

# Search for Self-Identity in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* and *My Name Is Red*

**K. Bhaskar**, Assistant Professor of English, Anna Govt. Arts College, Musiri.

Orhan Pamuk, born on 7 June 1952, is a Turkish literary novelist, screenwriter, academic and Nobel Prize winner in literature in 2006. One of the most prominent novelists in Turkey his job has sold over thirteen million books in 63 languages, making him the best-selling writer in the country. Pamuk is the author of novels including *Silent House*, *The White Castle*, *The Black Book*, *The New Life*, *My Name Is Red*, *Snow*, *The Museum of Innocence*, *A Strangeness in My Mind*, and *The Red-Haired Woman*.

Other cultures, traditions, art, or even technology always challenge and influence identity. Identity is fluid, never fixed, always changing. Likewise, Loomba stresses that "colonial identities are volatile, agonized and in continual flux. This undermines both colonialist and conservative claims to a unified self, as well as advises against viewing difference in culture in an intrinsic or reductional term." (Istanbul, p.271) Moreover, Turkey is now still looking for its identity, whether it is entirely East, wholly West, nationalist or secular. Huddart says identities function as palimpsests. He talks about overwriting identities on which previous writing is still noticeable below newer writing. They are offering a suggestive hybrid identity model. Turkey is still writing its fresh identity over its Islamic Ottoman heritage, which is still noticeable even though the Westernization project had already erased it.

Turkey has three provisional periods to illustrate the phase of creation of its identity: the acquiescence of the Byzantine town to Sultan Mehmed II, the fall of the empire and succeeding Turkey as the town, and the reminiscence for the multicultural past of the town. Istanbul is a model of the palimpsest town complete of magnificence as well as the harmonious various cultures, ethnicity and religion of the Ottoman Empire, destroyed by the Westernization project of Ataturk. The modifications in the ancient houses in Istanbul, destroyed and substituted by the new contemporary apartment houses, demonstrate how the current Turkish identity is overwritten on which the ancient Ottoman identity is still noticeable under the new one as there are still remaining ancient Ottoman buildings and ruins. Mehmed II, Atik Sinan, and Murad III are illustration of Turkish figures who had an oscillation identification predicament. In *My Name is Red* and *The White Castle*, I find that on the miniature painters, Enishte Effendi, as well as Hoja and his Venetian slave, the identity crisis is still gnawing.

Mehmed II continues to search for his identity. Although the Fatih wished to control the West, by inviting many Western artists and researchers, he was also very interested in Western art and science. After capturing Constantinople, by building The Fatih Camii or the Conqueror's mosque, he attempted to erase the glory of the Byzantine Empire, which had ruled supreme for over a many years. However, his attempt to erase the Byzantine Empire's previous grandeur with Conqueror's mosque reveals an irony that

the mosque's architecture was obviously affected by the Hagia Sophia, Christian Byzantium's masterpiece.

As stated in the introduction, Mehmet II, Constantinople's conqueror, is known to have invited many medals and sculptures from Florence and Venice in the 15th century. One is Costanzo da Ferrara, who produces Mehmet the Conqueror's portrait medal, the other is Gentile Bellini, who produces Mehmet II's portrait. Despite having conquered Constantinople, there is still a desire to be the West by inviting an Italian painter to paint him in the style of the Italian rebirth. This European picture of the excellent Ottoman leader could serve as a suitable focus for the willingness of contemporary Turkey to get better some of its European origins and influences in its "fresh turn to Europe."

Stierlin, in *Turkey: From the Selcuks to the Ottomans* claims his background as the son of a Christian mom triggered Mehmed's interest in Christianity as well as Western culture and tradition. Mehmed II also surrounded himself with Greek, Italian, and Central European academics, artists, and engineers. When he captured Byzantium, the young sultan, who was still twenty-four years old, always wanted to learn and comprehend the recent arts and science developments. In addition, he was the first Muslim to take an interest in artillery and entrusted German metal smiths with the manufacturing of his cannons.

Although Mehmed II was interested in Western culture, he also attempted to contest the Byzantine Empire masterpieces that Istanbul and the Ottomans obtained after capturing Constantinople by building The Fatih Camii (the Conqueror's Mosque). The mosque was constructed on the spot of the Holy Apostles' ruined Byzantine church to replace the grand of the Byzantine Christian structures. The Sultan intends to write the new identity of the Ottoman over the destroyed Byzantine structures under the new construction. The Fatih chose a Christian architect, Christodoulos, or better known as Atik Sinan (Sinan the Elder) under his Turkish name. The daily contact of the Ottoman with the Byzantine masterpieces and the context of the architect who was a converted Christian to Islam had heavily affected the mosque's architecture. Furthermore, the design of Sinan is the proof that Hagia Sophia (Western heritage) gave the mosque great impact.

In "painting" his tales, the disputed identity and the oscillation in the identity formation procedures of Turkey become the main colors of Pamuk. Pamuk also combines the capitulation of the Byzantine town, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the nostalgia of the multicultural past of Istanbul with the question of Turkey's disputed identity to present the oscillation between Self and Other in his two chosen works. He delineates how the Other is always present within the Self's historical confines as a threat and seduction. The basic problem in his stories, however, is the identity problem. Pamuk says in Istanbul, along with the quotation in this opening chapter, that we can discover our identity only by imitating the Other. He tells a story that when he was still wanted to become a painter, Utrillo a French painter whose specialization is in cityscape had affected his style of painting and that he had tried to paint the cityscapes and the local landscapes like him. In addition, Pamuk also clarifies that,

the almost-but-not-quite-shameful truth was that I could paint only when I thought I was someone else. I'd imitated a style. I'd imitated a craftsman with his own one of a kind vision and method for painting. Also, not without benefit, I too now had "my" own style and identity.(I, p. 254)

This is how Pamuk and the miniature Islamic painters discover their real identity by using or imitating the painting style of Utrillo and Frank. Hoja additionally applies Western science and innovation in a similar vein with Pamuk and the Islamic painters to forestall the plague and overcome the West so as to compose its crisp personality over its Islamic Ottoman identity.

For example, in *My Name is Red*, Pamuk attempts to show how the miniaturists adopt and mimic the technique of the Italian Renaissance and the sultan who needs to be painted in the way of the Frankish masters. The miniaturists, on the other hand, also fear the loss of the old style of painting challenged by Frankish painting. Uncle Effendi says the love for paintings, illustrations and good books felt by all sultans and rulers can be split into three points:

Because they've learned sincerely to appreciate works of art, they gather distinction while in the meantime storing up books, which after their demises; guarantee the diligence of their fame in this world. . . (MNR, 175)

The quotation above demonstrates how Italian painting operates not only as a kiss, but also as a threat and barrier for the sultan and even the miniaturists to enter the doors of Heaven ... "for Our Prophet says that on Judgment Day, Allah will punish the artists and the idol-makers "(MNR, 175).

Shekure, Enishte's daughter, is also still looking for her real identity as she experiences the oscillation between her disdain for the Frankish painting that her dad admires and her desire to be represented in such a way. Shekure is both "fed up with the pictures he made in impersonation of the Frankish bosses by the miniaturists and tired of his Venice recollections " (MNR, 152). At the end of the tale, she expresses her willingness to use the Italian Renaissance style to have her own portrait.

My whole life, I've secretly very much wanted two paintings made, which I've never mentioned to anybody: my own portrait. ...How happy I'd be today, in my old age which I live out through the comfort of my children if I had a youthful portrayal of myself". (MNR, 443)

What Shekure experiences above is an instance of an unclear willingness to be Others. Her identity search is demonstrated in her desire for her self-portrait. Moreover, as mentioned at the start of this session, only by becoming the "other" can we understand our real identity.

Pamuk complicates the binary Self-Other between Hoja and his Italian slave in *The White Castle*, which has no end. To know their real identity, writing "Why am I what I am" is a way of knowledge and becoming the Others. Through the series of composing the memoirs, both Hoja and his Italian slave share their previous memories so that they later embrace the way and life stories of the Other as their own. (TWC, 63) A certain blurring of identities entails writing memoirs and sharing with each other or sharing memories. Their discussion, science undertakings, and living together become a kind of mutual demolition, destroying what distinguishes each one. The memoir resembles the European novel. Both are

ways to think, understand and imagine, and also a way to imagine yourself as someone else. For Pamuk, European novel has helped him comprehend the boundaries, histories, constantly flowing domestic differences, a fresh culture, and a new civilization of Europe.

Moreover, the memoir has helped both Hoja and his Italian slave to understand the history, culture, and identity of the other as well as to imagine that they are someone else. I contend here that on the private quest for identity, both Hoja and his Italian slave share the same issue. They want to be like someone else, but sometimes with jealousy they want it. It can be seen when the Italian slave wishes to imitate Hoja but also envies him because his master can "play in the plague and the mirror on fear" (TWC, 83).

Hoja tells he's the slave of Italy and he's the slave. Also, the young slave feels Hoja is himself, his very self. (TWC, 98) As stated earlier, I can conclude that *The White Castle* reflects Pamuk's connection with his older brother. He was motivated to write this novel by having a brother who is only eighteen months older. Pamuk's jealousy of his brother is represented in the novel when Hoja is jealous of his slave and his master's slave is jealous. Pamuk suggests that Europe is like a very competitive brother for the East (read: Turkey). Europe is also the alter ego of Turkey, and the Italian slave is the alter ego of Hoja, the power representation. That's precisely what occurred to Pamuk by having as his alter ego his older brother. Both his sister Pamuk and Shevket, as well as his master and his Italian slave, compete all the time. They always care how much they might be influenced by the power or achievement of the other. Pamuk stresses that this jealousy is the anxiety that someone else is influencing reflects the situation of Turkey when it looks west.

In terms of identity exchange and dual identities, at the end of the tale, *The White Castle* introduces the identity switch between Hoja and his slave. When Hoja and his slave exchange their clothes, the identity change is started. In addition, Hoja is also cutting his beard while his slave is letting him grow, making their mirror similarity even more disturbing. (TWC, 84)

"Come, let us look in the mirror together." I looked, and under the raw light of the lamp saw once more how much we resembled one another. ... At that time I had someone I must be; and now I thought he too must be someone like me. The two of us were one person! (TWC, 82)

It can also be seen when Hoja and his Italian slave alter their identity after failing to break the white castle with their war machine.

The erasure of the ancient identity is comparable to the Islamic Ottoman identity that was substituted after the collapse of the Empire in the First World War by the initiative of Ataturk to Westernized Turkey. This situation is comparable to that of Hoja, whose combat weapon fails. As a Turk and write his new identity by becoming his slave and fleeing to the nation of his slave. The identity exchange, symbolized by the exchange of clothes between Hoja and his slave, demonstrates how Turkey abandoned and lost its ancient identity, which the elite Westernists compelled and led suddenly. Mass destructive weapon failure is comparable to the Empire's fall, which was then followed by the creation of

a new republic. Turkey, which has an ambition to promote Westernization, has not been able to go far enough and still rejects its efforts to become the European Union. Turkey is still knocking at the gate of Europe until now, asking for entry, complete of high hopes and excellent intentions, but also a sense of anxiety and fear of dismissal. ...Watching the EU negotiation, seeing that they still don't want us for all our attempts to be Western. Pamuk is highly critical of Attaturk's Westernization project through the exchange of identity between Hoja and his slave, which suddenly destroyed the Islamic Ottoman tradition and simplified the cosmopolitanism of Turkey as well as complicated and multidimensional identity.

According to Almond in "Islam, Melancholy, and Sad, Concrete Minarets," the Orient was for the Westerner not a source of information but self-knowledge, a means by which he could build for himself a "real" identity by immersing himself in the exotic. The Italian slave is moving deeper and deeper into the lives of Hoja and embracing the identity of his master. Consequently, the identity of the Italian slave as a Westerner is obscure and almost invisible as he begins to admire his master and imitate the personality of his master. The Italian slave shares his sadness with Hoja for the Ottoman territory's loss despite being a Westerner. Moreover, "he doesn't even seem to rejoice that with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire there could be a chance for the West to defeat Islam completely. . ."( Kantar,p.131) After listening to the recent orchestra brought from Venice by the ambassador, the slave even feels that Western culture is a pretentious nonsense.

Searching for identity is encountered not only by an person, but also by the individuals of Turkey as one group, one citizen of Stanbul, and one country as well as experiencing and living in the method of identity formation. The forced modernization of Ataturk and all efforts at Europeanizing or dividing Turkey brought the grief to the whole town. Through the Gezi demonstrators and the spirit of unity they carry, they demonstrate that the individuals of Turkey are coming together in the third room to deconstruct their leader's authoritarian who systematically utilizes violence against ethnic and religious minorities and forces Turkey to have only one identity. Hüzün, proposed as "a sense of community, an environment, and a culture" (Istanbul, p. 101) The hüzün they think for their city has breached down the wall that separates the broad individuality built for Muslims and Christians by Turkey's elites, men and women, humanists and republicans have voiced their opinions to challenge the "new colonizer's" power.

### References:

- Almond, I. "Islam, Melancholy, and Sad, Concrete Minarets: The Futility of Narratives in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*", *New Literary History* 34, 1 (2003).
- Boyar, E. & Fleet, K. *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*. First Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2010
- Farred, G. "To Dig a Well with a Needle": Orhan Pamuk's Poem of Comparative Globalization. *The Global South* 1, 2 (2007).
- Huddart, D. *Homi K. Bhabha*. New York: Routledge. 2006.
- Jardine, L. & Brotton, J. *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd. 2000.



- Kantar, D. "The Stylistic Dialogue of East and West in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*". Amsterdam: Rodopi B. V. 2007. A journal compilation in the *Challenging the Boundaries* edited by Işil Baş and Donald C. Freeman. New York: Rodopi, B.V. 2007.
- Komins, B. J. "Cosmopolitanism Depopulated: The Cultures of Integration, Concealment, and Evacuation in İstanbul". *Comparative Literature Studies* 39, 4 East-West Issue (2002).
- Laksana, A. B. "İstanbul: Melankoli yang Mendera". *BASIS* 62 (2013).
- Loomba, A. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Second Edition. Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. 2005.
- Pamuk, O. *The White Castle*. First Edition. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc. 1998. trans. Victoria Holbrook.
- ..., *İstanbul: Memories and the City*, New York: Vintage International. 2006. trans. Maureen Freely.
- ..., *My Name is Red (Benim Adım Karmizi)*. London: Faber & Faber. 2001. trans. E. M. Göknar.
- Stierlin, H. *Turkey: from the Selçuks to the Ottomans*. Köln: Taschen. 2002.

