fear, as the picture grew in my mind. Never had I come upon such destructive segregation. (*Stigma*, p. 17)

[13] More on this point later, but for now, see also Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 77–8, 80.

from regaining its former glory was its identity as a non-Western state. In the reconstructed nationalist narrative of the republic, the failure to modernize, to become Western, is seen as the primary reason for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, for Turks, the pain of losing an empire is fused with the feeling of inferiority due to being not Western/modern enough.

Three cases of stigmatization: Turkey, Japan, and Russia

By now, it will probably come as no surprise to the reader if I confess that I started this project with the desire to understand the things I found so frustrating about my native country, Turkey – but also because I thought that there had to be something missing from a body of literature that had almost nothing to say about political actions I observed on an almost daily basis.

Now that I have put some emotional and physical distance between Turkish society and myself, I am able to observe a certain peculiar tendency in friends and family. "Only in Turkey," they will frequently say, "such a thing could only happen in Turkey!" The complaints vary, but the formula remains the same: "if only we were living under a true democracy/in a modern country/among civilized people, then our fellow citizens would behave/dress appropriately/talk politely/have manners/they would not be so religious/or wear headscarves/or try to cut corners/or elect a government like AKP/and so on." Goffman points out that this kind of condescension is a way of putting a distance between oneself and one's "own": "The stigmatized individual exhibits a tendency to stratify his 'own' to the degree to which their stigma is apparent and obtrusive. He can then take up in regard to those who are more evidently stigmatized than himself the attitudes the normals take to him."[14] There is also a parallel narrative about the uniqueness of Turkey. Only Turkey is supposed to be unfairly singled out for discrimination by the West; only Turkey can bridge the East and the West; only Turkey can be a model for Muslim countries; nobody understands Turkey; nobody appreciates Turkey; Turkish society is too complex for ordinary political institutions to work there, etc.

[14] Goffman, *Stigma*, p. 107.

There was a time I would have agreed with them wholeheartedly – after all, I too am shaped by the Turkish national habitus.[15] Growing up in Turkey, I was inclined to think that Tolstoy's maxim about unhappy families applied equally well to nations, and that Turkey was a special bundle of contradictions and problems, the likes of which nobody else had to deal with. Thankfully, I was wrong (misery loves company). As much as Turks would like to believe that they face a unique set of challenges, there are in fact other countries with similar constellations of problems.

The domestic narratives in both Japan and Russia bear a striking resemblance to those in Turkey. All three countries are torn between the East and the West, and in each case this condition is sometimes seen as a weakness that needs to be overcome (by choosing one side over the other) and sometimes as a blessing that needs to be exploited (by acting as either a bridge or a protective gate between the two).[16]

This similarity may be surprising given the differences between these countries' material conditions, but it is no accident. Certain characteristics set these states apart from both the "East" and the "West," and it is no coincidence that William McNeill singled these three countries out as examples of states that were unable to eliminate "tell-tale traces" of older patterns despite their "heartfelt efforts."

Turkey, Japan, and Russia all pre-date the Westphalian system as political entities.[17] As empires, they[18] long sustained social universes capable of producing comprehensive worldviews – in other words, before their incorporation into the Westphalian system these states had their own normative standards by which they defined themselves as "normal" and others as different, abnormal, or inferior.

[15] Habitus is "an active residue or sediment of [the actor's] past that functions within his present, shaping his perception, thought, and action and thereby molding social practice in a regular way." Crossley, "The Phenomenological Habitus," 83.

[16] E.g. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, p. 177; Klien, *Rethinking Japan's Identity*, p. 6.

[17] Obviously, these were not the only states around in the seventeenth century to have missed the beginning of system formation only to join it in some form later. Aspects of my argument apply to states such as Iran, India, China, and Thailand as well, but what distinguishes Turkey, Japan, and Russia is the relative autonomy they were able to retain vis-à-vis Europe.

[18] For system-level arguments, the book follows the IR (and layman's) convention of referring to states *as if* they are capable of expressing purposeful, unitary agency.

Therefore, incorporation into the Westphalian system in the case of these pre-modern empires necessitated giving up a self-affirming position of relative privilege and accepting a self-negating position of an outsider instead. This new position did not square well with self-understandings shaped by centuries of being the masters of their own domains.[19] Furthermore, because they joined the original incarnation of the international system, the European society of states, as autonomous entities, their position of inferiority was not overtly forced on them, as it was in the case of colonized peoples[20] – they came to an awareness about their inferiority, i.e. in the sense of a lack or deficit of modernity, through their own internal discussions.[21] As such, people of these states did not reject outright the values of modernity as a hostile foreign imposition (as is perhaps the case with certain schools of Muslim thought) but, rather, looked upon those values as something to be emulated; believed Westernization to be a goal that a state could achieve by trying hard enough, and saw it as a solution that might allow them to recreate their past privileged position in the new normative universe. In the twentieth century, all three countries experimented with revisionist grand strategies with the intent of capturing what they thought was their rightful place in the new international system. However, instead of earning them a seat among the "established" members of the international society, these revisionist policies ended in failure.

As I will demonstrate throughout this book, the aforementioned dynamics between the Western core of the international system and the Eastern latecomers closely resemble the *established-outsider* figuration delineated by the famous sociologist Norbert Elias. According

[19] The importance of having a consistent self-understanding for state behavior is stressed in the literature on "ontological security." Ontological security is first and foremost about having a consistent sense of "self." See Zarakol, "Ontological Insecurity," as well as Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, pp. 25–6, for an extended overview of the relevant literature.

[20] Having escaped direct colonization is a significant element of both Turkish and Japanese identity narratives. The Japanese call this a "'parting point in history' (rekishi no wakare)." Klien, *Rethinking Japan's Identity*, p. 11.

[21] This is the case even with Russia. Despite its success in joining the Westphalian system as an equal member after Peter's reforms, Russia maintained an outsider status within this in-group and its differences became more evident after the radical transformations in Western Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century.