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The Metamorphosis of Identity: Artistic Expression and Cultural Transformation in Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red and The White Castle*

Kotaba Saleh Fenjan[1]

Ali Salami[2]

Abstract

This article explores the complicated interaction of artistic expression with cultural identity through two novels by Orhan Pamuk: *My Name is Red* and *The White Castle*. The analysis will lean upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together Stuart Hall's view on cultural identity as a fluid entity, Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, and Arjun Appadurai's work on global cultural flows. This research demonstrates how Pamuk's narratives contest given binary oppositions between East and West, and also tradition and modernity, through close textual investigation, reflecting upon questions regarding cultural change within the Ottoman framework. The study shall show how Pamuk's characters negotiate the multiplicities of cultural influence through artistic utterance and personal metamorphosis with a view to creating new identities beyond borders. While tension in *My Name is Red* between Ottoman miniature traditions and Western portraiture is in itself a vehicle toward cultural adaptation, The White Castle presents an identity exchange between an Italian scholar and his Ottoman captor, which shows, through time and interaction, the permeable nature of such a boundary. This study focuses on how globalization equally amplifies traditional binaries and creates opportunities for their transcendence, enriching our understanding of Turkish literary modernism.

1. Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Language and Literatures, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran kotaba.saleh.Fen@ut.ac.ir
2. Associate Professor of English Language and Literatures, Department of English Language and Literatures, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran Salami.a@ut.ac.ir

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It holds the view that cultural identity can be jointly created not simply by negating or fully accepting foreign influxes but by being in creative interaction with both the traditional and the new, and thus provides an important insight into the understanding of cultural change in societies experiencing rapid globalization and modernization.

Keywords: Orhan Pamuk, cultural identity, Ottoman Empire, artistic tradition, modernization, cultural hybridity, Turkish literature

Article Overview and Organization

The paper explores the relationship between cultural identity and artistic expression in the literary production of Orhan Pamuk. The opening part sets the theoretical framework and main arguments, thus giving grounds for a detailed analysis. The research reveals the manner in which the main characters in Pamuk's fiction interact with cultural forces through artistic activity and personal experience.

The study starts with an exploration of the struggle between traditional Ottoman art, as embodied in miniature painting, and Western portraiture within the narrative of *My Name is Red*, along with identity transformation as a theme in *The White Castle*. This study illustrates that Pamuk employs Ottoman historical contexts not merely as backdrop, but rather as a dynamic arena for identity constructions. This historical approach paves the way for examination of the intricate relationship among religion, culture, and modernity, with Turkey playing the special role of a bridge between Islamic tradition and Western modernity.

The paper then analyzes the intricate process of identity formation in *The White Castle*, revealing how captivity can result in extreme psychological and cultural transformation. It applies Edward Said's theoretical frameworks to analyze power relations and artistic conventions underlying the nature of cultural identity.

The last part of the article examines the influence of globalization on Pamuk's fiction, and it demonstrates that his characters demonstrate a synthesis of various cultures in the interdependent modern world. The conclusion asserts that Pamuk, instead of embracing an East-West binary opposition, considers identity as a fluid construct that is continuously configured by historical, cultural, and religious dynamics. The article concludes by highlighting the relevance of Pamuk's approach to the notion of identity in the modern context.

Introduction

This study looks at the interplay between artistic expression and cultural identity in the novels of Orhan Pamuk and offers new insights into the complexity of cultural change. By examining the intricate narrative techniques and symbolic elements in *My Name is Red* and *The White Castle*, the study contributes to our understanding of how literature can reflect and shape social change. Orhan Pamuk's works reveal the human experience through narratives of art, identity and change. Literature can shatter all idealized, official rhetoric, be it that of nation, race, religion or the state. This corresponds to the way Pamuk questions national and social discourses in his novels through literary introspection based on human experience (Afridi et al. 26). Brameswari further emphasizes this quality in Pamuk's work, noting how his narratives explore the challenges stemming from the attempts in inventing Turkey's new ideal identity (Brameswari 2020).

Pamuk's literature reflects the interplay between tradition and modernity in Turkish culture and society. Ertuğrul et al. (2009) state that his work is based on the representation of the overarching concept of modernity in Turkey in conjunction with "Western individuality" (635). In other words, insecure, peripheral or dislocated characters in his novels regularly attempt to imitate Westerners in Ottoman or Turkish historical settings. Pamuk captures Turkey's intermediate state between tradition and modernity. The characters in the novel mimic Western modernity, leading to mixed and tragic results and illustrating the struggle for identity in a rapidly modernizing society (Rossouw 2017).

History is another motif in his writings, especially Ottoman history in a European context and also the transformation of the Ottoman Empire into the modern Middle East. Like himself, his characters are nationalized, orientalized individuals in search of their identity, looking for other narratives of identification. Referring to the Ottoman-Islamic past and its legacies, Pamuk opposes the conservative state figures, theses of national modernization and secularization. His works make clear how Turkish literary modernism is embedded in the relationship between religion and state secularism, correcting imbalances that favor secular state interests. As Avrutina (2020) notes, the Nobel Prize winner is considered a liberal author who supports

Eurocentrism in his work.

Pamuk addresses the tension between individual self-expression and societal expectations, “These restrictions and limitations affect not only the freedom of the individual, but also the way others are seen through the narrow prisms of race, class, religion and nation” (Afridi et al. 26). His characters struggle to reconcile personal desires with traditional cultural norms while adapting to inevitable cultural change. As Dollar (2015) notes, his novels primarily explore the concepts of identity within religion and the East-West dichotomy based on Edward Said’s theory. His novel ‘Snow’ also depicts the dichotomy between East and West (Brameswari 2020).
What is special about Pamuk’s work is that he is able to effortlessly set the modern narrative in the historical period of the sixteenth century, creating distinctive, fully realized characters. The attention to detail and complexity in character development does not make the historical figures artificial, as seen in *My Name is Red.*

Analysis

This tension between the preservation of cultural heritage and modernity gives Pamuk’s work a decisive impetus. Through his work, Pamuk portrays modernity as a powerful, multi-layered entity that simultaneously liberates the individual from tradition and puts cultural identity at risk (Brameswari 2020; Dollar 2015). Artists, writers and intellectuals who act as intermediaries between the world of tradition and modernity often attempt to bridge this gap by using their art to create new worldviews.

Pamuk proposes to connect tradition and modernity through a dynamic cultural dialog instead of choosing between them. According to Fisk,

> “Pamuk is praised for the infrastructural work he does between the Judeo-Christian West and the Islamic East, building a bridge where one is needed, a diplomat between warring factions and a window from one side of the world to the other” (19).

My Name is Red and *The White Castle*, set in the Ottoman Empire, develop these themes through their use of art, identity and transformation. These novels form a rich tapestry on which to analyze how such fundamental aspects of human life are interconnected. In doing so, Pamuk explores profound questions of individualism, tradition and self-discovery. He foregrounds the complex intertwining of these

themes and challenges the reader's understanding of art, identity and change. In this regard, identity can be constructed through religion and spirituality in two of his novels analyzed by Dollar (2015).

In *My Name is Red*, Pamuk uses several explicit narrators, including horses, trees, ink, death and Satan. The various narrative voices are digressive but seem to contribute to the development of a central plot. The novel begins dramatically enough with a dead miniaturist speaking from beyond the grave, revealing his own murder and uncovering the mystery that drives the story forward. Each narrator speaks in the first person, creating a mosaic of voices that coalesce into a single, unified narrative flow.

In his work, Pamuk shows how different cultures interact and influence each other, while also incorporating historical elements. He does this to address issues of self and identity, especially the difficulty of finding oneself when surrounded by many cultural traditions. People can create a harmonious whole (dynamic unity) by bridging different cultural perspectives and traditions (symbolic cultural horizons) with creativity and empathetic understanding (Bharathan and Krishnamayi 2016).The central conflict of the novel arises from the clash of traditional Ottoman miniature painting and Western artistic influences. The Ottoman miniatures, which originate from the Persian tradition and are influenced by Mongolian and Chinese art, show standardized faces that look almost identical. This artistic convention clashes with the introduction of Western portraiture and creates tensions that catalyze the events of the novel, including the murder at the beginning.

The White Castle, a novel set against the backdrop of the Ottoman Renaissance between the 15th and 19th centuries, deals with similar issues of East-West cultural exchange. The period covered is a major development characterized by the integration of the Ottoman Empire into Western technologies and a more global, capitalist economy. As Camoglu notes, "This geopolitical reassessment and its competing denunciations were closely interwoven with the literary fabric of the time, revealing among other things the contingencies of this particular moment of modernity" (1).

Both novels problematize the reductive narrative of Ottoman history and Turkish modernity. Pamuk revives neglected aspects of Ottoman material culture and transforms elements such as manuscripts and miniatures from mere historical

artifacts into central narrative devices. In this way, he "criticizes Turkish modernity and creates a new image through the lens of historical and archival realities" (Goknar 39). In *The White Castle*, the relationship between the Venetian slave and his Ottoman master symbolizes cultural otherness and identity formation, as both characters embody aspects of their respective cultures and influence each other (Soumya 2021).

The figure of the Italian scholar from *The White Castle* also symbolizes a problematic relationship between Western and Islamic traditions. His relationship with Hoja becomes a powerful metaphor for cultural exchange and identity change. As he says in *My Name is Red*:

> "I would like my dear readers who have given close attention to my story and my fate to bear these two things in mind, as they are the genesis of my world. [.] In the years I endured my amorous exile, I often thought how I was in fact deeply indebted to Shekure and my love for her, because they had enabled me to adapt optimistically to life and the world" (Pamuk 25).

The Ottoman Empire's location at the crossroads between Europe and Asia made it a unique melting pot for the fusion of cultures. Both novels explore this through the prism of art and esthetics in *My Name is Red* or through the relationship between prisoner and captor in *The White Castle*. This even goes beyond a simple cultural comparison in questions of identity, modernity and tradition. Such an elision of history can be seen through cultural interweavings and imaginations for the purpose of forming a dynamic unity in Turkey.

Pamuk's narrative technique uses seemingly trivial objects — coins, trees, dogs — as symbols for alternative cultural narratives. This approach allows him to critique both Western modernization and traditional Ottoman perspectives while avoiding simplistic binaries. Instead, he presents a nuanced view of cultural exchange in which tradition and modernity coexist in complex, sometimes contradictory ways. Ertuğrul et al. (2009) note that modernity and Western individuality coexist in Pamuk's novels.

Through these works, Pamuk challenges both the pejorative view of Ottoman history and uncritical narratives of modernization. He presents the Ottoman period not only as a precursor to secular modern Turkey, but as a rich cultural period worthy of serious artistic and literary exploration. This reinterpretation allows for a more

nuanced understanding of Turkish identity while challenging prevailing narratives of secularization:

> Every picture serves to tell a story," I said. "The miniaturist, in order to beautify the manuscript we read, depicts the most vital scenes: the first time lovers lay eyes on each other; the hero Rüstem cutting off the head of a devilish monster; Rüstem's grief when he realizes that the stranger he's killed is his son; the love-crazed Mejnun as he roams a desolate and wild Nature among lions, tigers, stags and jackals; the anguish of Alexander, who, having come to the forest before a battle to divine its outcome from the birds, witnesses a great falcon tear apart his woodcock. Our eyes, fatigued from reading these tales, rest upon the pictures. (Pamuk, My Name is Red 18)

In *My Name is Red*, the arrival of the Venetian master symbolizes the confrontation between Western artistic influence and Ottoman tradition. This clash is explicitly recognized by the Sultan's desire to demonstrate cultural adaptability:

> "Our Sultan, Refuge of the World, wanted to demonstrate that in the thousandth year of the Muslim calendar He and His state could make use of the styles of the Franks as well as the Franks themselves" (Pamuk, My Name is Red 25).

This tension reflects broader cultural dynamics in Turkey, as noted by Afridi: "Pamuk's version of Turkish Islam encourages questions of religion and the gaze of the colonial traveler in Turkey, creating a modern dilemma for Turks, as Turkey is the only openly secular country in the Islamic world" (22).

The White Castle explores similar themes through the relationship between an Italian scholar and his captor Hoja. Their interaction epitomizes Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity, where "shared meanings or shared conceptual maps" shape understanding between groups and the self is constructed through belonging to "distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and above all, national cultures" (Ouda 4). The novel challenges conventional narratives of authorship and cultural difference through what Pitman describes as "deliberate narrative strategies, including omissions, substitutions, and displacements" (64).

Both novels examine the transformation of identity through different lenses. In *My Name is Red*, identity is inextricably linked to artistic expression, as the miniaturists

struggle between traditional anonymity and Western-style individual recognition. The internal conflicts of the artist community reflect the larger societal tensions between tradition and innovation. The perspective techniques and individualism of the Venetian master challenge established Ottoman artistic conventions and create a microcosm of cultural conflict. The oscillation between modernity through a balanced identity and cultural identities has also been emphasized in his work (Brameswari 2020).

Moreover, artifacts and manuscripts in the novels play an important role in intensifying cultural identity and artistic changes that emphasize cultural change (Soumya 2021). *The White Castle* is a novel of identity in which the main characters undergo a gradual change. The Italian scholar is forced into captivity, learns about and even embraces Ottoman culture by adopting its language and way of life, while he is forced to reconsider his Western views. Similarly, through his relationship with his captor, Hoja is made to reconsider his preconceived notions about Western thinking. This relationship develops into a game of knowledge and power that shows how identity can be shaped through cultural interaction.

The novels address the question of what role art can play in the search for identity in different ways: *My Name is Red* literally draws on miniature painting and makes artistic techniques work metaphorically for much broader contexts, namely philosophical or even religious viewpoints, so that the artistic dispute becomes a warhorse that carries larger questions of modernization vs. tradition in the very Ottoman society. *The White Castle* is not only about the visual arts, but also about storytelling and narratives, which are also artistic forms of identity. The transfer of artistic expression through the change of story and role between the characters is translated into a changed perception of the self and the other. As Soumya (2021), who analyzed Snow, states, his characters cannot decide between modernity and tradition, which leads to a loss of self.

The cultural interaction between East and West is subtly addressed in both works. Instead of a simple binarism, they show in a complicated way how the cultures influence and change each other. In *My Name is Red* this leads to debates about the question of artistic technique in representation, in *The White Castle* to personal transformation and the confusion and blurring of individual identity.

The theme of power relations runs through both stories: In *My Name is Red* this occurs through the workings of artistic authority and religious tradition, in *The White Castle* through the relationship between prisoner and captor. In both cases, there are fluid and complex power relationships in which the characters' roles and identities shift and influence each other. Such influence can show how the writer's works portray power and dynamic identity (Soumya 2021).

These novels thus suggest that identity is not fixed but fluid and always interacts with culture. Encountering other cultural viewpoints through art, storytelling, personal relationships, or whatever, changes the characters in both works. This is neither a simple assimilation nor a rejection of foreign influences, but a very complex process of negotiation between different cultural traditions and individual identities. Moraru describes this negotiation as a form of embedded cosmopolitanism where characters exist in a world of increasing interconnectedness that both challenges and enriches their sense of self (Moraru 2012).

The theme of transformation is presented differently in *My Name is Red* and *The White Castle*. In *My Name is Red*, the transformation takes place through artistic development, as the Ottoman miniaturists grapple with Western influences. The figures are confronted with inner conflicts as they navigate between traditional techniques and innovative approaches, as seen in the confrontation of a figure with a Western portrait: "More than anything else, the picture showed an individual, someone like me. It was an unbeliever, of course, not one of us. But as I stared at him, I had the feeling that I resembled him" (Pamuk, My Name is Red 19). Here the elements of modernity, power and history together construct a dynamic identity. As Hall (1992) notes, identity is constructed through self-regulation on the part of historical and powerful discourses.

In *The White Castle*, the transformation is more psychological, as identity is explored through the developing relationship between the Italian scholar and Hoja. As Afridi notes, both Pamuk and Svevo demonstrate that "psychoanalytic thought transcends national and cultural boundaries and challenges the notion that it belongs exclusively to Western approaches to human psychology" (26). This challenges the conventional dichotomies between colonizer and colonized, as it implies that the categories of difference are more fluid than traditionally assumed.

The artistic identity in *My Name is Red* arises from the tension between collective tradition and individual expression. The Ottoman miniaturists are torn between the desire to be recognized and the part of their culture that rejects individual identity and builds on its conventions. Every brushstroke is an act of negotiation between the creative impulse of the individual and cultural tradition.

The rich Ottoman cultural heritage forms more than just a backdrop in both novels. In *My Name is Red*, manuscript illumination represents cultural pride and continuity, as artists are expected to adhere to techniques that have been passed down through generations. However, these same artists yearn for individual recognition, creating a tension between artistic innovation and traditional constraints.

The White Castle is an exploration of the same themes, only through the narrative of captivity. Such a relationship between Hoja and his captive challenges traditional hierarchies, as their identities blur and change with each other's interactions. Their roles and narrative exchanges show how individual identity can transcend traditional social and cultural boundaries.

Both novels are about the tension of dealing with one's private authenticity in the face of societal pressures. In *My Name is Red*, the artists risk scandal with innovative elements in their work, while in *The White Castle*, the relationship between the characters defies the conventional power dynamic of prisoner and captive. Nevertheless, as Bhaskar (2019) notes, there are elements of envy and erosion of historical identity. This could lead to both figures taking on a regulated and negotiated character based on processes of power and institutions (Hall 1992).

This tension between tradition and innovation reflects a broader cultural dynamic within Ottoman society. The artists in *My Name is Red* are artisans, but more importantly, they express their drive for a unique creative voice in terms of their respect for culture. Similarly, the characters in *The White Castle* are pushed to reconcile their personal identities with their socially prescribed roles.

Through these works, Pamuk suggests that transformation - whether artistic or personal - is a complicated negotiation between individual desire and cultural tradition. Rather than portraying this as a simple struggle between East and West, between old and new, he writes in great detail to show how people manage to change with their culture while trying to preserve their heritage. Nevertheless, such navigation can lead

to grief over the loss of cultural identity (Soumya 2021).

The novels therefore ultimately suggest that individual identity, whether through art or personal relationships, is forged in dynamic interaction with tradition - not in its simple rejection or acceptance. It is a process of transformation in which one must engage with both cultural heritage and new influences in order to create a synthesis and not a contradiction. In other words: While this interplay is being shaped, it can lead to tensions (Toker 2019).

Ottoman world in the analyzed novels

Pamuk explores Ottoman miniature paintings in *My Name is Red* and uses them as a metaphor to describe the broader cultural conflicts in the modernization of the empire. The characters in the novel reflect the historical experience of the Ottoman Empire succumbing to Western influences in the tension between individualism and collective identity. By arguing that identity is a flexible construct shaped by historical and cultural factors, rather than a strict binary, as Parpală and Afana (2013) have noted, Pamuk's work challenges the East-West dichotomy. This underpins the findings of previous studies that discuss how Pamuk creates a hybrid literary canon that situates his characters in a chronotope that defies easy categorization and captures the complexity of Istanbul's cultural milieu (e.g. Erol 2011).

Similarly, *The White Castle* offers a story that deals with identity in the context of intercultural communication and change. Against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world, the protagonist's experience of doubling and mimicry is a commentary on broader existential questions. In the same vein, Khanum (2021) emphasizes how the historical context of Turkish society, where the desire for a unique Turkish identity clashes with the dominance of Western culture, is linked to Pamuk's reflections on identity in this book. Pamuk's illustrated manuscripts as symbols of cultural identity were indicative of his understanding of the artistic conflict arising from these cultural adaptations.

Western artistic techniques and traditional Islamic artistic expression are at odds with each other in the manuscripts. This dichotomy is evident in the reflections of Abshavi and Moayedi, who claim that Pamuk's stories use themes of duplication and imitation to provide a space for individual and collective identity formation

(Abshavi and Moayedi 2020). As the characters wrestle with their position in a society characterized by cultural hybridity, Pamuk's artistic expression becomes a tool with which to examine the transformation of identity. Moreover, the stories Pamuk tells have an impact that goes beyond the Islamic concept of modernity. According to Mahdavi, the diversity of Muslim responses to modernity challenges the universality of a single Western concept of modernity and instead points to the existence of multiple modernities, each with unique historical and cultural characteristics (2013). Such a perspective is consistent with Pamuk's themes, which portray identity as complex and the result of historical, religious and cultural intersection. To summarize, *My Name is Red* and *The White Castle* offer perceptive analyzes of Ottoman identity, artistic expression and cultural change. Pamuk challenges traditional notions of cultural identity by portraying it as an ever-changing interplay of influences, offering a nuanced look at a complex society in which a range of characters balance modernity and tradition. This collection testifies to the importance of Pamuk's work to the discussion of identity change and cultural hybridity in contemporary literature through a compilation of scholarly views.

Complex Interplay between Religion, Culture, and Modernity

Pamuk's question of religious belonging and secularism reflects the ambiguous positioning of Turkey between its Islamic heritage and Western-style modernization. Indeed, as Afridi observed in the current globalized era, "the boundaries between the personal and the political, the familiar and the foreign have become so intertwined that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between Eastern and Western influences" (3). This complexity expresses itself in political aspects, which Atacan calls "the constitution of a political identity and. the relationship between society and the political apparatus" (155). Yagcioglu's examination of silence in Pamuk's works offers additional insight into how his characters navigate the unspoken tensions between religious identity and secular modernity that characterize contemporary Turkish experience (Yagcioglu 2011).

The tension between religion and secularism is acted out in the characters' negotiation of personal faith and changing society. As Goknar notes, "If the categories of 'Islam' and 'state' are cultural constructs that carry narrative and political force in

modern Turkey, representing them in literature evokes dominant 'orthodoxies'" (30). Instead of a simple opposition between religious and secular views, Pamuk captures the contradictions and nuances inherent in an attitude that seeks to preserve tradition while embracing modernity. As Soumya (2021) and Toker (2019) note, this can lead to clashes and heated debates.

In *My Name is Red*, illustrated manuscripts are powerful symbols of cultural identity and artistic expression. These works transcend their physical form and embody Ottoman cultural heritage while serving as a vehicle for individual artistic expression. The manuscripts represent both the collective tradition and the personal ambition of artists trying to make their mark while working within conventions.

The figure of Olive embodies this tension with her apple drawing, working within the manuscript tradition and challenging traditional artistic conventions. This is a subtle rebellion, similar to how Hall (1992) sees cultural identity: as constantly changing through complex interactions — never static, never preset.

The symbolism of manuscripts can therefore go beyond artistic expression to include issues of cultural preservation and identity formation. In this sense, works such as Husrev and Shirin become iconic representations of Ottoman cultural identity past and present, embodying the empire's commitment to its heritage. Certainly, the painstaking process of manuscript creation reflects the preservation of tradition and development in the field of artistic expression.

The treatment of themes in most of Pamuk's novels offers a rich depiction of the Turkish cultural and social landscape. His characters often symbolize the struggle between old traditions and new adaptations in the midst of a rapidly changing society. In doing so, he avoids the rather superficial divisions between religious and secular viewpoints and shows the complicated ways in which people carve out their identities within a new social context.

The power of the illustrated manuscripts in *My Name is Red* lies in their dual role as preservers of tradition and agents of change. The artists' work within established conventions and fight for the expression of individual creativity — a reflection of larger societal tensions between tradition and modernity. The manuscripts become symbols of collective memory and personal ambition, representing the complex interplay between cultural heritage and individual expression.

In these works, Pamuk argues that cultural identity is created in the dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation and not in the rigid adherence to norms. His characters move in the spaces between Eastern and Western influences, religious and secular perspectives, and collective and individual identities to show the fluid nature of cultural identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Metamorphosis and Identity Exchange in *The White Castle*

A thought-provoking book about identity exchange and metamorphosis, *The White Castle* is a captivating exploration of the mutability of personal identity and the transformative power of captivity. The story's main characters, Hoja and the unnamed protagonist, are caught up in a complex web of events that subvert traditional notions of who they are and blur the boundaries between identity and self. *The White Castle* revolves around the idea of transformation through captivity. The Ottoman Turks capture the protagonist, a young Italian scholar, at the beginning of the book. His life, which until now has been characterized by his academic activities and intellectual interests, changes drastically and unexpectedly when he is imprisoned in a foreign country. His identity undergoes a significant change as a result of the events that occur during his imprisonment.

An important turning point in the story is the role reversal between the protagonist and his captor Hoja. What begins as an obviously horrific and forced circumstance quickly undergoes a significant change. The characters are drawn into a world in which their roles are not predetermined and the boundaries between kidnapper and captive become blurred. The transformation that takes place illustrates how malleable identity is and how external events have the remarkable ability to change a person's perception of themselves. The main character has to get used to his new identity as a kidnapper. He has to cope with the expectations and challenges of this new role. This adjustment is a more significant psychological change than just a survival strategy. Captivity leads to a profound exchange of identities. It shakes the foundations of the character's self-image and identity.

Identity Exchange as a Form of Adaptation

The identity swap in *The White Castle* is a case of complicated adaptation. The initial role reversal is for survival. In order to secure their lives, the protagonist and

Hoja swap identities so that they can survive. Over time, it seems that this kind of adaptation is not just superficial, but extends into the soul, a complete psychological transformation. The characters not only take on the roles of others, but in the same breath must also adopt the perspectives, behaviors and expectations associated with them. And this is a process that goes from the outside in and becomes deeply personal. This challenges fixed definitions of identity and leads to a reformation that touches the deepest core of the characters themselves. What is most interesting about *The White Castle* is that this exchange of identities is not just a survival strategy, but a profound exploration of the malleability of personal identity. The characters do not just react to their situation, they actively create and recreate their identities and eventually begin to question the stability of their selves.

This exchange of identity by the characters refutes the fact that one's identity is something immutable. The novel posits that identity is not just something innate, but is also formed through interaction with the world and the external forces that come into play. In the story, his transformation from scholar to prisoner calls into question everything he has believed and thought about himself. He must reconcile his past with his present and take on a new role that requires different skills, attitudes and behaviors. This change underlines the central theme of the novel - that identity is not a static and immovable concept, but a fluid and evolving construct. By confronting the rigors of his new identity, the reader is forced to reflect on how malleable the self actually is. The novel encourages reflection on how external circumstances can both shape and redefine who we are. It shows that our sense of identity is not fixed, but can change depending on the world that surrounds us.

Throughout history, these boundaries have begun to dissolve. However, the role reversal does not only remain at the level of outward appearance, but also extends to the character's thoughts, feelings and memories. It is not a purely physical dissolution of boundaries, but a very psychological one.

The characters not only swap their outer roles, but also their inner worlds. They take on each other's thoughts, feelings and experiences and lose themselves in each other's identity. The theme emphasizes the interdependence of people and how shared experiences change one's self-image. Most importantly, his inner monologs bring out deep changes in him. They show how his mind reflects the slow merging of

identities, where the distinction between his original self and the identity of his captor begins to blur. This dissolution of boundaries challenges the notion of an unchanging self and characterizes the novel as one that explores how circumstances can change people. Furthermore, Orhan Pamuk masterfully explores the duality of identity and paints a vivid picture of characters living in a constant state of dual existence. This is a story in which the characters are playing their part in life, but are actually their true selves. This means that they are fighting an inner battle of great depth and exploring the multi-layered human nature. Bhaskar (2019) establishes that such a transformation in coexistence is possible, as depicted in the writer's work.

In it, the protagonist, who plays Hoja, comes to terms with his inner conflict: an attempt at reconciliation with one side as a scholar and learned Ottoman. This is expressed not only by the fact that he puts on his captor's clothes, but also by the fact that he comes to terms with his captor's mentality and the consequences associated with it. It is this continuous negotiation of opposing identities that underlines the narrative's thematic preoccupation with duality.

Cultural Otherness

Edward Said's concept of 'cultural otherness', often referred to as 'othering', is a central theme in both *The White Castle* and *My Name is Red*. This idea explores how the East is portrayed as fundamentally different and alien to the West, often leading to misunderstandings, misrepresentations and a sense of exoticism. Turkey, which bridges the geographical and ideological divide between East and West and between the West and the Islamic world, has often been a focal point in discussions of cultural conflict. Following Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar, who used the metaphor of Janus - the two-faced Roman god symbolizing transitions and dualities - to describe the mental divide in Turkey shifting from an Eastern to a Western orientation, Orhan Pamuk has depicted Turkey as a "Janus nation". In this depiction, Turkey embodies inherent contradictions between generations, including conflicts between Eastern and Western values, secularism and religion, and modernity and tradition. Rather than choosing sides, Pamuk argued for the acceptance and integration of these different aspects, arguing that Turkey's identity is enriched by the acceptance of these contradictions (Toker 5).

In the following passage, cultural differences between Eastern and Western societies are sharply delineated through the perspective of a horse:

> It displeases me that Frankish infidels parade their women around half naked, indifferent to pious modesties, that they don't understand the pleasures of coffee and handsome boys, and that they roam about with clean-shaven faces, yet with hair as long as women's, claiming that Jesus is also the Lord God—Allah protect us. I become so aggravated by these Franks that if I ever came across one, I'd give him a good mule kick. (Pamuk, My Name is Red 238-239)

This excerpt impressively illustrates the cultural difference through several key elements. It emphasizes the fundamental religious and social differences between Islamic and Christian societies while expressing a sense of cultural superiority and contempt for Western customs. The passage highlights the contrasting approaches to gender norms, religious beliefs and personal appearance, and uses strong language that reveals an active hostility towards the cultural 'other'. Through this vivid description, we see how deep-rooted cultural differences can foster prejudice and hostility between societies, even as artistic and cultural exchange continues between them. The use of a horse as narrator adds complexity to this critique and allows for a more direct and unvarnished expression of cultural bias than a human character could.

In both novels, the characters grapple with the notion of 'otherness' as they work out their interactions with cultures that they initially see as foreign, exotic and fundamentally different from their own. Said argues that historical views of the Orient, like those of today, are full of stereotypes, cultural misunderstandings and prejudices based on ethnicity and religion, all of which should be revised or discarded. He emphasizes the need to recognize and understand the difference between 'the West' and 'the Other'. Novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz, Orhan Pamuk and Mohsin Hamid are examples of such awareness in their works. Said suggests moving from a methodology based on 'visions' to understand the Orient to a methodology based on 'narratives', which means engaging with the textured and dense historical context that harbors a variety of local stories told by people. The literature of Mahfouz provides an excellent insight into this theme, while Pamuk explores a similar dynamic of the Eastern and Western self in his exploration of Turkey's cultural topography (Afridi

et.al.9). In *The White Castle*, Italo is an ideal embodiment of 'cultural otherness'. He begins his journey with prejudiced and stereotypical views of the Ottoman Empire and its inhabitants.

These concepts are deeply rooted in the Western view, nurtured by centuries of Western representations of the East. When he is captured and enters the Ottoman world, he is confronted with a culture that is very different from his own, or so it seems to him at first. In the eyes of the protagonist, the Ottoman Empire is something else – a country with foreign customs, languages and traditions. He struggles with this feeling of otherness as he tries to find his way through the complicated intricacies of Ottoman life. This novel highlights the misunderstandings and tensions that can arise when two cultures with different worldviews meet. We see through him the process of 'othering' as he tries to make sense of the strangeness and unfamiliarity while being aware of his limitations. However, as the plot progresses, the novel pushes the reader to overcome this one-dimensional Western view through the protagonist.

My Name is Red takes a different but equally profound approach to cultural otherness. It deals with the idea of the 'other' in the context of art and identity. The tension in the novel revolves around the clash between Western and Ottoman artistic traditions. The Venetian master, who represents the Western point of view, is juxtaposed with the Ottoman art world, in which the miniaturists maintain their own esthetic and cultural identity. The novel examines how the Venetian master initially sees the Ottoman tradition as something different. He sees the Ottoman approach to art, especially the use of miniatures and illustrations, as foreign and different from his training as an artist. The Venetian master's view of the Ottoman figures, such as his mistress Shekure and the other miniaturists, also reflects this sense of otherness. The confrontation of the figures with their cultural otherness is framed by the clash of artistic traditions. Furthermore, these books reflect Edward Said's idea of knowledge and power, which are intertwined in Western depictions of the East. The relationship between the prisoner and the captor in *The White Castle* illustrates the power dynamic. A complex power dynamic is reflected in the initial captivity of the Italian scholar and his role reversal with Hoja. At first, the captor Hoja controls the hostage and directs the scholar's activities and lifestyle. However, the power dynamic changes when the roles are reversed. The captive can now challenge the

authority of the kidnapper as he has the captor's identity and knowledge. This shift in the balance of power emphasizes the importance of knowledge.

A significant part of the story is shaped by the knowledge and understanding of Italian scholars in a variety of disciplines, particularly astronomy and astrology:

> Two years ago I traveled once again to Venice as the Sultan's ambassador. I observed at length the portraits that the Venetian masters had made. I did so without knowing to which scene and story the pictures belonged, and I struggled to extract the story from the image. One day, I came across a painting hanging on a palazzo wall and was dumbfounded.
>
> More than anything, the image was of an individual, somebody like myself. It was an infidel, of course, not one of us. As I stared at him, though, I felt as if I resembled him. Yet he didn't resemble me at all. He had a full round face that seemed to lack cheekbones, and moreover, he had no trace of my marvelous chin. Though he didn't look anything like me, as I gazed upon the picture, for some reason, my heart fluttered as if it were my own portrait. (Pamuk, My Name is Red 119)

The scholar is able to negotiate his new role and undermine the authority of the Hoja by using knowledge as a source of power. The novel's complex relationship between power and knowledge is evident through the exchange of identities, both intellectual and physical. The production of illustrated manuscripts is one of the many artistic traditions that characterize the Ottoman Empire. Within the creative community, power struggles arise from the conflict between the traditional definition of art and the desire for personal artistic expression. The Venetian master challenged the conventional Ottoman approach to art by embodying Western knowledge and creative methods. His perspective and expertise brought something new to the Ottoman art scene. The characters' negotiations of their roles and the impact of knowledge on their creative choices, especially those of the Venetian master and the miniaturists, show the dynamics of power. The characters in *My Name is Red* must weigh the implications of absorbing new information while preserving tradition, because knowledge is a source of power. The power struggles in the artistic community are a reminder of how knowledge can influence cultural identity and how people challenge

established norms by expressing their own points of view.

In his writings, Pamuk experiments with a variety of narrative devices, from metafiction to social realism, before developing creative manifestations of Istanbul cosmopolitanism that blend internal and external influences. This literary development demonstrates that Turkishness is influenced by a range of cultural contexts, including Ottoman heritage, Sufism, Islam and even Orientalism, in addition to simple ethno-nationalism. Pamuk uses the novel to challenge the Turkish state politically and to question the secularization thesis that underlies Turkish modernity (Goknar 21). As Soumya notes in relation to *The White Castle*, the depiction of opposition to the West is characterized by fluidity and dialog in order to soften the harshness of this opposition.

Globalization and Cultural Exchange: A Shifting Paradigm

The literary works of Orhan Pamuk reveal the profound effects of globalization on Turkish society. In the interaction of his characters with external influences, Pamuk vividly paints a picture of complicated negotiations about cultural otherness and reflects on the challenges and opportunities that arise in the Turkish context. The exchange of ideas, cultures and influences, accelerated by globalization, is at the heart of Pamuk's stories. On these pages, the characters themselves often find themselves at the crossroads of different cultural currents, caught up in a clash of cultures that by no means goes in only one direction.

The Turkish characters themselves actively participate in and influence the changing dynamics of the globalized world by demonstrating a mutual exchange of cultural ideas. Pamuk's depiction of cultural exchange and hybridity reflects the changing face of cultural identity in the Turkish landscape.

For instance, in the following passage,

> Herat painting and Istanbul ornamentation happily merged in Olive. [...] Black said it was Olive who showed the most enthusiasm for and the most ease with the styles of the Frankish masters admired by his late Enishte. [...] Whether Olive was more deeply and secretly bound to the Herat styles—which went back to his father's mentor Siyavush and Siyavush's mentor Muzaffer, back to the era of Bihzad and the old masters—than he appeared to be, but it always

made me wonder whether Olive harbored other hidden tendencies. (Pamuk, My Name is Red 280-281)

Pamuk illustrates how artistic traditions from different regions (Herat, Istanbul and European/'Frankish' styles) began to merge and influence each other, indicating an early form of cultural globalization. The text highlights both the opportunities and the tensions that arose - while some artists embraced new styles, others remained committed to traditional approaches, illustrating the complex dynamics of cultural exchange and preservation during this period.

He depicts how Turkish society has adapted to the changes brought about by globalization and emphasizes the dynamic nature of cultural otherness. There are entanglements between the West and the East, and in this regard, literature can portray how the tensions can be reduced through negotiated identity. By coping with these features of globalization, the characters became examples of the multiple dimensions of Turkish cultural identity, which is not a dead construct but a dynamically changing entity under the influence of the global currents of the 21st century.

Identity and Cultural Hybridity

Many of Pamuk's characters illustrate the complexity of cultural hybridity. In a world characterized by globalization and cultural exchange, people often find themselves at a crossroads between different cultural traditions. The clash of East and West in the Turkish context is the clash of external cultures and an inner duality that the characters experience. In *My Name is Red*, for example, it is the character of the black man himself who best embodies the play with a complex identity. As a liminar of Western influence and positioned in the middle between Eastern and Western artistic traditions, the inner turmoil he feels to express his artistry can be seen as his small replica playing for the cultural hybridity among all Turkish people. This duality in the character reflects the way many Turks negotiate the difficult cultural terrain where East meets West.

Many characters in Pamuk's novels experience a profound personal transformation as they grapple with cultural otherness. This otherness can be used as a filter when analyzing his works (Sumaya 2021). This transformation is linked to the search for one's own identity - a journey that is inextricably linked to interaction

with foreign cultures. In White Castle, the role reversal between the Italian scholar and Hoja sets them both on a path of transformation. Thus Hoja, a prisoner and initially a symbol of Turkish tradition, begins to search for his own identity after being confronted with Western ideas and perspectives by the Italian scholar. This kind of transformation illustrates the malleability of personal and cultural identities, that they are never fixed but are constantly changing under the influence of external forces (Göknar 2006).

> Once in a while I still see in my dreams that person who used to be me, or who I now believe was me, and wake up drenched in sweat. This person who brings to mind now the faded colors, the dream-like shades of those lands that never were, the animals that never existed, the incredible weapons we later invented year after year, was twenty-three years old then, had studied 'science and art' in Florence and Venice, believed he knew something of astronomy, mathematics, physics, painting. (Pamuk, White Castle 11)

Furthermore, many of Pamuk's works contain the themes of memory and nostalgia as integral parts of identity. Personal or collective memories play an important role in the way the characters perceive their identity and cultural affiliation. In *My Name is Red*, the characters struggle against their memories of the greatness and cultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire. These memories become a touchstone for their understanding of identity in the context of otherness. The novel questions how collective memory and nostalgia can shape personal identity, and it emphasizes the role of the past in shaping the present. Canefe argues that this deliberate suppression of historical memory represents "an alarming degree of amnesia institutionalized by the Turkish nation-state" (139), a calculated strategy aimed at inducing widespread cultural amnesia and implementing what she describes as "official and popularized forgetting" (140).

Any consideration of the interplay between cultural otherness and personal identity must take place in the context of globalization. In a world with increasingly porous borders, people must navigate a globalized landscape in which cultural influences are omnipresent. The characters in Pamuk's works often find themselves at a crossroads of globalization, facing decisions that can reshape their identity (Soumya 2021). The novels foreground the fleeting nature of identity in a globalized

world and raise the question of how individuals and societies define themselves in an ever-changing landscape.

Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* and White Castle feature characters struggling with binary oppositions such as East/West, Islam/secularism, reality/representation and tradition/modernization.

Afridi explains, "Narratives can explore every dimension of life, from art to science to religion to war, and we consider the novel as an essential map of all disciplines in multiple dimensions" (2). While previous studies highlighted the role of binaries such as secular and religious or traditional and modern (Dollar 2015), this study interlaces globalization as a force to identity. Such a novel perspective can better explicate the works authored by Pamuk.

Conclusion

The entire cultural hybridity, the change of identity and the interaction between tradition and modernity in Turkish society as well as in the Ottoman Empire can be unraveled in great detail in *The White Castle* and in *My Name is Red*. In both books, the stories are very detailed and show that religious traditions, artistic forms of expression and the mixing of East and West have a great influence on the development of individual and collective identities. In *My Name is Red*, traditional Ottoman miniature painting and Western artistic influences collide, suggesting broader cultural conflicts. By using multiple narrators and emphasizing artistic identity, the book is about finding a balance between embracing innovation and preserving cultural heritage. *The White Castle* is also a novel of identity transformation, in which the relationship between an Italian scholar and his Ottoman captive demonstrates how cross-cultural interaction can lead to a flexible, shifting sense of self. Both works resist traditional representations of Ottoman history and Turkish modernity as well as simplistic East-West divisions. Instead, they present identity as a dynamic idea shaped by historical, cultural and religious influences. By portraying the Ottoman Empire as a place of cultural hybridity rather than a monolithic entity, Pamuk presents a more subtle understanding of how tradition and modernity can coexist and influence each other. In these novels, Pamuk argues that the dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation shapes cultural identity rather than rigid adherence to established

norms. Through his characters' transitions between Eastern and Western influences, religious and secular viewpoints, and collective and individual identities, he depicts the fluidity of cultural identity in today's increasingly interdependent world. Modernization, cultural exchange and the preservation of traditional values are some of the debates that continue to resonate in this profound study of identity and change. Ultimately, by highlighting globalization, this study has shown how such an element can drive binaries such as religion/secularism or East and West. Pamuk's narratives illustrate the complexity of self-identification in this global context with references to art, religion and Western identity.

Thesis Declaration

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AI Use Declaration

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