
FORUM

The Reception of the Frankfurt School in Turkey: Past and Present

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ABSTRACTS

Seit den 1990er Jahren gibt es in der Türkei ein steigendes Interesse an den prominenten Figuren der Frankfurter Schule, insbesondere an Theodor Adorno und Walter Benjamin. Es gibt zahlreiche Kurse, Konferenzen und Publikationen, die westliche und türkische Geschichte, Literatur und Ästhetik durch diese Philosophen analysieren, außerdem verschiedene Analysen ihrer Arbeit in der türkischen intellektuellen Welt. Voraussetzung dafür waren Übersetzungen aus dem westlichen Marxismus im Zeitalter der späten Globalisierung des Wissens. Mein Ziel besteht darin, einen umfassenden, aber kritischen Überblick über die Rezeption der Frankfurter Schule in der Türkei anhand dreier Forschungsansätze zu geben: Übersetzungsstudien und das Konzept des Kulturtransfers; übersetzte Werke von Vertretern der Frankfurter Schule und Interventionen von internationalen Wissenschaftlern; und Analyse von in der Türkei geschriebenen akademischen und nicht-akademischen Texten.

Since the 1990s Turkey, has seen a rising interest in the prominent figures of the Frankfurt School, especially Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. There are now numerous courses, conferences, and publications analyzing Western and Turkish history, literature, and aesthetics through these philosophers alongside different analyses of their work in the Turkish intellectual world. This has taken place through translations from Western Marxism in the age of late globalization of knowledge. My aim is to present a panoramic but critical overview of the reception of the Frankfurt School in Turkey through three research approaches: translational studies and the concept of the 'cultural transfer'; translated works by representatives of the Frankfurt School

and interventions by international scholars; and analysis of academic and non-academic texts written in Turkey.

With its radical social criticism and 'heterodox' Marxism, Critical Theory is the other side of the 'German influence' in Turkey, and a vein that feeds opposing pursuits contrary to the traditional-nationalist authoritarianism which inspired the official ideology.¹

There has been 'Adorno and Benjamin madness' in Turkey for some time now. In various departments, academics offer doctoral courses focusing solely on Theodor Adorno or Walter Benjamin, modernity studies are carried out exclusively on Adorno readings, and Adorno books are meticulously translated and discussed at workshops at various conferences in Turkey – and if they are not about Adorno, then they are about Benjamin... Representatives of the Frankfurt School, – except for Jürgen Habermas – all of whom died in the 1970s, are newly recognized in Turkey. The great interest in this subject has resulted in people eagerly interpreting Turkish modernity or modern Turkish literature through thinkers such as Adorno, Georg Lukács, and Benjamin. In this article I will examine the broadest concept of the Frankfurt School and their reception and evaluation in Turkey and in Turkish. My main points of focus will be three approaches to the study of intellectuals such as Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Lukács, who are considered to be part of the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*).² These approaches are the translations of work by these critical theorists; the analysis of their work by predominately non-Turkish researchers, which have been translated from English into Turkish; and, finally, the texts on the Frankfurt School written by Turkish intellectuals in Turkey, primarily written in Turkish (with some in English or German). I will organize my research by focusing on published books and articles, with less emphasis on existing master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Thereby I will offer a panoramic view and assessment of the reception of the Frankfurt School in Turkey.

Because the books by representatives of the Frankfurt School have only been translated into Turkish within the past few decades, the beginning of the discussion of these materials in the academic world is interesting in various respects, especially when we consider that Germany has held a special position in Turkish modernization. Especially after 1871, "German discipline", found in German engineering, the military, and the German education system and its universities in particular, but also in the German industrial order, and respected literary and philosophical tradition, resulted in Ottoman Turks gradu-

1 S. Aydın, Türk Düşüncesinde Alman Etkisi, in: Ö. Laçiner (ed.), Dönemler ve Zihniyetler, Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce, vol. 9, İstanbul 2009, p. 965.

2 The idea of the "Frankfurt School" was introduced in the 1960s as synonymous with Critical Theory in intellectual circles in Turkish academia. Hence, somewhat misleadingly, Lukács was considered to be a close relative of the Frankfurt School representatives. Later, in the 1990s in Turkey, Antonio Gramsci was also associated with Critical Theory and thus with the Frankfurt School.

ally began to view Germany first as a potential ally, and then as a role model. Therefore, it is no coincidence that most of the books on European history or culture published between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the end of the Ottoman Empire are related to Germany, German military technology, and the Germans.³ It is possible to add to this the alliance of World War I, the flirtations between Kemalism and Nazism, and the still unending Hitler sympathies of the Turkish right-wing ideologies.⁴ Furthermore, as a result of the university reforms of 1915 and 1933, the admission and welcomes of German academics into the Turkish higher education and the decades following made clear that the impact of this “German discipline” had been deeper than expected.⁵ More importantly, as a result of the migration of members of the Turkish labour force to Germany from the 1960s onward, mutual relations have gained new dimensions.⁶ Today, around 3.5 million Turks live in Germany, where they constitute more than four per cent of the population, and thousands of people with dual citizenship have a career in German academies. The number of Germans residing in Turkey is close to one hundred thousand, and more than five million Germans visit Turkey each year. The importance of relations can be understood even better when considering the many bilingual athletes, artists and celebrities in Germany and Turkey, and the fact that there is even a Turkish-German University in Istanbul.

1. The Weak Translation Culture in Turkey and the Dominance of English since the 1960s

The dominant language of the realm of culture from the early Ottoman Empire until the Cold War, and regarded as the Western “lingua franca” of Turkey, was French. What is important here is the Turks’ association from the sixteenth century on of Europe with Paris and France, and being European with Frenchness, or being “Frenk” [the Franks], both of which show the influence of Ottoman-French relations. Because of the relations

- 3 The most important works on this subject are: General Colmar Freiherr Von Der Goltz Paşa, *Millet-i Müselleha, Asrımızın Usul-i Harb ve Ahval-i Askeriyesi*, Mehmet Tahir (trans.), Istanbul 1301 [1895]; Mustafa Satı, Faik Sabri, *Büyük Milletlerden Japonlar, Almanlar*, Istanbul 1329 [1913]; Ahmet Refik, *Prusya Nasıl Yükseldi?*, Istanbul 1331 [1915]; G. Blondel, *Bismark’tan Sonra Almanya Siyaseti*, M. R. Ethem (trans.), Istanbul 1332 [1915]; Habil Adem, *Pançermanizm-Panİslamizm*, Istanbul 1332 [1915]; *Feldmareşal A. Von Schlieffen*, Kan, I, II, Hasan Cemil (trans.), Istanbul 1327–1341 [1911–1925]; D. Terich, *Almanya ve İslam*, Istanbul 1331 [1915]; B. Waylet, *Şarkta İngiliz-Alman Rekabeti*, Bedri Fikri (trans.), Istanbul 1332 [1915]; Mehmet Nihat, *1870–1871 Seferi*, Istanbul 1341 [1915]. For a full list of these publications, see E. Koray (ed.), *Türkiye Tarih Yayınları Bibliyografyası, 1729–1955*, 2nd edn, Istanbul 1959, pp. 48–50.
- 4 M. Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War*, Cambridge 2008; S. McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power*, Cambridge 2010; E. J. Zürcher (ed.), *Jihad and Islam in World War I: Studies on the Ottoman Jihad on the Centenary of Snouck Hurgronje’s “Holy War Made in Germany”*, Leiden 2016; S. Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*, Cambridge 2014.
- 5 I. İzzet Bahar, *German or Jewish, Humanity or Raison d’Etat: The German Scholars in Turkey 1933–1952*, in: *Shofar*, vol. 29, no. 1, (2010), pp. 48–72; F. Neumark, *Zufucht am Bosphorus. Deutsche Gelehrte, Politiker und Künstler in der Emigration 1933–1953*, Frankfurt am Main 1980; P. Schwartz, *Notgemeinschaft. Zur Emigration deutscher Wissenschaftler nach 1933 in die Türkei*, Marburg 1995.
- 6 N. Abadan-Unat, *Turk in Europe: From Guest Worker to Transnational Citizen*, New York, Oxford 2011.

developed with Prussia starting in the end of the nineteenth century, the German language was considered an important foreign language, and for decades a large majority of translations in Turkey, especially of literary and philosophical texts, were made from French, with a smaller portion of translations made from German. Even today, in the sociology of everyday life, going to Europe implies going to Paris or Berlin – not to Madrid or Stockholm.

However, in the Cold War period, Turkey adopted a pro-American political attitude, which resulted in the decision to use English as the language of education in newly opened top universities and, over time, the language of Turkish diplomacy moved from French to English. These two phenomena resulted in English becoming the standard for new generations in the realm of culture and for dealing with the outside world. After 1980, which was a critical political-cultural threshold for Turkey, English accounted for about 80 per cent of foreign language teaching and translated text publications; today this has reached around 90 per cent.

On the other hand, there is an interesting, one-sided production in terms of intellectual history. Although we have passed the centenary of the 1917 Revolution, as of 2021, there is still not one translation of Lenin's work from Russian into Turkish, and Marx and Engels' *Das Kapital* was finally translated into Turkish in full and from the original German version only in 2014. These examples concerning communist works are not anomalies: although from 1800–1850 French-language writers and thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and Alphonse de Lamartine were well known among Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals, there was no such familiarity with the leading sources of conservatism, such as Burke, whose renown in Turkey was no different from that of Lenin. Modern classics of the West that are not originally French are only now being introduced into Turkish, often simultaneously with the publication of the most recent research. In addition, the vocabulary of Turkish philosophy, sociology and political theory expands with Western (especially English) concepts. This also applies to the works of representatives of the Frankfurt School which, since the 1960s, have been available in pieces and, since the 1990s, through a great deal of interest, have transformed the realm of thought in Turkey. This is how we can treat the general conditions of the historical momentum, which I will try to explain in more detail below. It is possible to read this cultural transfer as a “conceptual transfer” and a partial “histoire croisée”. As Christopher L. Hill points out, “each of these tends simply to multiply the frame of national history in positing departures and arrivals, source and target languages, or the distinct actors of intercrossings.”⁷ We can also add to these concepts such as entangled history, connected history and *Transfersgeschichte*.

However, ideas have largely circulated only unilaterally, and the fact that Turkish social thought and literature have been introduced to Western languages in a very limited manner has created a great asymmetry. Therefore, exchange of ideas, or in a broader

7 C. L. Hill, *Conceptual Universalization in the Transnational Nineteenth Century*, in: S. Moyn/A. Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*, New York 2013, p. 135.

sense “cultural transfer”, does not only happen through translation studies, reception or appropriation. “There are essential lessons to learn from how and why ideas traveled the world at specific moments.”⁸ That’s what I aim to do here.

2. 1960–1980: Remote Perspectives

Although we know that some German academics escaped Nazism, were employed at Turkish universities and corresponded with people such as Walter Benjamin (for example, Eric Auerbach, who worked at Istanbul University between 1936 and 1947), they do not appear to have published anything on Critical Theory during their time in Turkey. Thus we can say that there is nothing in Turkey from the Frankfurt School between 1930 and 1960. The first publication in Turkish by someone who was associated with the Frankfurt School appeared in the 1961 edition of *Tercüme Dergisi*, a biannual journal that published the Turkish translation of “The Task of the Translator” written by Walter Benjamin.⁹ In the following twenty years, except for Marcuse and Lukács, neither a book by nor a critical review on the representatives of the Frankfurt School was translated into Turkish. The texts by these two authors, who were presented by the Turkish press as being agents either of the CIA (Marcuse) or of Stalin (Lukács), were interpreted in the shadow of the political problems of 1968 and student activism in Turkey.¹⁰ In 1969, the Turkish government, with Suleyman Demirel’s conservative-nationalist Adalet Partisi (Justice Party) in power, banned the entry of these individuals and their works into Turkey, along with other intellectual figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Franz Fanon. During this period of twenty years that started with one military coup and ended with another (1960–1980), Turkey went through quite turbulent times. In 20 years, 24 governments were established, academic and culture-art circles completely changed their face, and the world of the press saw the emergence of a multi-polar, confrontational environment. Despite the Turkish left publishing books under these circumstances about the Angolan, Vietnamese, Chinese and Albanian models, and even on how to make ‘Havana style’ molotovs, almost no work reflecting the diversity of ideas of Western Marxism was presented to readers. In these two decades, four books by Marcuse were available; *Tek Boyutlu İnsan (One Dimensional Man: 2 editions in 1968 and 1975)*, *Aşk ve Uygarlık (Eros and Civilization: 1968)*, *Mantık ve İhtilal (Reason and Revolution: 1971)*, *Diyalektik Materyalizm: Devlet ve Faşizm (Dialectical Materialism: State and Fascism: 1975)* as well as several by Lukács, including *Çağdaş Gerçekçiliğin Anlamı (The Meaning of Contempo-*

8 Ibid., p. 144.

9 W. Benjamin, Çeviricinin Ödevi, Melahat Özgü (trans.), in: *Tercüme Dergisi* XV (1961) 73–74, pp. 111–121. There is also one very short another paper written by Melahat Özgü for introducing Benjamin to the readers, see: Walter Benjamin, *Hayatı ve Eserleri*, p. 110.

10 A. Oktay, Türkçe’de Lukacs ve Düşüncesinin Etkisi, in: *Defter* (1989) 10, pp. 20–39; and daily *Milliyet* on 1 November 1968, 16 August 1969 and 19 December 1969; cited by D. B. Kejinlioğlu, *Kesintiler, Kırımlar: Türkiye’de Frankfurt Okulu’nun İzleri*, in: D. B. Kejanlioğlu (ed.), *Zamanın Tozu: Frankfurt Okulu’nun Türkiye’deki İzleri*, Ankara 2011, pp. 32–33.

rary Realism: three editions in 1969, 1975, and 1979), *Avrupa Gerçekçiliği (European Realism: 1977)*, *Birey ve Toplum (Individual and Society: 1978)*, and *Estetik I (Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen I: 1978)*. Articles by both authors are also found in books compiled by Turkish publishers, in volumes which also included articles by other pioneers and global leftists such as Che Guevara, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Mao. In these difficult twenty years, thinkers such as Adorno, Bloch, Horkheimer, and Hannah Arendt are almost invisible.

3. Belated Acquaintance: From the End of the 1980s to the Twenty-First Century

After 1980, the Turkish intellectual world gradually began to wonder about Western Marxism and post-Marxism. This growing curiosity is seen in the first translations of work by Frankfurt scholars, such as a special edition in 1981 of the journal *Oluşum* introducing the Frankfurt School¹¹; followed by books published by publishers that were in line with Trockism. These are *Estetize Edilmiş Yaşam [An Aestheticized Life]* (Dost, 1982), selected and translated by communications professor and translator of Benjamin's work Ünsal Oskay, and *Brecht'i Anlamak [Understanding Brecht]* (Metis, 1984), a selection-translation by Haluk Barışcan and Aydın İşisağ. Horkheimer's *Aklın Yıkımı (The Eclipse of Reason, Metis, 1986)* is a critical threshold, because Orhan Koçak, who translated it from English, added a 45-page introductory preface about the Frankfurt School, which became one of the first and the most influential texts on the subject in Turkish.¹² Given the interest in this subject, Koçak followed with two translations of Adorno, with *Minima Moralia* in 1998, and *Edebiyat Yazuları (Noten zur Literatur I, II, III, IV)* in 2004, along with various articles and interviews, thereby providing important contributions to the literature in Turkey.

Apart from these translations made by representatives of the Institute in the 1980s, four more books written by Western researchers on the Frankfurt School have been translated from English. These are Fritz Raddatz's brief work on Lukács (*Alan*, 1984), and three books published in 1989, written by Martin Jay, Tom Bottomore, and Phil Slater.¹³ In this period, not a single book about the Frankfurt School and "Critical Theory" was published by Turkish researchers (Levent Köker's *İki Farklı Siyaset: Pozitivizm ve Eleştirel Teori [Two Different Paths: Positivism and Critical Theory]* in 1990 was the first social sci-

11 There are some essays on music by Adorno, on art in the technical age by Benjamin, and a sample of the understanding of critical social sciences of Habermas, and some other articles and translations by Enis Batur, Ertuğrul Özkök, İsmail Ertürk, Oruç Aruoba, and Ünsal Oskay. See *Oluşum Aylık Sanat ve Düşün Dergisi*, no. 40/82 (1981).

12 O. Koçak, Önsöz: Horkheimer ve Frankfurt Okulu, in: M. Horkheimer, *Akıl Tutulması*, O. Koçak (trans.), İstanbul 4th edn 1998, pp. 7–52.

13 F. Raddatz, Lukacs, E. Ateşman (trans.), İstanbul 1984; M. Jay, *Diyalektik İmgelem*, Ü. Oskay (trans.), İstanbul 1989; P. Slater, *Frankfurt Okulu, Kökeni ve Önemi*, A. Özden (trans.), İstanbul 1989; T. Bottomore, *Frankfurt Okulu (eleştirel kuram)*, A. Çiğdem (trans.), İstanbul 1989.

ences book written in Turkish¹⁴); a few introductory articles and superficial discussions published in a handful journals was considered sufficient.¹⁵

From 1989 onwards, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the satellite states, the Turkish public authorities initiated a new era, in every sense, through the debate of public space. This started with removing, to a certain extent, the restrictions on socialist publishing, and through neoliberal politics, urbanization, and the ban on wearing headscarves at universities. The Frankfurt School benefited from this partial liberation, and particularly Habermas, the last living representative of the Institute, has received considerable interest in Turkey. The fact that postmodernism received a growing fast-food-speed interest thanks to the Foucault translations in 1980s and Habermas' rebuke that Enlightenment and modernity was "an unfinished project" in reaction to the claim that meta-narratives have ended, also played a role here.¹⁶ Additionally, Benjamin, Adorno, Lukács, and even Marcuse, whose radicalizing effect in his youth no longer existed, in the nineties, and especially in the 2000s, restructured the Turkish intellectual publishing community and the academic curriculum in related fields. As a result, the variety in books by these authors available today, with new editions and the continuous reprints, has reached a different dimension. In recent years (according to 2000–2019 data), the Turkish academy, which has developed a bad reputation internationally due to its supposed lack of interest in the outside world, has twenty (20) PhD/MA theses-dissertations directly on the Frankfurt School, thirty (30) on Adorno, fourteen (14) on Horkheimer, sixteen (16) on Benjamin, ten (10) on Marcuse, and five (5) on Lukács. As for Habermas, the number of theses written on his works between 1993 and 2019 is forty-two (42).¹⁷ It should also be noted that during these years the number of universities in which postgraduate education was offered tripled.

A similar situation applies to the different versions of these books, such as translations of work by these authors, re-translations, and compilations of selected works (both articles and conference texts). As a result of the efforts of the most respected translators of Turkey, the following list can be compiled of books that were published between 1991 and 2019: thirty books by Adorno, thirty-two by Benjamin, twenty-nine by Lukács, eight by

14 L. Köker, *İki Farklı Siyaset: Bilgi Teorisi-Siyaset Bilimi İlişkileri Açısından Pozitivizm ve Eleştirel Teori*, Ankara 1990.

15 For more bibliographical information, see A. Aydoğan, G. C. Acar, *Frankfurt Okulu Düşünürlerinin Türkçedeki Yapıtları*, in: D. B. Kejanlıoğlu (ed.), *Zamanın Tozu: Frankfurt Okulu'nun Türkiye'deki İzleri*, Ankara 2011, pp. 51–69; and M. Açıkgöz, *Frankfurt Okulu Eleştirel Teorisi Üzerine Türkçe Kaynaklar*, in: *Felsefelogos*, no. 53, (2014), pp. 113–136.

16 Ahmet Çiğdem, one of the intellectual agents of Habermas in Turkey, describes how Weber and Habermas are trying to reconstruct rationality and modernity as a whole because it has the possibility of individual and social emancipation. See: *Bir İmkân Olarak Modernite: Weber ve Habermas*, İstanbul 1997. According to Besim Dellaloğlu, it is a kind of 'deconstruction' that Adorno and Horkheimer made in the Marxist tradition. All the intellectual activities of Habermas are a new 'reconstruction' for the Enlightenment project through the theories of Enlightenment thinkers and Marx. See: Eve Dönüş, in: *Toplumbilim*, Special Issue on Karl Marx, no. 3 (1995), p. 74.

17 I obtained this data in August 2019 from the database of YÖK, the central bureaucratic administration of Turkish universities.

Horkheimer, twelve by Marcuse and four by Löwith. And while names such as Pollock and Löwenthal had no place, there were seventeen books by Habermas.¹⁸

It is also useful to note which books saw more interest. Adorno and Horkheimer's collaborative work *Aydınlanmanın Diyalektiği* (a new edition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* published by Kabalcı Yayınları) had ten reprints between 2010–2016, and Adorno's compilation of three essays *Kültür Endüstrisi, Kültür Yönetimi* [*The Culture Industry*] published by İletişim Yayınları, was also reprinted ten times between 2007 and 2016. *Minima Moralia*, published by Metis, was reprinted nine times between 1998 and 2017. Yapı Kredi Yayınları's 36th issue of the quarterly academic journal *Cogito* (Fall 2003) was dedicated to Adorno on the 100th year of his birth, and the issue was so popular that between 2003 and 2017 it was reprinted nine times, with print runs of 1000 and 2000 copies respectively. It is interesting to note that while most of Adorno's work, either his own or that written in collaboration with Horkheimer, was reprinted at least twice, one of his works that is deemed important internationally, *Otoritaryen Kişilik Üzerine* [*The Authoritarian Personality*] was published in 2003 and 2011 by two different publishers, but it wasn't considered of much importance by readers. However, in recent years has seen many debates about the authoritarian personality of Prime Minister – then President – Erdoğan. So, if the Turkish reader, who enjoyed *Rüya Kayıtları* [*Dream Notes*] so much between 2010 and 2016 that it was reprinted three times, now relegated this work to the background, we can make the assumption that the reader prefers Adorno's fragments. What also played a role here is that, together with Orhan Koçak, the writer of the first and most satisfying text in Turkish on the Frankfurt School, *Defter* journal also collected names such as Nurdan Gürbilek and Oruç Aruoba as intellectual representatives of the Frankfurt School. At the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties they published translations of nine texts and letters by Adorno. Despite the interest in Horkheimer's work with Adorno, and especially with the introduction Orhan Koçak offered to the readers, their individual works didn't receive the same respect. While *Akıl Tutulması* [*The Eclipse of Reason*] was reprinted eight times between 1986 and 2015, none of the first print runs of their other works were sold out between 1990 and 2019. When we look at the Hungarian literary theorist György Lukács, we see that especially *Roman Kuramı* [*The Theory of the Novel*], published by Metis – the only work by Lukács published by Metis or any of the other 'Top Ten' publishers of Turkey – was reprinted six times between 2003 and 2019. While *Çağdaş Gerçekçiliğini Anlamı* [*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*], *Estetik I, II, III* [*Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen I, II, III*], and *Aklın Yıkımı I, II* [*The Destruction of Reason*] published by Payel Yayınları were reprinted between 2003 and 2013, books that aroused interested in the 1980s such as *Lenin'in Düşüncesi* [*Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought*] are currently not in print. Another name that fell behind is Herbert Marcuse. The three translations available of Marcuse's work – *Tek Boyutlu İnsan, Eros ve Uygarlık* and *Us ve Devrim* – were translated

18 I obtained these statistics in January 2020 by a comparative analysis of the publications on kitapurdu.com, dr.com.tr, idefix.com.tr, the most popular online-bookstores in Turkey.

by Aziz Yardımlı into a language that few people could understand because Yardımlı tried to construct new and purified Turkish translations for Marcuse's terms. They were published by Idea Yayınları, which since the 1980s has been run by one person, and each of the books has been reprinted four times between 2000 and 2016. However, instead of the translations by Dr. Yardımlı full of his neologisms, many people still prefer to read the translations from 1968 or 1975, and these editions can easily be found at second-hand bookstores. It is also striking that the number of translations of Marcuse's work in journals and research articles on Marcuse's thought has been little bit outdated.¹⁹

When we look at Walter Benjamin, we can consider 1993 as a threshold. Interest in Benjamin rose rapidly after the first (and partial) translation of *Pasajlar* [*Passagen*] in 1993 (by Yapı Kredi Yayınları). We see that, especially since 2003, *Pasajlar* has been reprinted more frequently: the meticulous translation by Ahmet Cemal, one of Turkey's best translators from German, was reprinted fifteen times between 2003 and 2019. The Benjamin selection *Son Bakışta Aşk* [Love at Last Sight] translated by the literary critic Nurdan Gürbilek and published in 1993 by Metis was also reprinted eight times over twenty-five years, between 1993 and 2018. One of the reasons for the importance attached to this work is Gürbilek's inspiring analysis of Benjamin. *Tek Yön* [*One Way Street*] by Yapı Kredi Yayınları is another much-read work that keeps the interest of readers in Benjamin alive, and was reprinted eight times between 1999 and 2018. *Cogito* journal's special edition on Benjamin (No. 52, Fall 2007) received a response that required five reprints over the following ten years. It is an interesting detail that, while Benjamin's dissertation *Alman Romantizminde Sanat Eleştirisi Kavramı* [Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik] first published in Turkish by İletişim Yayınları, had four print runs (2010–2019), while another work of Benjamin published in Turkey, *Parıltılar* [Illuminationen] (Belge, 1990) found nearly no favour at all. Let's also note that Benjamin's *Brecht'i Anlamak* [Understanding Brecht] first published in 1984, had been reprinted six times by the end of 2019, and his seven other books were also all reprinted at least once. That being said, second-hand bookstores in Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara offer a highly active second-hand book circulation, and there are various databases and web sites that share illegal PDF files of books and journal archives; the latter are especially popular among university students and idle intellectuals in Turkey. When we consider how easy it is to access them from personal computers, the effects of these publications increase even further.

Most of these publications have been published by publishing houses that are either Trotskyist or what in Turkey is more often referred to as “progressive left/social democrat” and which, in the eye of intellectual readers, are very prestigious. Istanbul-based publishers Metis, İletişim, Yapı Kredi [YKY], Kabalıcı and Agora are the most well-known

19 The articles published in periodicals between 2010 and 2016 that I came across are: K. Gülenç/M. Büyüktuncay, Herbert Marcuse'nin Hedonizm Soruşturması Üzerinden Kitle ve İktidar İlişisini Yeniden Düşünmek, in: Doğu Batı (2014) 69, pp. 183–208; D. Kellner, Marcuse ve Radikal Öznellik Anlayışı, M. Polat (trans.), in: Felsefelogos (2014) 53, pp. 87–104; Ş. Nişancı/A. Çelik, Modern Siyaset Kuramında Herbert Marcuse ve 'Olumsuzlama' Felsefesi, in: Civillacademy 8 (2010) 3, pp. 23–42.

of these. In addition, the journals *Defter* (1987–2002), *Toplum ve Bilim* (since 1977), *Cogito* (since 1994), and *Doğu-Batı* (since 1998), and Turkish publishing platforms (that can all be reached online) are still much read by the intellectual reader, and make it possible for debates on the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory to remain fresh. After *Defter* and *Cogito*, the special issue in 2007 of the journal *Toplum ve Bilim* on “Reconsidering Critical Theory” (No. 110) as well as in 2014 of the journal *Felsefelogos* (No. 53) on “Critical Theory” are on the reading list of many courses, and the discussion deepens whenever new research appears. This gives the newer generation of researchers, and especially new graduate and postgraduate students in the social sciences, the opportunity to start new studies.

It would not be wrong to say that a group of authors, translators and academics who gathered around the publishing houses and journals mentioned above bore this great cultural transfer from the 1980s to the 2010s – and only a few of them knew German, so the majority depended on English editions. Names that come to mind are Ünsal Oskay (1939–2009, professor of communication), Oruç Aruoba (1948–1920, professor of philosophy and translator), Orhan Koçak (b. 1949, critic-translator), Ahmet Cemal (1942–2017, critic-translator), Ahmet Oktay (1933–2016, critic), Hasan Ünal Nalbantoğlu (1947–2011, professor of sociology), Oğuz Demiralp (b. 1952, diplomat-writer), Nurdan Gürbilek (b. 1956, essayist-critic), Meral Özbek (b. 1954, professor of sociology), Levent Köker (b. 1958, law professor), Beybin Kejanlioğlu (b. 1964, professor of communication), Ahmet Çiğdem (b. 1964, professor of sociology), Tanıl Bora (b. 1963, researcher, editor, and translator), Tuncay Birkan (b. 1968, translator), Aykut Çelebi (b. 1962, professor of political sciences), and Besim Dellaloğlu (b. 1965, professor of sociology). These intellectuals come from two generations: some of them were born in the second half of the 1940s and were university students in 1968, others experienced the 1980 coup as young professors or university student. It is nearly impossible to name other important figures besides these among academics and researchers. And, as it cannot be said that the new generation of social scientists, born from and carried on the shoulders of the pool of literary critics, author-translators and academics (see footnote 29 in this article), has managed to start adding original contributions to the literature, the field of interest of this work has stayed largely in the periphery.

4. A Match between Text and the Context: Why and How the Frankfurt School?

The fact that almost all of the names mentioned above have been published by certain publishing houses and in certain journals since the beginning of the 1990s, has resulted in the appearance of a more consistent, holistic attitude, rather than a field of individual pursuits. However, it can also be argued that in the articles in Turkish, especially on the literary and aesthetic understanding of the Frankfurt School, one of the figures at the

fore, whose work lay at the basis of further research, is the famous essayist, editor and critic Nurdan Gürbilek.

Gürbilek was mainly known for her short translations and reading notes published by the journal *Defter*; the journal was edited by long-time Frankfurt School enthusiasts including the above-mentioned Orhan Koçak, Oruç Aruoba, and Ahmet Oktay in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁰ Through her writings on original works of modern Turkish literature and prominent authors, as well as analysis on new cultural tendencies appearing in the 1980s, which in the 1990s and 2000s quickly were published in books, Gürbilek's work has been referred to in nearly all recent articles on the humanities and social sciences. Her most important work is *Mağdurun Dili* [The Tone of Aggrieved] (2008), which brings together the intellectual perspective of Walter Benjamin and Edward Said and combines the theory of these two global references with the most striking examples from the history of Turkish literature. The first point separating her from other intellectual agents of the Frankfurt School in Turkey was the quality of her translation and editing of a selection of Benjamin's *Son Bakışta Aşk* (1993; eighth print run in 2018) and the long preface she wrote for this work.²¹ Here, she presents biographical-introductory information as well as vivid anecdotes and intellectual interpretations while touching upon Benjamin's friendships, stories about the origins of his writings and translations, his travels, and the problems he faced due to Nazism and the Jewish Question. Bringing forward Benjamin's distinction between being a *homme de lettres* and a professional revolutionary, Gürbilek describes and portrays the man of letters through Benjamin's own frame as

[h]e considers writing or reading as an experience in itself, rather than as a means of achieving a certain goal. He commits himself to his subject in each of his writings so much that he almost forgets all of his previous judgements. Instead of aiming to attain a coherent system and theoretical clarity, he expects to gain something from his thoughts oscillating between stretched, obscure edges. He seeks truth in wreckages, the remains of previous systems, and shattered pieces rather than in mental integrity. He sees culture as part of natural history, instead of considering nature as part of cultural history²²

and thereby builds a bridge between Montaigne and the era of Adorno and Benjamin. She emphasizes that Benjamin's non-systematic fragments and essays which follow the traces of the past and attend to conflicting symbols, ideas and values without trying to associate them with each other is his fundamental peculiarity.²³ In short, while Orhan

20 Gürbilek's first works in *Defter* related to the Frankfurt School are two translations and a book review. See G. Lukács, Denemenin Doğası ve Biçimi Üzerine, N. Gürbilek (trans.), in: *Defter* (1987), no. 1, pp. 105–123. H. Marcuse, Diyalektik Üzerine Bir Not, N. Gürbilek (trans.), in: *Defter* (1988), no. 6, pp. 37–43; N. Gürbilek and İ. Savaşır's article: Foucault'nun Hapishanelerine Giriş, in: *Defter* (1989), no. 9, pp. 7–10.

21 N. Gürbilek, Sunuş: Walter Benjamin, 1892–1940, in: W. Benjamin, *Son Bakışta Aşk*, Nurdan Gürbilek (ed. and trans.), 7th edn, İstanbul 2014, pp. 7–38.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–32.

Koçak often puts Adorno over Horkheimer in his 1986 presentation about Horkheimer, and while Ahmet Oktay discusses the Turkish realm of translation rather than Lukács in his 1989 article about Lukács and translations of his works into Turkish,²⁴ Gürbilek succeeds in remaining focused on Benjamin and his world of thought in this fruitful work. For more than a quarter-century, Nurdan Gürbilek has continued to draw on the Benjaminian motifs she propounded so compactly in this work celebrated for both surveying Turkish intellectual history and her original literary criticisms.

Similarly, Oğuz Demiralp, who is known and respected for his essays, and Prof. Ünsal Oskay, founder of “Turkish Benjaminianism”, have fallen behind in our day, since Demiralp did not produce works as interesting as Gürbilek’s, and Oskay confined himself to writing somewhat more easily consumed texts. But their books, especially those of Oskay, played a significant role in the reception of Benjamin in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁵ Meral Özbek’s trilogy of reading Benjamin, “*Walter Benjamin Okumak I, II, III*”, published in three parts in the Journal of Political Sciences at Ankara University (*Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*) in 2000, is another remarkable and frequently-cited reading of Benjamin.²⁶ Besim Dellaloğlu also made contributions to the literature with his *Benjaminia, Frankfurt Okulunda Sanat ve Toplum* [Art and Society in the Frankfurt School] and *Toplumsalın Yeniden Yapılanması: Habermas Üzerine Bir Araştırma* [Reconstruction of the Social: A Research on Habermas] both published twice in the 2000s.

Nevertheless, we should indicate once more that Orhan Koçak obtained a position of authority similar to that of Gürbilek in the field of literary analysis with writings, interpretations and interviews rich in political-philosophical content. The introduction he wrote in 1986 for Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason*, which interwove compact definitions and analysis, is so inclusive and procreative that it virtually framed and dominated the relevant discussion from 1986 to the present. It is clear that, as much as they concern the book itself, most of the subsequent discussions are levelled at the absolutist sense of modernity resulting from the fetishization of reason with the influence of this foreword. It can be seen that Koçak and followers of the Frankfurt School in Turkey focus on the iron cage of ideology resulting from this absolutist modernity, the horrors of totalitarianism, and the quests of “liberation” from that dreadful system.²⁷ In a way, this is a quest for

24 A. Oktay, Türkçe’de Lukacs, pp. 20–39.

25 For an overview on Ünsal Oskay’s works directly related to Walter Benjamin, see A. Avcı, Ünsal Oskay’ın Walter Benjamin Üzerine Çalışmaları, in: Marmara İletişim Dergisi (2015) 23, pp. 13–36.

26 M. Özbek, Walter Benjamin Okumak-I, in: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi 55 (2000) 2, pp. 69–96; Walter Benjamin Okumak-II, in: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi 55 (2000) 3, pp. 103–131; and Walter Benjamin Okumak-III, in: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi 55 (2000) 4, pp. 83–110.

27 See O. Koçak, Maelström Usulü, in: Defter (1988), no. 5, pp. 7–12; M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, Aydınlanmanın Diyalektikliği, Orhan Koçak (trans.), in: Defter (1988), no. 5, pp. 13–16; O. Koçak, Modernizm ve Postmodernizm, in: Defter (1992), no. 18; T. W. Adorno, Minima Moralia’dan Seçme Parçalar, Orhan Koçak (trans.), in: Defter (1992), no. 18; O. Koçak, Narkisso’stan Oidipus’a, in: Defter, no. 22, pp. 95–107; O. Aruoba, O. Koçak, I. Savaşır, Heidegger Üzerine Üç Soru, in: Defter (1995), no. 25, pp. 96–113; T. W. Adorno, Evsizlere Sığınak, Orhan Koçak (trans.), in: Defter (1997), no. 30, pp. 132–136; O. Koçak, Adorno-Marcuse Yazışmasına Giriş, in: Defter (1999), no. 37, pp. 93–114.

a new paradigm which postulates the criticism of Nazism, Fascism, and, in the case of Turkey, Kemalism, in addition to mainstream leftist ideologies such as Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism, and which places importance on the individual, the particular, the non-systemmatical, culture, and aesthetics. This is a pursuit that incorporates a considerable degree of pessimism and, in this aspect, distinguishes Critical Theory from socialist tradition.²⁸ Indeed, one can easily say that Koçak directed his attention in this manner not only in the journal *Defter*, but also in the works of Adorno which he translated and edited, and the essays and interviews which he wrote over the following twenty years. Apart from, or rather in the wake of these, an increase in the number of studies about culture industry, cosmopolitan encounters, theory of alienation, and criticism of ideologies becomes evident especially in the fields of sociology, communications, political sciences and cultural studies. Once again, we must point out that many younger individuals who follow the aforementioned intellectual agents have been building their academic or writership careers around these themes. The influence of the agents of the Frankfurt School has substantially increased in recent studies, particularly in those concerning criticism of authoritarian-totalitarian regimes, criticism of global capitalism, the destructive impacts of modern mass society on the individual, criticism of authoritarian personality and political order, the quest for non-violent politics, the endeavours of enhancing social-public communication, and inquiries into the meaning attributed to melancholy and history. This is mainly due to the augmentation of readings of the Frankfurt School. The literature is expanding and debates are flourishing with the publication of postgraduate theses and PhD. dissertations addressing these issues. Apart from those subsequently collected into book form, one can find many interesting examples among these works penned in both English and Turkish language, from the comparison of Habermas and Jean Baudrillard to the relationship between the Frankfurt School and Antonio Gramsci.²⁹ To sum up, nearly all of the books written by the thinkers and philosophers who are involved with the Institute have been published, as stated above, more than once. The increase in the number of interdisciplinary studies and postgraduate courses, and the consequent need for Western references which are suitable for this tendency and proven to be adequate for penetrating different disciplines must also have played a part in this.

28 Koçak, Horkheimer ve Frankfurt Okulu, pp. 34–37 and pp. 39–46.

29 F. B. Mertoğlu, *The Concept of Meaning: A Comparison between Habermas and Baudrillard*, ODTU (1996), 112 pp.; K. Gülenç, *Eleştiri, Toplum ve Bilim: Frankfurt Okulu üzerine bir inceleme*, Hacettepe University (2010), 279 pp.; S. Akkanat, *The Conscious of the Presentness as a Critical Attitude towards the Progress: Kant, Arendt, Benjamin*, Boğaziçi University (2004), 104 pp.; C. Arınç, *Against Historicism and Aestheticism: Walter Benjamin's Critical Philosophy of Film*, Boğaziçi University (2008), 88 pp.; E. Tomuş, *The Rule of Law as a Democratic Principle of Legitimacy: The Views of Jürgen Habermas and Otfried Höffe*, ODTU (2001), 130 pp.; Ö. Soysal, *Habermas ve Foucault: Evrenselcilik ve Öznellik Üzerine Bir Tartışma*, Ege University (2011), 747 pp.; E. Erdem, *Habermas and Viroli on Constitution and Patria: A Defense of Constitutional Patriotism*, Sabancı University (2012), 96 pp.; Ö. Kulak, *Theodor Adorno: Kültür Endüstrisinin Kısacasında Kültür*, Hacettepe University (2016), 209 pp.; M. Becermen, *Theodor Adorno: Kültür Endüstrisinin Kısacasında Kültür*, Hacettepe University (2009), 232 pp.; B. Y. Paker, *The Frankfurt School and Antonio Gramsci*, İstanbul Bilgi University (2009), 97 pp.

However, the cultural-intellectual resurgence of the 1990s revitalized the market of journal publication. Successive criticisms of ideologies, the trend of post-modernism, the polemics between republicans and democrats, and reciprocal exchange of ideas on subjects like whether civilizations come into conflict with each other in the post-Soviet world order eroded the fragmented intellectual tableaux consisting of not-very-interactive journals such as *Türkiye Günlüğü*, *Evrensel Kültür*, *Birikim*, *Dergâh*, *Tezkire*, and *Defter*, which were first published in 1987–1991, and therefore seemed to be closed “epistemic communities” in a sense. It is interesting that Nietzsche and Foucault were mentioned much more frequently than any Turkish intellectual during these debates. As both the translations of and the studies about Nietzsche and Foucault’s works became more visible by the second half of the 1980s, the Turkish world of thought also turned towards Heidegger and Gramsci, making the German philosopher and the Italian theoretician permanent names on the agenda of Turkish intellectuals.

In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Adorno became popular as a consequence of the interest in Nietzsche, forasmuch as supplementary works for understanding enigmatic writings on aesthetics and politics, masses and power, and nationality and universality of this non-positivist thinker who abstains from offering a “schematic” or “programmatically” philosophy, renders the world into fragments, and left behind a complex heap of texts which were gradually translated into Turkish, one after another. Moreover, the conservative-Islamist circles yearning to perceive and show the existence of “another West” were accompanied by leftists who had little concern about the cultural issue, but put up a struggle against orthodox Marxism and a strict sense of Kemalism by translating works of philosophers, such as Perry Anderson, about Western Marxism, the rise of hermeneutics, heterodoxy and syncretism in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

As a result of all these, as well as the interest of Friedrich Nietzsche readers in Benjamin’s tragic life and the translation of Adorno’s *Noten zur Literatur* into Turkish in 1990, the interlacing of Benjamin’s language with mysticism led to a very different understanding than that encouraged by the influence of Habermas, Lukács, and Marcuse’s critical theory, especially on the “rebellious youth” in 1968 and onwards. Furthermore, although both Lukács and Marcuse’s works continued being translated, the attention devoted to them, particularly to Marcuse, had already diminished considerably in Turkey, as it had worldwide... As for Adorno, Benjamin and, in part, Horkheimer, they were more promising in terms of novelties in the eyes of their Turkish addressees seventy years after Nazism, Stalinism, and the monopolistic capitalism of the 1930s and 40s, even if there had been numerous changes around the world. When it comes to the 2010s, Hasan Ünal Nalbantoğlu underlines that “many of the points Adorno and Horkheimer made about advanced capitalist industrial societies are also true of present-day Turkey”, while Aykut Çelebi asserts that interdisciplinary studies should be improved by applying the conceptual repertoire of the Critical Theory to analysis about Turkey, since “the Frankfurt School does not offer formulations which are clear enough to be directly translated

into politics”³⁰ and that it is possible to make quite original evaluations about Turkey with this material.

5. Conclusion and Evaluation

Readings of the Frankfurt School demonstrate that the outcome of history is not predetermined for the socialist circles in Turkey and, apart from the Moscow-centred understanding of Marxism, there exist semitones, considerations which go beyond vulgar-materialism. In addition to an ample sense of historical dialectic, there are also fragments, capabilities of “free wills” appearing out of nowhere, and deviations that can be both heroic and horrific. In Horkheimer’s words, “no universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb,” and according to this perspective, suffering is what knits history together.³¹ Even though this perspective would not hinder us from discovering different sympathies for modernity in Benjamin or Lukács, the devastation of the two World Wars and the Cold War made it necessary to question modernity. Totalitarianism, ideological imposition, alienation, and the reversal of the basic values of the Enlightenment – such as rationalism- were intensely experienced in the twentieth century; modernity was incurvated despite the promise of linear progression.³² The culture industry of the same era produced a mechanized, technologized and manufactural art while popularizing it.³³ This gloomy era, as Marcuse pointed out, made people “one dimensional.”

When it comes to the Frankfurt School, the first work to spring to mind in Turkey is the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the reception of which generated a tripartite debate. Its Turkish translation caused it to be simultaneously considered the magnum opus of the Institute members and evidence of the School’s anti-Marxism, while others regarded it as the symbol of deviation towards a neo-romantic Schopenhauerian pessimism,³⁴ and its projections penetrated subsequent writings.

Readings and reception(s) of the Frankfurt School became crucial in this context, making it possible theoretically and historically to critique modernity on the basis of the horrors and remainders of the twentieth century. This objection to tyranny and violence constituted the common platform of Islamists and critical moderns, anti-capitalist

30 H. Ü. Nalbantoğlu, Aykırılıklar: Adorno et. al. Üzerine, in: D. B. Kejanlioğlu (ed.), Zamanın Tozu: Frankfurt Okulu’nun Türkiye’deki İzleri, Ankara 2011, p. 653. For Aykut Çelebi’s views, see Aykut Çelebi, in: D. B. Kejanlioğlu (ed.), Zamanın Tozu: Frankfurt Okulu’nun Türkiye’deki İzleri, Ankara 2011, p. 749.

31 Horkheimer, On the Problem of Truth, The Essential Frankfurt, p. 438, as cited in Koçak, Horkheimer ve Frankfurt Okulu, p. 37.

32 H. Aksakal, Politik Romantizm ve Modernite Eleştirileri, 2nd edn, İstanbul 2015; K. Gülenç, Bir Mit Olarak Aydınlanma: Aklın Diyalektiğine Negatif Bir Bakış, in: Felsefe Söyleşileri V–VI kitapçığı, İstanbul 2011, pp. 37–62; see also A. Öztürk, Aydınlanmanın Mite Gerileyişi Tezi Üzerine Düşünceler, in: Doğu Batı 71 (2014–2015), pp. 93–108.

33 S. E. Yüksel, Modernizm ve Kültür-Sanat Bağlamında Frankfurt Okulu, in: D. B. Kejanlioğlu (ed.), Zamanın Tozu: Frankfurt Okulu’nun Türkiye’deki İzleri, Ankara 2011, pp. 395–448.

34 Koçak, Horkheimer, p. 13.

groups, and environmentalists in the 1990s Turkey. After the Cold War came to an end and the Soviet Union ceased to be a threat to Turkey, criticisms of the state and ideology emerged in Turkish public opinion, and the positivist aspect of Turkish modernization was often animadverted upon. In the first half of the 1990s, when the inception of the post-Kemalism era and whether the country was in the threshold of the II. Republic were major topics of discussion, Habermas' new social movements theory predicated upon dialogical democracy and communicative rationality was received favourably.³⁵ The aforementioned temporary coalition dissolved in the next few years, and Turkey started to utilize the concepts of the Frankfurt School for other topics of discussion during the rise of Erdoğan's government of Islamist origins. Today, Frankfurtian concepts and notions such as "destruction of reason", "eclipse of reason", and "authoritarian personality disorder" are among the expressions most commonly used by the politicians and intellectuals opposed to Erdoğan.

Owing to the increasing number of well-educated people as well as the expansion and diversification of book and journal publications since the 1990s, it might be presumed that the interest in the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory will continue to increase. On account of multi-critical thinking, the Frankfurt School will remain a significant reference in terms of conceptualization and theorization for subjects such as the formation and reconstruction of ideology and ideological mindsets in Turkey, the defects of modernization regarding Turkish society, the structuring of mass culture, and "the dialectic of Turkish Enlightenment", a matter yet to be studied.

35 For more information on the nature of these discussions, see L. Köker, *Demokrasi Üzerine Yazılar*, Ankara 1992, pp. 27–56, pp. 123–164; A. Çiğdem, *Akıl ve Toplumun Özgürleşimi: Jürgen Habermas ve Eleştirel Epistemoloji Üzerine Bir Çalışma*, Ankara 1992; N. Göle, *Modern Mahrem, Medeniyet ve Örtünme*, İstanbul 1991.