

OTTOMANIA: MULTIPLE NARRATIVES OF THE OTTOMAN PAST IN
TURKEY

by

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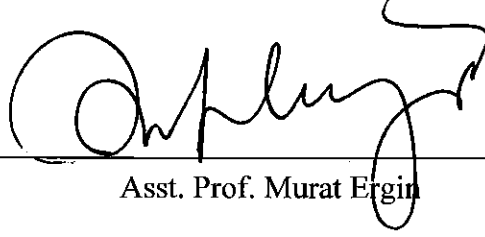
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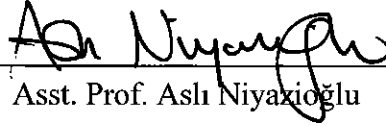
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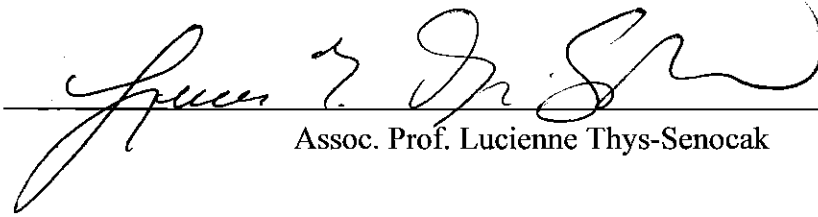
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Abstract

This thesis examines Ottomania, a neologism for the rise of the Ottoman element in popular culture, political discourse and popular history in Turkey. Ottomania is an area of research which stands in the intersection of popular culture, everyday life, identity construction and rewriting of history in Turkey. The most important aim of this study is to understand how Turkish people from different backgrounds relate to the phenomenon of Ottomania and how they construct the Ottoman Past through their narratives. Moving from the idea that people digest the past that is out there differently thus use the Ottoman history differently to build their identities I conducted a research in three cities in Turkey: Istanbul, Kayseri and Izmir with twenty five people with different educational, gender, political and religious backgrounds.

In this study I examine Ottomania through four indicators. These indicators are the perception towards consuming Ottoman theme artifacts, the view towards *Muhtesem Yüzyil* (a Turkish TV series on Ottoman Empire), evaluation of Ottoman theme photo shoot and the reception of Mehter (Ottoman military band). I argue that consuming or not consuming Ottoman theme artifacts become a means to emphasize distinction in Turkish society. The search for authenticity and the necessity to distinguish the imitation become a tool for the middle classes to show their position in Turkish society. Second I show how people who don't like *Muhtesem Yüzyil* base their dislike on very different reasons which show the multiplicity of contrasting constructs of the Ottoman past in people's minds.

Through research data I show multiple narratives built around Ottoman Empire in current Turkish conjuncture. There are five sub-themes and three bigger clusters which define the Ottoman past for Turkish people. The three bigger clusters are the ancien regime, the long lost golden past, and the neutral Ottoman past with both good and bad deeds. Five subthemes are the Ottoman Empire as a multicultural entity with religious and political tolerance, Ottomans as ancestors of Turks, Ottoman Empire as the carrier of the Muslim flag, Ottoman Empire as a burden on Turkey and lastly Ottoman Empire as in *Muhtesem Yüzyil*.

Keywords: Ottomania, multiple narratives of Ottoman past, popular culture, consumption, Turkey

Özet

Bu araştırma Türkçeye Osmanlı çilginligi olarak çevrilebilecek, dünya literatüründe dolasına yeni girmis Ottomania fenomenini incelemektedir. Ottomania popüler kültür, gündelik hayat, kimlik insasi, bugünkü Türkiye’de tarihin yeniden yazimi gibi birçok konunun kesisim noktasında durmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın ana amacı Türkiye’de farklı gruplardan insanların Ottomania kavramına nasıl eklemelendiğini ve Osmanlı geçmişini nasıl kurguladığını anlamaktır. Herkesin Osmanlı’ya ve Osmanlı ile ilgili olana farklı baktığı ve bunları kendi sindirim sürecinden geçirdiği düşünülerek Türkiye’de üç farklı şehirde bir araştırma yürütülmüştür. İstanbul, Kayseri ve İzmir’de değişik eğitim gruplarından, dinsel eğilimlerden, politik görüşlerden ve toplumsal cinsiyetlerden kişilerle görüşülmüştür. Bu araştırma Ottomania kavramını dört farklı gösterge ile ele alıyor. Göstergeler Osmanlı temali esya tüketimi, *Muhtesem Yüzyil’a* bakış açısı, Osmanlı temali fotoğraf çekimine tepki ve günümüz mehterinin değerlendirilmesidir. Bu araştırma gösteriyor ki insanlar Osmanlı temali tüketim toplumsal farklılıkların yeniden yaratıldığı bir süreç şeklinde isliyor. Sahte ve gerçek ayırımı üzerinden ve gerçeklik arayışı ile insanlar toplumsal konumlar yeniden kurgulanıyor. İkinci olarak bu araştırma gösteriyor ki *Muhtesem Yüzyil’i* sevmeyenlerin birden fazla ve birbiriyle çatışan nedeni var, bu da farklı grupların kafasındaki farklı doğru ya da gerçek Osmanlı’lara işaret ediyor. Araştırma verileri birden fazla Osmanlı kurgusu olduğunu gösteriyor. Bu kurgular üç ana tema ve bes alt tema altında şekilleniyor. Üç ana tema şunlar: silinmesi gereken eski rejim olarak Osmanlı, altın çağ Osmanlı, iyisi ve kötüsüyle Osmanlı. Bes alt başlık ise şöyle: Çok kültürlü, toleranslı Osmanlı, Türklerin ataları Osmanlı, Müslüman bayragını taşıyan Osmanlı, Türkiye’nin sirtindeki yük Osmanlı ve *Muhtesem Yüzyil’daki* Osmanlı

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Çilginligi, çoklu Osmanlı geçmisi anlatımları, popüler kültür, tüketim, Türkiye

To Neriman Solak...

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One of the professors who has been very influential in shaping the way I see society and social relations has once said that the unintended consequence of coming to a class were building friendships, interacting with people, and having a drink after class. Social action and social space that are created around our class time have proved his point. This thesis that you are reading similarly is beyond what it seems like. It provided me life for two years, life meaning relationships with different people, fun moments and some hard times. Overall it has been a great experience for me and I would like to thank several people for this experience.

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Introduction

I am wandering in the shopping mall, noticing the sign on a jewelry shop window which reads Hürrem ring has arrived. Hürrem, the wife of Suleiman the Magnificent, is again in the chit chat of Istanbulites after five centuries, thanks to the popular TV Series “*Muhteşem Yüzyıl*” (Magnificent Century) in Turkey. Turkish women from different social echelons like to wear a replica of the ring she wears on the show. I go on and stop by a special photography studio, and watch people dressed up like Ottoman Sultans, getting a photo shoot to enjoy their Ottoman versions in pictures. Men wear their proud faces and women seem to be happy with their sultans. I go to the food court and find a restaurant which offers so called traditional Ottoman food. In the bookshop there are many popular novels apart from the scholarly written history books on the Ottoman Empire. Every step I take in the market place I run across the Ottoman Empire. This interaction with the Ottoman Empire is one of many similar experiences that I have had in the last few years, which engenders a sociological curiosity about the reasons and scope of this phenomenon which in this thesis I refer to as Ottomania.

My interest in the subject of Ottomania began with the cursory observation that Ottoman elements in social artifacts such as TV series, clothing, jewelry, interior design pieces have been on the rise. This observation necessitated an inquiry of the particular timing, scope and reception of this rise. Soon I realized that if I wanted to examine Ottomania, I had to move beyond the social artifacts and treat them as symptoms of a broader change. With this intention I decided to focus on different meanings attributed to Ottoman Empire in Turkish society. This particular emphasis of this thesis is important because I will add perspective's of people in Turkey to the literature which focuses mostly on Turkey's problematic relationship with its past relying on the official narrative of Turkish history. Concentrating on people's perspectives is even more important today where we see an increase in the penetration of the historical into everyday life. This process entails an active engagement with history on

people's part through everyday life encounters and activities such as TV watching, enjoying an Ottoman photo shoot or eating traditional Ottoman food in fine dining restaurants.

Ottomania is an area of research which stands in the intersection of popular culture, everyday life, identity construction and rewriting of history in Turkey. There are numerous consumption items, and a huge range of activities related to Ottoman past which one can choose to research on. My aim in this thesis is to combine what is out there in terms of Ottomania in the arena of popular culture and how it is received by people from varying backgrounds in Turkey. I concentrate on the case of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* to depict what is out there in terms of consumption items related to Ottoman past. I conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty five people to analyze and discuss people's reactions to Ottomania and different layers of narratives woven around the Ottoman past in Turkey.

When studying Ottomania one has to narrow it down because it is not possible to engage with every contributing factor to Ottomania substantially within the scope of a master's thesis. Choosing particular examples from the indicators of Ottomania to make the reader familiarize with it is crucial first because there are a lot of indicators of Ottomania and second they are multiplying day by day (the last one is a water pipe cafe named after Ottomania in Üsküdar). With this intention a separate chapter on *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* engages with the plot, offers a sociological interpretation of the plot and presents a discussion on the related news. By identifying consumption, history and politics as three subjects on the news which revolve around *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* this chapter shows how this TV series stands on the intersection of these three areas. By providing the views of the producers and the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* issue of the popular history magazine *NTV Tarih* this section covers an example of Ottomania from the aspects of both production and reception.

The chapter on Ottomania situating it in its historical context engages with the relational aspect of identity building by pointing to the ways in which Ottoman past has posited a discursive domain for people to construct and reconstruct their identities. In this sense Ottomania is one of the domains in Turkey through which different identities are formed relationally. People present their identities through consuming or not consuming different artifacts on the market, asserting their differences by making a reference to the Ottoman past. Rather than only looking at the materials such as *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, I concentrate on how people evaluate these materials to include people's agencies into the picture showing the interactive nature of popular cultural consumption and reflexive nature of production of meaning.

Because Ottomania stands in the intersection of popular culture, rewriting of history, everyday life, identity construction, class reproduction and politics there are a lot of possible theoretical frameworks to explain it through. Instead of just focusing on one of them I try to show the intersections of these different pillars in the theory chapter. The theory chapter first proposes different interpretations of popular culture focusing on neo-Gramscian and Postmodern views which I argue, offer a substantial tool to understand Ottomania as a popular cultural phenomenon. Neo-Gramscian view which sees popular culture as a domain of negotiation between different sets of meanings and worldviews and a specific part of postmodern theory which captures the intermingling between the so called real and the TV together offer the theoretical perspective to understand Ottomania as a popular cultural phenomenon. Second, it is shown that based on Pierre Bourdieu's perspective on the making of the class distinction how cultural consumption points to different class positions in Turkey. The third function is to display how history, consumption and popular culture come together, examining how history is not only the domain of academic historians but also a domain through which we can infer about different aspects of a society.

This research aims to understand the ways in which people in Turkey relate to Ottomania and the Ottoman past. In order to find out the different layers of meaning that are created around the Ottoman Empire I conducted twenty five interviews with people from different backgrounds in terms of age, education, gender and political inclinations in Istanbul, Izmir and Kayseri, three cities in Turkey. With the semi-structured interview technique I inquired what Ottoman past means for these people, and how they evaluate the consumption patterns that are related to Ottoman past. I used Atlas.ti to code and interpret the results. The results are conveyed in two separate chapters. The first one focuses on the reception of Ottomania as a consumption area and second chapter engages with the meanings attributed to Ottoman past in general.

In the chapter entitled “The perception of Ottomania in contemporary Turkey” I investigate Ottomania through people’s reactions to four indicators that I have identified. These indicators are the perception towards consuming Ottoman theme artifacts, the view towards *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, evaluation of Ottoman theme photo shoot and lastly the reception of Mehter (Ottoman military band). I argue that here consuming or not consuming Ottoman theme artifacts become a means to emphasize distinction in Turkish society. This chapter investigates the notion of imitation and the emphasis on authenticity which are encountered frequently in the research data. The search for authenticity and the necessity to distinguish the imitation, preference towards the unique become a tool for the middle classes to show their position in Turkish society. In line with this I show how commercialization and popular culture are condemned by the people I interviewed which becomes a tool to build boundaries between different groups of people. This condemnation becomes a way in which people distinguish themselves from other groups in Turkish society. Second, I show how people dislike or like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* for different reasons based on their religious and political backgrounds. For example secular people don’t like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because they argue that

the Ottoman Empire is shown from a positive light, as if it was a glorious and just period where the good of the peoples was pursued. More religious people do not like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because the Ottoman Empire is shown from a negative light where sultan's intimate life is depicted and a lot of emphasis is put on harem life. The fact that people watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* although they think that it is a poor depiction of Ottoman past is justified through the argument that they watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* with a critical eye, thus are protected against the false messages that are conveyed via these TV series, unlike the popular masses who take what is depicted in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* for granted.

In the second chapter on research results, entitled "Narratives on the Ottoman Empire in Turkey" I portray how people with different socioeconomic, religious and political backgrounds evaluate the Ottoman legacy. Five sub-themes which are connected to three bigger clusters emerge from the interview data. These bigger clusters are the Ottoman Empire as the ancien régime, Ottomans as the glorious people of the long lost golden past and Ottoman Empire as a neutral system which should be recognized with the good and bad sides. The derivatives from these bigger clusters are the Ottoman Empire as a multicultural entity with religious and political tolerance, Ottomans as ancestors of Turks, Ottoman Empire as the carrier of the Muslim flag, Ottoman Empire as a burden on Turkey and lastly Ottoman Empire as in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. These differing views on Ottoman Empire are revealing the production and reproduction of history as a process which is bound to the current political and economic context in Turkey. The multiplicity of the narratives of history also point to multiplicity of subjectivities built around history in Turkey.

Overall this thesis engages with a case of rewriting and reinterpreting the past in the Turkish context where recently the Ottoman becomes the signifier of the golden age showing the ways in which this rewriting of history coincides with a rewriting and reproducing the identities.

Chapter 1

Ottomania

Introduction

A green eyed, black haired actor appears on the scene and the audience hears his inner monologue. "I am Suleiman, born from Yavuz Sultan Selim. I am Suleiman, Suleiman who learned from foreign teachers and always questioned what he read, never content with what he learned, who constantly tries to further knowledge. I am Suleiman, Suleiman who loves mountains, peaks and stars. Today I am taking over the throne from my father. I am promising that I will seek justice every step I take as the tenth Sultan of the Ottoman Empire." This is an excerpt from the popular TV series called *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, now screened in Star TV a Turkish TV channel. The TV series is based on the Suleiman the Magnificent's reign of Ottoman Empire focusing on the life in the imperial palace. Causing great controversy when its screening was first announced, it produced an area of debate in several social places such as daily small talk, internet forums, TV programs, and newspaper articles.

In numerous shopping malls located in Istanbul, a special photo shooting center is constructed where you can dress up like Ottoman Sultans and can be captured as a member of Ottoman dynasty. People queue in front of the centers, and enjoy their images as sultans. Their pictures become souvenirs to ornament their houses, a moment captured-forever to cherish. People wear t-shirts with Ottoman seal on them, buy Hürrem's ring and adorn their houses with Ottoman artifacts. A growing number of designers including fashion and interior designers present their muses to be the Ottoman Era. Atıl Kutoğlu, Cemil İpekçi and Bahar Korçan have been the harbingers of the growing trend of Ottoman Empire in fashion. Zeynep Fadilloğlu and Serdar Gülgün devote themselves to Ottoman inner design and Ottoman architecture.

Aforementioned occurrences are examples which feed into the phenomenon of Ottomania, the rise of Ottoman element in the areas of popular culture, political discourse, media and design in Turkey. Dan Bilefsky, an author of New York Times article entitled "Frustrated with West Turks revel in Empire Lost" argues that Ottomania is "a harking back on the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire by Turks who are frustrated by the West."(Bilefsky, 2009) Although it is true that Ottomania can be seen as a way in which the Turkish society responds to the modernization, I argue that the phenomenon of Ottomania is more than a response to the frustration with the West. It should be investigated from many dimensions including its popular cultural reflections, its influences to the debates in the historiography, and the ways in which it is articulated in politics. Last but not least Ottomania should be analyzed based on the perceptions of the people in Turkey from different backgrounds. Experiences of people from different educational background, in different ages, living in different parts in Turkey with different gender experiences should be considered and their perceptions need to be analyzed. This perceptual dimension is the main domain which I focus on in my thesis.

In the social scientific literature there are studies on the problematic relationship of the Turkish republic with its past, mostly focusing on the nationalist aspect of the Turkish history and historiography. There are studies on different novels and films which identify the characteristics of heroes from the past and how they are translated in nationalism. There are studies on popular culture which contend the significance of popular culture if we are to understand the relationship between neoliberalism and consumption of cultural artifacts. What I add to this literature is how social actors interact with Ottoman history through TV series in TV channels, historical films, fashion, cuisine, and leisure time activities like the Ottoman theme photo shoot. Although people consume the Ottoman Empire, they do not do it for the same purposes, or do not experience the consumption of the Ottoman Empire in the same

manner. In this sense there are multiple meanings and thus multiple experiences of Ottoman Empire constructed around the consumption of the past.

In this chapter first, I situate the phenomenon of Ottomania in its historical context by relying on accounts which point to the increasing penetration of the Ottoman past in everyday life through celebrations such as commemoration of the conquest of Constantinople. Then, I engage with the works which combine history, consumption and a relational type of identity construction in Turkey. These works underline the changing nature of history due to different interpretations in different political, social and economic conjunctures. This thesis engages with a similar task in today's Turkey.

Popular Culture, History and Turkey

Alev Çınar in her book *Modernity, Islam and Secularism* (2005) writes about the incorporation of the Ottoman Empire in the historiography of Turkey in 1990s through the unofficial celebration of the conquest of Istanbul in 29 May 1453 by Mehmed II. She argues that nation states try to build a linear way of history through making past available in the present. Commemorative practices such as celebration of the initiation of the republic are one of the most important ways in which some nationally significant event from the past is memorialized to engage the national subject in the present. She claims that official national Turkish history which is consolidated in the early republican period defamed the Ottoman and Islamic past and set the founding moment as 29 October 1923. Engaging with the unofficial commemoration of 29 May by the Islamist circles of Turkey, she shows how an alternative past which emphasized Islam and Ottoman legacy become to be envisioned in 1990s. As opposed to the secular history which denies the Ottoman past, this path of history writing helps creating a Turkish identity which is Islamic, centered in Istanbul as the capital of the Ottoman Empire in contrast to secular Ankara built on tabula rasa geography. Çınar contends that “just as official nationalism involved the insertion of a founding moment around which a

new national history was written, in the 1990s the Islamists produced a different founding moment around which an alternative national history could be written” (2004: 141). History is particularly important to the extent that it offers a sense of continuum where the national subject can locate his/herself. Within this continuum, identity is consolidated around an essential quality that is claimed to stay same over time, as an integrity that transcends and endures the destabilizing effects of temporal change. According to Alev Çınar “in the construction of national identities, this ascribed essential quality may be located in ethnicity, race, blood ties, language, culture, or historical experience” (2004: 143). What may appear to be a historical truth is in fact an effect of the ideologically motivated reconstructions of time in which identities are constructed. In this continuum of national time people build their personal histories in reference to that continuum, thus national time serving as a pre-set calendar. The histories of people, associations, groups, practices, and ideas find their place in time always in reference to linear time as oriented around the founding moment, thereby becoming a part of the nation (2004: 145)

According to Çınar the official construction of history by the state around textbooks is important yet not enough in perceiving the making of history since there are celebrations such as republic days, independence days and liberation days which are public performances. These events inscribe history into daily life and public memory because they are more entertaining and do elicit public interest. Through these events that people take part history becomes more vivid and part of people’s life more than it can do in the setting of a class. Çınar argues that “participating in the festivities or parades, watching fireworks, going on a family vacation, visiting parents, or even staying home to avoid the crowds—all become means through which the public is implicated in the celebration of the commemoration day” (2004: 152).

In her analysis of the revival of the Ottoman past in the 1990s Alev Çınar presents what kind of an Ottoman Empire was imagined through the commemoration of the conquest of the Istanbul. In this imagination Ottoman Empire was ruled with Islamic rules and standarts, was superior of the West because it defeated the so called West in 1453, was more socio-politically just, and it was a place where people from different millets lived peacefully. In this imagination decline of the Ottoman Empire was attributed to its attempts to Westernization, which is contrary to the secular imagination which sees Westernization as a positive thing overall. According to Çınar “the Islamist rhetoric presented a new sense of national history as essentially located in this past, a past that can be traced in the present through various architectural, cultural, and social practices and monuments of the Ottoman era” (2004: 162). With the new national history located in the Ottoman Empire a new identity which is located in traditions, practices, architectural forms, styles and genres linked to the Ottoman times is produced. Alev Çınar points to the fact that “since these practices and forms have been recovered from the past to be incorporated into the present, they are also always new” (2004: 163).

Although there is an increase in the embracement of the Ottoman past starting from 1990s, and lately an infusion of this phenomenon to popular culture and consumption, it is important to remember that within the history of Turkey there have been moments where the relationship between the Ottoman past and Turkish history have been contested. There have been novels written on the Ottoman Empire, or the conquest of Constantinople has been remembered at various moments in the past. In this sense I see the articulations of the Ottoman past as a continuum which gets manifested in different ways such as Orientalism. Yet, today we see a difference in the intensity and characteristics of this remembrance of the Ottoman past. Today, the rearticulating of the Ottoman Empire becomes a consumer oriented

phenomenon where people engage in consumption practices to show where they stand in terms of the reception of the Ottoman past.

Esra Özyürek (2007) in line with Çınar analyzes the ways in which Turkish relationship with the past changes in different time periods. People articulate different representations of the past, which allow them multiple and personalized representations of themselves, in which memory becomes both a source for cultural reproduction and a source of resistance to it. She points to the fact that Turkish Republic was originally based on forgetting, contrary to the twenty-first century, when people begin try to remember, define and represent the past. She argues that “the new regime established itself as a homogeneous and secular nation-state that rejected the multicultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire and its emphasis on Islam” (Özyürek, 2007:3). She uses the term public memory and says that it connotes both the shared and contested aspects of memory at the same time, and different groups and individuals in society promote their own versions of memory. In line with this she argues that in the 1990s Islamist and secularists shared the idea that foundation of Turkish Republic was a crucial moment in Turkish history worth to be celebrated, yet the reason to celebrate the foundation of Turkish Republic was a contested issue among them. Islamists chose to remember the religious nature of the early Republican period by retrieving religious statements of Ataturk. In order to show a moment when the same event is used for different ends by different groups, Özyürek analyzes the 75th anniversary of Turkish Republic and looks at the ways in which the celebrations targeted political Islam which are considered to challenge the secular principles of the Turkish republic. Esra Özyürek argues that through the celebrations of 75th anniversary of the republic, which were conceptualized as spontaneous and enthusiastic occasions where mass participation was emphasized, people were organized to rally against political Islam. On the other hand, newly opened Virtue Party, which was the inheritor of the legacy of the Islamist Welfare Party celebrated the anniversary on its own

terms, which mobilized a moderate conservative political discourse by abandoning the earlier Islamist, anti-Western and counter-capitalist one. They underlined the religious origins of the Republic by arguing that “the current hardships faced by political Islam and religious Muslims contradict the original intent” (Özyürek, 2007: 122). This unusual campaign was, according to Özyürek, a rhetorical strategy which aimed to neutralize past and present pressures against the Islamists and find a politically legitimate space for Islam.

Özyürek and Çınar analyze public events in which history is rewritten, used for different ends and through which different identities are consolidated in a dialogue with each other. This thesis engages in a similar task by looking into moments where we see a more profound penetration of history, in this case the Ottoman past, in Turkish people’s everyday lives. I claim that nowadays the penetration of history is enhanced by the intermingling of TV, everyday life, internet and consumption. The vast array of consumption items and consumption habits built around the Ottoman past recently enable a more extensive analysis on the intersection of consumption, popular culture, history and identity construction. In a time period when neither the official history, nor the popular media refrains from using the Ottoman past in different ways, I investigate different forms of this utilization and different articulations of it to show the stake of people in history writing and consumption of history, in the form of watching TV series, buying Ottoman furniture, or wearing a t-shirt with an Ottoman seal.

Through the data from the interviews that I conducted I show how not everybody who watches the TV series “*Muhteşem Yüzyıl*” watch it for the same reason, and how different groups form opposing arguments using the same visual material. Similarly, those who were criticizing the TV series in question when it first came out did not do it for the same reasons. Some asserted more the nationalist sentiments; some condemned it because it was

contradicting with the alleged Islamic perspectives in the Ottoman Empire, while some were discontent with its sexual themes.

There is a literature on the artifacts which might have shaped people's sentiments around history and the ways in which they inoculate nationalist ideas or a sense of the erasing of the Ottoman past. Murat Belge (2008) for example traces back different veins of search for the "origins" of Turks and points out how in different time periods different theories of descent or origin were embraced. He argues that before the Early Republican period an Ottomanist- Islamist past was embraced. But after the establishment of the Turkish republic, theories which were formed around the conception of Turkish origin gained currency. By rigorously working on several characters from comic books, analyzing movies, meticulously reading historical novels he offers a survey of Turkish history in popular culture. This information provides a pool of Turkish historical narratives and characters, yet his scope of research is different from mine. He is engaging in a discursive analysis, but does not concentrate on the ways in which, the artifacts that he is writing about was perceived and digested by the Turkish audience. He criticizes the ways in which a particular form of nationalism was invented and fed by these stories but does not provide an analysis of how people might relate to those texts by an active engagement on their part. This approach is limiting the alternative forms of meanings that might arise from unique readings of the given texts. I argue that a study which pays attention to the engagement of people with the materials would be more open to including different forms of meanings.

Providing an analysis which focuses on people's perceptions about history and how they digest what is out there would enhance our understanding about identity construction of people in Turkey formed around consumption of the popular culture. Murat Belge sees magazine and popular culture in Turkey as domains where people with socioeconomic problems in life "escape", to be freed from the concerns of their everyday lives. He is critical

of the language and discourses related to magazine and popular culture and thinks that these hinder people from emancipation. Contrary to this assumption that people take popular culture as it is presented the people who participated in this research on Ottomania differ in their engagement with popular culture, showing that agency is an important factor in the ways in which popular culture is absorbed.

Esra Özyürek different than Murat Belge, takes popular culture, everyday life and consumer practices related to everyday life as the core of making sense of the social reality. (Özyürek, 2002) Özyürek explores how and why the symbolism of neoliberalism is being popularly translated into new contexts with strong state ideologies and nostalgic memories of state-led modernization projects. She shows how people use market-oriented symbols of neoliberalism to consolidate their ideology and defend their position. She argues that neoliberal symbolism of the market and privatization related to neoliberalism traveled to spheres of life which are considered to be outside of economy such as civil society, the domestic sphere, history writing, and emotional expression.

We can observe this in the ways in which people perceive history, build their own narratives of the past and its affiliations to the Ottoman Empire. The growing interest in Ottoman artifacts, Ottoman style inner design, Ottoman cuisine, and watching Ottoman TV series should also be evaluated in this context where people use these items to consolidate their ideology and defend their position. The endeavor to understand why people feel the need to consume “Ottoman Empire” in different forms to express their view towards the history, in this case Ottoman past, and how they perceive the past accordingly stands in the crossroad of economy, history, politics and identity construction in Turkey.

The consumption of the Ottoman past, and its articulation in different contexts provides a domain for people to emphasize and reproduce their identities. One of these theories is that opposing groups are usually built in relation to each other (Navaro-Yashin,

2002). Rather than binary oppositions formed separately, different groups are formed simultaneously in a constant dialogue to each other. Beyond the fact that they form counter arguments based on the other group's arguments, thus develop their identities in a relational way; they also share the same discursive universe. People from different backgrounds and supporting differing ideologies watch the same TV-series based on different motivations, this time *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, experience *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, thus Ottomania differently and build different subjectivities around them.

Navaro-Yashin deconstructs Turkish state and Turkishness by looking at the everyday relations in Istanbul and similar to Özyürek identifies the importance of consumerism in creating and highlighting the boundaries of one's identity (2002). She ascertains that two different groups in Turkish politics, secularists and Islamists, are created in a dialogue to each other and should be analyzed together to see the links between them. After all we should recognize that both meet on the same phenomenon, namely consumption. Identity production in relation to history is also tied to consumerism and neoliberal culture. This research investigates how different groups are formed around the consumption of the Ottoman past, showing that debates about the Ottoman past and increasing of Ottoman elements in popular culture and everyday life provides a domain, a language system, a discursive universe from which opposing groups can choose differing arguments and use them for their own ends. In this sense different groups are formed in a dialogue with each other, shaping each other in the process.

Conclusion

In this section I provided a glimpse into Ottomania, trying to give a sense of the Turkish context. I pointed to the intersections of Turkish history, identity construction and consumption habits built around the theme of the Ottoman past. I develop the arguments presented in this chapter in the chapter dedicated to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as a case of Ottomania. I

present the ways in which people in Turkey perceive the notion of Ottomania in the two chapters that are on research results.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Ottomania is a vast topic and it is not easy to narrow it down to a master's thesis. Therefore I chose to focus on certain aspects of it especially on the ways in which it is received by the Turkish audiences. In order to enable the reader to understand what is going on in contemporary Turkey first I engage with what is out there in terms of Ottomania and then move to the research results which show the ways in which different people in Turkey make sense of the Ottomania.

I have two units of analysis in this research project. The first one is a sample of different individuals' accounts in Turkish society, clustering them among the variables of age, gender, education, religious orientation and political inclination. The second one is an example of social artifacts consumed in the context of Ottomania: A contemporary TV series, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, internet forums and news related to this particular TV series, and *NTV Tarih*, a popular history magazine in Turkey. I chose *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because it is based on the Ottoman past, engendering a social and economic environment where people talk about the Ottoman past and consume models of artifacts such as clothes or jewelry which actors and actresses wear in the TV series. *NTV Tarih* is significant because it led the discussion concerning the Ottoman past when the TV series was first announced. This thesis is an endeavor to combine these two units of analysis and show how people in Turkey relate to history in terms their interaction with popular cultural elements. In this chapter I am going to talk about the methods I utilized to understand the notion of Ottomania.

I surveyed the news related to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* by setting a Google alert on this topic for ten months between August 2011 and May 2012. I collected the news related to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and then clustered them around different topics to determine the scope of the news

related to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. I did not include all of the news related to this show especially excluding the news related to the daily lives of the actors and actresses starring in the show. I came up with the clusters of news on consumption, news on politics and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, and mistakes in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*: concerns about historical accuracy. In addition to the news I analyzed the NTV Tarih magazine issue on the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* to show Ottomania from the perspective of a popular history magazine, one of the creators and contributors of the phenomenon of Ottomania.

Interviews

The primary method of my thesis is conducting interviews. I interviewed twenty five people from three cities in Turkey. Kayseri, Istanbul, and Izmir were my research fields. I interviewed eleven women and fourteen men. Twelve of my informants were university graduates/ students. Ten of my informants were high school graduates and three of them were either primary school or middle school graduates. Six of the women were university graduates/ students and five of them were high school graduates. Six of the men were university graduates/ students, five of them were high school graduates and three of them were either primary school or middle school graduates. I interviewed fifteen people in Istanbul, five people in Kayseri and five people in Izmir. Nine of my respondents were between the ages of 18-30, ten of my respondents were between the ages of 30-40 and six of my respondents were between the ages of 40-50. I interviewed people either at home or at work (the ones who owned their own small business and who were just available during day time), and in cafes in five cases.

AGE	FEMALE	MALE
18-30	4	5
30-40	5	8
40-50	2	1

EDUCATION	UNIVERSITY	HIGH SCHOOL	MIDDLE OR PRIMARY SCHOOL
FEMALE	6	4	1
MALE	6	5	3

Recruitment

Through the recruitment process I worked with the research company Optimist. The interviewers from Optimist went to field to find people from different backgrounds who were willing to participate in a one hour in-depth interview. I presented small gifts to the participants such as Turkish tea glasses and chocolate which cost between 10-15 TL (6-9\$) per person. I worked in collaboration with Optimist during the recruitment process because in the beginning of my research I was not sure how many interviews or cities would suffice to acquire the data. I thought to interview thirty people in the beginning and to include another city yet after twenty five interviews the data I collected reached a saturation level so that I decided to stop interviewing and focusing on analyzing them. Through people's narratives I collected different reports on perceptions about Ottoman past and how people react to the recent increase of the Ottoman element in popular culture and market.

Interview Technique

Following Russell Bernard's suggestion that "in situations where you won't get more than one chance to interview someone, semi-structured interviewing is best" (1994: 209), I conducted semi-structured interviews. Bernard contends that semi-structured interviews have the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing and is similar to unstructured interviewing in terms of the skills it requires. Different from an unstructured interview, it is based on the use of an interview guide which consists of a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered pursuing a particular order. I chose this type of interviewing because I did not want to dictate the conversation, but rather want to keep it at a minimum control, enough to be

able to ask my questions. My aim was to understand how people perceive the Ottoman past in the popular cultural context and how they make meaning of the recent boom of TV series, movies and consumption habits related to Ottoman Empire. Thus, open-ended questions proved to be a good research tool for me. Most of the time, I asked all of the questions. I dropped one or two occasionally, because informants talked about that particular subject in the previous questions. The interviews lasted from twenty five minutes to two hours depending on how much time informants spent answering the questions. I did not interrupt interviewees unless they diverged from the conversation topic. I recorded the interviews after asking each respondent's permission. None of my respondents declined this request and I did not face any drawbacks related to the presence of the recording device, at least not that I know of.

Questions

I formed the questions based on the data that I have from TV series, popular magazines, internet forums, and popular news topics provided by the help of Google alerts which relate to Turkey's relationship with the Ottoman past (see the Appendix for the questionnaire). I first tested the questionnaire with two pilot interviews before entering the field. The questionnaire is arranged under seven subject headings. I started with demography and housing under which I ask about their occupation, education and their class position according to their own judgment. This section provides the demographic information about informants. It helps to warm up the participants and build a personal connection with them. Third, the connection with the people's backgrounds and the way they interpret and perceive Ottoman past in relation to popular culture and consumption is easier to make via this section. Demographic information combined with the attitudes which I query in the last section provided me with the necessary information about respondents' socioeconomic background. The second subject heading is leisure and cultural activities under which respondents' TV watching habits and

their attitude towards TV series are inquired. Then there is the section on *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* to find out if they watch it and how they find it. Third subject heading is interest in literature where I ask if they read things related to history such as novels or popular history magazines. The fourth section is about the perception of Ottoman history where how people perceive Ottoman Empire in relation to their daily life is inquired. This section also questions what Ottoman Empire means in the Turkish context. The fifth section in the questionnaire is concerned about the official education of history and how my informants relate to history in the school. Through this section I see if their interest or disinterest in history relate to history education in Turkey. The sixth section is consumption of history where I see how my interviewees perceive the environment of consumption developed around the Ottoman past. I find out if they consume any Ottoman cuisine, buy jewelry with the Ottoman style, like to listen to Mehter music (The music performed by the reenactment of Ottoman Military Band) and if they have any experience with the Ottoman photo booths. In the last caption there are questions related to informants' attitudes about religion, politics and Turkish international relations.

I transcribed the interviews and used qualitative research program Atlas.ti: <http://www.atlasti.com/features.html> to code and interpret the results. Atlas.ti is a program, developed specifically to code and interpret complex social phenomena engrained in textual media, which was helpful to systematically analyze the data that I gathered through the interviews. I coded the data around several themes, through multiple readings of the data. The most important themes among them are Meaning of Ottoman Empire for the informant, Meaning of Ottoman Empire for Turkey, Consumption of Ottoman Empire, Popular Culture, Hyperreal, and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*.

In general I relied on qualitative research methods to guide me throughout my research. I appreciate the importance of quantitative data because it gives social scientists a

broader overview of the societies or particular groups that they are studying. Yet in order to get a more profound comprehension of the topic or group we are engaging with we should benefit from the vast resources that qualitative methods allow us. The knowledge that I intended to create in this research project is not a final word but a drop in the ocean of meanings, offering a glimpse to Turkish people's perception of history. This research will nourish our understanding about people's perceptions about Turkish history in the popular cultural context. My primary wish is to incorporate as much as voice in the ways in which people understand history and to take the art and craft of history writing from the monopoly of historians and sociologists. People in Turkey after all have their own personal stakes in writing and re-writing of history and these different stakes may at the same time can point to different segments of the Turkish society. Through this research I show that there are ways in which social science can show the segmentations in society without directly referring to income or similar mainstream indicators like that. We can come across social differentiation by analyzing the discourse of interviews. The two months that I spent in the field and the following four months in depth engagement with the interview was a different experience. Meeting the people in person as a first step, engaging with their voices through the recordings as a second step, and lastly taking up with transcriptions, written data add up to the experience of the researcher, which offers a profound interaction with twenty five people.

Chapter 3

Theory

In this chapter first, I propose different perspectives on popular culture, since I am working on the intersection of popular culture, history and consumption in the Turkish context. I focus on some authors who can be considered as postmodernist and neo-Gramscian way of studying popular culture. I think these together combined offer insight into the ways in which popular culture as a domain both shapes how people construct history and is shaped by the people who are either the audience or the producers. The neo-Gramscian perspective recognizes the interactive way of popular culture, meaning that popular culture is not imposed from top-down. It is also a bottom-up process marked by negotiation where the producers and consumers of the popular culture actively participate. The postmodern view points to the intermingling between the TV and real highlighting the way we see a boom in historical TV series and how we should approach them. This perspective engages with the comeback of the historical in different forms in the postmodern period. Cultural consumption is the second pillar of this chapter. Pierre Bourdieu's account on class and how cultural consumption goes into the making of the class help to explain how people I interviewed contribute into making of the class boundaries through their consumption habits and how they view the market around Ottomania. The ways in which different people consume historical artifacts and evaluate the cultural consumption of these artifacts, point to which class position they hold. Third I look closely to the ways in which history, consumption, and popular culture come together, examining how the production and consumption of history belongs to a field not restricted to the academic historian. I benefit from Jerome de Groot's approach to consumption of history in this last part.

Definitions of Popular Culture

In this chapter I want to begin with a brief overview of how popular culture has been studied by different approaches in the literature. John Storey sketches out six definitions of popular culture (Storey, 1993). The first definition contends that what is great in numbers is popular. In this sense what is widely favored or liked by many people in the cultural domain would count as popular culture. A social scientific research on popular culture thus would concentrate on numbers including sales records, ratings, and shares and so on. In my view, although numbers may be telling in the study of popular culture they are not adequate on their own.

Second way to define popular culture is to put it in opposition to high culture. When we define what high culture is what is left over is popular culture. In this definition popular culture is residual, a category where the cultural practices which fail to meet the standards to be considered as high culture go in. This dichotomy between high culture and popular culture is more complex than it seems at first sight. The decision about what belongs to which cluster is never a simple issue but has political and class-related implications. Storey argues that being difficult to be understood is one of the key aspects of high culture in this dichotomy (1993). Being difficult brings high culture an exclusive status by guaranteeing the exclusivity to its audience. Not everyone can understand high culture, thus who understands high culture acquires a privileged status in the society. Pierre Bourdieu argues that distinctions based on cultural acquirements are used to sustain class distinctions. Taste is not simply a choice but it is an ideological category. Consumption of culture becomes a social marker which legitimates social differences. Distinctions are then supported by the argument that popular culture is mass produced and commercial contrary to high culture which is individual and based on creativity. Popular culture is considered to be inferior and deemed as the culture of those who would not be able to understand high culture.

The third way to define and work with popular culture is to see it as mass culture. This definition is related to the previous one. Popular culture is produced to be consumed by masses who are considered to be non-discriminating consumers. This culture does not require rational activity and is manipulative. The audience is considered to be passive and it does not have any contribution to the making. It takes what is offered without any filters. There is very limited space for the activity of the audience in terms of contribution and contradiction. In this perspective popular culture generates the dominant ideology.

The fourth explanation of popular culture argues that popular culture is the culture of the people. Against the argument that popular culture is imposed from above this view argues that this is the culture of the people by the people. One criticism against this view is about the difficulty of defining the concept of people. Who would qualify to be included in the cluster of the people is problematic. Moreover, people do not produce the culture with raw materials they make themselves. They make popular culture with artifacts provided commercially.

None of these explanations about popular culture work well in my thesis because they either completely neglect the importance of agency in popular culture, or they just emphasize agency. A more working explanation would combine both agency and the environment that agency is situated in. This explanation is provided by the Neo-Gramscian analysis and the postmodernist approach to popular culture which I engage with in the coming two sections.

Neo- Gramscian Explanations of Popular Culture

The fifth definition is the neo-Gramscian way of defining popular culture based on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Gramsci has developed the concept of hegemony to explain the way in which "dominant groups in the society through a process of intellectual and moral leadership win the consent of the subordinate groups in the society" (Storey, 1993: 13). The notion of hegemony implies a society where despite exploitation and oppression there is a

high degree of consensus, and social stability. In this conceptualization “subordinate groups and classes appear to support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meanings which bind them to and incorporate them into the prevailing structures of power” (1993: 124). Although there is a high degree of consensus in this society, not all the conflict is removed. The conflict is contained and maintained by dominant groups and classes. The process of building hegemony can be named as a negotiation marked by both resistance and incorporation. The theorists of popular culture who are inspired from this definition, the neo-Gramscians, evaluate popular culture as a domain of struggle and interaction “between the forces of ‘resistance’ of subordinate groups in society, and the forces of ‘incorporation’ of dominant groups in the society” (1993: 14). This approach is formed both against those who see popular culture as imposed from above and those who see it solely as coming from below. Popular culture is not imposed by the theorists nor created by the spontaneous groups from below. It is rather a domain which enables exchange, struggle, negotiation and contestation between the two. In this sense activities related to popular culture move within “compromise equilibrium”, a term coined by Gramsci. In this process what once considered as popular culture can move to so called high culture. The compromise equilibrium of hegemony can point to different types of conflicts involving class, race, gender, religion, region, generation etc. Through the in-depth interviews these different components become visible in people’s attitudes about popular culture which is a “contradictory mix of competing interests and values: neither middle nor working class, neither racist or non- racist, neither sexist or non-sexist, neither homophobic nor hemophilic but always a shifting balance between the two” (1993: 127). Popular culture is also partly what people come up with through their active consumption of popular cultural artifacts, and it tells a lot about issues such as class position, inequalities and political attitudes. It is the domain where these inequalities, positions and attitudes are reproduced yet at the same time contested.

A key term in neo-Gramscian studies is articulation coined by Stuart Hall. The concept as used by Hall plays with the double meaning of the term: to express and to join together according to Storey. According to Hall the cultural texts and practices do not have once and for all fixed meaning set at the phase of production but the meaning is a result of an articulation. From this point of view the domain of culture is characterized by "a struggle to articulate, disarticulate and rearticulate cultural texts and practices for particular ideologies, particular politics" (1993: 129). The task for the social scientists who study popular culture is to find out why particular meanings get regularly constructed around particular texts and practices and acquire a certain taken-for-granted quality.

When Ottoman past is approached as a text the contemporary meanings constructed around it through popular culture makes more sense. Ottomania, the contemporary popular culture constructed around the Ottoman past is such a domain where different political camps, religious views and different class positions meet and struggle. Rather than concentrating solely on the producers or the consumers neo-Gramscian studies pay attention to the interaction of the production, distribution and consumption of culture, which as a method offers the possibility to understand what is at stake in consuming the Ottoman past. This way makes it possible to see the process of negotiation and articulation of different groups in reproducing the Ottoman past.

The Periodization: Why Ottomania now? How is it situated in postmodernism?

The sixth definition of popular culture is shaped around the debates on postmodernism. The main point according to John Storey is the claim that in postmodern culture the distinction between high and popular culture are no more recognized (Storey, 1993: 170). Some of the theorists see this as a positive development; yet, some of the theorists of postmodernism, such as Fredric Jameson, are critical about this blurring which is a result of the takeover of

commerce over culture (1993: 182). Here I will concentrate on the intersection of popular culture and postmodernism by investigating the work of Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson.

Lyotard speaks of science as a metanarrative in order to emphasize its claim of being above all sorts of narratives one can imagine about life (Lyotard, 1984). Approaching history as a social science in a Lyotardian manner can be fruitful to understand and deconstruct the contemporary debates around history woven through facts and archival documents, versus the validity of the historical narrative that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* offers. Science's conceptualization of world, where truth exists outside of us, which is reached by logical abstract thinking and is legitimized by proofs are the pillars of its claim about being the sole provider of meaning of life. Lyotard argues that "science has always been in conflict with narratives" (1984, xxiii), but he recognizes the fact that characteristically science is similar with narratives because like the other narratives which try to make sense of the reality, "it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game". This means that like the other narratives about life, like religion or myths science needs to build coherence by having internal rules and criteria. Lyotard identifies that science is one of the language games in the world. He borrows Wittgenstein's term 'language games' which means "that each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put" (1984, 10). Lyotard sees language games as the minimum relation needed for a society which is made of nodal points, to exist. There are many language games existing in the society, and they are required, yet they don't have to form a totality in which all the language games are in harmony.

I think both *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and history as a social science belong to this discordant environment of the language games and contribute into the subjectivities of the people in the society. It is important to see that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as a popular cultural item and history as a social science are equally important as language games. Like Lyotard argues both are not

always harmonious. Lyotard compares and contrasts scientific knowledge and different narratives because he thinks it is important to draw parallels between them to show that scientific knowledge's existence is no more and no less necessary than the narratives' existence. Both of them are made of statements around the rules applicable to the specific language game, so since the rules are different, different language games: science and narratives cannot be judged as inherently good or bad. He suggests that what we can do is to appreciate the diversity in truth claims, and see that different "discursive species" can exist at the same time.

Lyotard suggests that since 19th century truth requirement of science has backfired on itself and that scientific knowledge is in a legitimization crisis. As examples he gives divisions between various fields, the fact that science becoming not the seeker of truth, but much more technology and hence power, paradoxical questions that cannot be answered within science giving way to new ideas and new questions, meaning that "the principle of a universal metalanguage is replaced by the principle of a plurality of formal and axiomatic systems capable of arguing the truth of denotative statements" (1984, 44). By looking at science through the lenses of language games, we can see that science itself becomes a place where more than one truth can find a place which makes it similar to narratives. Postmodern science for Lyotard becomes to be characterized by undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete transformation and paradoxes which makes it "discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable and paradoxical" (1984, 60).

Scientist in this case more and more becomes like the figure of storyteller, to the extent that he/she generates ideas and tells his/her story about the ideas he/she generates. He thinks that this is a moment where we move from grand narratives to little narratives which give space to multiple narratives and truths. He here also engages in a dialogue with Habermas and asserts that these multiple narratives should not necessarily build a totality, a

consensus, rather he emphasizes dissension. This environment of dissensions enables people to pick from different narratives to build their own subjectivities often in a dialogue with other subjectivities. As Jameson argues in the foreword of Lyotard's book Lyotard does not think that the role of science is "to produce an adequate model or replication of some outside reality, but rather simply to produce more work, to generate new ideas and fresh scientific statements, to make you have new ideas" (1984, ix)

How people develop their subjectivities around the Ottoman past is one of the important questions in my thesis. The kind of subject I have in my mind is close to Lyotard's who sees the subject as a nodal point within numerous nodal points. Subject exists in relation to other subjects and its existence is contextual (Lyotard, 1984). Subjects are made within the nodal points and our subjectivity is both product and producer of the nodal points in a sense. In this context the subject is an agent who is not free from the structural effects of the sum of different nodal points. The meaning is constructed in the language games and people are part of that language games as nodal points. This particular approach to the subject is different from the theoretical humanism which theorizes the subject as a bounded entity which is able to act as a conscious and separate being regardless of the environment that they are situated in. It recognizes that agencies are in relation to the environment of conflictual narratives. The Ottoman past which in contemporary Turkey is a sum of different narratives from popular culture, official history, and different groups of historians can be regarded as a discursive environment where agents pick different arguments to build their subjectivities.

Lyotard's conceptualization of meta-narratives and the position of subject in the post-modern condition is important for me to theoretically visualize the subjectivities build around the different language games on the Ottoman past yet, his view of popular culture as "an anything goes culture, a culture of slackening where taste is irrelevant and money the only sign of value" (Storey, 1993: 176) is not very productive in understanding popular culture's

contribution into different subjectivities. As the research data shows it is a domain worth to be studied as a source of understanding different language games, and that there are other values than money that people pay attention to in building their own identities and assessing where the other people in the society stand in the pool of different identities.

Jean Baudrillard argues that “it is no longer possible to separate the economic or productive realm from the realms of ideology or culture, since cultural artifacts, images, representations, even feelings and psychic structures have become part of the world of the economic” (Storey, 1993: 177). He coins the term simulacrum which means an identical copy without an original. He thinks that postmodernism is a culture of the simulacrum where every distinction between original and copy has itself been destroyed. Postmodernism in this sense is the culture of simulation which is “the generation by models of a real without origins or reality: a hyperreal” (1993: 178). According to this conceptualization of the postmodern hyperreal is everywhere. Storey gives the example of people who write letters addressed to characters in soap operas, making them offers of marriage, sympathizing with their current difficulties. Television villains are approached on the street to be warned about their behavior. For Baudrillard this is “the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV” (1993: 179). With the advance of internet today I think the triangle between internet, TV and everyday life enhanced the hyperspace even more. What I observe in the chapters of “Ottomania”, Muhteşem Yüzyıl and the two chapters on the interview data point to this intermingling between TV, politics, everyday life and consumption even more. Frederic Jameson sees postmodernism not just as a different evaluation of concept of knowledge, a different philosophy, or another style but also as a stage within capitalism (1998). Moving from this idea the phenomenon of Ottomanism in Turkey can be seen as an example of the part of this period within capitalism with its cultural and economic logic. Jameson speaks of a “stage or moment in capitalism which projects the cultural logic of postmodernism”

(Jameson, 1998: 37). For him, postmodernism is a transitional period between different stages of capitalism, where the older forms of the economy is being structured such as labor and organizational institutions. He holds on to the idea of Hegelian totality and he conceptualizes a “unified theory of differentiation”, which suggests that a system remains a system even if it inheres differences. It means that Jameson embraces the idea of totality which is existent with all sorts of different modes in it. It has different tendencies and counter arguments in it, which also means that the types of agencies also differ. Rather than a world, where agency is non-existent, we live in a world where “agents of all sizes and dimensions are at work” (1998: 41). What holds the system is a unified idea, an ideology or, a spirit in Hegelian sense. This spirit, cultural logic goes along with the third stage of capitalism, as in the Marxian base-superstructure model. In this sense postmodernism is a periodizing concept which correlates new elements in culture with the new emergent social life and the new emergent economic order (Jameson, 1998).

When Jameson conveys the characteristics of this culture he talks about pastiche and the nostalgia mode in relation to that. These are the notions that I borrow from him in making sense of the Ottomania. Pastiche can be featured as mimicry of the past without irony and satirical impulse, as a parody without sense of humor. This also parallels the nostalgia mode, which calls for a certain embracement of the past without really naming it for what it is. In this kind of perception of history past is not necessarily a Marxian interpretation of the past, in which past is understood in order to overcome and move beyond it, it is rather utilizing past without understanding it. We can think of all the historical images that find their place in t-shirts, bags or even our bodies in the form of tattoos such as Che Guevara.

When I read Jameson’s account on Star Wars (1998) which he names as a nostalgic film or a pastiche rather than a historical film I thought of the historical TV series in Turkey, which are based Ottoman history, or novels written in the early 20th century. Historical TV

series such as *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* which I concentrate on as a part of Ottomanism is a good example of the notion of pastiche and nostalgic film. We cannot think of these series as historical accounts to the extent that they are adapted to contemporary conjuncture, yet they are not ‘proper’ accounts of present. In Jameson’s words Turkish series which have contemporary settings are invaded by the style of old novels, as though, we were for some reason unable to focus our own present. According to Jameson these TV series could be seen as “pathological symptoms of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history” (1998, 10). Storey argues that according to Jameson “nostalgia films work in one or/and two ways: it recaptures and represents the atmosphere and stylistic features of the past; and recaptures and represents certain styles of viewing of the past” (Storey, 1993: 186). These films do not attempt to recapture the real past, but always convey certain cultural myths and stereotypes about the past. These are like the simulations in Baudrillard’s terms, representations of other representations. In line with this argument *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* reproduces the stylistic features of the Ottoman past through its own interpretation, and second it conveys a certain form of viewing the past. This representation of history is not unbound from the contemporary period but has hints about how today is constructed in terms of family life and gender roles that it denote.

Jameson sees postmodernism, as a periodization concept which posits a radical break from modernism. Yet he does not hesitate to include that “radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuring of a certain number of elements already given” (1998, 18). We can say that the logic of consumer capitalism still persists, and is reproduced in postmodernism in which there may be possible emergent resistances against this logic in question. Moreover, culture according to Jameson in postmodernism is more than ideology which disguises the economic activities of capitalist society; it is itself an economic activity of all. The assumed distinction between popular and

high culture is not the only thing which collapses but also the distinction between the realm of culture and the realm of economic activity collapse. I am not sure if there was this clear cut distinction between culture and economy in modernism, yet I agree with Jameson that the blurring and intermingling between the two has intensified in the period of postmodernism, which is visible through *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*'s presence within the intersection of culture and economy. Items such as jewelry, clothes and hair dye are cultural pieces carrying a reference to a culture which allegedly belongs to past contributing into contemporary market. People buy these items to signal where they belong in this realm of consumption engaging in a cultural and an economic activity at the same time.

Cultural Consumption and Class:

Pierre Bourdieu's work presents a very beneficial way to understand the making of cultural exclusivity (Storey 2003). First, it helps to understand how the power of social class operates across the field of culture. Second, it helps to understand how actions in the field of culture help reproduce the inequalities of social class. In this sense, social practices of cultural consumption help to maintain and legitimate forms of domination and power, which are rooted in economic inequality. Class rule may be ultimately economic yet the way it is articulated is cultural. The production and reproduction of the domain of culture helps to produce and reproduce social space, social power and class difference. These differences are used as a means of social production by different classes in the society. Bourdieu demonstrates that what social groups consume is part of a strategy for making a hierarchical social space. "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" according to Bourdieu (1984). Bourdieu's aim is to situate cultural consumption in the domain of everyday experience. In order to understand cultural practices, we should look at the everyday practices, such as TV watching, with an anthropological gaze (Storey, 1999). People that I interviewed make sense of their everyday life through evaluating people by the way they engage in cultural

consumption. They also emphasize their identities through the things they consume or not consume. By condemning or praising certain consumption habits built around history such as TV watching or furnishing themselves with Hürrem rings or Ottoman seals people tell a story about their view towards the Ottoman past, denoting also where they stand in terms of class.

The group of people whom I conducted interviews with are from diverse backgrounds and class positions. Contrary to the assumption that popular culture belongs to a sole class, there is no clear cut distinction between the classes who consume or not consume *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. Rather, people build the boundaries between themselves and the other classes through the way they consume popular culture. Richard Peterson's contribution to the theory of distinction with the terms of omnivorous and univorous consumption highlights this finding. According to Peterson the distinction between elite and popular culture gives way to a difference between omnivorous and univorous patterns of consumption (1992). Different forms of consumption are not solely secured for one class to keep the distinction but upper classes participate in a multiplicity of cultural consumption patterns. Today members of dominant cultures consume items once considered and dismissed as mass culture. Yet this does not mean that the differences vanish. The way you consume what is considered mass culture matters. Storey claims that "the symbolic boundaries of taste still exist, as do the social hierarchies they support and make visible, but they are increasingly no longer based on cultural exclusivity but on a very particular mode of cultural appropriation, which is both intellectual and intertextual" (2003: 47) The participants in my research who watched *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* do not belong to a singular class yet they build their difference by emphasizing their way of consuming such examples of popular culture. Of course we know that popular culture needs intrigue, drama and love stories that's why we can endure the false representation of history they say. If *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* was like a documentary no one would watch it, knowing this we watch this kind of an account on history. By securing that they do

not watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* uncritically they feel safe in watching it because in the end it belongs to the vast array of cultural activities that they would participate in.

The idea that social emulation has been a factor in the birth of consumerism is significant in making sense of the data collected in this research. First, social emulation has been one of the previous theories to understand consumption which is today contested. Second, concept of social emulation is a tool of Turkish people to make sense of the Turkish society based on the interview data. People emphasize the negative side of imitation and pretension referring to the cases where people buy items they see in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. According to McKendrick (1992), in imitation of the rich the middle ranks of the society spent more than before and in imitation of them the rest of the society joined. Encouraged by social emulation and class competition, people yielded to the pursuit of novelty and fashion. According to him social emulation was facilitated through the close proximity of the different social classes and the power of fashion caused by social competition. Through social emulation and the manipulation of social emulation people pursued luxuries where they had previously bought decencies and where they had only bought necessities.

Ann Birmingham (1995) is against this explanation and thinks that the concept of social emulation is an inadequate approach to understand cultural consumption because, according to her, cultural consumption is not always a top-down process where lower classes emulate the upper classes. Social emulation would fall short of explaining the reverse situations where upper classes engage in social emulation. This explanation which opens up the space for a bottom up model of cultural flow should not blind us to the fact that there may be other reasons of cultural consumption. We should move to the moments of actual consumption rather than purchase and also focus on the meanings people attribute to the things they consume, and how they consume the cultural texts and artifacts. Interviewing people is a tool to gain insight about how people engage in cultural consumption and how

they evaluate the people who engage in different forms of cultural consumption. Interviewing people shows how there can be other reasons of cultural consumption than social emulation. In some cases people even refrain from using the things they have consumed previously not to be labeled as someone who engages in mimicry of other classes, social emulation.

The view that people engage in cultural consumption because they are manipulated is similar to the social emulation model which does not leave any agency to the people. From this perspective people consume cultural artifacts as dictated by the producers. Among the groups and people who see cultural consumption as manipulation are the Frankfurt School, the Leavisites and Roland Barthes (Storey, 1999). These scholars having different views on popular culture have one thing in common according to Storey, which is the fact that they operate with a model of cultural consumption as manipulation. The Frankfurt School has coined the term culture industry to denote that the mass culture is identical and predictable. It maintains "that the culture industry, by producing a culture marked by standardization, stereotype, conservatism, mendacity, manipulated consumer goods had worked to depoliticize the working class; that is, it had limited its horizon to political and economic goals that could be realized within the oppressive and exploitative framework of capitalist society" (Storey, 1999: 19). Furthermore, the Frankfurt School sees a mutual relationship between work and leisure time meaning that "the effects of the culture industry are guaranteed by the nature of work; the work secures the effects of the culture industry" (1999: 20). Culture industry organizes leisure time in the same way that the capitalist industrialization organizes the time at work. This is a top-down approach to popular culture which does not take people's intentions into account. Similarly the Leavisites argue that meaningful cultural consumption has been limited to a truly cultured minority which is changing in the twentieth century. They see this as a cultural decline and long for the golden past when a small group set the standards for consumption and the masses went with the elite's choice of cultural consumption. Roland

Barthes formulates the term “myth”. Myths are the stories societies live by. Myths offer the means to understand and conceptualize the world helping a society to form a self-identity. Barthes sees myths to be the attempts of building a society’s common sense which makes the cultural seem natural.

There are several common problems of the cultural consumption as manipulation model. John Storey argues that these works “display an overriding modernist assumption, that we can read off knowledge of audience responses and reception from our presumed knowledge of mass culture texts” (1999: 31). Although it is true that the culture industries seek to manipulate and exploit consumers to some extent, it is not the case that the practices of cultural consumption can be seen as the total and for all time successful manipulation of passive subjects. The research on Ottomania shows that there are issues which cannot be explained solely as cultural consumption than manipulation. First, cultural consumption offers a domain for people to express themselves and build their identities. Second, people use the same products for different reasons, having different assessments of those who use the same product or theme. Third, people mostly are critical of forms of cultural consumption just like the Frankfurt School or the Leavites contrary to the assumption that people are people are uncritical consumers of those whom they are fed with. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that consumption always occurs in a cultural contexts meaning that people are not individuals who are drawn by one commodity where no other commodities and rival claims exist. Moreover people have personal histories of consumption influencing their consumption habits. In the Turkish context, that the Ottoman past is a theme for cultural consumption for example opens up a space for creation of different meanings and different interpretations of the past. The cultural consumption around the Ottoman Empire is a political, cultural, social and an economic domain where people articulate different identities and opposing groups in the Turkish society are reproduced via their dialogue over the Ottoman past. Seculars and

Islamists, upper classes and lower classes, leftwing and rightwing use Ottoman past to contest, reproduce and consolidate their ideas about the opposing groups, the past and consumption. These ideas often combine and give way to constellations.

Popular Culture, History and Consumption

Although a good proportion of history is produced in the universities, the significance of history cannot be grasped if its diffusion in the society is overlooked. The production and reproduction of history is an ongoing process, continuing outside the scholarly environment. It is reproduced in a vase furnishing homes, it is reproduced in a t-shirt having an Ottoman seal on it, it is reproduced in novels, and it is reproduced in TV series. Not all of them have the same significance yet they belong to the same galaxy. In line with this Trouillot argues that historical production “interacts not only with the work of academics, but importantly also with the history produced outside of universities” (1995: 19). It is not only the historians who write history but politicians and commoners participate in historiography when they use history in order to consolidate their worldviews, and articulate their positions concerning the ideologies they support. History is reproduced in daily chit chat, in classrooms and in the media. In this line, this study shows how in the case of Ottoman past, history is rewritten by different groups in the ways in which they make sense of it.

In order to understand better what history means through the ways in which it is sold, presented, transmitted and experienced, Jerome De Groot investigates the blurring between the history that the professional historians produces and other ways of participating in the making of history (De Groot, 2009). De Groot argues that the traditional legitimacy of the historians has been corroded by the changes in technology, theory and access. He identifies history as a set of stories and a range of discursive practices which have been borrowed liberally by popular culture. De Groot claims that this process of mutual borrowing has given way to hybrids. He thinks that beginning from the early 1990s “history and the genres of the

historical have grown exponentially as cultural artifact, discourse, product and focus” (2009:2). History as a leisure pursuit and the historical as a cultural trope boomed in this time period due to technological improvements, funding changes, institutional revolutions and political interventions. In the Turkish case this is visible through the phenomenon of Ottomania which is the sum of the interest in Ottoman past in popular culture, politics and history.

Jerome De Groot approaches history from the perspective of consumption because he thinks that “how a society consumes its history is crucial to the understanding of contemporary popular culture, the issues at stake in representation itself and the various means of self- or social construction available” (2009: 2). According to him consumption practices work to define how the past is articulated in the society. To understand what history actually is, he looks at the popular and unusual ways that historical knowledge is constructed, transmitted and perpetuated. He acknowledges that a thriving market for cultural histories, celebrity historians, historical novels, films, TV drama, documentaries, and a number of cultural events, such as launching of the History Channel, have pushed history into the mainstream in last twenty years. He looks at these unofficial forms of history in the popular culture and argues that “the historical in the popular culture is multiple, multiplying and unstable” (2009: 4). He thinks that these new forms of engaging with history have not been thoroughly investigated mostly because of the distaste for the various popular forms of history, emerging from the critique of the popular and the theoretical model of the cultural industries which envisions a binary of high versus low culture. He emphasizes the importance of studying contemporary cultural historical practices and the need to develop coherent positions on the relationships between the media, academic history, and institutions, such as museums, consumption and popular culture (2009: 7). The way he approaches the past offers an important tool to examine Ottomania: “The past is fantasy, lifestyle choice, part of the

cultural economy, something which confers cultural capital, something to win or to desire, a means of embodying difference and a way of reflecting on contemporary life. It is engaged with on a personal, group and family level; it can be experienced in a range of ways at the same time.” (De Groot, 2009: 249)

Conclusion

In this chapter first I presented different views on popular culture contending that Neo-Gramscian way and postmodern view combined make sense in my research where I engage with Ottomania. Neo-Gramscian analysis enables to see the intersection between the top-down and bottom-up approaches in arguing that popular cultures provides a space of negotiation where different people interpret what is offered differently and use popular cultural elements to build their identities. The postmodern approach offers the tools to see why particularly in contemporary period history becomes an important device to make sense of the world and how it becomes something else through its articulations in TV and market. Second, I proposed how cultural consumption and class are important theoretical tools to perceive what Ottomania denotes in the Turkish context underlining that people use popular cultural consumption to draw the boundaries between themselves and different classes. Lastly I sketched how to combine popular culture, history and consumption in the case of Ottomania highlighting that past is a lifestyle choice, part of cultural economy, a way to contemplate on contemporary world and a tool to emphasize difference, drawing especially from the research of De Groot.

Chapter 4

Muhteşem Yüzyıl and Beyond:

One of the vivid examples for Ottomania is a popular TV series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century) which began in 2011 and broadcasting the second season at the time of the writing of this thesis. The series which depicts the life of the royal family in sixteenth century Ottoman Empire makes almost a perfect case for the phenomenon of Ottomania. Ottomania is a notion worth studying today since it can give many insights about various issues. One of these issues is the perception of history of Turkish people from different backgrounds which I inquire through the interviews I conducted. Another domain is the discourse of Pax Ottomana in the Middle Eastern region which can be unpacked through a careful reading of politicians and historians. The consumption of Ottoman artifacts inspired from Ottoman past is another significant part of Ottomania. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is a fruitful gate opening to these three issues: perception, consumption and the discourse of the Ottoman past. It is both a result of this ongoing rediscovery of Ottoman past, and a case which also contributes in this rediscovery. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* probably would not be successful as a TV series half a century ago, or would count as avant-garde without the historical turn in Turkey. By historical turn I mean the shift from the official Turkish history established in 1930s which defamed the Ottoman and Islamic past to a history which acknowledged and celebrated the Ottoman heritage both officially and unofficially. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* also contributes to this shift through the means of popular culture by creating the universe of consumption, conversation and negotiation. This chapter will focus both on the TV series and its reception by TV audiences as reflected in news stories published in a number of media outlets, such as daily newspapers, magazines and internet-based news agencies. I aim to make Ottomania more visible to the reader by providing one of the best examples of the universe of Ottomania.

Introduction

Muhteşem Yüzyıl is a TV series which has been on air since January 2011 in Turkey. The show is a historical drama chronicling the Suleiman the Magnificent's reign of Ottoman Empire and is built around the daily life in the Ottoman Palace in the sixteenth century. Even before it was screened on TV its announcement aroused a lot of controversy in the Turkish public. Many conservative critics believed that it was appropriate to deal with a sultan's private life in the framework of a TV series. For example some members of the İsmailağa society (a religious group in Turkey) spread the rumor that the set of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* was doomed. After the leading star Halit Ergenç broke his leg, Okan Yalabık fell from his horse on the set, one of the actors died on the street because of an accident and the script writer got lung cancer some people from İsmailağa society started to talk about "the curse of the ancestors". Allegedly this curse predicted that the souls of the Ottoman dynasty inflicted a curse on people who are involved with *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because these people disgrace the souls of the Ottoman dynasty by showing the lives of the holly Ottoman dynasty in an improper manner (Habertürk, 2011). Ironically it has been one of the TV series in Turkey since then and it continues to generate controversy. The controversies born out of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* are vast. Some of the controversies deal with the historical accuracy of the show. If Ottomans ate on tables when sitting on chairs, if a globe was present on Suleiman the Magnificent's table, and if the clothing was appropriate are among the examples. Other controversies are more concerned with the daily life of the actors and actresses. The issues such as the exact hair color of Meltem Uzerli who stars as Hürrem, and if she needs to lose weight are among the examples. The debates about the cost of the show also take place in the news. How much a war scene costs, the salary of actors and actresses are discusses occasionally.

In this thesis I am not interested in the historical accurateness of the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* or the moral implications of having such a TV series. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* for me signifies the growing interest in Ottoman past and the controversies around it which point to political, economic and popular cultural issues in Turkey. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is unique in the ways in which it builds a dense social, political and economic environment in itself. However, as an instance of the growing interest in Ottoman past, it shows commonalities with other cultural practices that I will discuss in this thesis.

The interest in the Ottoman past has the three dimensions of historiography, popular culture and politics. In history there is a shift from the unilinear approach to Ottoman Empire which suggests a narrative of foundation, peak, decline and collapse to a more complex understanding of history writing which incorporates the lives of different societies. It aims to put the Ottoman Empire in a world historical context and which questions the unilinear periodization. In popular culture we see several TV series and films on Ottoman past, and an incline in the activities and consumption habits related to Ottoman past in general. In politics the notion of Pax Ottomana and the legacy of Ottoman Empire in Turkish foreign affairs are among the issues we encounter. I argue that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* stands in the crossroad of these dimensions which is also because of the characteristics of popular culture in general. It can say a lot about other things such as politics, history, class and making of boundaries in general. In this section I will present a selection of the news, interviews and critiques on *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* which I collected from August 2011 to May 2012 by setting a Google alert on *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. I then surveyed the news I collected coming up with three significant sections which are “the news on consumption”, “mistakes in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*: concerns about historical accuracy” and “the news on politics and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*”. These sections cover historiography, consumption and politics.

In this chapter in line with Baudrillard's account on postmodernism I argue that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* with the environment around it can be identified as hyperreal. Postmodernism is according to Baudrillard the culture of simulation which is "the generation by models of a real without origins or reality: a hyperreal" (Storey, 1993: 178). With the advance of internet today I think the triangle between internet, TV and everyday life enhanced the hyperspace even more. The case of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* points to the intermingling between TV, politics, consumption of everyday life. Like Baudrillard would say this case shows that "it is no longer possible to separate the economic or productive realm from the realms of ideology or culture, since cultural artifacts, images, representations, even feelings and psychic structures have become part of the world of the economic" (Storey, 1993: 177).

Muhteşem Yüzyıl

Muhteşem Yüzyıl started to be broadcasted in January 2011. After two seasons (sixty three episodes in total) it is still being broadcasted in Star TV one of the private channels in Turkey. It changed three channels after its first release, to be broadcasted primarily in Kanal D and then Show TV, finally settling down in Star TV. Obviously the channels which sold it profited a lot. It is produced by Tim's Production and the budget is estimated to be 4 million TL (2, 2 million\$) by IMDB. It is produced by Timur Savcı, directed by Taylan Brothers and written by Meral Okay. According to the internet news organization Haber7 *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is sold to twenty two TV channels in various countries including Middle East, Slovakia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Hungary, Croatia, Afghanistan, Russia, Albania, and Japan (Haber7, 2012). It is a ninety to one hundred minutes prime time TV show, which with the advertisements and the summary of the previous week takes up to three hours. A regular episode is usually less dense than a regular American TV series in terms of the scenario and marked by long moments of meaningful staring, and long scenes around mundane things such

as eating, shopping etc. It is because of the general nature of the TV series in Turkey where a lot of things are implied through meaningful staring rather than directly uttered. In combination with dialogues and monologues one watches a lot of staring, and thoughtful moments of the characters combined with music.

According to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*'s official site the main plot of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is on the love of Süleiman, the tenth sultan of the Ottoman Empire and Hürrem, one of her concubines and later wife. The episodes are woven in the background of important historical occurrences, yet the main theme is the relationship between Hürrem and Suleiman. The official site of the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* portrays Süleiman as a sultan who aimed to build an empire in the world more powerful and more extensive than Alexander the Great and render the Ottomans invincible when he was twenty six years old. It is stated that throughout his forty six year old reign Süleiman became the greatest warrior. Hürrem, according to the site has been the daughter of a Ukrainian Orthodox minister who was sold to the Crimean palace then to be presented to Süleiman. She is rendered as a plotter who helped to rule the empire through bloodshed and intrigue. In the official site of the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* the plot is presented by referring mainly to Hürrem, Süleiman and İbrahim, Süleiman's loyal companion. It is claimed that "Suleiman will be paying the price for his great passion for Hürrem with the beheading of his most trusted friend and Grand Vizier Ibrahim as well as ordering the death commands for his own sons. For Hürrem, the game of power is bloody and ruthless where anything is acceptable in order to be victorious" (www.muhtesemyuzyil.tv).

From the perspective of the producers

Muhteşem Yüzyıl is written by Meral Okay who died in April 2012. Yağmur and Durul Taylan who go as Taylan Brothers have been directing the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. An interview published in Milliyet Sanat in March 2011 with three of them is my source to understand how they presented their work to the public. Durul Taylan argues that the most important things in a TV

series are the characters. Although we more or less know Suleiman and Hürrem from history these are Meral Okay's Suleiman and Hürrem he argues (Milliyet Sanat, 2011: 62-63). After several collaborations three of them have managed to build a healthy relationship according to him. Yağmur Taylan says that they think television and movies through genres and that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* belongs to the genre of the historical drama which according to him was going to be implemented in a proper way in Turkey for the first time. According to Durul Taylan in Turkey historical movies and TV series are always produced from a specific perspective, a world view, a political point of view so to speak. If you are doing a historical job you are faced with an identity card: you are Ottomanist, not Ottomanist etc. which hasn't been the case in this job because Meral Okay has written the script by loving the characters and having thought about their psychology. He says they expected that this would be a good job but they did not expect this much of a rating. Yağmur Taylan says that they don't have an ideology and that they are not in the domain of history, they just perform their own task. You have to remind this all the time you are working with history according to him. "We clearly state that this TV series is fiction inspired from history but not history itself", he says. (Milliyet Sanat, 2011)

The interviewer asserts that given that the history is written by men and that the life of women in the harem is not known it is very significant that Meral Okay as a woman is the script writer, and adds that a woman is telling the story of Hürrem and the others. By that opening remark, Meral Okay starts to talk about her experience as a female script writer of a historical drama. She says she has been beaten a lot in that project and that a male script writer's job would have been a lot easier. She says a male script writer would not be insulted this much during the process. She argues that there is a limit to insulting a man in this country but that the same thing is not true in case of women. When you enter in the domains that are not for women then the reactions are two times more than the reactions a male would face.

She says she has suffered a bit but it is not necessary to make a big deal out of it. She says they are in a genuine endeavor in doing their job, and they are trying to do it in an ethical way. According to her a TV series cannot have a more meaning than that. Moreover, she argues that the audience approves of this TV series and that would be a huge disappointment for them if the audience did not like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*.

Muhteşem Yüzyıl in NTV Tarih

To display how *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is assessed from a popular historical perspective I will start with the popular history magazine *NTV Tarih* which dedicated fourteen pages of its February 2011 issue to Süleiman's reign and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. The magazine covered the issue in three different sections. First, the authors Necdet Sakaoglu and Ayşen Gür tell the story of Suleiman the Magnificent and "the other side of the coin" (*NTV Tarih*, 2011: 28) of his reign. Second, they tell the significant events and important heroes of the century. Third, experts from *NTV Tarih* analyze *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* from a technical and historical perspective (*NTV Tarih*, 2011). I will engage with the way in which they approach this issue in the rest of this section. I argue that *NTV Tarih* as a popular history magazine has a linear way of history writing. Moreover, its perspective on *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is similar to the criticisms on it which I investigate in the section on the news. It meticulously engages with the factual mistakes in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, not necessarily questioning the contextual reasons behind the making of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* in Turkey, or noticing how the royal family reproduces the life of an upper middle class family.

NTV Tarih begins with the remark that Suleiman's reign is a record in the history of the Ottoman Empire with its forty six years length, and weaves the issue around the famous people at that period which is considered to be the peak of the Ottoman Empire both in the Turkish and the world literature according to the magazine. The important historical figures of

that era such as the famous architect Mimar Sinan, Captain Barbaros Hayrettin Pasha, the poet Fuzuli are mentioned. Their accomplishments in terms of creating an Ottoman reputation in different fields are put forth. It is said that this period became the golden standard of the Ottoman Empire including the eastern arts and that it never reached the same power again. This is a common way of representing 16th century Ottoman Empire from a mainstream historical perspective.

NTV Tarih touches upon the world context at that time period by pointing to Süleiman's rivals, identifying this century as a war of power between Habsburgs and Ottoman Empire, and says that the conquests in the Eastern Europe inflicted the Turkish trauma in the West which would never disappear afterwards. Süleiman's reputation as the law giver is discussed and it is argued that the state system was above his person. The idealness of the period is questioned because according to *NTV Tarih* towards the end of his reign first signals of the fall has begun. *NTV Tarih* claims to approach Suleiman the Magnificent from a different perspective and argues that although he was the law giver he should also be remembered how he was merciless to some of the other family members including his brothers, his wives and different groups of people living in Anatolia. It is asserted that it is naïve to connect to Suleiman the Magnificent by just knowing his relationship and love life with Hürrem through a TV Series

From my perspective, *NTV Tarih* has a linear way of history writing. It follows a conventional periodization, which divides Ottoman history into a narrative of foundation, rise, stagnation, fall and break up. Revisionist historians challenge this periodization, especially by arguing that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should not be considered as a period of stagnation. Even though *NTV Tarih* argues that there is another story of Ottoman Empire which is one of the peoples in Anatolia they choose to build their narrative around the ruling elite like the famous architect Mimar Sinan, the captain of the seas Barbaros Hayrettin and

Suleiman the Magnificent. They mention just one group of people in one section when explaining the economic stagnation and the following Celali uprisings in Anatolia, which I would say is not enough to build up “the other side of the coin”, the other side of the story which is not woven around the person of the Suleiman the Magnificent.

After this conventional section on the sixteenth century they move to the twenty first century take on it: “The Magnificent Century”: “*Muhteşem Yüzyıl*” (2011: 36). They compare and contrast the real, genuine sixteenth century and the one as depicted in the TV series. They start with the remark that *NTV Tarih* supports TV productions which take history as their reference point, historical movies, and documentaries on historical issues. They acknowledge that in Turkey there is a growing interest in history. According to *NTV Tarih*, no matter what the view point, the quality, level of the given productions is, they are all significant because they raise the historical consciousness of the society. The authors and producers of these historical TV programs, films etc. should bear with the critiques as much as they are inspired by the praises and positive remarks. *NTV Tarih* argues that the interest in history aroused by *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and the ratings are indicators of success. The environment of discussion created around the TV series is positive.

After this smooth introduction they continue to say that the historical TV series and films should remain in line with the historical records and sources. *NTV Tarih* inserts that it is totally against banning and censoring such productions because they create the opportunity for Turkish state and its citizens to relate to and face their histories touching upon the necessity of history education. Yet it is argued that time, place, forms of behavior, clothing, and historical figures should not be sacrificed just for the sake of fiction. It recommends that these sorts of shows should get help from historians and benefit from their expertise. *NTV Tarih* concludes by saying that such remaining art works become very valuable artifacts to history and influence people more than any other academic writing, history magazine, and

scientific publication, and move to pointing the so called mistakes in the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and explaining how it was in reality.

Firstly, *NTV Tarih* team refers to the mistake about the exact date of when Suleiman and his love, concubine and later wife Hürrem met. It is asserted that they have met before Suleiman had come to power. Secondly, it is argued that the actor who performs Suleiman looks older than Suleiman in reality who was without a beard when he came to throne. Thirdly, the navy that he is trying to build in the TV series was already built by his father according to *NTV Tarih*. Fourthly, *NTV Tarih* argues that the historical site that the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is filmed was not there in sixteenth century. *NTV Tarih* doubts if there was a harem in the Topkapı Palace in that century. According to them back then the harem was still in the old palace. Moreover, not everyone could enter the harem but harem was strictly controlled by women guards and eunuchs. Even eunuchs could not enter the inner circles of the harem. The non-Muslim, non- Ottoman Turkish speaking slaves could not enter harem before they were educated in a different place which is different than how it is shown in the TV series. Another issue they cover is how a divan meeting (imperial council) was held in that century. They said that beginning from Mehmed the 2nd's reign sultans did not actively participate in the divan meetings but watched it from outside. The rule of manners in the sixteenth century is a topic *NTV Tarih* is concerned about. It was forbidden to look Suleiman the Magnificent in the eye and rules and regulations around these manners were set in a strict manner. The close relationship between Ibrahim Pasha and Suleiman the Magnificent is strange according to *NTV Tarih*, and it is normal that the audience found this relationship peculiar as it is shown in the TV series. According to them it would not be very difficult to build the environment of sixteenth century if they had studied the miniatures in a careful manner. That the Suleiman is sitting on a chair in front of a table with a globe and studying is very strange and anachronistic according to *NTV Tarih*.

From a sociological perspective the mistakes about the historical facts do not draw my attention as much as the anachronisms about the daily life and feelings do. By rigorously watching *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* I noticed that the imperial family is not very different than an ideal upper middle class family in terms of the relationship with the children, the working father as the breadwinner and caretaker of the family who would go on wars instead of work. The wives who would wait at home for him to return, the children who would not want to study and the myth of love towards the family and spouses seem to contribute to this family ideal. Moreover, depiction of Ibrahim Pasha as the close brother of Suleiman the Magnificent who would appear in many scenes next to him, who would be consoled by Suleiman when he experiences his regular identity crisis because he is a convert is also interesting. This bro-like relationship is also peculiar and one asks the question if Suleiman the Magnificent who would not show himself to public and pursue a period of seclusion would have such a relationship with a Pasha. I would argue that the background is a historical one but the feelings, structures and daily concerns belong to a modern (maybe postmodern) world.

On the News

News on Consumption

When I surveyed the news in the media one of the most important themes I came across was the intersection of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and consumption. There were lots of products related to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, debates on the sponsorships of the TV series, and newly created *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* related goods. I identified three main points that which may highlight the consumption culture built around *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. First, most of the consumption goods seem to be shaped around the female lead figure Hürrem, relating to her in different ways. Second, sponsorship is a very important issue in TV series, in the ways in which it can shape the themes which the TV series are built around. Third, the price range of the products that are

born out of TV series is very flexible making room for consumption from various classes. I am particularly interested in the news on consumption because it highlights the ways in which history becomes something to be consumed through the help of TV series. This is not a good or bad thing in itself but it is a way in which people relate to history by consuming. This way of consuming history is not passive or dictated by the TV series but a selective process which I show in the sections that I engage with the interview data. In this section I deal with what is out there, the meanings people attribute to what they consume is the subject of another section. Contradictory to the idea that culture industry is marked by standardization the products are vast and sometimes also produced by petty producers and small shop owners often as a result of an imaginative process. Moreover these products can be also local, not produced in a manner of mass production.

Hürrem, Suleiman the Magnificent's love and the lead female character in the TV series is very popular in terms of what she wore, how she died her hair, where she slept, and how her delight would taste like. This commercial interest in her is very significant to the extent that she intermingles with people's everyday life in the ways in which they consume things, how they carry their hair, and where they choose to sleep. There are several examples which show Hürrem's comeback in the 2010s. According to an article in a news site on the internet HaberX in May 2011, "Hürrem's bed" which is worth 9500TL (4300\$) is shown in the Evtteks fair. The bed which consists of steel and wood is constructed after Hürrem's bed in the TV series (HaberX, 2011). Another product related to Hürrem is her fragrance sold on the market. Hürrem's fragrance made up of lavender and several other fruits sold in the bazaars among other fragrances named after other lead heroines in different TV series. Hair Styling after Hürrem Sultan is also en vogue. A hair dresser from Bursa claims that more than fifty percent of his customers want him to dye their hair like Hürrem. He claims that Hürrem's hairstyle was the number one in the year of 2011 (Star, 2011). Among the Turkish delights

named after Obama and Madonna we find Hürrem Sultan's special Turkish delight inspired from the TV series, produced by a candy shop in Adana. A guy who runs a candy shop in Adana has also patented his specific Turkish delight which consists of rose leaves and pistachios (Haberler.com, 2011). These examples are from different cities in Turkey and not necessarily mass produced goods and standardized. The domain of consumption around Hürrem makes it visible that popular culture creates role models, desires and lifestyles. It is important that people actively participate in making of this popular cultural environment/hyperreal. No matter how commercial the candy shop runner's interests may be he in a performative way sits down to think of a Turkish delight which would be the best fit for Hürrem, creates it and patents it, which makes him a part in this process. The women who ask to carry Hürrem's hair or want to smell like her reproduce a historical figure that is already a reproduction and thus both changing Hürrem and themselves. History, everyday life, and TV series become one to build the hyperreal.

One of the important themes is the sponsorship fights around *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. Different than the products such as Turkish delights, hair dye or affordable fragrances the sponsorship firms sell more expensive products such as jewels and rugs. One of the debates around sponsorship for example has been the fight between two jewelry firms which sponsor the jewelry in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. According to the news *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* was using Boybeyi jewelry when they posted Altınbaş as their sponsor on the screen. Boybeyi brought the issue to the Turkish court signifying how important it is for a firm to sponsor *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. Altınbaş Jewelry firm eventually became one of the leaders in feeding to and from this interest in Ottoman style jewelry. This firm presented its collection: Otto, and the special pieces it created for the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* in the 33.Istanbul Jewelry Show. The firm claims that the Arab world is highly interested in Hürrem's jewels. The demand is not only from Europe, but from the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Dubai and Qatar according to Altınbaş. It is also

put forth that there were two pieces which drew a lot of attention costing 99.000 \$, and 300.000 \$.

Jewelry, although not the only sector related to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is a very interesting domain in the ways in which it is used in the show. First, Suleiman is known to be a jeweler and he is depicted as making rings and other sorts of jewels in many scenes. Second, people in the palace are constantly exchanging jewelry pieces, giving them as gifts, wearing different items throughout the episodes. You cannot escape noticing the different types of jewels and how they are used because most of the episodes are shaped around them. The ring that Suleiman gives Hürrem as a gift becomes a scandal, it is stolen, Hürrem is beaten for it, it is found to be stolen again in different episodes. Suleiman's mother gives Hürrem a necklace as a gift of her birth, Ibrahim Pasha secretly sends a broche to his lover, and there are countless scenes where women choose jewels from a selection of jewels. This is a good example about the consumption and commercialization related to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and how some episodes are woven around themes which would fit the sponsors' interests. The pieces from the sponsor firms are expensive and not everyone can afford them, but there are also ones which are made from non- valuable stones thus less expensive and affordable for lower classes. In the section that I engage with the interview data, I am covering how people react to this type consumption, and what it means for them in relation to imitation and consumerism.

An area of sponsorship is the kitchen utensils. In an interview with one of the owners of Gral Porcelain she says that *Muhteşem Yzyıl* boosted the sales of coffee glasses with the Ottoman seal (tuğra) on them. Mrs. Gral says that serving Turkish coffee with water was one of the traditions that were going to be forgotten if it was not for the *Muhteşem Yzyıl*. We produced the glasses with the Ottoman seal inspired from the *Muhteşem Yzyıl* and it got to be really popular she says (Akşam, 2012). As a marketing strategy they started to watch women's programs on TV and these programs are the trendsetters according to her. Different

groups buy different things, buying sealed glasses is a habit of traditional house wives contrary to working modern women who choose more functional kitchen utensils says Gral. They are working on creating a story for a consumption unit according to Mrs. Gral, which was not the case in Turkey in the previous years. This example is very significant for me because it offers the viewpoint of creators of *Ottomania*. Looking from their perspective this seems like a very calculated market strategy for them to produce coffee glasses with seals on them, yet it is a question mark if everyone who buy these products relate to the story they intend to create in the same manner. The activity of drinking water from sealed glasses with coffee is a moment of reinventing a tradition shaped around coffee drinking and proves her point about the method of story building. It is still not certain that everyone consume these glasses by adhering to her story. The moments of usage of these products would for sure create different stories and subjectivities than intended. It is not possible to know if people buy the sealed glasses as a fun souvenir from Turkey, if a conservative Turkish family buys it because it makes references to the glorious Ottoman past or if a young married couple who study history stop by the shop window and buy the glasses thinking that it might be fun to show these pieces to their colleagues.

A newspaper article published in 2011 in *Star* about an internet site through which you can find out particular items in the TV series is also related to the issue of sponsorship. You can inquire about the brands of things like furniture and clothes, and where you can find them through the internet site which is called *dizisponsorları.com* (*sponsorsoftvseries.com*). The founder of this site claims that they receive questions about *Muhteşem Yzyıl* too. Most of the people ask about the framed Ottoman seal found in Suleiman's room. The founder of this site argues that this site that she established showed him that people in Turkey wanted to live like characters in the TV series. She is not sure if this is a good thing but it is what the situation is she says. In the news article it is argued that people no more just watch the TV series but they

want to live like that people, eat where they eat, wear what they wear, go to the places that they go. The author calls this phenomenon of consumption a fanaticism. The founder also points to the fact that people in the Arab countries are also very interested in this phenomenon, and according to her the leading countries are Syria and Iran in terms of this growing interest (Star, 2011). What the internet site owner names as fanaticism in the sense that people want to live like the TV characters is for me an example of the blurring of the distinction between TV as the fake and the life as the real. They are the part of same thing and without being able to make sense of what she is doing the founder of the site feeds into this phenomenon. She posits herself as outside this environment, is very much in this hyperspace.

My last point about the intersection of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and consumption is the vastness of the array of consumption items and the price range of them. This has been one of the issues I have encountered during the interviews. People talked about the expensive items and the cheaper ones. Sometimes they condemned those who bought the expensive ones and sometimes they condemned those who bought cheaper ones. In this spectrum of goods there is 9500TL (5300\$) bed but also there is the 10 TL (5, 50\$) picture you can buy. There are Hürrem rings which cost 7300 TL (4000\$), but there are also ones which cost 120 TL (66\$) and even 3 TL (1, 6\$). I inquired about this subject in my interviews by asking if my informants have ever bought such an item, or what they think of the ones who bought such an item. The answers are diverse and point to many debates in popular culture. There are the ones who see it as pure imitation, some men see this as a gender thing some people don't like it but cannot escape buying these items to their children and niece. I engage with these issues in the analysis section.

Mistakes in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*: Concerns about Historical Accuracy

One of the striking topics in the news I surveyed was the concerns about the historical accuracy of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. Columnists, historians, blog writers have uttered their

discontents about the mistakes in the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* related to history. These concerns are mostly about the factual mistakes (like *NTV Tarih*) and about how this TV series shatters Turkish family values. Some of them approach *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as a conspiracy against Turkey, and the values in Turkish society. I am going to show this discontent through offering the related news. I argue that people mostly write about factual mistakes and their displeasure about the ways in which historical values are not conserved. Some people as a reaction to this kind of view write pieces claiming that this is a TV series, not the history itself hence looking for factuality would not make sense in this case. The interesting thing is that no one writes about how Ottoman dynasty depicted as a modern upper middle class family and the related anachronisms around how feelings are shown. From a sociological perspective, through the careful watching of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* I am moved by the way they depict the royal family of Ottoman Empire as a perfect upper middle class family surrounded by daily matters such as gaining weight, nagging of the Prince Mustafa about his classes, or complaints of Hürrem because she does not get enough attention from Suleiman because he has to work a lot. The way love between the Sultan and his children is depicted and the romantic love between the Sultan and Hürrem is very similar to the modern family ideal. The parental relationship between Sultan and his mother is also based on love and affection. Suleiman's relationship with his son Prince Mustafa is very close to a relationship between a contemporary father and a son. A son, who chases his father, wants to spend as much as time with him, complains about the school all the time, wants to play with him and envies his sibling in his mother's womb. A father who does not hesitate from hugging his son in public, teaches him sword plays, introduces his son to his sibling in her mother's womb, trying to make sure both of them are equally important to him, who spares time for him as much as the state affairs allow him, and lastly a father who is concerned about his son's education. This TV series is almost a

perfect reproduction of family life and feelings towards family and is a representation of daily matters of a family in a historical setting.

Muhteşem Yüzyıl is teleological and our historical characters are avant garde in the ways in which they see life and live their emotions. For example the emotional ebbs and flows of the converts seem very modern which we can inquire through the inner monologues of these characters. The identity crisis of people such as Hürrem or Pargalı İbrahim may be real in the sense that they doubt where they belong because they are converts but being a convert and looking for a unitary belonging and confusion about one's identity is a modern phenomenon in my opinion. Moreover constant popping up of people from Hürrem's and Pargalı's pasts are reminders that these people come from different backgrounds than other family members. Pargalı goes back to his village to come terms with his past. His identical twin reminds him who he indeed is, what would have become from him if Ottomans did not convert him. Hürrem's ex- fiancé finds his way to the palace as a painter again reminding her of her village, her lost past, and what could have been if she was not ripped from her life. Through these we are reminded that these people had a past and we question if they belong to Ottoman Empire for real. This makes one believe that identities are genuine and that people should have one dimensional origin. Through the interviews I conducted I also came upon the issue of how people doubted if Hürrem or Pargalı could leave their Christian background in the past. The idea of one way identity where you can just belong to one place is very modern, and people doubt the possibility and genuineness of converting to Islam overall because they are trying to make sense of the past through their teleological lenses.

As an example about the anachronisms related to lifestyle and feelings the way that Suleiman the Magnificent depicts himself in the beginning of the TV series can be counted. He posits himself as a curious seeker of knowledge and truth, and who is never content of what he finds reminds one the figure of the enlightened man who is constantly after

knowledge and truth. There may be a misplaced globe on Suleiman's table, but its material existence is nothing compared to the world views and modern feelings that anachronistically sit on that table even more solid than the globe.

The historians' concerns in the news I have collected are as I have argued related to factual mistakes and the moral inappropriateness of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. Mehmet Emin Gerger, a historian writes a book about Suleiman the Magnificent because he thinks that every other book is either Orientalist or very shallow about Suleiman. In the TV series Suleiman is only depicted in harem which is a very controversial way to show a sultan who spent his entire life on the horseback he argues. (Star, 2011) This shows some historians' discontent of the Suleiman depicted in TV series or other books. Gerger's concerns also show how self-Orientalism disturbs some people. Showing Suleiman in the harem most of the time is an Orientalist way of showing his life according to Gerger and he writes a new book to contradict this way. In the interviews I have met informants who think that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* was Orientalist in and that it owes this feature to Turkey's relationship to the West. One another example to the historians' who are discontent of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is Yusuf Halaçoğlu who is a deputy of MHP and who was the ex- president of Turkish Historical Society. He says that he wants to commit suicide because of the mistakes in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. (Habertürk, 2011) He claims that he is unable to watch this show which is record breaking with its ratings. He rigorously lists the mistakes. First, he thinks that anyone can enter harem in this TV series which was not the case in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover women did not have that much cleavage at that time period. There are records from English ambassadors from 17th century but none of them say that women had cleavages. Second point is about the historical accuracy. He argues that although they say that they do not make a TV series of history but get inspired from history they have to remain in line with historical facts. If you are telling something about history you have to base your scripts on history according to him. As instances he

underlines the presence of a history writer in the TV series which who did not exist in the Ottoman Empire. Similarly according to him Ottoman Empire did not use fireworks in that century.

The issue of morality raised by the conservative historians gets intermingled with the general concerns about historical accuracy. The issue of morality is combined with the conspiracies against Turkey which allegedly try to shatter Turkish values by attacking its history through popular culture. The view against commercialization of history, making history a theme in consumption and conspiracy theories are in common both in the news and in the in depth interviews. In this view history and historical figures are too sacred to be means to economic gains. It is almost a sin and a conspiracy against Turkish society to use the Ottoman past to earn money. Nail Keçili owner of a famous advertisement agency in Turkey writes in an internet news agency called Medyafaresi. He claims that his mother was related to Suleiman, emphasizing that his mother had the facial look of a member of a dynasty. He represents himself as a person who reads a lot, and who has written a lot about Suleiman's life both in German and English, and who knows Ottoman history almost by heart. For a person who visits world famous libraries and reads Ottoman history there, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is too much to endure he says. He is begging that this TV series is no more shown because it is a sin that history is used in such a way to earn money. It is an insult to the people to whom we are related. According to him Suleiman is one of the most three important sultans and depicting him as a Casanova is something unacceptable. It is not proper to write these scripts without reading the sources that are in English and German but according to him no one has the knowledge about these two languages. He argues that "even we did not dare to say anything about Suleiman although we knew a lot about him" and adds that those who abuse history to earn money are destined to hell. He asks the rhetorical question if it possible for Suleiman to have so many affairs when he just spent one and a half years in the palace and who loved

Hürrem a lot (Medyafaresi, 2011). It is interesting that he criticizes the producers of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* by saying that history should not be used to earn money, being the owner of an advertisement agency. Popular culture's appropriation of history in a commercial way is condemned and viewed as inappropriate.

A similar point with Nail Keçili is raised by Yavuz Bahadıroğlu, historian and author who gives a speech at the fourth Kocaeli bookfair making references to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. He argues that one should not confuse films with science: ("İlim ile film karıştırılmamalı"). He claims that he cannot be mad at those who make these shows because they aim to make money, but if we are to believe in these shows it would mean that we are unfair to the historical characters in question. We have to realize how much charity work Hürrem has accomplished during her life rather than clinging to the shows that she was shown as a witch. "My sister was cursing Hürrem until I had asked to which hospital she goes and it turned out to be Haseki Hospital built by Hürrem Sultan's orders" argues Bahadıroğlu (Haberler.com, 2012). At that moment his sister realized how Hürrem was in truth. Bahadıroğlu claims that the moment we start to be proud about people whom we raised as a country rather than just bragging about the beauty about the nature in our country, we will become the real grandsons and daughters of Ottomans. He says whenever we put the word of God into the plaster than we will have architects who are as good as Architect Sinan of sixteenth century. (Haberler.com, 2012)

The idea of conspiracy finds its place in an article published in the newspaper Zaman. It is said that there is a systemic endeavor to shatter Turkish family values. According to the article TV series are responsible for this. TV series by their sexual and violent content push people to commit crime. Especially uneducated masses and children are in danger because of the sexuality and violence shown in these shows. One of the characters in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*,

Malkoçođlu who sexually harasses every other person he sees is given as an example in the article. (Zaman, 2012)

As one can see these are errors about facts, particular people, and some inventions which are in the *Muhteşem Yüzyil* before their time. There are no complaints about how these people practice a different life style and hold a worldview different than their time. These historians' position towards *Muhteşem Yüzyil* is interesting. Jerome de Groot who investigates the blurring between the history that the professional historians produces and other ways of participating in the making of history argues that the traditional legitimacy of the historians has been corroded by the changes in technology, theory and access. There are several reasons why historians' react this way, yet Jerome de Groot makes a good point. Why historians' react this way may be partly because of the feeling of the loss of monopoly of the art and craft of history writing. Moreover it is also important to see how the series provided an avenue for some historians to show themselves which they use willingly. It should be noted that not all historians react the same way or has the same view towards *Muhteşem Yüzyil*. The way different historians approach history is of course different. The historians whose view I presented here can be considered as popular historians who themselves engage in history writing not in academic settings but in popular cultural ways. Yet *Muhteşem Yüzyil* seems to have made them uncomfortable to the extent that it disturbs the way they conceptualize history as a factual social science. Other historians who would approach the Ottoman society from a sociological perspective might have criticized the gender aspect, or questioned why not the entire social groups in the Ottoman Empire were present in *Muhteşem Yüzyil*.

News on Politics and *Muhteşem Yüzyil*

In this thesis I hesitate to make bold arguments about how *Muhteşem Yüzyil* as a TV series on Ottoman Empire fits into the political conjuncture that Turkey is in. Yet it is important to

remark that this series would not be possible some fifty years ago. Why people watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* today is overdetermined yet Turkey is no more the country where the official discourse is against a particular Ottoman Empire and which thrives in Turkish historical thesis. It is significant to notice that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* fits into the zeitgeist, both contributing to and feeding from it. News that is both related to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and politics eased my job to give a sense about the political conjuncture in Turkey and how popular culture becomes intermingled with politics giving way to interesting hybrids. The Kurdish issue, the Armenian issue, the increasing soft power of Turkey in the Middle East found their ways to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, and sometimes *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* found their way to them. People talking about the increasing power of Turkey in the region choose to use the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as the example: Turkey is just like the Ottoman Empire shown in the TV series, it is powerful. Likewise, Kurdistan is omitted in Suleimans letters becoming an example about how we cannot think about the past without thinking about today's problems for a second. When France is discussing passing a law about the "Armenian massacre" Turkey sends Sarkozy implicit messages through TV series, find comfort in watching a French ambassador kissing Suleiman the Magnificent's skirt on TV. In this part I present the news around these issues creating a scrapbook of political issues on Turkey by relying on the newspapers and news sites. Instead of depending just on academic accounts which are on current Turkish politics I choose this method because first it fits to my grand purpose of presenting different views on Ottoman Empire and making multiple voices heard and second it is a suitable way to show the fusion between internal and external politics, everyday life and popular culture. I will first engage with the instances when *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is used in international politics, moving to the moments when it is articulated in internal politics. Lastly, I will portray how I encountered the subject of the Pax Ottoman in the region in my survey of the news.

When the law which anticipated imprisonment and pecuniary punishment to those who denied “Armenian massacre” was being discussed in France Erdoğan chose to read a letter that Suleiman wrote to the French king. In the news this was presented with the heading “The magnificent answer” referring both to the TV series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, and the muhteşem: glorious past of Turkey: the Ottoman Empire. In the news Erdoğan’s way of reading is compared with Halit Ergenç’s reading who is starring as Sultan Suleiman. Erdoğan reads the letter by saying that he has given this letter as a gift to Sarkozy but because it seems like Sarkozy has not read it he felt the need to read it. The letter in its original form is written in a very polite form, framed with very elegant words. I personally did not see how this letter could be an offensive and implicitly meaningful response to Sarkozy until I saw how it was read by Erdoğan and Ergenç. Parts of the letter were omitted and the tone itself was suggestive. The letter is translated like this:

“I, sultan of sultans, king of kings, the shadow of God who bestows the crown to the monarchs on earth, the supreme ruler of the Mediterranean and Black Seas, the Balkans and Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Damascus and Aleppo, Egypt, Mecca and Medina, Jerusalem, and all of the Arab dominions, and Yemen, and the sultan and the supreme king of many nations, I am the son of Sultan Selim Khan and grandson of Sultan Bayezid Khan, and you, King Francis, are the governor of the French province.

You have sent to my Gate, the sanctuary of many kings, a letter by the hand of your faithful servant Frangipani. He has made known to me how the enemy overran your country, so you are now a captive. You have asked aid, for your deliverance. What you have requested has been set forth at the foot of my throne, which controls the world. Your situation has gained my imperial understanding in every detail, and I have considered all of it.

There is nothing astonishing in emperors being defeated and made captive. Keep your heart content and do not grieve. In these situations our glorious predecessors and illustrious ancestors, may God keep alight their tombs, never ceased from making war to drive back their foe and conquer his lands. We ourselves have followed their path; we have at every time conquered provinces and citadels both great in strength and in difficulty of approach. By night as well as by day our horse is always saddled, and our saber ever girded on.

May God the Most High advance righteousness! May His will, whatsoever it portends, be accomplished. For the rest, ask it from your envoy and be informed. Know that it will be as said.” (http://web.me.com/eroly/Reference_on_the_Turkish_Ottoman_Empire/France.html)

In the versions in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, and the one Erdoğan has read the paragraph which is before the last paragraph is omitted. It is the very paragraph where Suleiman the Magnificent implies he could also have been captivated, or that his ancestors never gave up although they have been in similar situations. To choose to omit that paragraph is not a coincidence and it changes the tone in the letter showing how past is used to articulate contemporary political matters. In the same speech that Erdoğan gave about the issue of Armenian massacre he brings the issue of Algeria forth by saying that “If Sarkozy does not know what happened there he could ask his father”. Rather than tackling with the issue in a different manner, he chooses to pick issues from Turkey’s glorious Ottoman past and France’s grim past with colonialism. In this sense history becomes a tool for everyday politics, not to solve unspoken issues and to come terms with them but to prove that Turkey is superior because of its glorious Ottoman past, and France does not have the right to bring the Armenian issue because it has the dark past of colonialism in its historical baggage.

One of the cases of the intersection between politics and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* has been the articulation of the Kurdish issue through *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. In an episode of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* Suleiman in the beginning of a letter said that “I, Suleiman who ruled over the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Anatolia and Rumelia omitting Kurdistan which was present in the original letter. This was protested by BDP, the Kurdish Party in Turkey. In the next episodes Kurdistan was put back in the openings of the letters. (Habertürk, 2011) This case is showing in terms of how daily political matters become intermingled with popular culture. Turkey’s Kurdish issue is reflected in the TV series when the script writers are hesitant to put the word Kurdistan in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. For me this is one of the moments which show the meaninglessness of the

dichotomy between the 'real life' and the 'culture'. As we can observe in this example political is very much created in the popular.

Right at the moment when Turkey is going through an educational reformation which requires an increase in the mandatory years of schooling Hilmi Ziya Ülken chooses to critique the educational reform in question by referring to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. He claims that Suleiman the Magnificent erased Mehmed the 2nd's legacy in education through shifting to more religious studies. Contrary to Mehmed the 2nd who is considered as a renaissance man, Suleiman the Magnificent according to Ülken removed philosophy classes from the curriculum thus put education in a deteriorating phase. Ülken argues that this is similar to the contemporary shift that Turkish education is going through and that this particular legacy of Suleiman the Magnificent should be touched upon in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. He argues that the difference between Mehmed the Conqueror and Suleiman the Magnificent should be put forth in the TV series as a pre-warning of the drawbacks that would be faced if the educational reformation is passed. Ülken chooses history, and a popular cultural historical drama to talk about daily matters. By referring to the Ottoman past he draws parallels with today's educational practices and those in the past. He also advises Meral Okay to put the issue of education in the script. To choose an instance from six hundred years ago to talk about the current educational reform becomes even more possible when six hundred years ago seems more recent thorough its comeback through *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*.

The third aspect of the intermingling between *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and politics is on the discursive area of the international politics in the Middle Eastern region. Turkey increasing with the Ak Party government started to feed from the discourse of the glorious, peaceful Ottoman past argument. The idea of Pax Ottoman, the distancing from the West and a more active way of engaging in politics in the Middle Eastern region with the acquirement of the peace-maker role has been popular in the last decade. The actual moves in international

relations may or may not reflect this but it is certain that there is a discursive shift in the international politics. In line with this Visiting Professor Dimitri Kitsikis who teaches at Gediz University gives an interview on Turkish Greek relationships arguing that Turkey is pursuing a foreign policy which encompasses the region where Ottoman Empire reigned in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He claims that through neo- Ottomanism Turkish influence and presence are felt in the geography that you see in the TV series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. He utters that with the foreign policy Turkey is pursuing, it is increasing its influence over different people with different religions and languages. He remarks that Erdoğan and Davutoğlu are doing a great job in terms of international politics in the region, and that Turkey is as strong as it is shown in the TV series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. (Haber3, 2011)

Similarly İsmail Çolak who is a historian and an author argues that Turkey is no more a distant police office of the West thanks to Ak Party and Davutoğlu (Pirsushaber, 2011). He says that the news in the West which engage with the question if Ottoman Empire is coming back reflect the West's fear about Turkey's new position in the region. Turkey according to him left the political agenda which revolved around the West since the early republican days and shifted to a more independent political agenda. Turkey is much more assertive in the region where we can call as the Ottoman Empire's backyard he says. Like the Ottoman Empire, Turkey is after peaceful and human centered foreign affairs he argues. It is not a shift of axis but finally finding the axis which is incumbent upon Turkey's history and geography according to him. The history and geography that Turkey has, necessitates more than being the West's office in the region, and brings the need to assert that Turkey is very much in the game of world politics. He says that he finds this shift very successful and has a positive view about the recent developments in reel politics.

İsmail Çolak argues that as long as we are at peace with our past, with our values and our identity, and as long as we trust ourselves we can go back to those days when we were a

great power. The interviewer asks about his opinion about the news that are shaped around the idea that Turkey is trying to revive the Ottoman past by giving the example of the Newsweek article on this subject. He responds that because Turkey now has a leading role in the Islamic world, and that it is powerful in the region brings forth the concerns about revival of the great Ottoman past in the Western world. These developments of course would scare them but not Turkey according to İsmail Çolak. When the interviewer asks if he thinks the people living in Turkey are knowledgeable enough about the Ottoman past İsmail Çolak says that 1990s are a breaking point in terms of the relationship with the Ottoman past. Turkey and Turkish society started to learn about Ottoman Empire and tried to face and come terms with the Ottoman past. He says that this process still continues. He argues that books, academic research, films and documentaries help with this process yet works like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* distorts history and mars the Ottoman past by showing the past like a magazine. Those works which have the aim of rating do not help with the interest in Ottoman past. The interviewer remarks that a young person who reads İsmail Çolak's book on Suleiman the Magnificent and comes back home to watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* in the evening would be really surprised. The hypothetical young person asks himself if the Suleiman who has a soft spot for women is the actual Suleiman or the one he reads from the books. Çolak says that these sorts of shows should not be watched at all. According to him people should learn history from proper books (PirsusHaber, 2011). This example is a showcase of the clashing narratives about the Ottoman past. Neither the way İsmail Çolak conceptualizes Ottoman past as solely a peace-maker nor the way it is depicted in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is absolutely true. Yet, İsmail Çolak does not hesitate from advising people to abandon watching *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* altogether. I think this is the result of the endeavor to have the monopoly of narrating the Ottoman past in a sea of clashing narratives of the Ottoman Empire. İsmail Çolak, a conservative historian who supports Ak Party's political agenda inspired from a mythical Ottoman Empire does not want a young

person to watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because it is against the language game that he possesses around the Ottoman past

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Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the phenomenon of the TV series, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as an example of the notion of Ottomania. I approached it as hyperreal, a showcase of the intermingling between the everyday life, TV series, and politics. I showed how it posits a reference point for Turkish and in some cases foreign people to talk about daily matters related to history, politics and economy by surveying the news that are on *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. Politics, concerns about historical accuracy and consumption are the three pillars that I identified through this survey which I made visible to the reader by providing examples from the news I have surveyed.

Chapter 5

Perception and Consumption of Ottomania in contemporary Turkey

Ottomania cannot be understood without engaging with the ways in which different people from different backgrounds make sense of it. With this in mind I conducted twenty five interviews with people who differ in age, gender, political standpoint, religious orientation and class position. The indicators of Ottomania in this research are the perception of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, reaction to photo shooting with the Ottoman theme, attitude towards Mehter (Ottoman military band), and view towards consumption of Ottoman past in the forms of jewelry, clothing and kitchen utensils. Although I do not try to establish strict correlations with people's background and their stance toward Ottomania, looking to the data in this way has been helpful to defamiliarize the familiar. In this chapter I start with the outcome of the view towards consumption of artifacts with the Ottoman theme. Second, I engage with the ways in which people react to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. Third, I put forth how the interviewees evaluate Mehter. Fourth, the reactions towards photo shooting with the Ottoman theme are presented.

Consumption

The consumption of Ottoman past is investigated in the interviews by a brief introduction to the recent popular artifacts on the market and a consequent set of questions asking if the informants have encountered these artifacts in their daily lives, if they bought any of them, why they bought them, and what they think of those who buy these artifacts. Fourteen out of the twenty five have a negative evaluation of this phenomenon of consuming artifacts with Ottoman theme, but the reasons why they find it negative change depending on their religious and political orientation. Among the reasons why they find the consumption of the Ottoman

past negative are the wrongfulness of using the past for commercial ends, the usage of these items for ideological ends, and the handling of these items to imitate the upper classes both in history and today, and the fault of engaging in conspicuous consumption. Five of the interviewees are ambivalent about consumption of the Ottoman past. They bought these items to their relatives and children although they are themselves critical of this phenomenon, or they would like some of these items but would be confused about the favorability of liking such things. One of the interviewees for instance would want to use these items to represent Turkey to the foreigners but thought it was vane and pretentious to use these sorts of things in an excessive manner. I identified three people as searchers of authenticity. They are okay with artifacts with Ottoman theme as long as they represent Ottoman past correctly. These people are against consuming things which were not existent at Ottoman times as Ottoman. Four people are completely positive about using Ottoman artifacts. They have either consumed Ottoman artifacts and have a positive view towards the phenomenon in general or they have a positive view towards although not having consumed it personally.

An outcome from the interviews is that not all the artifacts have the same significance or meaning for the people. For example people I interviewed who are from the different segments of the middle class usually have consumed Ottoman seal in different forms like jewelry, and household ornaments and have nothing against these less-expensive items. But when it comes to consuming expensive items such as ostentatious jewelry they become critical of this habit and evaluate this as conspicuous consumption and being blinded by the market. The distinction of less expensive items from the expensive ones and attributing labels such as “özenti” (pretention, pretentious, affectation) to those who consume the expensive items like rings or the imitation of the rings becomes a tool of differentiating themselves from the other segments of the middle classes or upper classes. The fact that they are aware that these items are produced to manipulate the desires of the lower classes to become one of the

upper classes, and their awareness of the impossibility of becoming one of those by just consuming them becomes a device to establish their difference both from the middle classes who are not aware and from the upper classes who produce and conspicuously consume these items, as will be discussed below. People use taste to differentiate themselves from the other segments of the society, where the taste is overdetermined by the class position, gender, age, political stance and religious inclination. As Bourdieu (1984) demonstrates what social groups consume become a part of a strategy for making a hierarchical social space. Cultural consumption of Ottoman past and how they view the tastes formed around cultural consumption of Ottoman past become one of the ways in which class differentiation in today's Turkey is reproduced, reformed and maintained.

The condemnation of the popular and commercial culture is a common theme of the fourteen people who are completely against the consumption of material goods with the Ottoman touch. A thirty three year old woman from Istanbul who studies at university, politically informed and a practicing Muslim thinks that the market around Ottoman artifacts is like any other commercial market. She argues, speaking of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, that for a TV series to be popular, it is necessary that it has a market around it. She says that "I would not like to live in that era. Everyone should live according to their own era. Artifacts from that period would not fit my life. It would be cumbersome for me to clean all that house ornaments, and such ornaments belong to a certain lifestyle but not mine. In the Ottoman period ornamented furniture had a meaning, they served a purpose. They do not belong to this century". She finds it awkward that people use such things. Moreover for her TV series are long advertisements which the society does not really realize. Because she is interested in writing TV series, she also offers an insider view into the TV series. A script writer who she sees as a mentor has recommended her not to forget to put a special artifact in a scenario in order for a show to be successful. Different than the actual advertisements you would get

interested in the clothing, furniture without realizing she says. When asked about the Hürrem ring she says that her close relatives were really into Hürrem ring that's why she knows about it. She argues that "because the ring belongs to a sultan when she wears that ring she feels like a sultan. Of course it is fake, costs 5 TL (3\$) but she feels she deserves to live like a sultan". According to her TV series in general push people not to like their own lives, not to be content. They give the message that there is a better life out there, they make people want to consume more. She thinks that people's lives should be harmonious as a whole. Because she washes the dishes and cleans the house in her daily life Hürrem ring would not fit her. It is awkward to wash dishes with a Hürrem ring. She differentiates herself from the society, the peoples, *halk*, by saying that she is aware of the logic behind TV series; they are long advertisements. How I interpret what she says is that everybody should know where they stand in the society and they should consume accordingly. Hürrem ring does not fit somebody who is washing the dishes. Ottoman style ornamented furniture does not fit her home because it belongs to another life style. The ways in which people consume Ottoman past become a social marker and in this case the informant points to the cases when people consume 'wrongly', which give way to awkwardness.

A twenty five year old man who is at university, informed about political matters and who represents himself as a practicing Muslim thinks that TV series work in our unconscious and affect us to buy things that are presented in the TV series. He is very sad about those who buy the Hürrem ring, identifying it as a sign of imitation. He claims that "if you asked me what would be the last thing you would do in this world that would be buying a Hürrem ring". He also asks me if it is mostly women who buy Hürrem ring emphasizing the gender component of this particular consumption type.

A similar reaction comes from a thirty five year old high school graduate who is politically not engaged representing himself as a moderate political person and a non

practicing believer. He argues that he would rather live Ottoman past in his heart rather than showing off in a pretentious manner. He says that he is respectful of those who buy, but he would not do it himself. When asked about the Hürrem ring he says that the behavior of buying a Hürrem ring shows “pretentiousness, vanity, affectation and imitation” As a society we are into vanity and imitation he says. Showing off, and to claim that I am like this person, I am like that person is a habit of Turkish society.

A male interviewee (thirty five) who is a high school graduate, politically informed and practicing believer claims that he would rather be unique and not buy something that he could see on every other person. He says “firms know that the Turkish society likes imitation and pretentiousness and they abuse this. I do not really understand why people would do such a thing I would rather wear something that is not existent in this world”

A male interviewee who is thirty seven years old, middle school graduate, politically informed and who represents himself as a non-believer implies that the fact that Hürrem rings are sold confirms that Turkish society is stupid by saying that “Aziz Nesin was probably right”. (Aziz Nesin is an author who once argued that sixty per cent of Turkish society is stupid) He says that someone who is self confident and who is not after vanity would not feel the need to buy such things touching upon the issue of imitation. For him Turkish society is interested in the products shown on TV in general. He gives several examples from instances when Turkish people bought several items which belong to celebrities condemning this sort of behavior.

The theme of imitation is very significant in the sense that combined with consumption of history, commercialization, and the link between the market and TV series it becomes a tool for Turkish people to make sense of the society that they are living in. The above examples show that there is a group of people who is very suspicious of this kind of

consumption related to TV series. The impossibility of combining today's lifestyle and that ostentatious life style from the imperial family and the awkwardness of buying Hürrem ring to imitate those imperial people are the reasons that make these people react in a negative manner to the consumption of Ottoman Empire.

Like the earlier theories of popular culture a group of people in Turkey conceptualizes this type of behavior as imitation. Watching TV series make people aspire to those who are economically better off than them, leaving them prone to be abused by commercial interests. These people mark the boundaries between themselves and those who buy things like Hürrem ring. In their conceptualization they are the informed ones and the others are just blinded by false aspirations, dreams that will remain unfulfilled and they will never move from the echelons of the imitators to those who have become. The social emulation model which McKendrick has developed to understand cultural consumption is very similar to how some of the participants have made sense of consumption of the Ottoman past. McKendrick suggests that social emulation encouraged people to pursue fashion and novelty. Through social emulation and manipulation of social emulation people pursued luxuries rather than necessities. As a critique of conspicuous consumption and social emulation this may sound as a valid argument but it falls short of understanding why people consume such items. Both as a theoretical model and as an explanation coming from the society to understand the society it is rigid. The ones who are positive towards buying these items and who like them have interesting information about why they like to consume the Ottoman past. The commercial explanation and the model which predicts people consuming particular items because they are manipulated by the media, and the market is not adequate as a sociological explanation. Yet it is very significant as a tool of making sense of other groups in the society. The explanation sounds like this: "the ones who are not like me buy these items because they are blinded but I am not. I am aware of my position and I am aware that buying that stuff will not help me

change my position". It helps to reproduce the boundaries which are set before, and help people normalize where they stand. They are aware of the manipulation and pressure coming from different sources and they pity the ones who are not aware that they are being manipulated. This explanation is very broad in scope and in some instances people make sense of the Turkish society as a whole. "Turkish society is stupid, Turkish society likes to imitate, as a society Turkish people are into pretentiousness and vanity" are the common things that people uttered when they are elaborating on the habit of buying a Hürrem ring.

The people who are positive or ambivalent about buying Ottoman items are diverse and have different backgrounds. Unlike what my informants would think of them, I will argue that they are not completely manipulated by the media and the market. The people who are ambivalent about whether to buy or not to buy are also very telling about the process of cultural consumption since they show that cultural consumption is not the sterile environment where people are aware of their intentions, or sure of what to buy and where to buy. For example one of my informants for who is a forty nine year old woman, a high school graduate and a practicing Muslim argues "I really like the jewelry in the show. I think that especially after this TV series people are into Ottoman jewelry. They are really really beautiful. They are so splendid and gorgeous. But this is... Maybe they should not put that much jewelry in the show. I am not sure, maybe the jewelry are a bit much on the front scene though". Her hesitation after she utters that she really likes the jewelry on the show shows that the decision making process is not a straight one. Rather than an unconscious action of engraving the urge to buy the jewelry as one of the informants has predicted she actively engages in a thinking process whether this much jewelry is good or not. When I ask her why people would buy items with the Ottoman theme she says that "that person in question who buys such items with the Ottoman theme probably likes the character in the TV series a lot and wants to remember that character in her everyday life. Maybe he or she wants to become

more integrated with that person. That can be the reason why one buys such stuff". The answer she gives to the question why would somebody buy a Hürrem ring is interesting and is interacting with those who are totally against buying items with the Ottoman theme. She says "Why would someone buy Hürrem ring... Probably to feel like Hürrem, like if Hürrem wears it I wear it too. You know what, let me tell you something interesting. At that time the *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* was not broadcasted... My daughter and my husband bought me a set of jewelry, a ring, a necklace and earrings. After the TV series have become popular my daughter started teasing me. Oh mum you are so lucky, you are like Hürrem. But it is not even related they bought the set before the show was even popular. I could not wear them for a period. Now I wear it when I go out with my close friends. It occurs to me as if I am trying to look like Hürrem but they bought it before." How this coincidence makes her feel about herself and her engagement with people's possible reaction is interacting with those who condemn usage of Ottoman theme artifacts in general. She likes the jewelry in the show, she likes her set but she is afraid of the possible reaction of the people. She does not want to be seen as imitating Hürrem, although she likes the jewelry overall.

Similarly one of the informants who is forty, high school graduate, and presents herself as a secular non-practicing believer informs that she really liked the Hürrem ring in the beginning and wanted to buy one of those. She claims to having realized that everybody owned one of these rings and that made her give up the idea of buying a ring. She says that her sister-in-law has made her brother buy one of those rings, one of the real and expensive ones, which shocked her. She says it is very different than the one she saw at the local bazaar. I asked her what she thinks of this action. She argues that her sister-in-law is always into pretentious things. For example she had her kitchen decorated just after a kitchen she saw on a magazine's cover. She on the other hand would be content to buy a fake Hürrem ring from the bazaar and be equally happy with that. She likes elegant presentation, decoration, and wearing

chic clothes yet she is not into the extremities of these. She likes moderation in these matters. I inquire what she would feel if she wore the ring. She says she would feel beautiful and would feel more special. Her view towards this practice shows how the people who buy the ring is not very different than the ones who ruthlessly criticize this action. When they engage in the same action, they critically think what it means and interpret their feelings. The others on the other hand, female relatives for example are not as informed as them. They are either pretentious or they like vanity, that's why they buy a Hürrem ring. But when they buy it, it is about feelings and they are aware of what they are doing so this is not imitation or pretentiousness.

Among the ones who are negative or ambivalent about the consumption of Ottoman past a significant argumentation is built around the issue of ideology. They make sense of the consumption items as ideological things which give a message to the society. The ideological nature of these artifacts is interpreted both as positive and negative depending on the interviewee's political and religious attitudes.

A forty four year old, university graduate who presents himself as a secular democrat and leftist person argues that "when religious beliefs rise people buy more Ottoman stuff like a veil with Ottoman seal. With the rise of religious inclinations peoples' interest in the Ottoman and Ottoman period rises. These people see the Ottoman Empire as one which brought civilization to everywhere and they do not care what indeed happened there where they went. They do not really know what foreigners think of us that's why they post Ottoman seal as stickers on their cars, or why they wear headscarves with Ottoman seal or Arabic words. I do not think that people know what those Arabic words mean". When asked about what he thinks of the Hürrem ring and the people who buy this ring, he explains it as a matter of gender. He argues that both secular and Islamist women may buy this item because women in general like to carry beautiful jewels. He says that it is normal for women to be influenced

by TV series when even men can be influenced by these. He interprets wearing Hürrem ring as fashion in general and does not see buying a Hürrem ring as negative as posting an Ottoman seal or wearing a head scarf with Ottoman seal. "A fashion designer who uses the Ottoman motif in short skirts is not doing a negative thing because he does not do this for religious reasons. A designer uses a popular thing, consumes its popularity and is done with it after it is no more en vogue. This is not a bad thing in itself it is to make money."

Similarly a thirty three year old woman (university graduate) who identifies her as secular, leftist and non-believer thinks that the rise of the Ottoman theme in consumption items is a reflection of current political context in Turkey. According to her "the political formation is backed up by the authors, designers, architecture and so on, the story behind the political system is written by these people. This is a sequence a chain in a sense". Her reaction to the people who buy the Hürrem ring is one which would confirm the idea of the hyperreal coined by Baudrillard.

As I discuss in the theory chapter postmodernism is the culture of simulacrum where the distinction between the original and the copy is destroyed. This form of culture can be identified as a simulation which is the production by models of a real without origins or reality, the hyperreal. According to this conceptualization today hyperreal is everywhere where TV dissolves into life and life dissolves into TV. In line with this notion of hyperreal the interviewee argues that "no outside remains of the fusion between TV and real life in people's everyday lives. They are so enmeshed with TV series that the TV series is not enough for them they also watch magazine shows to learn what these people do, where they go, what they eat, what they wear, whom they are with, where they sleep. People live in a small world. There are even people who are not able to go out, not even to do their shopping. These people would watch TV series the whole day and there is no way that they can escape from these shows. Men work for long hours, they sleep for six hours and in the remaining

time they don't have any energy to do anything but watch TV. I have a lot of friends who are university graduates but work for long hours for the minimum wage. These people have nothing but TV and when they gather together they talk about the people on TV. This is something popular which fills up their lives so in order to be related more to the people in TV series people buy such items as Hürrem ring. This may have a psychological side, they live in that world and they need an item to relate even more to that world". She in a Marxist way summarizes how the free time of working people is regulated like their work time. This regulation has worked in a way not to leave them any personal space in her conceptualization which makes their lives become one with the lives of the people in the TV series, where the need to relate with the celebrities through an item arises.

One of the informants who is twenty five years old, middle school graduate, non practicing believer, and moderate in political activity says that the most popular item that he has encountered is the Ottoman seal. He says that people wear the Ottoman seal in the form of rings and necklaces. When asked why people would wear such things he argues that he hasn't asked them yet he thinks that this is a sign of nationalism and his nationalist friends wear such stuff. Hürrem ring on the other hand signifies emulation, vanity and pretentiousness and someone who would wear Hürrem ring would want to try to put his man under control by feeling like Hürrem.

Another informant who is twenty nine, university graduate and would identify himself as a socialist, anarchist person says that people use things such as Hürrem ring or a ring with the Ottoman seal to influence and manipulate those people who do not feel the same way about the Ottoman Empire. These people buy these items because when they do they feel themselves better, and they show the people their heritage. They embrace Ottoman Empire and the ring becomes the symbol of the Ottoman Empire. They claim to be a descendant of that empire and become a part of it. They give the message that their past belongs to the

Ottoman Empire. An eighteen year old informant who is at high school and claims to be a practicing believer says that he would want to buy an item like a t-shirt to show a tourist because it would be impressive. Similarly he would like to see a tourist wearing such an item because usually tourists or foreigners do not like the Ottoman Empire for having ruled the world once. They have built sovereignty nearly on the whole world. When asked about the Hürrem ring he says that he does not approve of such a behavior. It is a form of imitation for him. As the youngest person in the sample his perspective about the tourists and the favorability of the Ottoman items to give a message to the tourists is significant. When a woman buys a Hürrem ring it signifies something negative yet a tourist wearing a t-shirt or himself wearing an Ottoman t-shirt signifies something positive. His interpretation of the two different items is exemplary of the diverse nature of Ottoman artifacts. As I have argued not all the consumption items have the same value for the people.

The people who are positive about consuming Ottoman Empire and the ones who are ambivalent about consuming Ottoman Empire are diverse in terms of their religious and political orientation. One can grasp this through looking at the ways in which how these people make sense of consuming Ottoman Empire. What I present here is a tiny glimpse of the vast array of views towards consuming the Ottoman past. Different class positions, different ages, genders and religious and political orientations give way to different life stories, thus subjectivities and diverse attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire.

There are four people who are positive about using artifacts with the Ottoman theme. They differ in their political and religious orientation. One of the informants (twenty four, female, university student) who comes from an upper middle class family, and engages in moderate religious activities claims to have grown up with Ottoman artifacts such as coins which belong to his grandfather. She does not have anything particular against Hürrem ring but says that there is nobody around her who has bought a Hürrem ring. One of the informants

(high school graduate, twenty eight, moderate practicing Muslim, middle class) had a ring designed which is similar to the one Suleiman wears in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. He had also a necklace designed for himself which cost 1500\$ according to him. It is designed after Mehmed the Conqueror's coins, and he wears it occasionally. One of the interviewees (thirty one, male, high school graduate, non practicing Muslim) who claims to be a humanist person politically says that he is addicted to the Ottoman seal and he had the Ottoman seal on his business card because he admires the Ottoman past. He claims to have developed this admiration when he was doing his military service as a guard in front of the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul. He claims that the historical atmosphere of the Ottoman Empire has had a great influence on him. He says that he saw the original versions of what belonged to the Ottoman Empire and this has helped him to build a certain liking of the Ottoman Empire and its stylistic forms. Another informant (thirty five, middle school graduate, practicing Muslim, politically conservative) wears an Ottoman seal ring and informs that he wears that ring because it reminds him of the glorious Ottoman past. He says "This is our past. I am proud of our past. Why wouldn't I carry this ring? I love the Ottoman Empire, I embrace it and I would wish that sultanate comes back in that format, in the format when everything was ruled with justice. Today there is no just rule. In today's rule, today's society everything is for the ones who have the money."

Muhteşem Yüzyıl

In this section I concentrate on people's reactions to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as an indicator of their stance towards Ottomania. People make sense of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* through several themes. It is referred as the magazine side of the history which just engages with the harem life, an enigma to us because there are not many records on it. It is referred as a show which gives the feeling of nostalgia to the viewer. It is put forth as a good way to keep the Turkish society busy turning its attention from more important topics. It is presented as an ideological tool

which feeds into the current conservative political structure. It is approached as a conspiracy, an effort to misrepresent the glorious Ottoman past. It is very striking that a show can possibly fulfill these clashing projects. That some of these projects stand on the different ends of a spectrum is the proof that a phenomenon can be pushed to endless directions from different sides of the society. Just like a historical event which can be interpreted in various ways from the different parts of a society in different times *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as a popular media phenomenon which represents a sequence of historical events can be interpreted differently from different segments of the society. Yes, it is for sure that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is condemned. It is condemned because it is historical; it is condemned because it is a-historical. It is condemned because it is representing the Ottoman Empire as a good thing; it is condemned because it is representing the Ottoman Empire as a bad thing. Another thing that is for sure is that almost everyone in the sample is somewhat critical of the show. Almost nobody is fully content with the show, disturbed because one or more reasons that I presented. They are critical of it and they think that there is a group of people out there (most of the time the Turkish society) who uncritically enjoy the show and thus acquires a false understanding of the Ottoman past. This is related to the nature of popular culture in general. People seek authenticity in the representation of history, they do not want the magazine side of the history, and they want the real history. This is why they talk about the fakeness of the show. The clothes don't seem real, the palace life does not look real, and the fact that Hürrem is so intriguing does not seem convincing. The jewelry couldn't have been that ostentatious, Suleiman was younger when he came to power he doesn't look real are the examples of the moments when people look for the authentic Ottoman Empire, the textbook Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman Empire which was already present differently in different people's minds. Secular people had the picture of the ancient regime in their minds, the rotten, degenerate, corrupt Ottoman Empire which *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* shattered. Conservative people had the

picture of the religious Ottoman Empire, the holder of the Islamic flag, the caliphate which Muhteşem Yüzyıl also managed to disturb.

Nobody likes *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* but everyone watches it because they know what they do not like it about the show so they can disapprovingly raise their eye brows at the right moment. When they have their critical gaze towards it they can enjoy it with a clear conscious. The Turkish society, the uninformed, uneducated, elite, rich, poor, stupid, religious, secular masses of course are in the back of their heads, to be mentioned when they talk about the show in public, with their friends, in internet forums, and when a researcher comes to talk about *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*.

The condemnation of Muhteşem Yüzyıl because “it solely represented harem” was one of the controversies that I encountered during the interviews. One interviewee (twenty two, university student, female, non practicing Muslim, lower middle class) argues that she watches Muhteşem Yüzyıl but it is exclusively composed of harem life although there have been many conquests during Suleiman’s reign. She says “for me Ottoman Empire does not consist only of harem. But if Ottoman Empire was presented in other ways then people would not watch it. People watch it to watch Hürrem and other characters. Maybe they shouldn’t have named it after the Ottoman Empire.” When I ask her if the Ottoman Empire was like the way it is presented in Ottoman Empire she says that harem is a black box. She says that she has investigated the issue through several books and found out that nobody really knew what happened in harem. Likewise another informant (forty nine, female, high school graduate, practicing Muslim, middle class) argues that she likes Muhteşem Yüzyıl when she views it as a TV series but if you look at it from different perspectives she does not like it. She says that Suleiman is a very different, unique, and special person. They show him as if he does not have anything else but harem to care about. Someone feels the need to say: How can you rule the Ottoman Empire when you cannot rule your own harem? They are concentrating lot on

harem that is why I am criticizing it. My brother says he really suffers when he watches this TV series. Harem is a very secret space, they show it in a way that I feel ashamed to watch it with my son. There are even things that I cannot explain him properly. He asks me if Suleiman marries the girls he is going to bed with. I cannot answer. He is a high school student. How can I explain him these matters? He is surprised that glorious Suleiman can do such things, so he says what is left of his gloriousness. I fall short of explaining these matters to my son. They should find a way to explain these things properly. It is shown as if Suleiman's only job is to get in bed with the women in harem. She says that the harem scenes weigh more compared to the war scenes and the war scenes are low quality, as if it was a computer game. It looks very funny. She says she will not deny that she watches it yet it hurts her when she thinks of it from this perspective.

Correspondingly a male respondent (thirty five, middle class, non-practicing Muslim, high school) argues that he does not like the show because although Suleiman is ruling a country he is after his own business with women. It is for sure that someone can fall in love and get married yet Suleiman is not settled for one, he wants more, he is almost able to get his own football team. He also argues that there are very controversial sides of Ottoman Empire like the rulers who just care about their own good but nothing else. Another informant (thirty three, male, university graduate, practicing Muslim, conservative) contends that harem is an unknown thing. What we know about harem is basically what some Orientalists wrote and fed us with. It might mean that they are doing injustice to Hürrem by showing her as an intriguing woman. The Hürrem we see on the screen is probably not very similar to Hürrem who lived at that time period. He says that he watches this TV series and finds it good as a show but when I ask him if it is wrong to have Muhteşem Yüzyıl he says yes. He would rather not have it. He says when we think of the structure in Turkey it would be better if the characters had a more conservative identity, if there were less intrigue and more war scenes. According to him

people then would not like the show as much as they did now. Most of the TV series which are popular are scandalous and that is the reason Turkish society like these shows.

There is a consensus on the fact that it is wrong to have so many harem scenes when the sixteenth century was based on wars and conquests. The harem is approached as the magazine side of the history and the show is condemned because it shows the glorious and religious Ottoman Empire as if it was consistent of harem, the women's domain which we know barely anything about. People find it normal that popular culture needs sensation and intrigue, and most of them say that as a TV series it is good yet it becomes problematic when the religious and belligerent Ottoman Empire clash with the necessities of popular culture. Another criticism on *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* corresponds with another common way in which popular culture is denounced generally. The view that assesses *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as a tool which keeps the Turkish society busy thus blinding it to important political and economic developments that Turkey is going through is similar to the earlier Marxist approaches to popular culture which sees popular culture as the opium of the society. In this perspective the process of negotiation and struggle of different groups of people in the formation of popular culture is overlooked. Some of the people I interviewed have also had this form of conceptualization of popular culture. One of the informants (thirty seven, male, high school graduate, non believer) for example claims that "It is wrong to have TV series like this. If you intend to make a TV series about history then you should tell the real story. Instead they use these TV series to put people to sleep and show everything in a distorted manner." Likewise one other informant (twenty nine, male, university graduate, non believer, politically socialist and anarchist according to him) argues that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is a good way to keep the Turkish society busy. Another way in which how people relate to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and make sense of it is the feeling of nostalgia. There are four accounts where people contend that they like to watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because it conveys the feeling of the past in a nostalgic

manner. They doubt if Ottoman Empire was like this, yet they like the feeling of past, the feeling of a lost paradise, the representation of past through certain way of talking, and through certain clothes and jewelry. This feeling of nostalgia that is evoked by watching *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* brings me to Frederic Jameson's conceptualization of pastiche and nostalgia mode situated in the postmodernism which I talk about in the theory section. In this conceptualization pastiche is the mimicry of the past without irony and satirical impulse, as a parody without a satirical humor (Jameson, 1998). This parallels the mode of nostalgia which calls for a certain embracement of the past without naming it for what it is. As example Jameson uses Star Wars as a nostalgic film. He argues that this sort of films fulfill two functions. First they reproduce certain stylistic features of the past such as clothing and decoration, second they represent certain styles of viewing the past. I think *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* works in both of these ways. It brings back certain styles back with the jewelry and clothing, and the house decoration items and it reproduces some of the ways in which we view history. It for example reproduces the linear view of history telling in sixteenth century Ottoman Empire lived its best, reaching the peak to start going downhill for three centuries. It reproduces the textbook idea that the women in the Ottoman palace played a significant role in the demise of Ottoman Empire. These reproductions are examples of pastiche because when Hürrem ring moves from sixteenth century to the twenty and multiplies itself to adorn numerous Turkish women from different backgrounds it loses its initial sixteenth century nature to give way to multiple different postmodern stories. It is the perfect simulacrum without the original.

As in the Baudrillard's conceptualization of postmodernism, the distinction between the original ring and copy has been destroyed. With the ring and everything history is at home now and people are trying to make sense of what is going on. What is the real history, what is the history at TV, what does it mean to wear a Hürrem ring is indeed also sub-questions to

what is real in the post-modern world with the intermingling between the TV, internet and everyday life. I think people's responses to why they like or dislike *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* in which they claim that they like the dresses, the pastness, and the historicalness are instances which support this idea of nostalgia. "We are a nostalgic family. I mean we do not belong to the contemporary era. Most of the people who know us say that, they say it would be good if you lived in the past. We cannot really deny that. We love it. It is not like a yearning or longing for the past. We enjoy the past. If you asked us where we would live if we did not live in Istanbul it would be Bursa. If you asked where we would live abroad it would be Cairo. It would not be New York or anything. We would choose Cairo. That's why we like watching historical things. It seems more pure, more naïve". That's how one of the informants (thirty three, male, conservative, university graduate) talked about watching historical TV series. The feeling of the past and the nostalgia mode is what lures them to past which is more naïve and pure than today. Because they conceptualize the past to be naïve everything which falls outside of the domain of the pure and naïve seem wrong. Another interviewee (thirty, female, high school graduate, non-practicing Muslim) says that it is like returning to the past and living that past. "You visualize what was lived in that period when you watch *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*." she says. Similarly when I ask one of the interviewees (female, forty, high school graduate, non practicing believer) why she likes the show she says that "The power, the power of Suleiman, the clothing... I like the clothing, the places, I mean the old. I like old things, historical things. It is because of my star sign. I like history, the old and the past. I mean copper things, chests feel close to me, I like the decoration there..."

One of the most important reasons why people claim that they don't like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is the fact that it misrepresents the Ottoman Empire. In this case different groups claim the same thing on different grounds. Based on the interview data, it becomes clear that more politically and religiously conservative people condemn *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because it shows

too much sexuality, thus disturbs the sacredness of Ottoman Empire. Another reason why they think *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* distorts the past is because it does not show the Ottoman Empire in a religious light with an emphasis on the imperial family's Islamic orientations. More politically secular and religiously non practicing people claim that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* distorts the Ottoman past because it shows it in a good light by relying on the palace life and the best period of Ottoman Empire which is considered as the peak. One of the people that I have interviewed who represented himself as a non- religious, leftist person (forty four, university graduate) argues that "the kind of programs such as *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* makes Ottoman Empire look as if sultanate was good for the people. I don't think the sultanate system is something good for the humanity or the society. We have to accept the fact that where there is no democracy people are not treated in a good way. We have lots of examples in the history who exploited people. In a system of sultanate people are punished by people who are beyond the confines of humanity. The fact that an empire is big does not mean that everything went well in that empire. Our history is not thought us properly".

Similarly a woman who presents herself as a secular person (thirty two, non-believer, University graduate) argues that "Beauty, glory... Maybe Ottoman Empire was like that... A lot of people live outside of the palace, thousands of people... Maybe they are poor, maybe there are religious fights going on, maybe they are over-taxed. Maybe Islam is something that is imposed, maybe not... We just see the harem and fifty people who lived in the palace". When I ask her if it is right to have *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* she says that she does not approve. She does not approve of the way history is presented. It does not present the reality. "It is just a part of that period. It is ok that it does not represent everything but it should at least represent some of it". Moreover, she thinks that the reason why Ottoman Empire is represented that way is because of the conjuncture. "This TV series has a contextual significance, the big Turkey, the big Ottoman Empire. It is the model that the current government, AKP is trying to

build. You see it is the powerful Turkey in the Middle East. Since they are in power it is what they are trying to build. I mean like it is the celebration of the birthday of the Sultan in the national assembly, like commemoration of the death of the sultan. And it is another story what these sultans have done when they were in power. As I say history is sided, biased. Maybe Ottoman Empire sees him as a sultan yet he has signed a treaty with the English. That's why a TV series like this has a meaning in terms of the current conjuncture in Turkey". For her there are multiple sides of Ottoman Empire beyond the glorious palace life, like the peoples over which Ottomans have ruled and we don't see them in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* according to her. The history is shown in a distorted way and it feeds into the ideology of the current government.

The other camp who thinks that history is shown in a wrong perspective is consistent of people who represent themselves as politically conservative religious people. Among them there are people who approach *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* as a conspiracy. Opposite of the secular people who think that Ottoman Empire is shown from a positive perspective these people say that Ottoman Empire marred by the depictions of harem. The fact that sultan's private life is displayed freely concerns them.

One of the informants conveys his worries about this situation by saying that educated people have been prejudiced against the Ottoman Empire for a long time. When I ask him if it is okay to have a TV series like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* he says "I am not sure where the media and the movie sector stand in this matter but I see that people have been looking to Ottoman Empire with a certain prejudice and that they have a complex about Ottoman Empire. Some people are ashamed of Ottoman Empire. I think we do not understand our history truly... This is probably mostly something particular to the elite... I am not sure though which segments of the society... I do not think Ottoman Empire is something to be ashamed of though... We see that the Republican history, official history, has never been at peace with the Ottoman Empire. There are always subtle references to Ottomans. It was this way in the Ottoman

Empire it is this way in Turkish Republic.... I mean Ottoman Empire ruled over a great geography. It is said that it ruled over seventy two different millets. People lived in peace. In a place like Jerusalem where Muslims, Jews and Christians were present they lived peacefully. This is impossible without a working system, without organization. I think this is not understood quite well. The bloodshed over the former Ottoman geography never ends today... If we understood Ottoman Empire it would not be like this. I think there is a group of certain people who give extra effort so that we do not understand the Ottoman Empire properly.”

When I ask him how he finds the dresses in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* he says that the clothing looks unrealistic. “The cleavages don’t look realistic and it is a psychological war to show the Ottoman Empire like this. Meral Okay (screen writer) herself was a revolutionary person. I do not know how much Ottoman history she read or how much she knows the Ottoman history is disputable. It is clear how revolutionaries see the Ottoman Empire. I don’t think those people can remain objective in viewing the Ottoman history. It is not possible that in a system like Ottoman Empire which is identified with religion wore that kind of clothes. It shows the ulterior motives of the screen writer”.

Similar to this person another interviewee who is politically conservative and religiously practicing believer (thirty one, university graduate) does not approve of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because he thinks that it does not remain within the confines of history. He argues that certain values should be kept even if this is a TV show. He gives *Brave Heart* as a good example. “It is also a show yet it remains within the confines of history. Even if the events themselves are not accurate the logic behind is true. The Scots would do this and the English would do this. Nobody knows about what the sultan talks about in his room, not even the people in the palace but we see a lot about this in the show”. He argues that Turkish society has problems in dealing with its history. “It is through that the Ottoman Empire started its own modernization, the process of Europeanization, yet with the Republic the problem of

history reached a certain kind of denial. Our way of approaching history is like okay sultanate, okay it can be criticized yet it has also many positive sides. We have this vision of states as if they are personas yet a state is a state. When it is necessary it may do some cruelties, or whatever. Our way, our language of telling history is problematic because we have gone through a language reformation”.

To the question if Ottoman Empire depicted in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is similar to the actual Ottoman Empire he responds that the situation in Ottoman Empire depended on the Sultans who ruled in different time periods and that we cannot understand the Ottoman Empire through the lens of the nation state that we have borrowed from the West. He says that nobody could enter sultan’s room so we do not know anything about harem. The way this TV series depicts harem is similar to the harem in European’s minds. There are a lot of women which belong to sultan, and his life is fun. I asked him if Turkish society started to wear the Western gaze in looking to the Ottoman Empire. He answered that it was before *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, this TV series was a result of it.

Mehter

Mehter (Ottoman military band) is another indicator in this research to assess Turkish people’s reaction to Ottomania. Different companies of Mehter perform in occasions such as national holidays, commemorations and sometimes in private celebrations such as weddings and graduations. Mehter in Ottoman Empire was used at wars, becoming a form of entertainment in contemporary Turkey.

There are two questions related to this matter. First people are asked if they like Mehter and second they are asked if they find it acceptable that Mehter is used in celebrations such as celebration of the foundation of republic, a graduation ceremony, or a wedding.

Out of twenty five people there are six people who can be considered to have a negative response to these questions. The other nineteen people claim that they like Mehter and that they would approve of Mehter band performing in occasions that are listed above. Out of six people who have negative views towards Mehter two people find Mehter completely awkward and funny and claim that they do not like it. Three people are neutral about Mehter but they find it meaningless or wrong that the Mehter band performs in celebrations. One person likes Mehter but thinks that it would be inappropriate to have Mehter in celebrations. Two of these six people are politically conservative and practicing believers. Four of them are politically secular and religiously either non-practicing Muslims or non believers.

One of the participants who like Mehter (thirty three, conservative, practicing Muslim, university graduate) claims that he uses Mehter music for motivation and tells why he likes it referring to his personal experiences. "Oh god! Mehter is enough for me. When I am travelling, at work, if I am going to do a hard task, I put the headphones. The song of attack (Hücum Marşı) is my favorite. Even though I know that Mehter music is produced in 1800s. and that it is partly artificial, and that some of it is from foreign composers... I know all this but it does not mean anything. The lyrics are superb. I have benefited from it when I have to concentrate when I am working on something in Excel. I dream of the Ottoman army, it is going slowly, it is about to attack, when the music stops and accelerates than I say now the two armies are fighting... Once I saw it at Dolmabahçe Palace, where there were tourists watching it. One of them asked what they were singing about. I told him "you would not want to hear"... I told him if this society remembers it's past... He was a bit shocked. I told him this is not the right place to ask this question..."

These two instances are important because they show the multifaceted nature of the comeback of history. The moment of listening to Ottoman military band's music may serve a

very mundane interest; motivating one to accomplish a hard task in Excel at work. Ottoman Empire fights its war in your mind, when you fight your own daily war at work with Excel. You give yourself some background music, some boost. When you hear it at Dolmabahçe Palace among a group of tourists you are in a different context and you are nationally boosted among them: "This is not the right place to ask what the lyrics say, don't make this nation remember its past... It is full of victories."

One of the informants (twenty five, university graduate, secular, moderate practicing Muslim, female) who likes Mehter as well claims that she likes Mehter on one condition, when it is not used for nationalistic purposes. She says that she likes the logic behind Mehter. That the Ottoman army moves forward for three steps and then moves backwards for two steps is a good perspective according to her. It is a good war tactic in order not to lose the back. Yet she tells that she encountered a scene where the Mehter team plays in a public place to celebrate Turkish nation. To use it to celebrate Turkish nationalism is meaningless and useless for her and she does not approve of it.

People who have negative attitudes towards Mehter have diverse rationales. Two of them find it out of time and place meaning that they do not think that Mehter fits in to the current context. A participant (conservative, university graduate, practicing Muslim, male) thinks that Mehter music is an important branch in Turkish music yet he thinks that the culture of Mehter has not been conserved properly. He says that it would be good if it was preserved appropriately. The fake mustaches that the team members wear or the clothing do not seem real at all. It appears fake and out of context. To use it in celebrations is another sign of the degeneration of this culture according to him. Similarly another interviewee (twenty five, middle school, secular, non-practicing Muslim) claims that Mehter has lost its function in contemporary Turkey. According to him it is just a visual thing, a ritual that has lost its function. Formerly it was used to frighten the enemy yet today it is used in celebrations as a

fun visual thing. One another interviewee (secular, middle school, thirty seven, male) says that it would be okay for him if there were not political intentions behind the revival of Mehter. According to him the AKP government wants to inject the Ottoman theme in one way or another and this is another example of this fact. Formerly in celebrations it was the Turkish army who would march in celebrations yet day by day Mehter team will replace this habit. Overall he finds the Mehter team funny. In line with this a participant (female, thirty two, university, non-believer) argues that she cannot think of Mehter without thinking of the current context. According to her this is part of a particular nationalism which is different than patriotism. Mehter has a meaning and a political affiliation for her thus cannot be thought on its own.

Photo Shooting

Photo shooting is another indicator in order to infer about people's stance towards Ottomania. In this particular form of photo shooting people are dressed up as Ottoman sultans, women from harem, or Janissaries. They pose in different concepts and get a photo shoot in Ottoman theme. The activity of photo shooting ranges in price. There are single photo booths in shopping malls or on street bazaars, and there are complete studios with rooms decorated after Ottoman style to give the perfect atmosphere. Rather than randomly posing and having a single photo shoot in these studios you usually go with an appointment, choose a particular package and get a set of photos with the Ottoman theme. I choose photo shooting as an indicator of Ottomania because this is a form of reenactment characterized by a performative action. Here in this specific form people by dressing and posing as Ottoman people participate actively in the making of Ottomania. Dressing and posing with Ottoman artifacts such as swords and water pipes, people perform a moment from history in the present. In this particular moment the perceptions about history and present are rearticulated at the same time, drawing the distinction between the Ottoman past and present-day Turkey.

Eight people out of twenty five people in the sample claim not to like this activity, three people do not know about this activity, and the remaining fourteen people either like it or are neutral about it. Two people have had their photo taken, seven of them had a close relative or a friend who had their photo taken and two people inform that they would want to have their photo taken in this Ottoman theme.

One of the participants (thirty five, male, middle school graduate, conservative, practicing Muslim) who is critical about this activity of photo shooting argues that this is an instant of show off. "You should live the way the Ottoman lived in order to experience that life style. If you can make the Ottoman tradition, the customs and life style with your family that is good. Cherishing just the visual aspects of Ottoman Empire, having an Ottoman style photo taken seems rather childish". Similarly an informant (eighteen, male, high school attendant, practicing Muslim, conservative) disapproves this activity claiming that "the glorious sultan has turned into a part of the shopping mall as a theme".

One of the informants (male, thirty seven, secular, non-believer, middle school graduate) connects this with the rise of AKP and the related rise of the theme of Ottoman past. He says that not only this activity of photo shooting but also the TV series such as *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is a result of the rise of AKP and the TV channels' wish to be close to the leading party. For him it would not be possible to have *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* if it was not for AKP. He has a political explanation for the rise of Ottomania relating it to the conservative party's-rise. He sees this activity as a signifier of the rise of conservative AKP rule and evaluates it as something similar to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* which is for him a showcase of the wish to be close to AKP government.

Some of the participants who are critical of this activity approach it from the perspective of imitation, emphasizing the class dimension. "I suppose it is affectation,

emulation. Maybe that person is not content with his or her situation. Today a lot of people believe that they can be rich, they can reach a higher status. There are a lot of success stories going around like he had a humble beginning but he became such and such, making five million dollars a day... Maybe I am not able to become a sultan today, but I can belong to that high culture” claims one informant (male, thirty one, university graduate, conservative, practicing Muslim). His view reflects how for some people photo shooting is a part of mimicry of a life style rather than solely being the mimicry of historical figures. By dressing up as Ottoman sultans, and women from harem you do not just engage in historical role modeling, but you imitate a certain class and show your aspiration to be successful and rich. For the interviewee this instant is part of today’s discourse that is shaped around success stories. People believe that they can become something, maybe not the sultan but something close to him. Like the consumption of the Hürrem ring this is something to be condemned since it is a sign of people who want to traverse the class boundaries. When someone poses as an Ottoman sultan he does not become one, but signals his aspiration to be successful and rich and belong to a higher culture. I claim that his condemnation of those who have their photo taken becomes a tool to show that he is content with his position and feeds into the pre-set boundaries of class, reproducing the idea that one should stay where one is.

People who have had the experience of photo shooting speak of this event as a fun thing and the photo itself is evaluated as a fun souvenir. When they show their photo they laugh about it showing that they do not take it very seriously. One of the informants (twenty five, male, middle school graduate, non-practicing believer, secular) claims that he has done it as an activity of pleasure and the photo for him does not have any more value than being a visual thing. Similarly one of the participants (thirty two, practicing Muslim, university, conservative) argues that her husband and she have done it for the fun of it. She says it would take more than a photo to become a sultan. The idea of fun, and the attitude of not being very

serious about it, conveying the experience sarcastically reflects the broader idea of participating in popular culture sarcastically. People show that they are informed about the fact that they do not become an Ottoman sultan when they just dress up in the so called Ottoman way. Yet they keep the label of “being informed about it” to themselves emphasizing that they do it for fun, that they are different because they are aware that this activity do not turn them to an Ottoman. Similar to the experience of watching *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* critically, thinking of the masses who do not watch it that way, people that I interviewed emphasize their difference in terms of their experience of photo shooting.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have conveyed what Ottomania means for twenty five Turkish respondents. Here Ottomania is conceptualized through four indicators which are Consumption of the Ottoman Past, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, Ottoman theme photo shooting and Mehter (Ottoman military band). By showing how people view these phenomena I show the perceptions built around the Ottoman theme in contemporary Turkey through pointing how class boundaries are reproduced, and how oppositionary groups are built in relation to each other. People who don't like Ottomania have different reasons not to like it. Similarly people who are positive towards the phenomenon of Ottomania differ in their motivations.

Chapter 6

Narratives on the Ottoman Empire in Turkey

To grasp how people in Turkey reinterpret the Ottoman past and rewrite the history I asked two straight forward questions to the people I interviewed in order to find out around which premises people relate to the Ottoman past. The first question poses what Ottoman Empire means for them and the second question asks what they think Ottoman Empire means for Turkey. Through these questions people reflect on the Ottoman Empire coming up with different interpretations based on their political inclinations, worldviews, and religious orientations.

There are several clusters of meanings that people attribute to Ottoman Empire. In terms of what Ottoman Empire symbolizes there are three bigger interpretation clusters based on the research data. A group of people in my sample see Ottoman Empire as the ancient regime, the grim past from which Turkey evolved and distanced itself from. A second group of people see it as the long lost golden past where things were more just, people were rich and happy and different groups lived happily. A third group sees it as a more neutral period where both good deeds and bad deeds were accomplished, and as a period that Turkey has to come terms with. There are derivatives from these three main groups. There are people who see it as multicultural empire of religious and political tolerance; there are people who see Ottomans as the ancestors of Turks, either reveling in this thought or seeing it as a neutral fact. There is a group of people who see it as a Muslim empire which carried and defended the flag of Islam. There are those who see it as a burden for Turkey because of the atrocities committed, mostly referring to the ways in which foreigners see the Ottoman Empire. These different views display the vastness of the interpretations that can be built around a certain time period in the

past. These interpretations are dependent on both people's agency and the current Turkish political, popular cultural and economic context. Moreover these different attributions to Ottoman Empire show us the flexible nature of the history which is constantly reinterpreted and recreated.

Ottoman Empire as a tolerant, multicultural entity

Six people out of twenty five people represent Ottoman Empire as a multicultural empire. Some of the participants are critical about the idea of Pax Ottomana questioning the benevolent nature of the Ottoman Empire over the different groups of people (millets) that it has ruled. Approaching this peaceful period of time where different groups lived happily doubtfully they argue that this representation of the multicultural, peaceful, tolerant Ottoman Empire is a discourse, myth induced by several organs such as U.S. or AKP government. Some of these people attempt to understand the possibility of keeping so many people peacefully together from today's perspective, ending up asking the question "We cannot even solve the Kurdish issue how did so many people live at peace in the Ottoman Empire?" This is partly because people try to make sense of the Ottoman past from a nation state oriented world view. Trying to imagine how empires operated is enough to give headaches to someone who has lived in the age of nation-states.

One of the informants (thirty two, female, university student, and practicing Muslim) that I inquired about the meaning of Ottoman Empire in contemporary Turkey argues that "I see that we are trying to revive the Ottoman Empire in contemporary Turkey. We all grew up reading the history textbooks. I mean these books taught us that the Ottoman Empire was bad and corrupt. The narrative went like this: the Ottoman Empire died and we established a new state instead of it... Today it changed. Who were in the Ottoman Empire? Russians, Macedonians, Armenians, Arabs. Allegedly they all accepted the boundaries and they all respected the rule of the sultan, and found peace at his reign securing themselves from other

countries. Nowadays when Turkey goes to another country to help or for something else it is represented as if these people living in those foreign countries are very happy about it. Turkish flags everywhere... People are shown to be welcoming Turkey, they are shown as if we don't know them but they know us. They are shown as if they still have the taste of Ottoman rule in their memory and want to have some more of it, some expectation from Turkey to revive it. But Turkey is not there yet, to take that responsibility, because it is itself at war indeed. Turkey has one ethnic problem and it is not even able to solve that one problem, and it is expected to have a say in the Arab issue. Turkey does not have that much power. It just has a charisma". The informant refers to the soft power of Turkey in the region and talks about the relation between the contemporary Turkish politics and the way Ottoman Empire is represented. For her as an epitome of the tolerance and multiculturalism Ottoman past is indeed a burden for Turkey according to the informant to be expected to fulfill the role of negotiation in the current Arab context. The statement "Turkey is not able to deal with its own problem, Kurdish issue how can it have a say in solving the conflicts in the Arab region?" reflects her concerns about the presentation of Turkey as the inheritor of the Ottoman legacy as the peacemaker in the region. She thinks that what the discourse posits is not possible in reality. Her concerns also reflect the conflicting if not impossible nature of thinking of attributing the roles of an empire to a nation state.

Similarly a respondent (female, twenty five, university graduate, moderate practicing believer) says that the first thing that comes to her mind when she thinks about the Ottoman Empire is the difficulty of keeping so many people from different backgrounds together. "How did the Ottoman Empire manage to keep so many groups intact? We cannot manage to keep just two people side by side. The first thing that comes to my mind is this. So many groups from different ethnicities managed to live together. How is this possible and why can't we do it today". The millet system that the Ottoman Empire is said to have maintained as a

model is contrasted with the Turkish nation-state dealing with its ethnic problems. The respondent is surprised by the fact that the Ottoman Empire managed to maintain peace between these groups. On the same matter another respondent is rather uncertain. She (thirty two, female, university graduate, and non-believer) recognizes that Ottoman Empire was religiously tolerant although it was an empire which aimed to further Islam. She says that today Turkey is way more intolerant in terms of religion and that there is a lot more emphasis on religion. She says that the reason why Ottoman Empire is presented from a religious perspective is because of the current government. Moreover she refers to the rise of the Ottoman theme in general arguing that America's project on Middle East has ignited this interest in Ottoman Empire in Turkey. People think that they personally can flourish in a strong state and think of Ottoman Empire as a strong state after which today's Turkey may be modeled. According to her this assumed correlation between Turkey and Ottoman Empire comforts people because they think they would benefit economically in a strong state, yet they don't recognize the fact that the economic wealth will not be distributed equally among the . According to her the strong Turkey modeled after the multicultural, tolerant wealthy Ottoman Empire is an illusion which people are made to believe in. For her this is a contextual thing which follows other trends like decline in republican values like secularism, or etatism.

The aforementioned excerpts show how the perception of Ottoman history is dependent on the context of Turkey. These pieces also show that people are also aware of the change of discourse around the Ottoman Empire and that they are trying to make sense of this occurrence. They critically engage with the possibility of the fulfillment of the role of the tolerant and negotiating Turkey in the Middle Eastern context, dismissing it by referring to Turkey's failure in solving the Kurdish issue. Their concerns and questions are also reflecting the fragile attempt to reconcile the roles of an empire in a nation-state context. The informants don't really believe in the feasibility of such.

Ottomans as the Ancestors of Turks

Eight people out of twenty five refer to the Ottoman Empire using the word “root” (kök, bizim tarihimiz, Osmanlı’dan geliyoruz, Osmanlı’nın torunlarıyız). The usage of this word combines with claims such as “we are descendents of the Ottomans, we are grandsons of the Ottomans, Ottoman Empire is our past, our history. Not all of the informants see this as a positive fact questioning if the Turks really descend from the Ottoman Empire. Some people see this as neutral factual information to remember, some see it as a past to be ashamed of referring to the atrocities committed in wars. By presenting excerpts from the interview data, I will convey these differing approaches to the Ottoman Empire’s relation to Turkey.

One of the participants (male, twenty five, university attendant, practicing Muslim) who is highly positive about the Ottoman Empire claims that “We should be informed about the Ottoman history. In the end this history is shaped on the geography that we are living. This is just one of the ways through which we can claim a belonging to the Ottoman Empire. Other than that, there are several common denominators that connect us to the Ottomans. Yet the most important thing is that Ottoman is our past, pedigree, our history. With the mistakes and successes we should learn this history. Like the way we listen to the stories of our great grandfathers from our grandfathers or grandmothers who are still alive to learn about our past, we should learn the Ottoman past. To understand something that is about yourself, something that belongs to you, you listen to these stories.” This participant builds a semblance between the history that he would listen from his grandparents and the Ottoman history. Both stories help him to make sense of the world he lives in. Ottoman history is the history of Turkey and it tells the story of his so called ancestors. Both the stories from his grandmother and the Turkish history help him to make sense of the reality that he is situated in.

In line with this one of the informants (twenty eight, male, moderate practicing Muslim, high school graduate) argues that “if I were married the Ottoman Empire would be

one of the things that I would inoculate (teach) my child. In order for him/her to be efficient and fast in making life time choices I would teach him history because history is something to get inspiration from. When one reads about the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman past one trembles and feels pride. The Ottoman army, how difficult that is to build and maintain in contemporary world... Very brave, very courageous... Words are not enough to tell such things..." He thinks that Ottoman Empire is extremely important for Turkey arguing that "if it weren't for the Ottoman Empire we would not be able to sit comfortably in Turkish soil. This structure would not be possible. We owe everything to the Ottoman Empire. It is our history and the ones who don't know their history cannot be successful in contemporary world and future." This participant is very positive about Turkey's affiliation to the Ottoman past and does not approach it in a neutral manner like some of the participants who recognize that Turkey is related to the Ottoman Empire which would not necessarily mean a positive thing.

As an example to this group of people who are neutral about this assumed affiliation one participant (thirty five, male, high school, non practicing Muslim) answers the question if Ottoman Empire mean anything to Turkey that "Normal, not to the extreme... Before Turkey there was the Ottoman Empire, it collapsed and Turkish republic is established. Secularism is established, A new country a new system... But of course we are related, affiliated we have a connection. They are our roots, our pedigree. It would be awkward to say we are not affiliated". Similarly an interviewee (thirty, female, high school, and non-practicing believer) responds that "It is our history, our ancestors... A lot of blood was shed so that we reached these days but I haven't thought deeply about this issue... Ottoman Empire is our pedigree, our history". Another interviewee (thirty seven, male, non-believer, and middle school graduate) who is on a similar premise argues that although Ottoman Empire is our pedigree, history Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic are two different things. He says that "Turkey does not need to borrow from Ottoman Empire nor has any resemblance to Ottoman Empire".

On the same topic one of the informants again (forty four, male, university graduate, and non-believer) is very critical. He engages in a hypothetical dialogue with the people who label the Ottomans as the grandfather, pedigree, or ancestors of the Turks. "People think that they come from the Ottomans that they are descendents of the Ottoman pedigree but we indeed do not come from the Ottomans personally. We are a people who have been living in Anatolia. The Ottoman is a dynasty, an imperial family. They may have come with us from Central Asia but they are a family a dynasty. They have ruled over all the people who lived on this geography. But because our people don't know much about their history, how Ottoman Empire really is, and because they are very attached to it they are very proud of it. But in reality they don't know about the Ottoman Empire or the system back then. If they were to know how the Ottoman Empire in reality was they would not be thinking that we are descendants of the Ottoman Empire. Similarly another respondent (thirty three, female, practicing Muslim, university graduate) engages with a critical dialogue with those who see the Ottomans as the ancestors of themselves. "Seriously let's leave the discourse about 'We are the grandsons of the Ottoman Empire' aside. We were this we were that... We should leave this small talk. We need to think, think deeply. Everyone, the rulers, everyone should think. An independent Turkey comes before everything. On paper Turkey might be independent but it is not independent in reality. Turkey needs to pick its friends. Turkey needs to know to whom it serves. Our biggest friend, allay is said to be America, but if you look at America there is blood in its hands... History is important; we are grandsons of Ottoman Empire... We should leave that behind. It is gone. We should think about today and we should think about the spiritual nature of the past and try to revive that. We should revive those spiritual and traditional values."

There are both positive and negative interpretations about Turkey's relation to the Ottoman past and seeing Ottomans as the ancestors of Turks, pedigree. People cherish the

Ottoman background of Turkey by referring to the powerful Ottoman army and how words are not enough to describe their pride. People talk about the difficulty of building a connection between the Ottomans and Turks since Ottomans were the imperial family where Turks were peoples of the Anatolia. People emphasize the meaninglessness of clinging to the idea of being descendant from the Ottoman Empire and point to the importance of thinking about contemporary conjuncture and contemporary allies of Turkey. These different interpretations again show how different people with different worldviews and backgrounds have very different approaches to history.

Ottomans as the defenders of Islam

Ottoman Empire as the carrier and defender of Islam is a common way of people in this research use in reference to the Ottoman Empire. As it is the case in other themes there are both supporters and opponents of this view. An interviewee (male, thirty three, university graduate, practicing Muslim) sees the Ottoman Empire as the last Islamic state, the last empire ruled by Islam. "As a person who would move around the axis of Islamic identity rather than being Turkish this is what the Ottoman Empire means to me. Turkey is the last geography left from Ottoman Empire on which a Muslim society lives. Maybe Turkey is not ruled the way Ottoman Empire is ruled or through the values of the Ottoman Empire but it should be acknowledged that Turkey carries the Ottoman heritage. Maybe Turkey forgot for years that it has carried that heritage but it for sure remembers its role. There is a saying in our circle, that the flag rises from where it fell. It is not for sure if the Islamic flag will rise from Turkey but it is Iran and Turkey that has the tradition of state rule. I mean we still obtain this legacy of the Ottoman Empire. If we remember that and if we start to live accordingly, the legacy of the Ottoman Empire will start to mean something at that point. Ottoman Empire does not make sense for me from the perspective of origin, like Turks are descendants from the Ottomans, but if we start to live according to the legacy that they have left it means

something for me.” His way of relating to the Ottoman Empire as a carrier of an Islamic life style and that we should remember the way the Ottoman Empire lived is a common sub theme of the themes that I identified in the beginning of this chapter. People envision a certain way of living that belonged to Ottoman Empire, referring to it as tradition, spirituality, Ottoman heritage (gelenek, örf, adet, maneviyat, Osmanlı mirası). Apart from emphasizing that Turkish people genealogically descent from the Ottomans they talk about the responsibility of living according the way of life that the Ottomans adhered to. This informant symbolizes this with the metaphor of the flag and thinks that the fallen flag will rise from this geography, leaving the job of carrying this flag further to Turks.

Similarly another informant (male, twenty five, university attendant, practicing Muslim) uses the metaphor of flag when faced with the same question. “Turk is used as a synonym of the Muslim especially in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries by the West. I think I have the same vision. I don’t think that being Ottoman and being Muslim are two separate things. In this sense I see the Ottoman Empire as an Empire which would introduce Islam to the people and carry it to another level. Apart from that Ottoman Empire has been the sword of Islam against the West. I see the Ottoman Empire as the vexillary, carrier of the flag of the Islam.” Against this point of view which sees the Ottoman Empire as the carrier of Islam an interviewee (thirty three, male, high school graduate, practicing Muslim) argues that “When you say Ottoman Empire I think of an empire which was ruled by Shariah nothing else... Nowadays when you say Ottoman people react as if religion was lived properly in that time period and they have the perception as if it is not possible to live according to the religion in contemporary world. I don’t think this is true. The only thing that changed between now and then is the fact that people live openly and do certain things openly. Nothing really changed with the people. People are the same, back then people did what they would do clandestinely but now they do it openly. What is inside the people, what they think

are the same." From his perspective there is nothing very particular about the way Islam was lived in the Ottoman past, it is just the presentation that changed. The belief that the Ottoman Empire was an Islamic empire is an illusion.

Seeing Ottoman Empire as an Islamic Empire is a common ground for religious people to relate to the Ottoman Empire but as accounts from three different religious people show they have quite different approaches about that. Some of them interpret Islam as a weapon against the West, some interpret as a life style that Ottomans have embraced, and some see it as an illusion that Ottomans had a better way of living Islam. This displays different possible veins of interpretations of Ottoman history which at first sight may seem similar or to be belonging to people who have similar religious orientation thus alike.

Ottomans as a burden

Some of the informants see the Ottoman Empire as a burden weighing on Turkey's shoulders. The Ottoman past is not a gift for them as some of the informants in this research think but something to be ashamed of. Mostly they reflect on the moments when they traveled abroad and found out what the foreigners thought of them. The appropriation of the critical foreign gaze makes these people uncomfortable and inoculates the feeling of guilt. First reason of this guilt is the atrocities committed against the people who lived on the lands that were conquered during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Second reason of the guilt comes from the recognition of the atrocities committed towards the collapse of the empire, especially the incidents in 1915. These people argue that we should come terms with our history by recognizing the good and bad sides of the Ottoman Empire. According to them taking Ottoman Empire just as a glorious, strong, rich, tolerant and benevolent entity would be problematic. Two of these people build the resemblance between a family history and the Ottoman history. One would have to know the facts about their grandfathers no matter they were good or bad. Similarly identity is a matter of history, where you come from. No matter

what you accomplish as a person you carry the identity that your family gave to you. Like a person remembers where he/she comes from he/she should also remember the Ottoman past with the good sides and bad sides.

One of the interviewees (twenty one, female, university attendant, and non-practicing Muslim) argues that "I feel lucky because Ottoman Empire is very rich and had a say in the history. That makes me proud. For Turkey Ottoman Empire may be a burden because it ruled over such a vast geography and could make its voice heard once but now Turkey cannot even enter the EU. The mistakes that belong to the Ottoman Empire now fall on Turkey. Turkey suffers the mistakes that the Ottoman Empire has done. Ottoman Empire hurt so many lives. Turkey is not loved in a lot of countries. Greece, Iraq, France, England..." For this respondent Turkey is not the carrier of the heritage of the Ottoman Empire has left. What Ottoman Empire left Turkey can be identified as a baggage in this context. Some countries don't like Turkey because it has the Ottoman past in its back, and Turkey cannot enter the EU because of the notorious Ottoman past.

Another informant (male, forty four, university graduate, non-believer) similarly looks back at the times he lived abroad and makes sense of the contemporary hostilities between himself and his coworkers through the relations in the past. "There was this Hungarian girl in the place that I have worked. She spoke very good English. I was talking to her one day... But she always acted coolly towards Turks. Not cold but cool, whenever we talked. It did not matter whether they were men or women; she acted very cool towards Turks. She was distant. When you didn't say hi, she would not say hi things like that. One day we were talking and I said in Europe there is no nation that would say we hate Turks but we know that they don't like Turks. There is no nation that likes Turks... At that point she said: why would I love Turks? She said that Turks have exploited her country for two hundred and fifty years. I asked her if we personally done her anything bad. She responded: 'Maybe you didn't do anything

bad personally but your grandfathers and ancestors did.' I asked her if her grandfathers have never done anything bad. I mean, how can it be meaningful that I am blamed because of something that my grandfather has done? You will take revenge, I will take revenge. Will this perpetually continue? It does not make sense at all. Then she told this anecdote: 'The governor that your sultan sent died when he was in his nineties and he just bedded with virgins in his whole life. I mean when she put that forth we could not say anything.' I mean imagine we are in Turkey and a French governor comes and stays in your country for sixty years and takes people's daughters every week. When people say that the Ottoman Empire was good and things like that I question their humanity. These things cannot be explained by saying that those were different times. Can we deny holocaust six hundred years later?" This excerpt explains the informant's frustration with the contemporary hostilities that are rooted in the past. Although he does not affiliate himself with the Ottoman Empire he faces barriers in his everyday life because of the Ottoman past. This example is also a showcase of the ways in which relate to their pasts by looking at it from the foreigner's perspective. The negative attributions to the Ottoman Empire that this informant makes are not unbound from his experience with foreigners. He himself puts himself in the foreigner's situation that went through the Ottoman conquest in history, yet he is also frustrated by the fact that he personally did not commit those misdeeds.

Another informant (thirty two, female, university graduate, and non-believer) similarly conveys her tourist experience in Hungary, by talking about the sightseeing tour that she made. "We went to Hungary. I mean people really hate the Ottoman Empire. We are having this sightseeing tour in Budapest and we are listening to the guide. I mean there are monuments from Soviets, there are monuments from Romans, there are Hungarian monuments, but sadly when it comes to the Ottoman Empire they say that these are ruins from the Ottoman Empire, remains of monuments which the Ottoman Empire could not protect."

Through her experience in a foreign country she shapes her perception of the Ottoman Empire. She feels sad and guilty because of the inability of the Ottoman Empire to keep the historical monuments intact. She says that people hate Ottoman Empire and see Ottomans as monsters possibly because it took a lot of lives. She says that she can see the Ottoman Empire from this perspective when she leaves her emotions about her country aside, because it is normal for a person to have positive feeling to the country where one is born. But when she takes a break from these feelings she can understand why Ottoman Empire is not very welcome in some countries. These two cases show how the perception of history is built in a dialogue with other national histories. In this case the historical view of the Hungarian people relationally shapes how people in Turkey see the history of the Ottoman Empire. For those who have lived abroad or visited foreign countries, being affiliated to the Ottoman Empire becomes a source of guilt, and they see the Ottoman past as a burden on Turkey's shoulders different than those who see the Ottoman past as a source of pride.

Another interviewee (female, twenty five, university graduate, moderate practicing believer) builds equity between one's personal history and the history of a country to clarify why it is important for a country to come terms with its history. "I think about occurrences like 1915... I think about the grief... We pay the price. Hundred years have passed but no one forgets... It is easy to understand. I live in Izmir but I was born in Giresun. This identity would never leave me alone. Where are you from? Giresun. My father is a peasant; he is a farmer that is it. Even if you enter high society it does not matter, this is your culture. This is not something bad, no not at all... I have never perceived it as something bad. But it is something that will chase you all the time. I am sure Ottoman is our culture. I mean when you exit the country no one cares if you are Yagmur or Z. Where are you from? Turkey, ergo Ottoman Empire. More than Turkey people will know about the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman

Empire means a lot. I am not taking it as something nationalistic yet it is something to embrace and come to terms with as a culture with its good parts and bad parts...”

The perception of the Ottoman past as a burden on Turkey’s shoulders is marked by several pillars. First people equate the Ottoman past with their personal histories. You cannot leave your identity back, likewise Turkey cannot forget its past, where it came from. It has to come terms with it. Second, this perception is built relationally by picking from the experience people have with foreigners. People put themselves in the boots of those who had the Ottoman experience and relate to Ottomans with a feeling of shame and guilt. Third, people see the Ottoman Empire as a burden because it was big, rich and successful. No matter what Turkey accomplishes it will not be able to reach that standards, thus past weighs on its shoulders, as a long lost paradise where it can never go back.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the research data that presents the meaning people build around the Ottoman past. I identified different clusters around which people relate to the Ottoman past. First theme identifies Ottoman Empire as a multicultural, tolerant entity, second theme refers to the Ottomans as ancestors of Turks, third theme is shaped around the view that the Ottomans are the defenders of Islam, the fourth theme concedes that the Ottoman Empire is a burden for Turkey, last theme is the Ottoman Empire woven around *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. These meaning typologies are constructed through people’s everyday life experience like where they work, and which countries they have visited. Moreover, these clusters are built relationally meaning that people engage with counter arguments and other ways of perceiving the Ottoman Empire in defending their position. There are multiple Ottoman Empires in Turkey, and ways in which people relate to the Ottoman Empire, yet these meanings are not unbound from people’s backgrounds and the current political and sociological situation in Turkey.

Conclusion

I have started researching Ottomania by observing the rise in the Ottoman element in Turkish everyday life. We see a comeback of the history in other cases such as England as Jerome de Groot (2009) observes, yet in Turkey this comeback is a complex one where for a long period of time after the foundation of the Turkish republic the Ottoman past was condemned. Ottoman Empire has been marked as the exact opposite of the newly founded Turkish republic and presented as the *ancien régime* and Turkish past has been constructed around pre-Ottoman Turkish past welling from Central Asia. Today this changes through the incorporation of the Ottoman past in the popular cultural, historiographical and the political domain.

The incorporation of the Ottoman past into current Turkish social space is a process where the past is reinterpreted and history is rewritten. Because of the change in the communicative mechanisms such as the increase in the number of TV channels and the rise of internet usage the public domain expands to give way to a form of hyperreal borrowing Boudrillard's terms. Through the intermingling of the so called real, TV and internet new representations of the historical emerge. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* which a separate chapter of this thesis engages with is an important example of this phenomenon. This case as an indicator of Ottomania shows the comeback of the history in the domain of popular culture. The debates formed around *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, which are different in nature point to the interactive nature of popular culture which is open to interpretation and articulation. People who like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* like it for the same reason neither the ones who condemn it condemn it with the same motivations. Through the discursive universe that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* offers people build their perceptions about Ottoman Empire and reproduce their identities. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is a way of presenting the Ottoman past through its stylistic features and it is also a way which offers people a way of looking at the past. The way of looking at the past is of course not unbound

from the ways in which contemporary world is imagined. The relations in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* for example are very modern. The way the imperial family is imagined does not go without being inflicted from the ways in which the contemporary family life is imagined. The concerns such as raising of kids, losing weight, the relationship between close friends and family members find their ways back to the historical in their contemporary forms to form anachronisms.

With the aim of understanding how different people from different backgrounds in Turkey engage in rewriting of history and relate to Ottomania I have conducted twenty five in depth interviews with people in three different cities in Turkey, namely Istanbul, Izmir and Kayseri. Through the interview results I have formed two different chapters on the reception of the Ottoman past in Turkish context. In the chapter entitled perception of Ottomania in contemporary Turkey I have presented how people receive Ottomania by relying on four indicators. The indicators are the view towards the consumption of Ottoman Empire, evaluation of the Ottoman theme photo shoot, stance towards Mehter (Ottoman military band) and the ways in which *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is interpreted. Here I show how condemnation of popular culture becomes a tool for people to distinguish themselves from other groups in Turkish society. Second I display how different groups use the dislike against *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* to consolidate and support where they stand politically and ideologically. In this sense secular people condemn *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because it praises the Ottoman past, contrary to more religious people who condemn *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* because it shows a degraded Ottoman Empire. In the second chapter on the interview data entitled narratives on the Ottoman Empire I posit the ways in which people envision the Ottoman Empire in their minds. These narratives are born out of an interaction between the current political, economic and popular cultural structure in Turkey and the agency of the people in Turkey in question.

All in all, this thesis is an endeavor to include multiplicity of the voices shaped around the theme of Ottoman past and to show the changing and fragmented nature of writing of history. This work intentionally focuses on popular culture and everyday life because popular culture offers an understanding of how both consent and dissensions are formed constantly in relation to build a domain, a language system from which people can pick sentences to build their narratives about how things have operated and operates in Turkey.

Every social action has unintended consequences, so as the action of writing this thesis. One of the unintended consequences of this thesis other than the findings that I have talked about have been the pleasure to meet with people from different cities, different neighborhoods with different socioeconomic populations and delving into their lives for one or two hours. As my first field experience and first extensive writing process it has provided me with joys and sorrows at the same time. The interviews that I have conducted to learn about people's stances towards Ottomania have also offered me glimpses from people's own personal pasts which made me more of a person. I often left the meetings with more than what is in my recorder, including cookies and dried fruits. The writing process of mine has been like the Mehter's march, two steps forward and one step back. I hope the music was good, my aim is no conquest after all.

Appendix: Interview Schedule

1- Demography and Housing:

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) Are you married?
- 3) How many people live in this house?
- 4) Where are you from? (regionally)
- 5) What is your occupation? How do you spend your day?
- 6) How do you define your economic and social position?
→ Where would you like to be?
- 7) What is the education of your partner, parents and grandparents?
- 8) [You are a ... graduate]. Which schools did you attend to?

2-Cultural and Leisure Activities: (let's talk about your activities in daily life)

- 1) Do you engage in activities like sports, listening to music, or going out for a meal in your spare time?
- 2) Do you actively do sports or support a team? Do you watch games? Do you watch games on TV?
- 3) How much do you watch TV? When?
- 4) What kinds of TV programs do you like?
- 5) What kinds of TV programs do you dislike? Why?
- 6) Which TV series do you watch? Why?
- 7) Do you watch any historical programs?
- 8) Do you watch any historical TV Series?
- 9) Do you watch Muhteşem Yüzyıl?
- 10) Do you like it?
- 11) Which character, do you like the most?
- 12) Do you think it is problematic to have a TV Series like Muhteşem Yüzyıl?
- 13) Do you think the Ottoman past resembles the way in which it is depicted in Muhteşem Yüzyıl?

3-Literature:

- 1) Do you read books? How often?
- 2) Which sorts of books do you like and dislike reading, why? Could you name the book that you read last?
- 3) Do you read any historical novels, or books?
- 4) Do you read any historical magazines such as NTV Tarih?
- 5) Which of the above would you prefer?

4-Perception of Ottoman History:

- 1) What is the meaning of Ottoman Empire for you? (What comes to your mind when you hear of Ottoman Empire?)

- 2) What is the meaning of Ottoman Empire for the Turkish Republic?
- 3) What events and people would you recall about Ottoman Empire?
- 4) Do you think one should learn and know the history of Ottoman Empire? Why?

5-Knowledge& Education of History:

- 1) Did you like the history classes when you were in school? (if not relevant: ask about their children)
- 2) Which part did you like the most? Do you think there was enough information in this part?
- 3) If you could change it, what would you change?
- 4) Do you think the history classes were adequate in terms of teaching and information?
- 5) Would you include anything else in the curriculum?

6-Consumption of Ottoman History: (do an introduction about artifacts in question)

- 1) Do you buy any historical artifacts?
- 2) If yes what are those? Probe: t-shirt, plates...
- 3) What do those artifacts mean to you?
- 4) There are Ottoman photo booths around. Have you ever seen one of them? What do you think of them?
- 5) Do you ever buy anything related to TV Series, such as Fatmagül kolyesi, or Hürrem yüzüğü? How would you assess the people who buy those?
- 6) How do you find the clothes in the Muhteşem Yüzyıl?
- 7) Why do you think people would buy Hürrem Yüzüğü?
- 8) What do you think of Mehter Takımı?
- 9) Do you think Mehter Takımı can be used in celebratory occasions? Graduation ceremony, Foundation of the Republic etc.
- 10) What do you think of the Ottoman cuisine? Do you think there is such thing as the Ottoman cuisine?
- 11) There are some people who think that there was homosexuality in the Ottoman Empire. Have you heard of it? What do you think of this? Can it be true?

7-Attitudes:

- 1) How would you define religiosity/religion? How do you perceive religion?
- 2) What kind of religious activities do you participate in?
- 3) Some people think that Turkey is becoming more religious while the others argue think the opposite. What do you think about that?
- 4) Turkey is rapidly changing, globalizing society. What changes did you notice? What do you think should be preserved?
- 5) Do you follow politics? Do you discuss with your friends, watch political shows?
- 6) How would you describe yourself politically?
→ Do you identify with any political party or movement? Why not?
- 7) What do you think of Turkish foreign policy?
- 8) Do you think Turkey should be close to Europe or Middle East?

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