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THE LIMITS OF WESTERNIZATION

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Journal of Transnational American Studies (JTAS) 8.1 (2017)

The Limits of Westernization



A Cultural History of America in Turkey

Perin E. Gürel

Columbia University Press New York



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For Marjane Honey—
May you always keep your love of learning and sense of humor entangled.

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THE LIMITS OF WESTERNIZATION

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Journal of Transnational American Studies (JTAS) 8.1 (2017)

INTRODUCTION

Good West, Bad West, Wild West

About halfway through the 2010 Turkish blockbuster *Yahşi Batı* (*The Mild West*), a mock-Western, two Ottomans dressed in stereotypical cowboy outfits are riding through late nineteenth-century America. Their sultan has sent them on a mission: to present a priceless diamond to the U.S. president as a token of international friendship. However, at the beginning of the movie, bandits attacked their carriage and stole the diamond and their clothes. Since then, they have been searching for ways to make money and retrieve the diamond. One of the pair, a refined and educated agent of the Treasury, confesses with exasperation, "I need to reevaluate my infatuation with the West." His companion, a coarse secret service agent, replies that it does not make sense to think so highly of the West anyway. "A hundred years ago," he scoffs, "the Palace of Versailles did not have any toilets. The king went directly on the palace floor. They invented the waltz to avoid stepping in all the shit." They ride on, commenting on the decline of the Ottoman Empire using schoolbook clichés, until they hear a gunshot ring out. As they take cover, they see that the sound came from a female sharpshooter holding target practice. The secret agent's jaw drops. Clearly impressed with her skills, he cannot take his eyes off her beauty. "I see a sudden infatuation with the West developing in you," observes his companion sarcastically. "Well," replies the agent, "you have got to take the things that are good from the West."[1]

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With that screen exchange, *The Mild West* reveals what the discerning viewer has already discovered: this movie is not really about the Wild West and the Ottoman Empire, but about contemporary Turkey and "the West," specifically the United States. The scene comments on what appears to be a love-hate relationship, connecting these troubled affects to the complexities of Turkey's westernization (*batılılaşma*). On the one hand, "the West" is disgusting; its supposedly civilized rituals of courtship (i.e., the waltz) are a mere cover for scatological realities. This is a West is to be avoided, somewhat like scattered excrement on the dance floor. On the other hand, the West is stunning and skilled; it must be observed and courted. Thus westernization becomes a double-edged sword, beneficial and malevolent, desirable and damaging. The United States may provide good elements for incorporation into the Turkish body politic; yet, if Turkey takes in too much or takes the "bad" things, it risks degeneration. Complicating these depictions is the fact that the viewer encounters them in a movie that mobilizes Turkish nationalist sentiments through the audiovisual grammar of Hollywood. The characters debating the merits of westernization are dressed like cowboys from a Clint Eastwood movie. This film, which comments on the complexities of westernization, in other words, would not have been possible without a type of westernization. But which type of westernization is that? The good, the bad, or the ugly?

The Republic of Turkey is a Muslim-majority progeny of the Ottoman Empire, the decline of which paralleled the rise of the United States in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[2] In the early-twenty-first century, U.S.–Turkish relations are marked by ambivalence. Officially, the two countries are NATO allies and strategic partners. Yet one does not need to search long to find condescending attitudes toward Turkey in U.S. newspapers and policy journals as well as in popular culture. Similarly, Turks demonstrated high levels of both "anti-Americanism" and pro-American sentiments in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In a 2001 Turkish poll, the United States ranked highest in response to the question, "Which country is Turkey's best friend in international relations?" Yet the United States also scored high, coming in second, when the question was reversed to "Which country is Turkey's number one enemy in international relations?"[3] Even more surprisingly, in a 2007 Pew Global Attitudes survey, Turkey gave the United States the lowest ap-

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proval rating (9 percent) among all surveyed countries.[4] Such data have long made Turkish–U.S. relations a puzzler for international relations scholars. How can Turkey, a longtime ally, give the United States its lowest approval rating on record? How can "the West" be the best, and the worst? As the proxy wars in Syria and Iraq persist and Turkey reels after a violent, failed coup attempt with alleged ties to the U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen, Turkish popular sentiments toward the United States continue to be complicated and in flux.

Focusing on the twentieth century as the crucible of contemporary U.S.–Turkish relations, *The Limits of Westernization* unpacks this love-hate relationship. In particular, it demonstrates how Turkish perceptions of the United States have formed in relation to local debates over *batılılaşma* (westernization). The "American century" saw Turkey transition from contiguous empire to nation-state, figuring its place in a world order increasingly influenced by a new kind of postterritorial empire that sought to remake that world in its own image.[5] Using Turkish and English sources, examining official, elite, and vernacular texts, I demonstrate how Turks responded to the rise of the United States as a world-ordering power through a preexisting lens that deemed westernization both necessary and potentially corrupting. Turkish stock figures and figures of speech, changing through time, contrasted America to Europe, representing it alternately as a good model for selective westernization or as the most dangerous source of degeneration. As U.S. policymakers cast Turkey in various figurative roles within their own prescriptive civilizational templates, Turks anticipated, manipulated, and contested these attempts through the local logics of westernization. Ultimately, the United States was not able to contain Turkey within its world-ordering blueprints, nor was the Turkish elite able to police cultural change through civilizational figures of "the West." Instead, alternate conceptions of modernity, and folk culture hybridized with American cultural exports, operated as resources for both popular anti-Americanisms and resistance to state-led westernization. The story of the twentieth century transitioning to the era of the War on Terror is, in part, a story of how local and U.S. elites attempted to figure peoples into civilizational templates that clash with the complexity of culture.

For over a century, Ottoman and, later, republican Turkish policymakers developed a mode of governmentality focused on Europe and,

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increasingly, the United States.[6] Led by its intelligentsia, the Turkish state repeatedly attempted what some scholars have called "modernization without colonization," and what I call authoritarian or selective westernization: selectively adopting Western institutions and technologies while trying to forestall unwanted changes in sociocultural norms.[7] As a type of governmentality, Turkey's selective westernization has operated both as general theory about governing through strategic, Western-inspired reforms, and a method of social engineering, creating a certain type of citizen-subject. Some of the most lasting selective westernization reforms, all implemented in the early twentieth century under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, were sociocultural. These included the introduction of French-style secularism (*laïcité*), the adoption of the Latin alphabet, Western forms of dress, and the Gregorian calendar. Such reforms sought to create properly "modern" Turkish citizens—citizens who would strategically embody Western modes of self-presentation but remain loyal subjects of the Kemalist state.[8] Atatürk, after all, was the very same leader who fought for and achieved Turkish independence from Europe during and after World War I. The opening dialogue's quip about taking the "good things" from the West echoes key questions regarding such elite borrowings and their nationalist limits: Can we draw the boundaries of westernization? If so, where? What are the "good things" to take? What should we exclude?

These are impossible questions, since no power elite can fully direct the trajectory of sociocultural change in even the smallest and most homogenous nation. As a project of nationalist "development," authoritarian westernization aims to destabilize traditional structures with the intention of establishing and reifying new ones.[9] However, as Bernard Lewis noted in his canonical history of modern Turkey, "it is almost a truism there can be no limited and insulated borrowing by one civilization of the practices of another, but that each element introduced from outside brings a train of consequences."[10] Despite official westernizers' commitment to order and mistrust of anomie (normlessness), cultural changes unleashed by increasing transnational contact often prove volatile.[11] Selective westernization carries within it the seeds of transculturation, that "extremely complex transmutation of cultures" interacting in asymmetrical relations of power.[12] Even the most resolute nationalist rulers can have no say over how (or even whether) their reforms will take

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root and hybridize with local cultural formations. Moreover, since no cultural formation is ever entirely foreign or fully local, we can only speak of "cycles of hybridization" and indigenization.[13] Yet, since at least the nineteenth century, this has not stopped Turkey's leaders from attempting to determine the proper limits of westernization.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Turkish elite developed a distinct set of discursive practices to describe and police the "wild" aspects of transculturation with the West. These include both figures of speech (e.g., metaphors, metonyms, symbols, and other rhetorical devices) and stock figures, representing the dangers of over- and under-westernization. As in the opening dialogue, Turks have historically figured the boundaries of westernization using tropes of gender and sexuality. In the process, they have developed a local discourse regarding the dangers of excessive westernization, or "westoxication," which casts certain types of Western cultural influence as degenerative.[14] The limits go both ways. Turkey's ruling elite have deemed it aberrant to absorb the West too voraciously, but were also concerned with policing citizens they considered too closed off from Western-style modernity. Thus stock figures like the over-westernized, effete Istanbul dandy found their counterparts in the stereotype of the coarse, under-westernized, hypermasculine Easterner.[15] Turkey's political elite regularly mobilized the two technologies policing the limits of westernization (authoritarian westernization as a mode of governmentality and "over-" and "under-westernization" as discursive aggregates) against wild westernization as a type of transculturation.

I use the qualifier "wild" to signify the unpredictable aspects of vernacular transculturation. "Wild" as a biological and sexual metaphor implies hybridization with colloquial, even vulgar, methods of communication deemed inappropriate for civic use. The concept goes beyond acknowledging how authoritarian westernization has failed to convert all subjects to a properly modern Turkish identity; it also underlines that there is no culturally pure resistance to elite-led westernization, even at the level of folklore. As Chen reminds us, the Middle East is "a half-Western Orient."[16] This is abundantly clear in the case of Asia Minor, which has both served as the borderlands for fluctuating understandings of "the West" and "the East" and been a rich site of transculturation since antiquity.[17]

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The term also purposefully evokes the "Wild West," an American "myth" connoting hybridity, chaos, and violence.[18] Before World War II, France was the primary Western exporter of cultural materials to Turkey; after World War II, the balance slowly shifted along with the rise of English language education in the country. Consumers of foreign media also diversified, expanding from the truly elite readers of French novels in the nineteenth century to a more mixed group of moviegoers, pop music fans, and Internet users. Certainly folklore and popular culture showed marks of vernacular hybridity long before the mid-twentieth century. Wide-scale wild westernization—that is, the wide-scale transculturation of Western cultural exports with the local vernacular—however, coincided with the rise of the United States as the world's leading exporter of mass culture materials in the mid-twentieth century.[19] These foreign exports, many transporting the myth of "the Wild West," merged with local folklore, with unpredictable results. As in the film vignette opening this introduction, the Wild West (sometimes figured as "Texas") works as a metonym for the United States in Turkish representations. In contemporary Turkish popular and folk cultures, this imported trope operates hybridized with local perceptions of U.S. imperialism.

Even as they were "figuring" the limits of westernization, Turks have had to "figure out" the United States—the new West that rose to prominence in the twentieth century—and the role it could play in national projects of westernization. Most cultural histories of Turkish westernization to date have focused on the Europe-inspired reforms of the early twentieth century, which included the adoption of "the Swiss civil code, the Italian Criminal Code, the German Commercial Code," and the French system of laïcité.[20] Indeed, Turkey's rulers originally conceived of selective westernization in relation to various European polities directly encroaching upon their sovereignty. However, they developed it in response to a new American empire, which mobilized a wide array of tools (economic, political, military, and cultural) to shape the world's peoples as figures in various prescriptive civilizational schemas. Local commentators on "westernization" do not always differentiate between the United States and Europe; the moments of conflation and differentiation, as explored in this book, can both be politically significant.

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In the late nineteenth century, U.S. intellectuals and policymakers began figuring America as the world's model, guide, and arbiter of modernity. Merging anthropology with eugenics, they mapped the world's peoples on a racialized scale of civilization, which cast the Ottoman Empire as the representative of Islamic barbarism through the stock figure of "the terrible Turk."[21] During and immediately after World War I, Wilsonianism touted the promise of liberal developmentalism alongside this racial logic, tacitly promising modernization and self-determination to all, while restricting access for nonwhite and non-Christian races. After World War II, during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the U.S. power elite began to figure a new world order that deemphasized racial and religious differences. Policy-oriented intellectuals developed an anticommunist "modernization theory" inspired in part by Kemalism and its attempts to counter the figure of "the terrible Turk" through selective westernization.[22] These theorists imagined modernization as a series of steps modeled on America's own developmental experience, open to all, with U.S. guidance. In this new rubric, the Republic of Turkey would play a key role as an intermediary example of successful, pro-American modernization. Thus by the mid-century, the figure of the terrible Turk had receded in memory to be taken over by images of Turkey as apt pupil, contrasted to the "bad Arab" embodied by the likes of Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. Yet the late twentieth century saw cracks in this logic, which expanded as American Islamophobia resurged after the Cold War. The events of September 11, 2001, made Muslim-majority Turkey a critical "front state" for the United States once again, recalling its role during the Cold War.[23] During the early years of the War on Terror, America's new figurative bogeyman, the "Islamic terrorist," allowed Turkey to be occasionally cast in the newly invented role of "moderate Muslim"—yet again a touted model for the rest of the Middle East. The recurring emphasis on racially and religiously inflected civilizational divides, however, showed the limits of U.S. internationalism in a supposedly postimperial and postracial world. Foregrounding shifting figures about and from Turkey—a country that continues to be a key player in U.S. plans to "modernize" the Middle East—helps demonstrate the transnational development of a powerful Orientalist trope, from "the Terrible Turk" to "the Islamic Terrorist."

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BETWEEN ORIENTALISM AND WESTERNIZATION

Scholars of American empire have inherited, and built upon, Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a model for examining how cultural production may intersect with international relations. According to Said, Orientalism is the discursive aggregate through which European authors, artists, scholars, and colonial administrators have constructed an East that is timeless, mystical, and irrational (thus utterly different and inferior). This figurative East comprises the West's "deepest and most recurrent images of the Other" and has justified imperial ventures in the Middle East.[24] Though Said underplays the United States in this account, the theory of Orientalism has deeply impacted American studies of the Middle East.[25] Melani McAlister, for example, has demonstrated how U.S. policymakers' projection of the United States as a "benevolent" foil to colonialist Europe complicates the gendered oppressor/oppressed and East/West binaries that are central to Said's formulation of Orientalism.[26] Americanists building on Said's work have both identified Orientalist biases in U.S. constructions of the Middle East and observed multiple, even counterintuitive, American uses for Orientalist constructs.[27] They have explored responses to Orientalist and post-Orientalist cultural productions and policies outside the United States and within diasporic communities.[28] Such scholarship challenges reductionist "cultural" explanations for international relations by emphasizing transculturation, heterogeneity, and historical context. It refines and expands Said's model by making visible the myriad discursive challenges to Orientalism operating within the so-called West and across transnational connections.

Unfortunately, unlike Orientalism, the growing literature on Occidentalism, which, in part, analyzes Asian uses of "the West," has yet to make its mark on cultural studies of the United States and Middle East.[29] This is partially due to the persistence of "the vernacular tradition" of (monolingual) American studies, despite the field's transnational turn.[30] However, the Eurocentric contours of scholarship in other fields has reinforced this narrow course as well: not only have studies of Occidentalism from other disciplines (including Turkish studies) tended to focus on representations of Europe, bilingual Americanist research on foreign reactions to U.S. hegemony has also been dominated by European texts

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and archives.[31] Transnational Americanist scholarship conversant with Orientalism can deconstruct hegemonic representations of the civilizational other. However, without a dialectical analysis that also considers local Occidentalisms, it is difficult to truly decenter U.S.-based figures and "provincialize" the field.[32] Moving toward this goal, *The Limits of Westernization* models an interdisciplinary methodology that combines transnational American studies, with its focus on the movement of people, products, and ideas across nation-state boundaries, with comparative cultural studies.[33] Brian T. Edwards's call to "seek to achieve a balance of attention between moments of transnationally inspired cultural encounter and that which remains local and difficult to translate" resonates with me.[34] Of course, as Edwards also notes, it is sometimes their profound transnational-ness—i.e., the absence of the stereotypical "exotic"—that hinders the translation and circulation of Middle Eastern texts in the United States.[35] As a fractured and fluctuating network of Occidentalisms, batılılaşma operates at the intersection of transnational contact and international relations. It is both ironic and telling that this transculturated cultural formation remains largely invisible to the West it seeks to define and manage.

Of course, debates over "westernization" are far from invisible to Turkish scholars. However, disciplinary divides often influence the specific kind of westernization scholars investigate. When social historians study batılılaşma, they are often referring to autocratic westernization, tracing specific reform movements through primary documents such as manifestos, official speeches, and laws.[36] Literary scholars often explore depictions of over-westernization in Turkish literature and its political implications.[37] Sociologists, anthropologists, and qualitative political scientists, on the other hand, have examined constructions of inadequate modernization and the cast of real-life figures associated with "the East": Islamists, *arabesk* music fans, *gecekondu* (shantytown) residents, belly dancers, rural migrants, *travesti* (male-to-female trans sex workers).[38] Wild westernization, the least studied, is the domain of cultural studies, literary texts, and the visual arts. Ethnography-oriented collections like *Fragments of Culture: Everyday of Modern Turkey*, "cultural climate" studies like Nurdan Gürbilek's *Vitrinde Yaşamak*, and novels like Elif Shafak's *Flea Palace* offer glimpses into vernacular transculturation in the shadow of the American century.[39]

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In this interdisciplinary book, I build upon these rich disciplinary engagements. I also conducted historiographic and literary research and interviews in Turkey and the United States between 2006 and 2013. Despite disciplinary divides, tropes, stock figures, and plot patterns associated with batılılaşma crisscross official and unofficial texts. This book, therefore, connects official narratives in state-approved histories (chapter 1), to the semiofficial narratives in novels published by public intellectuals (chapter 2), and to the unofficial discursive domain of the vernacular—the everyday cultural terrain in which jokes (chapter 3) and beds (chapter 4) are shared. I closely read these texts with attention to figures of speech and stock figures, situate them in their context of circulation, and relate them to debates over U.S.–Turkish relations. Following this trajectory from the institutional toward the folkloric, I demonstrate how ideas about westernization and America not only operate in the high register of national history writing and policymaking, but also influence everyday affects and identities. The figures of westernization gain traction at the level of the vernacular, yet they are also transformed through transculturation in ways that challenge the authority of the Turkish state (and the United States) to determine the parameters of sociocultural change. As such, the book offers a glimpse of "multiple meanings [and uses] of America and American culture in all their complexity," demonstrating how "America" may influence local identities and cultural politics, sometimes even in the absence of direct U.S. government intervention.[40]

Chapter 1, "Narrating the Mandate: Selective Westernization and Official History," explores rhetorical maneuvers of forgetting and remembering employed in official and popular nationalist histories. At its center are varying representations of a critical moment, between 1918 and 1923, from the end of World War I to the end of the Turkish Independence War, when the United States became seriously engaged with the fate of the Middle East due to calls for a U.S. mandate over Turkey. The history and historiography of a short-lived Turkish Wilsonian Principles League, founded by women's activist Halide Edib, allow an insight into how intersectional tropes of gender, ethnicity, and class have infused debates about foreign relations in Turkey. The chapter shows how early twentieth-century Kemalists came to institutionalize selective westernization by utilizing the discourse of over-westernization to marginalize their former allies, including Edib. Using history as a tool of the state,

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Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his followers were able to justify their own authoritarian westernization reforms, which included banning the fez and mandating the Western-style hat, to counter the Western figure of "the terrible Turk." These discursive moves echo in later historical references to the League and Edib, making "the mandate" a key rhetorical figure in U.S.–Turkish relations.

Chapter 2, "Allegorizing America: Over-Westernization in the Turkish Novel," provides a selective cultural history of the Turkish novel, with a focus on allegories of mobility and love, which have haunted the genre since its strategic adoption into Turkish. The nationalist novel, defined in relation to both nonfiction history (chapter 1) and folklore (chapter 3), operates as the primary crucible for figures associated with over-westernization. Through an examination of these thesis-driven, allegorical novels, I analyze the gendered and sexualized depictions of the United States and of Americans, starting with the early twentieth century. Comparing these to stereotypes of Europeans, I demonstrate how representations of Americans hardened during the Cold War in response to U.S. attempts to figure Turkey as a model laboratory for capitalist modernization theory. The historical trajectory shows how the United States came to dominate discussions of over-westernization, while also demonstrating how the Turkish novel began to critique the allegorical push of both Kemalist selective westernization projects and the U.S. state department as the century progressed.

Chapters 1 and 2 explore debates around Turkey's upper classes and their suspect loyalties. The last two chapters remind us that the discourse of over-westernization has a counterpart in representations of inadequate westernization. Turkey's political elite has mobilized the gendered and sexualized discourse of over-westernization against the upper classes, who are supposedly too eager to absorb Western norms (section one). Yet they have also condemned the working classes for being too backward, too Eastern, too premodern on gendered and sexualized terms (section two). In chapter 3, this type of inadequate modernization becomes a resource for bawdy political humor. In chapter 4, it manifests in panic narratives about inappropriate or illegible sexual identities and connected criminal tendencies.

Chapter 3, "Humoring English: Wild Westernization and Anti-American Folklore," examines humor about language and language humor,

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along with attendant rhetorical figures, particularly bilingual puns and homophonic substitutions, and comic stock figures. Bilingual Turkish humor, or "Turklish" humor, consists of several folkloric and vernacular subgenres, including riddles, jokes, and lengthy mock romances, all of which require some level of familiarity with the English and Turkish languages, as well as with Turkish and American popular culture. As such, these texts provide an excellent archive for studying vernacular transculturation with the United States. This chapter explores the historical trajectory and political uses of Turklish humor, which has become increasingly popular since the 1960s and 1970s. I argue that such bilingual texts formulate a vernacular, wild-westernized nationalism, which challenges the government's ability to determine the limits of sociocultural change. Bilingual humor also regularly revises figures imported from the United States, particularly that of the Wild West, to talk back to empire. One recent example has been the mobilization of humor to counter the post-9/11 figuration of Turks as compliant "moderate Muslims" in the War on Terror. However, in the process, such humor can bolster divides between Turkish citizens based on foreign-language competency and properly "modern" behavior.

If the first three chapters explore the clash of westernization in various discursive registers, from the official to the literary to the folkloric, the fourth chapter foregrounds the question that has been in the background so far: How exactly do these discourses influence identities, performances, and politics on the ground? How do individuals from different backgrounds maneuver within these discursive constructs to embody, challenge, or transform the figures of westernization? Chapter 4, "Figuring Sexualities: Inadequate Westernization and Rights Activism," demonstrates how, just as the limits of westernization are often figured in the language of gender and sexuality, gendered and sexualized figures are read through the limits of westernization. The chapter focuses on the contested construction of sexualized masculinities and sexual politics through discourses engaging the symbolic East/West binary. It traces how *gey* (gay) identity became increasingly normalized in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as the Turkish state began granting some begrudging public legitimacy to gey and *lesbiyen* (lesbian) identities, in line with its selective westernization projects. This official "acceptance,"

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however, has not prevented a rise in the murders of gey-identified men. Moreover, the normalization of a figuratively modern/Western gey identity coincided with the increasing marginalization of male-to-female trans sex workers (travesti). Travesti and working-class sexual partners of gey men who do not identify as gey often bear the brunt of criminalizing discourses around the lower limits of westernization. They, in turn, have developed their own rhetorical tactics, manipulating the gendered, classed East/West connotations of sexual acts and identities. The chapter shows how the United States, as the symbolic home of gay identity and LGBT politics, remains connected to debates around transculturated figures of gender and sexuality. Grants and discursive imports from European and American institutions influence local queer praxes, as does backlash against an ascendant neoliberalism structurally and figuratively connected to the United States.

Chapter 1 emphasizes the American figure of the Terrible Turk, chapter 2 brings in depictions of Turkey as a good pupil for U.S.-led modernization, and chapter 3 introduces attempts to recruit Turkey as a moderate Muslim ally in the War on Terror. The same chronology marks a transition in Turkish perceptions of the United States from a central guide for selective westernization (immediately after World War I and during the early Cold War) toward America as the most dangerous source of westoxication (late twentieth century) and as a complexly degenerative force countering Turkey's proper modernization (in the first decade of the War on Terror). Each chapter in *The Limits of Westernization*, however, straddles the divide between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries. The book demonstrates how important historical events, such as Turkey's formation as a nation-state, the Cold War alliance between Turkey and the United States, the 1980s switch to a free market economy, and the intensification of folk anti-Americanism in the early twenty-first century, have impacted different discursive fields. This approach allows the reader to see how each epoch has utilized the figures of the past, as issues and events that do not overlap temporally—the American mandate, contentions over Turkey's NATO membership, the 2003 Iraq war—coalesce symbolically. Thus some important figures such as Halide Edib, motifs like "the American mandate" and "mobility," and metonyms like "Texas," gain new valences from chapter to chapter.

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With this strategy, I seek to draw attention to cultural history writing as a discursive act itself, employing narratives, characters, and figures of speech. The overlapping layers are here to encourage a "writerly" approach that does not reify the linear historical narrative.[41] In the postscript to the book, I discuss the ramifications of this approach for thinking about culture in U.S.–Middle East relations in general.

The Limits of Westernization argues that increasing connectivity to the United States in the twentieth century has led to unpredictable, vernacular cultural politics that clash with both the Turkish state's authoritarian projects of westernization and U.S. figurations of Turkey. My theoretical insights are indebted not just to multinational, multidisciplinary scholarship but also to Turkish folk and popular cultures, which have become increasingly adept at examining the dilemmas of Turkish westernization through humor. A 2008 cartoon published in a weekly humor magazine, for example, made fun of selective westernization by depicting an Ottoman father frowning at an Ottoman youngster, who has decorated his room with posters representing "The Industrial Revolution" and "Steam Power," as if they were pictures of famous American singers or actors. "Our youth have surely become infatuated with the West," thinks the father gloomily. The dry pictures underline the limited libidinal dynamics of selective westernization, contrasting this phenomenon with vernacular transculturation, which is much more likely to influence how contemporary Turkish teenagers decorate their rooms. The cartoon father's disdainful reaction to his son's "infatuation" with the West, of course, also constitutes a knowing stab at the sexualized discourse of westoxication.

The opening dialogue from *The Mild West* similarly refers to selective westernization ironically to make a salacious joke. The humor stems from the incongruity of applying an instrumentalist model of authoritarian westernization ("taking the good things from the West") to a passion-driven circumstance, that is, the Ottoman character's attraction to an American woman. Such popular texts mock twentieth-century metanarratives about the limits of westernization, challenging the idea that the Turkish or U.S. elites can control the politics of cultural change in the country. Often the challenge is launched in the bawdy vernacular. Of course, as a cartoon and a motion picture, these texts are themselves products of a long history of transculturation; therefore, their commen-

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tary on wild westernization inevitably functions on a meta level. Referencing the Ottoman Empire as the birthplace of Turkish dilemmas around batılılaşma, these products might be heralding (and constructing) alternative ways of figuring America in the twenty-first century. Past debates around the limits of westernization will provide resources for that future.

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