

Is Orhan Pamuk a paranoid liar?

Saturday 7 August 2010, by [Orhan Kemal Cengiz](#)

Fatih Altaylı, the editor-in-chief of Habertürk, a major Turkish daily, titled his column yesterday "Students and Pamuk." I think his article was extremely illuminating to get a picture of the mentality and psychology of secular Turkish elites.

He said a group of American college students had visited him to get an idea about the media in Turkey. While they chatted, the students started to talk about how they were very surprised to see dramatic differences between the Turkey they saw with their own eyes and the one they saw through the lenses of Orhan Pamuk. Let's read the rest from Mr. Altaylı:

"We are very surprised,' they said. 'Why?' I asked. They said, 'Turkey is more modern, beautiful and richer than many places in Europe.' I asked, 'Why is this so surprising?' They replied, 'We read Orhan Pamuk and we did not expect this.' It is interesting that out of 15 students, 14 had read most of Orhan Pamuk's books. I said, wondering, 'What did you expect?' They said: 'After reading Orhan Pamuk, we expected a gray, low-spirited, oppressive, dull and dark country where soldiers patrol and the people seem unhappy. But we found exactly the opposite.'

"I asked, 'What do you think of it now?' They said, 'We think Orhan Pamuk is a liar and that he smears his country's image.' I said, 'Don't think that way.' They asked, 'Why?' I said: 'Orhan Pamuk is an artist. He is not an ordinary man. Like many artists, he lives in a world of his own with his paranoia, hallucinations and different perceptions in his spirit. When we look at a place, we see something different from artists. ... Accept him as he is, as an artist. He saw his spirit. He is not a liar. He is only an artist who reflects his state of spirit.' Then I showed them his picture on Goa Beach and said, 'Maybe he will write about brighter things.' We laughed.

"But deep down inside, I still got angry at Pamuk. This was the contribution of our only Nobel-prize winning author to the image of Turkey before the eyes of 15 young American journalists-to-be. They were lucky to have come and seen Turkey. What about those who do not come, but only read?!"

The writer of these paragraphs is not an "ordinary" columnist. He is a prominent figure in Turkish media. He played an important role and directed some newspapers and TV channels, including the Hürriyet daily, in the past. Through his article you can see the mentality of white Turks who hate Pamuk, who hate devout Muslims and who do not see anything wrong in Turkey's past.

He does not tell these students that Pamuk wrote most of his novels between 1980 and 2000, a period that carried the mark of the 1980 military coup, a period in which tens of thousands of people were brutally tortured, lost their lives, lost their jobs, when all civil society organizations were closed down and so on. He does not tell them that in these 20 years torture was widespread throughout the country, that Kurdish villages were burned down, that thousands upon thousands of Kurds were kidnapped in broad daylight and that their tortured bodies were thrown onto highways by the illegal gendarmerie organization JİTEM, whose existence our military still continues to deny. He does not tell these students that up until 2007, the year when the Ergenekon-deep state investigation began, it was not possible to imagine a military officer being put on trial for human rights violations and extra-judicial killings he carried out. He does not tell them that Pamuk's novels were written in this atmosphere and that Pamuk had to leave Turkey as a result of threats from the Ergenekon gang, whose very existence is still being denied by Turkish elites.

He could have told them that we still have a lot of problems with respect to democracy and human rights, but that Turkey's situation today is by no means comparable to the situation of this country just 10 years ago. If these students had come to Turkey 10 years ago, they would have seen police officers in the streets

watching people in quite a paranoid way. Had they come then, they would have seen that Pamuk was portraying this paranoid state mentality in a very masterful way.

But white Turks cannot see and confess that all this progress was made for several reasons: They were accomplices to the old military system of guardianship, they benefited immensely from the privileged situation provided them and, in return, whitewashed all the sins of this system. Second, they are highly allergic to devout Muslims and do not want to accept that the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, which rose to power with the support of these conservative and devout Muslims, can do anything good.

Instead of giving an honest account of what was really going on in Turkey during all these years, Mr. Altaylı, through his column, once again shows Pamuk as a target to nationalist hit men who will read his article's cherry-picked version of events on nationalist websites. He portrays Pamuk as a paranoid and delusional writer for Americans and as a traitor for predators who await his return to Turkey. Our white Turks have always been good as the devil's advocate and will apparently continue for a while to tell their rotten stories in thousands of new formats. How lucky are we to have people like Pamuk who only speak the truth. May God bless Pamuk.

Sources

Today's Zaman 04 August 2010, Wednesday