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Recapitulating Love

Modernity, Secularity, and Sufism in Turkey

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Summary: Recapitulating Love: Modernity, Secularity, and Sufism in Turkey

This dissertation argues that the notion of love in Turkey does not merely refer to an emotion but rather to reason, rationality, and a scientific mindset. It is situated among a plethora of interconnected fields, from culture to politics, and is woven into questions of national identity. This emphasis on love, *ashk* in Turkish, is derived from its ambivalent meaning in that it both refers to romantic and Sufi love. It involves both of their respective worldviews and articulates a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity between the “Eastern” culture of the Islamic Ottoman Empire and the “Western” culture of contemporary Turkey. As such, it stands between the binary oppositions of the Enlightenment, such as modernity vs. tradition, secular vs. religious, and reason vs. superstition. The ambivalence in *ashk* provides a ground for the relationship between secularity, modernity, and Sufism and its afterlives in contemporary culture in Turkey. The dynamics of Turkish modernization serve to show the change that occurred in Turkish society concerning love. Situating *ashk* at the intersection of modernization, secularism, gender, and Islam, I draw a genealogy of love in Turkey following Michel Foucault’s genealogical method. Using *ashk* as a tool to deconstruct Orientalist and colonial constructs between modernity and tradition, secularity and religion, this dissertation is not only a philosophical or historical study, but also a “philosophical-historical critique of the present,” as Foucault put it.¹

The dissertation points not to a linear and progressive history concerning the secularization of love and establishes continuities between the past and present following Foucault’s epistemological discussion. I argue that although *ashk* signals an epistemological break with the Ottoman Islamic past, primarily in the republican discourse, the Sufi concept of love *persists* in various shapes and forms in secularized Turkey. Throughout my analysis, love both complies with and resists secularization, and this ambivalence of the term indicates the crucial role of emotions, culture, and traditions in making of an alternative modernity.

To show how the affective and conceptual dimensions of the phenomenon of love are articulated and explored in the intersections between culture, politics, and scientific discourse, I opt for cultural objects ranging from novels and television series to theory. I discuss historically significant discursifications toward love, largely during the Republican Era, while also going back in time when the objects of analysis opened passageways. After providing a

¹ Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*, 5.

detailed etymological and historical analysis of Sufism, the dissertation is divided into two parts: discontinuity and continuity. In Chapters 2 and 3, I describe how Sufi love was reconceptualized in the early Republican Era and explain its relation to the political project of Turkish secularism, gender politics, and the emerging scientific discourse. In Chapters 4 and 5, I query how the metaphorical language of romantic love and political discourse in contemporary media reflects Sufi love.

In Chapter 2, I examine *The Novel of Kadıköyü* (1938), written by Safiye Erol. She portrays the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity through the youth's attitudes toward love in the formative years of the Turkish Republic. Unlike the dominant view towards the solutions to modernizing the Ottoman Islamic culture using instrumental reason, she proposes an alternate view in which she does not choose between civilizations, namely "either-or" dichotomies, but a "both *and* more." In this all-encompassing view of using ambivalence as a rich field rather than a requirement to choose between options, she selectively combines Sufism, Nietzsche, and Plato. In that, she spiritualizes the secular culture by including love as an "included middle"—with its ambivalence between secularity and religion—rather than an "excluded middle" and breaks the deadlock of the hegemonic masculinist writing by casting out the ambivalence inherent in love and Sufism. Her view is significant in the way that it is both a philosophical and historical analysis of the past and present that ponders on the future possibility of a culture that can use the enchanted view of Sufism as a creative treasure rather than the republican view that it is an irrational burden of a shameful past. In her suggestion, both Nietzsche and Sufism feed into each other to spiritualize the secular present and create a future that can tolerate ambivalence in a productive way.

In Chapter 3, I address two objects: a cartoon titled, *[It turns out] There Are Also Women's Dervish Lodges!*, which was published on 16 September 1925 in the satirical journal *Karagöz* in the Ottoman script, and Refik Halid Karay's novel, *Women's Lodge*, published in 1956. Both objects describe the anti-Sufi milieu by primarily ridiculing Sufi women, who attend a Sufi lodge, and attributing their spiritual devotion to women's inferiority in society. In Karay's novel, particularly the secularity of Sufi women are at the front of sarcasm and the ambivalent position of their sheikh, who successfully merges secular lifestyle with that of Sufism. In his account, Sufi love is a perversion both in terms of religion and public morality, and he uses psychiatric terminology to cast Sufi practices as abnormal. Supporting the state's main ideology, which regards Sufi orders as places of superstition and obscurantism, it bolsters the secularization thesis, which anticipates the decline of religion. Moreover, Sufi women's and their sheikh's secularity creates an ambivalence that is not tolerated in the desired

envisioning of the secular public sphere. I use Foucault's account of the historical construction of abnormality in the nineteenth century to uncover how Sufi love was cast as unreasonable and sexually perverted and how its ambivalence became antagonistic to the secular project.

In Chapter 4, I attend to Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil's 1898–1900 novel *Forbidden Love* and its eponymous adaptation into a romantic television series, broadcast between 2008 and 2010, on Kanal D, which I refer to with its subtitle *Seeking Ashk* (in order not to confuse the two objects with the name *Forbidden Love*). The title of this dissertation especially applies to this chapter, in which these two objects draw a comparison point to analyze their different takes on love, romance, and sexuality. However, this is not a linear account as disenchantment takes precedence in the novel rather than in the later television series. While Sufi love refers to a lost poetical universe with images, metaphors, and daydreams—what Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı call “Ottoman love script” that reflect the consuming aspect of *ashk*—to justify sexual longing, it gives way to a sacralized imagery that can inevitably exist with sexual union in the television series.² These different perspectives on romantic love and sexuality shed light on the role of emotions and the reenchantment of love after the reign of the secularized account of love in republican discourse. I interpret this shift in the discourse of love and sexuality by referring to Foucault's argument that two different procedures for producing the truth of sex have arisen over the course of history, namely, *ars erotica*, in which truth is drawn from pleasure, and *scientia sexualis*, which has developed procedures for telling the truth of sex in the form of knowledge-power in Western civilization. On the basis of this distinction, I evaluate *Forbidden Love* as an epistemological marker between two worldviews that differ in terms of desire, sexuality, and truth and *Seeking Ashk* as a reinterpretation of sexual attraction as divine love on a secular television channel. Since this resacralization leads not to a transcendence of love but rather to the sexuality of love, the television series becomes involved in a political debate about what should be “forbidden” and “permitted” in culture, highlighting the borders of sexuality, love, and the public sphere as the central issue.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how contemporary depictions of *ashk* maintain continuity with Sufi tradition while undergoing explicit political redefinitions. This chapter examines two television series, the historical (Sufi) drama *Resurrection* (2014–19) on TRT1 and the Sufi detective story *Aleph* (2020) on BluTV. *Resurrection*, set in the thirteenth-century Turkish conquest and settlement of Anatolia, what would become known as the Ottoman Empire, portrays the significance of the Sufi bond based on love between the political leader and a Sufi

² Andrews, “Ottoman Love,” 23. See also Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*.

sheikh. *Aleph* traces the death of a queer Sufi in present-day Istanbul, revealing the struggle between mainstream orthodox Islamic power and heterogeneous Sufi groups in Ottoman history, which is reflected in the present secular Turkey. Pointing to each enunciation of love in *Resurrection* and *Aleph* as a “biopolitical event,” I show how the notion of Sufi love is represented in both of these television series to attain a just and democratic society. As such, I compare their respective understandings of love to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s philosophical and political explanation of love, which regards love as a “common” that is crucial to a just society.

Both of these series reexamine the role of Sufism in politics and are connected to Turkey’s rekindled interest in Ottoman history and its connection to politics. While the view in *Resurrection* is based on tradition and the importance of cultural heritage, with its heroic images and success of the Turks in a manichean universe, *Aleph* focuses on the querness of Sufism and the ambivalence it incorporates as a productive position against antinormativity and the rigid binarism of the republican take on secularity.

Recapitulating love in all these objects shapes the perspective of my work, not only to trace the traditional signs of Sufism in the current culture but also to make meaning of the present, as Foucault advocates with his genealogical methodology. This concerns various relationships between modernity, secularity, and emotions that have appeared in the history of Turkey. *Ashk*’s nonlinear genealogy shows how it transitioned from a sacred premodern concept to a secularized one in line with the republican secularizing policies. In contemporary Turkish society, the role of *ashk* points to a lost sacred notion that is wished to be revived and hence is incessantly discursified in various cultural and artistic products as well as political discourses. As such, this study reflects on the disenchantment process and rechantment that occur in various forms in today’s culture and how an emotion can be a prominent part of history. It offers a novel approach not only on secularism and religion, but also on the political significance of the history and sociology of emotions.

Samenvatting: Recapituleren van de liefde: Moderniteit, seculariteit en soefisme in Turkije

Dit proefschrift betoogt dat het begrip liefde in Turkije niet louter verwijst naar een emotie, maar eerder naar rede, rationaliteit en een wetenschappelijke denkrichting. Het komt tot uiting in allerlei onderling verbonden gebieden, van cultuur tot politiek, en is verweven met vraagstukken van nationale identiteit. Deze nadruk op liefde, *ashk* in het Turks, komt voort uit de ambivalente betekenis ervan, omdat *ashk* zowel naar romantische als naar soefi-liefde verwijst, en zodoende beide wereldbeschouwingen met zich meebrengt. In het begrip *ashk* komt een dialectiek tot uitdrukking van continuïteit en discontinuïteit tussen de “oosterse” cultuur van het islamitische Ottomaanse Rijk en de “westerse” cultuur van het hedendaagse Turkije. Als zodanig bevindt het zich tussen de binaire tegenstellingen van de Verlichting, zoals moderniteit versus traditie, seculair versus religieus, en rede versus bijgeloof. Het ambivalente van *ashk* en de nieuwe verschijningsvormen daarvan in de hedendaagse cultuur in Turkije bieden een basis voor de beschrijving van de relatie tussen seculariteit, moderniteit en soefisme. De dynamiek van de Turkse modernisering illustreert de veranderingen die de Turkse samenleving heeft ondergaan met betrekking tot de liefde. Door *ashk* te situeren op het kruispunt van modernisering, secularisme, gender en islam, schets ik een genealogie van de liefde in Turkije volgens de genealogische methode van Michel Foucault. Door *ashk* te gebruiken als instrument om oriëntalistische en koloniale constructies op het vlak van moderniteit en traditie, seculariteit en religie te deconstrueren, is dit proefschrift niet alleen een filosofische of historische studie, maar ook een “filosofisch-historische kritiek van het heden”, zoals Foucault het uitdrukte.

Het proefschrift toont geen lineaire en progressieve geschiedenis betreffende de secularisatie van de liefde, maar stelt continuïteiten vast tussen het verleden en het heden in navolging van Foucaults epistemologische discussie. Ik betoog dat hoewel *ashk* een epistemologische breuk met het Osmaanse islamitische verleden betekent – voornamelijk in het republikeinse discours – het soefi-concept van de liefde in verschillende vormen en gedaanten voortbestaat in het gesecculariseerde Turkije. In mijn hele analyse gaat de liefde mee in en verzet zich tegelijkertijd tégen secularisatie, en deze ambivalentie van de term wijst op de cruciale rol van emoties, cultuur en tradities in de totstandkoming van een alternatieve moderniteit.

Om te laten zien hoe de affectieve en conceptuele dimensies van het fenomeen liefde

worden gearticuleerd en verkend op het snijvlak van cultuur, politiek en het wetenschappelijk discours, kies ik voor culturele studieobjecten variërend van romans en televisieseries tot theorie. Ik bespreek historisch belangrijke discoursificaties ten aanzien van de liefde, grotendeels uit het republikeinse tijdperk, maar ga ook terug in de tijd, toen deze objecten van analyse deuren openden naar nieuwe manieren van denken. Na een gedetailleerde etymologische en historische analyse van het soefisme is het proefschrift verdeeld in twee delen: discontinuïteit en continuïteit. In de hoofdstukken 2 en 3 beschrijf ik hoe in het vroeg-republikeinse tijdperk nieuwe opvattingen ontstonden van de soefi-liefde en leg ik de relatie uit met de politieke doelstellingen van het Turkse secularisme, de genderpolitiek en het opkomende wetenschappelijke discours. In de hoofdstukken 4 en 5 onderzoek ik hoe de metaforische taal van de romantische liefde en het politieke discours in de hedendaagse media de soefi-liefde weerspiegelt.

In hoofdstuk 2 analyseer ik *The Novel of Kadıköyü* (De roman van Kadıköyü) (1938), geschreven door Safiye Erol. Zij schetst de dialectiek van continuïteit en discontinuïteit via de houding van de jeugd tegenover de liefde in de beginjaren van de Turkse Republiek. In tegenstelling tot de dominante visie op de oplossingen voor de modernisering van de Osmaanse islamitische cultuur met behulp van de instrumentele rede, stelt zij een alternatieve visie voor waarin ze niet kiest tussen beschavingen, dus geen “of-of”, maar “beide *en* meer”. In deze allesomvattende visie waarbij ambivalentie wordt gezien als een veelzijdig veld in plaats van een gedwongen keuze tussen twee opties, combineert ze op selectieve wijze soefisme, Nietzsche en Plato. Daarmee vergeestelijkt ze de seculiere cultuur door de liefde – met haar ambivalente positie tussen seculariteit en religie – op te nemen als een “inbegrepen midden” in plaats van een “uitgesloten midden” en doorbreekt ze de impasse van de hegemoniale masculinistische teksten door de ambivalentie die inherent is aan de liefde en het soefisme niet langer te problematiseren. Haar visie is veelzeggend in de zin dat het zowel een filosofische als historische analyse van het verleden en het heden is, waarin de toekomstige mogelijkheid wordt verkend van een cultuur die de betoverde kijk van het soefisme beschouwt als creatieve rijkdom in plaats van als irrationele last uit een beschamend verleden, zoals de republikeinse opvatting luidt. In haar zienswijze haken Nietzsche en het soefisme op elkaar in om het seculiere heden te vergeestelijken en een toekomst te creëren waarin ruimte is voor een productieve opvatting van ambivalentie.

In hoofdstuk 3 behandel ik twee objecten: een cartoon getiteld [*It turns out*] *There Are Also Women's Dervish Lodges!* (Er blijken ook derwisjloges voor vrouwen te zijn!), die op 16 september 1925 werd gepubliceerd in het satirische tijdschrift *Karagöz* in het Ottomaanse

schrift, en de roman van Refik Halid Karay, *Women's Lodge* (Vrouwenloge), die in 1956 werd gepubliceerd. Beide werken beschrijven het antisoeffi-milieu door vooral soeffvrouwen, die een soefiloge bezoeken, belachelijk te maken en hun spirituele toewijding toe te schrijven aan de minderwaardigheid van vrouwen in de maatschappij. In Karays roman wordt vooral de spot gedreven met de seculariteit van deze soeffvrouwen en de ambivalente positie van hun sjeik (soefimeester), die de seculiere levensstijl met die van het soefisme weet te verenigen. In Karays relaas is de soefi-liefde een perversie, zowel wat betreft de religie als de publieke moraal, en hij gebruikt psychiatrische terminologie om de soefipraktijken als abnormaal te bestempelen. Hij ondersteunt de belangrijkste ideologie van de staat, die de soefi-orde beschouwt als plaatsen van bijgeloof en obscurantisme, en schraagt daarmee de secularisatiethese, die vooruitloopt op het verval van religie. Bovendien creëert de seculariteit van de soeffvrouwen en hun sjeik een ambivalentie die niet aanvaardbaar is in de gewenste voorstelling van de seculiere openbare ruimte. Ik gebruik Foucaults beschrijving van de historische constructie van abnormaliteit in de negentiende eeuw om te laten zien hoe soefi-liefde als redeloos en seksueel pervers werd bestempeld en hoe het ambivalente karakter ervan het seculiere project tegenwerkte.

In hoofdstuk 4 besteed ik aandacht aan Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil's roman *Forbidden Love* (Verboden Liefde) uit 1898-1900 en de gelijknamige bewerking ervan tot een romantische televisieserie, uitgezonden tussen 2008 en 2010 op Kanal D, die ik om verwarring te voorkomen aanduid met de ondertitel van de serie: *Seeking Ashk* (Op zoek naar *ashk*). De titel van dit proefschrift is vooral van toepassing op dit hoofdstuk, waarin deze twee objecten een vergelijkingspunt vormen voor het analyseren van hun verschillende kijk op liefde, romantiek en seksualiteit. Dat is echter geen lineaire kwestie, aangezien er eerder in de roman dan in de latere televisieserie sprake is van onttovering. Terwijl de soefi-liefde met beelden, metaforen en dagdromen verwijst naar een verloren poëtisch universum – wat Walter Andrews en Mehmet Kalpaklı het “Ottomaanse liefdesscript” noemen, dat het hartstochtelijke aspect van *ashk* weerspiegelt – om het seksuele verlangen te rechtvaardigen, maakt **ze** plaats voor de gesacraliseerde beeldspraak die in de televisieserie onvermijdelijk bestaat met betrekking tot seksuele gemeenschap. Deze verschillende perspectieven op romantische liefde en seksualiteit werpen licht op de rol van emoties en de herbetovering van de liefde na de dominante gesecculariseerde weergave van de liefde in het republikeinse discours. Ik interpreteer deze verschuiving in het discours van liefde en seksualiteit door te verwijzen naar Foucaults redenering dat er in de loop van de geschiedenis twee verschillende procedures zijn ontstaan om de waarheid van seks te produceren, namelijk de *ars erotica*, waarin waarheid wordt geput

uit genot, en de *scientia sexualis*, die procedures heeft ontwikkeld om de waarheid van seks uit te drukken in de vorm van kennis-macht in de westerse beschaving. Op basis van dit onderscheid beschouw ik *Verboden Liefde* als een epistemologische markering tussen twee wereldbeelden die verschillen in termen van verlangen, seksualiteit en waarheid, en *Seeking Ashk* als een herinterpretatie van seksuele aantrekkingskracht als goddelijke liefde op een seculiere televisiezender. Aangezien deze resacralisering niet leidt tot het bovenzinnelijke van de liefde, maar eerder tot het seksuele aspect van de liefde, raakt de televisieserie betrokken bij een politiek debat over wat “verboden” en wat “toegestaan” zou moeten zijn in de Turkse cultuur, waarbij de grenzen van seksualiteit, liefde en de openbare ruimte centraal staan.

In hoofdstuk 5 bespreek ik hoe hedendaagse voorstellingen van *ashk* de continuïteit met de soefitraditie behouden en tegelijkertijd expliciete politieke herdefinities ondergaan. In dit hoofdstuk analyseer ik twee televisieseries: het historische (soefi-)drama *Verrijzenis* (2014-19) op TRT1 en het soefi-detectiveverhaal *Aleph* (2020) op BluTV. *Verrijzenis*, dat zich afspeelt tijdens de dertiende-eeuwse Turkse verovering en kolonisatie van Anatolië, dat bekend zou komen te staan als het Ottomaanse Rijk, portretteert het belang van de op liefde gebaseerde soefiband tussen de politieke leider en een soefisjeik. *Aleph* gaat over de dood van een queer soefi in het huidige Istanbul en werpt licht op de strijd tussen de heersende orthodox islamitische macht en heterogene soefigroepen in de Ottomaanse geschiedenis, die weerspiegeld wordt in het huidige seculiere Turkije. Door elke uiting van liefde in *Verrijzenis* en *Aleph* te beschouwen als een “biopolitieke gebeurtenis”, laat ik zien hoe soefi-liefde in beide televisieseries wordt verbeeld als middel om een rechtvaardige en democratische samenleving tot stand te brengen. Als zodanig vergelijk ik de in deze series naar voren gebrachte interpretaties van liefde met de filosofische en politieke opvatting van liefde van Michael Hardt en Antonio Negri, die liefde beschouwen als “het gemeenschappelijke” dat cruciaal is voor een rechtvaardige samenleving.

Beide series onderzoeken opnieuw de rol van het soefisme in de politiek en illustreren de hernieuwde belangstelling in Turkije voor de Ottomaanse geschiedenis, onder andere vanuit politiek oogpunt. Terwijl *Verrijzenis* – met zijn heroïsche beelden en het succes van de Turken in een manicheïstisch universum – een visie uitdraagt die gebaseerd is op traditie en het belang van cultureel erfgoed, richt *Aleph* zich op de queerness van het soefisme en verbeeldt de ambivalentie daarvan als een productief standpunt tegenover normativiteit en het rigide binarisme van de republikeinse kijk op seculariteit.

In mijn werk kijk ik naar de recapitulatie van de liefde in al deze objecten, niet alleen om de traditionele sporen van het soefisme in de huidige cultuur na te gaan, maar ook om

betekenis te geven aan het heden, zoals Foucault voorstaat met zijn genealogische methodologie. Het gaat om verschillende relaties tussen moderniteit, seculariteit en emoties die in de geschiedenis van Turkije zijn verschenen. De niet-lineaire genealogie van het begrip *ashk* laat zien hoe het van een heilig premodern concept overging in een gesecculariseerd concept in lijn met de republikeinse seculariserende politiek. In de hedendaagse Turkse samenleving wijst de rol van *ashk* op een verloren gewaande heilige notie die men nieuw leven wil inblazen en die daarom onophoudelijk in diverse culturele en artistieke producten en politieke discoursen terugkomt. Als zodanig vormt deze studie een reflectie op de processen van onttovering en herbetovering die in verschillende vormen voorkomen in de hedendaagse cultuur en op hoe een emotie een prominent onderdeel van de geschiedenis kan zijn. Dit proefschrift biedt een nieuwe benadering, niet alleen van secularisme en religie, maar ook van het politieke belang van de geschiedenis en sociologie van emoties.