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**Imagining Turkishness: Identity and Modernization in the Turkish Novel**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Ceren Usta**

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Ever since its emergence in the nineteenth century, the Turkish novel served as a crucial space for imagining the new Ottoman and, later, national identity. However, more than the possibilities it presented in envisioning new definitions of Turkishness and homogenous communities, the novel also played an important role in the Westernization projects employed by the state in its attempts to insert itself in the grand narrative of European modernity. As such, the reformulations of Turkishness undertaken by the novel had to be conducted on the unstable nexus of modernity, imposition, agency and local necessities. This thesis aims to look at how various tropes of Turkishness came to be defined through an engagement with discourses of power and Otherness as well as through the cultural memory of the past and dreams of authenticity. Through the themes of “comparison”, “conversion” and “hybridity”, the three novels under analysis are discussed primarily in terms of the ways in which they imagined alternative definitions of identity and modernity against articulations of Otherness, imposed not only by European discourses of power but also by the Ottoman/Turkish state itself.

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## Introduction

“Why has the world fallen into anarchy from its formerly tranquil state?” (qtd in. Hanioglu; 9) This simple question from the eighteenth century was put forward in a political pamphlet on the reasons concerning the shifting power relations between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. This was a question that would come to be asked in many different forms from the eighteenth century onwards, well into the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. This thesis aims to look at how this question came to be a fundamental part in the making of “imagined communities” starting from the late nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire, leading to the nation-building process of the early twentieth century. Focusing on the question of identity, this thesis treats the modern Turkish novel as the very space where new definitions of Ottoman and Turkish identity emerged in connection to the European influence over the Ottoman and, later, Turkish society. Three novels from different periods, *Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi* (1876) by Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *The Clown and His Daughter* (1935) by Halide Edip, and *The White Castle* (1985) by Orhan Pamuk, serve as points of reference in a discussion of the ways in which this negotiation has been conducted on a nexus of agency, imposition, compromise. The themes of “comparison”, “conversion” and “hybridity” constitute the theoretical lens in analyzing the specific formulations of identity in each novel.

### I. Historical Background

In *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century*, Fatma Müge Göcek describes the origins of the Westernization (*Batılılaşma*) program in the Ottoman historical context in the following words: “Western influence in Ottoman society emerged through a long process; the Western impact in the eighteenth century was transformed

into Western influence as it diffused into Ottoman society” (3). According to Göcek, the Ottoman Empire had historically limited its engagement with Western Europe to military campaigns and trade relations, with a sustained control over which Western innovations to adopt and apply in Ottoman society (4). With the gradual loss of military superiority over the West, culminating in the two wars lost against the Russian and Austrian Empires in 1699 and 1718 respectively, the Ottomans were “alerted to Western military changes and the resulting shift in balance of power between the Ottoman Empire and the West” (4). As this shift in power relations revealed itself through military defeats, the empire adopted a policy of observing and understanding Western technology and civilization. The first embassies to Paris, Vienna and Stockholm were dispatched with a view to observing the West and reporting on those aspects which could be adopted by the Ottoman state. This controlled adaptation of Western cultural components, led by the Ottoman dignitaries, evolved into a fully-fledged state-policy in the late nineteenth century. The most determined manifestation of this state-initiated program of Westernization occurred during the *Tanzimat* period (1839-1878).

The *Tanzimat* was a program of “Western inspired political and social reforms” that enacted a wholesale institutional transformation of the legal system, central bureaucracy, communication and education (Mardin 1965; 4-5). Aiming to modernize as well as centralize the state, the *Tanzimat* program was undertaken by the Ottoman statesmen both under European pressure, to avert foreign intervention, and with the “genuine belief that the only way to save the empire was to introduce European-style reforms” (Zürcher 58-59). As these extensive reforms were met with restlessness by the Ottoman society, the question of how much to adopt from Western civilization and how to protect the authentic components of Ottoman culture caused different political factions and opinions to emerge. While the *Tanzimat* statesmen were blamed to



be too Europeanized (*alafranga*), the dissident group of intellectuals calling themselves the Young Ottomans came to the fore as the first group “to make the ideals of Enlightenment part of the intellectual equipment of the Turkish reading public and the first thinkers to try to work out a synthesis between these ideas and Islam” (Mardin 1965; 4). This synthesis between Islam, authentic Ottoman culture, and European notions of modernity began to be formulated in various ways, with the emerging “print-capitalism” providing the space for delineating the methods in proposal. With the changing communication technologies during this period, the first Ottoman newspapers were introduced, along with an effort to vernacularize Ottoman Turkish in order to facilitate literacy and sow the “seeds of Turkish nationalism” with vigorous activities in vernacular press (Anderson 75). Along with newspapers, the novel as a genre was also adopted to Ottoman Turkish literary tradition during this period, becoming one of the most influential tools in coming to terms with the transformations in social, political and cultural spheres of the Ottoman Empire.

A new model of Westernization that abandoned the theories of synthesis between Ottoman tradition and Western modernity was undertaken by the Young Turk regime (1908-1918). Associating European civilization with science, reason, and materialism, the Young Turks discredited the attempt to reconcile Western civilization and science with Islam and traditional values once and for all (Hanioglu 16-18). Grounding their Westernization program in the belief that “history and progress of mankind had been a tug of war between science and religion” (21), they preached a straightforward trajectory from Muslim tradition to European modernity mobilized by scientific materialism and social Darwinism. A period which also witnessed the increasing nationalist movements of different ethnic-religious communities, population exchanges, and mass killings, the Young Turk era also gave birth to the first conceptualizations

of Turkish nationalism. These ideological tools and Westernization program of the Young Turks were passed down to the Republic of Turkey, founded in 1923 after the Allied Occupation of the Ottoman Empire between 1918 and 1922 (Zürcher 153-55). The Republican program of Westernization, which now took the name modernization, constituted a direct link with the Young Turk ideology in grounding their extensive reform programs in this very opposition between religion and modernity. The new nation-state adopted the European secularization thesis which defined modernity as “the separation of religion from politics and art; its relegation to the private sphere; and the declining social significance of religious belief” (Göknar 24). Starting an authoritarian “civilizing mission” to enact this secularization thesis, the Westernization program of the Republican era came to be called “Cultural Revolution”, taking place between 1923 and the early 1950s (Göknar 24-27). Attacking such cultural markers as dress-codes, appearance, and language, the Cultural Revolution focused on reformulating the identity marker “Turk” in a positive and progressive way. This reformulation was undertaken with the purpose of challenging “Orientalized notions of Turkish tradition and ‘backwardness’ defined by, and current in Europe and Russia, where representations of Turks and Muslims were often racist and anti-Islamic” (25-26). Constructing the new Turkish identity in an engagement with these Orientalist tropes of the “Terrible Turk”, the Cultural Revolution came to internalize “the orientalist gaze of Europe”, formulating a social-engineering program that was a combination of models such as “European colonialism and Soviet socialism that targeted the visibility and influence of Islam as an impediment to modernization” (26-27). This internalization of the Orientalist discourses went to such an extent that Republican modernity constructed the Ottoman past and the modern nation as binary opposites in order to insert itself into the grand narrative of European modernity.

## II. Theoretical Framework

In this thesis, Westernization, as the over-arching theme connecting the identity constructions in the three novels under consideration, is studied through the lens of what Gregory Jusdanis defines as “an-other modernity”. This “other modernity” is defined as an “experiment on the margins, which, having internalized the tensions between dominant and minor, periphery and center, prototype and copy, imitates and also co-creates, follows but resists” (Jusdanis xii). Analyzing the implications of a purposeful modernization in the cultural realm and its fate in a society unprepared for it, Jusdanis’ study of “belated modernization” interrogates how the imported models of Europe functioned differently in local settings, giving birth to “many modernities”:

Belated modernization, especially in nonwestern societies, necessarily remains ‘incomplete’ not because it deviates from the supposedly correct path but because it cannot culminate in a faithful duplication of western prototypes. The imported models do not function like their European counterparts. Often they are resisted. (...) Peripheral societies, however, internalize the incongruity between western originals and local realities as a structural deficiency. Hence, “incomplete” attempts to catch up with the West are followed by calls for a new phase of modernization (xiii).

The novel, not only as a genre that made it possible to “think the nation” with its structure of “sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time” (Anderson 26), but also as a tool adopted for social modernization in the context of “belated modernity”, turns into an “unexplored repository and mini-archive” (Gökner 19) for exploring the negotiation

between “imported models”, impositions and local necessity. Jusdanis’ analysis of Greek literature as having emerged in a negotiation between local necessity and European imposition, and thus, having crucial differences with the literary paradigms of Western Europe, holds for the emergence and development of Turkish novel as well: “The compensatory role of literature, for instance, developed not in response to social fragmentation created by industrialization, as in western Europe, but in reaction to the ideological contradictions in Greek culture that emerged after its confrontation with modernity” (88). It should also be noted that these discussions of Western Europe, European culture and tradition does not refer to a “unified consciousness or metaphysical structure” without any specificity within, but to the ways in which Europe made itself felt as a whole for the Ottoman-Turkish society through “a set of discourses and cultural institutions” (Jusdanis 88-89). In the case of Turkish literature, the novel’s emergence as part of the vigorous Westernization program led to its development as “a space of moral critique, social guidance, and anxiety”, caught between the opposing poles of Europe/Ottoman and modernity/tradition (Göknar 30). As these opposing poles and discourses of power came to be internalized by the Ottoman and later Republican statesmen, the Turkish novel also functioned as a “forum for dissent” against the authoritarian modernization projects (Göknar 20). What Erdag Göknar describes as “literary modernity” in the Turkish novel, representing the innovations in “form, technique, and content”, emerged to challenge and negotiate with the narratives of Westernization, history and identity constructed by the state as much as challenging the impositions of European modernity (20-21).

The three novels this thesis focuses on are all connected by their double engagement with the West and authoritarian modernization discourses and projects of reshaping “Turkishness”. The first chapter, focusing on Ahmet Mithat Efendi’s *Felâhât-ı Bâkîyye* and *Rakim Efendi* (1878),

analyzes this engagement through the lens of “comparison”. As one of the earliest novels of Turkish literature, *Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi* explores the definitions of the ideal Ottoman gentleman in Rakim Efendi in comparison to Felatun Bey, whose embodiment of “over-Westernization” serves as critiques to the *Tanzimat* policies and its elites. However, comparison here does not only function to formulate the ideal “Ottomanness” in relation to the shortcomings of the *Tanzimat* Westernization politics, but it also exposes how Ahmet Mithat Efendi’s efforts of imagining a new identity had to be conducted alongside an act of comparing the Self (Ottoman) to European notions of civilization. In *Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi*, as the household of a British family comes to be the very space where Rakim’s idealness is approved whereas Felatun is constantly rejected, Europe and its discourses emerge as the undeniable “grid of reference” against which Ottomans were asked to measure themselves. The second chapter focuses on Halide Edip’s *The Clown and His Daughter*, a novel written in 1935 but taking place in the late nineteenth century prior to the Young Turk regime. Through the theme of “conversion”, Halide Edip’s novel subverts the Young Turk denigrations of Islam and challenges the Republican “conversion to modernity” thesis with its Muslim heroine and her marriage to a European. While conceptualizing an alternative modernity from the framework of synthesis between the Self and the Other, *The Clown and His Daughter* rescripts religion and Ottoman tradition into building the modern, national Turkish identity by positing “conversion” as a necessity for participating in a cosmopolitan Muslim modernity. Finally, the third chapter looks at how Orhan Pamuk deconstructs the definitions and discourses of Turkish identity in *The White Castle* (1985). By connecting the Republican identity crisis to a transformative period in Ottoman-European history when the discourses of hegemony first started taking shape, Pamuk is challenging national historiography also exposing the ambivalence of “Turkishness”. Through

the inverted master-slave relationship between an Ottoman scholar and Venetian slave, the binary opposites of Self-Other, East-West, and the history behind such discourses are analyzed and deconstructed, opening the space for an ambivalent, hybridized construction of identity as well as community.

Although they belong to different periods and cultural contexts, these novels by Ahmet Mithat Efendi, Halide Edip and Orhan Pamuk are constitutive parts of a literary tradition that developed in a negotiation with discourses of Otherness, local and foreign impositions, and well-established literary traditions. What emerges is that these tropes of “Turkishness” do not signal to an “autonomous or originary condition which can be defined in itself” (Gürbilek 15) but are rich expressions that had to incorporate various contradictions engendered by these negotiations. Whereas a comparative approach may label these contradictions as the very reason that the Turkish novel is “incomplete” compared to its Western European models, this study proposes that it is these very contradictions and negotiations that has been engendering the vibrant literary traditions of the Turkish novel since the nineteenth century.

## Chapter 1: An Ottoman Gentleman in the Making

### I. The Politics of the *Tanzimat* Novel and Ahmet Mithat Efendi

“So, what if I’m defeated? So, what if I make a fool of myself? The thing that is called progress is striving to reach towards the ones you see ahead of you. It is clearly preferable to move even if it does not necessarily lead anywhere rather than being fixated on the spot” (Ozon, 193). These arguments were made the by one of the most prominent authors of the *Tanzimat* novel, Ahmet Mithat Efendi, regarding what a new genre the novel is and how one should not be afraid of making mistakes in their endeavors to produce the first examples of it in Turkish literature. Indeed, the novel was adopted to Turkish literature for the first time in the nineteenth century when the empire was going through one of its most vigorous Westernization projects: the *Tanzimat* (1839-1876). The agents of this adaptation were the Europeanized, “vanguard intelligentsia” (Anderson 78) of nineteenth century Ottoman society with the aim to disseminate the principles of Enlightenment and their own definitions of modernity to a newly emerging reading public. In this regard, the role of this adaptation of the novel in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was, in fact, very similar to the role the novel played in eighteenth century Europe for what Benedict Anderson describes as “‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (25). The connection between novel as a form and the emergence of nation defined by Benedict Anderson as “an imagined political community” exposes not only the political roots of the novel as a global trend, of which the Ottoman Empire was one of numerous examples, but also allows the novel to be explored as a space of negotiating different constructions of community and identity. Among the many intellectuals who contributed to the first steps of this negotiation, Ahmet Mithat Efendi stands out not only with the sheer amount of novels he has written, but also by being one of the first novelists to construct various methods in

dealing with the imposition of European notions of modernity and civilization in imagining a new Ottoman identity and community. As a figure who later turned into a contested figure in the nationalist-secularist Republican narratives, Ahmet Mithat's constructions of a new Ottoman identity provide interesting answers to both the origins of envisioning a homogenous community and the contradictions that seeped into the very process as something growing in tandem with the vigorous Westernization projects.

Unlike many of his contemporary intellectuals and novelists, Ahmet Mithat Efendi was born into a family of modest means in 1844. As Holly Shissler describes, he became an assistant to a shop in the Egyptian Bazaar of Istanbul where he endured "long hours, hard work, poor food, inadequate clothing, and many beatings" (155). Ahmet Mithat Efendi was noticed by one of the leading statesmen of the *Tanzimat*, Mithat Pasha, while the former was a pupil in the newly established European model schools. Becoming his patron, Mithat Pasha hired the young Ahmet as a scribe while serving as the governor of the Danube and Baghdad provinces. He learned French but also received a classical Ottoman training in the religious schools (*medrese*) with the encouragement of Mithat Pasha, who gave the young Ahmet his own name Mithat as a sign of favor. With such an upbringing, Ahmed Mithat gained numerous experiences in writing, translating, and publishing. While working with Mithat Pasha in the provinces, he wrote a text book to be used in a school of commerce his patron had opened, thus earning the nickname of "First Teacher."

He differed profusely from his contemporaries with his concern of making a living out of his intellectual pursuits. This led to him to publishing many of his own works in his own living quarters early in his career, with the help of "water sellers, tobacconists, and peddlers" who sold his newspapers throughout the city (Shissler 155-156). He was also the publisher of the official



gazette of the Abdulhamit regime (1876-1909) in late nineteenth century, *Takvim-i-Vekayi* (*Calendar of Events*), something that turned him into an anathema figure due to his support of the sultan's autocratic regime. More important than the official gazette, however, was his own private newspaper *Tecuman-i-Hakikat* (*Interpreter of Truth*). This newspaper ran almost uninterruptedly from 1878 until the official demise of the empire in 1922, publishing news items and editorials as well as serialized fiction by both Ahmet Mithat himself and a number other authors who produced some of the canonical texts of Turkish literature. How Ahmet Mithat worked his social background into his novels becomes even more intriguing when coupled with these activities as a journalist. Studying the connection between the language reforms of the Tanzimat period and the attempts to create a civil society, Serif Mardin claims that Ahmet Mithat Efendi's "pioneering role in the nineteenth century Ottoman literary discourse consists in the creation of a new sphere in which the journalistic Turkish vernacular was smoothly blended with the characters of his novels. These characters and their social settings were plucked from the Ottoman middle and lower classes, and the attention Mithat gave to the values and the lifestyles of these classes was extremely innovative" (Mardin 2006; 133). The journalistic language which Mardin discusses was the simplified Turkish-Ottoman that was to be used in the first official gazettes of the Tanzimat, hoping that a language that was understandable by all would help promote the modernizing reforms and "transform the subjects of the sultan into active citizens" (128).<sup>1</sup> All of these nineteenth century reformist movements in language, literature, and press culture in the Ottoman Empire are representational of the history behind the emergence of print capitalism and the ways novels and newspapers made it possible "for rapidly growing numbers

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<sup>1</sup> This initiation was started by the Tanzimat statesmen such as the historian Ahmet Cevdet Pasa, Grand Vizier Mustafa Resid Pasa rather than being a state-sanctioned movement, as they started using a simplified Turkish-Ottoman in their daily correspondences (Mardin 2006; 80-83).

of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (Anderson 36).

Like many other Tanzimat intellectuals, Ahmet Mithat saw the novel as a political and educational tool. However, whereas other influential authors of the period wrote one or two novels defending their own theses on the Westernization movements, Ahmet Mithat dwelled on questions related to the novel as an artistic form as well.<sup>2</sup> As one of the leading scholars on Ahmet Mithat notes: “He wrote many novels, aiming to educate the public while making them laugh at the same time as well as trying new techniques of writing, playing around with this new material which was the novel. As a true novelist, he was occupied with the question of ‘how should one narrate a story’ and provided numerous answers for it, extending the limits of narration” (Esen 8-9). Moreover, Ahmet Mithat formed a relationship with his reader that went unmatched at the time. His choice of using humorous incidents and an informal tone was regarded as unliterary and vulgar by many of his contemporaries and the following generation of novelists, but it was this very intimate relationship that he built with his readers which singles him out as an artist with an immense contribution to the creation of a readership in the nineteenth century. As well as having a didactic narrative voice which safely wants to guide the reader to the moral of the story, he also frequently interrupts the story by addressing the reader directly: “We are offering you the behavior of two young men of our time. You’re free to choose the one you prefer. You’re also free to dislike both of them!” (Ahmet Mithat 43). These interruptions are not only a sign of the intimacy Ahmet Mithat establishes with his readers, they also demand the reader to question the events and develop their own opinions on the matter. As Jale Parla argues,

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<sup>2</sup> Comparing Ahmet Mithat was some of the other first novelists of Turkish literature like Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem and Namik Kemal, Nuket Esen makes the following argument: “He may not be the first person who penned the first novel in Turkish, but he deserves the title of “First novelist” more than any other Tanzimat author both with the quality and quantity of his writings” (4).

the didactic narrative voice was shared by many Tanzimat authors who spoke to an abstract and general readership, but these instances of intimacy in Ahmet Mithat's writing came closer to the narrative voice of eighteenth century European novels that was in search for its reader (25). This reader Ahmet Mithat was in search of was the new Ottoman subject, a subject whose identity was undergoing severe transformations in relation to the European presence felt in all layers of society.

Ahmet Mithat Efendi's response to these impositions and their effect on Ottomans' sense of Self is best conveyed through his iconic novel, *Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi* (1876). Besides laying the foundations in some of the basic issues and tropes of the early Ottoman novel, *Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi* makes an invaluable contribution to the imaginings of a new Ottoman community. As I will argue in the following paragraphs, Ahmet Mithat formulates an idealized Ottoman subjecthood in the figure of Rakim against the overly-Westernized Felatun. This idealization comes from Rakim's rootedness in his home culture as opposed to Felatun's alienation from it. But more importantly, this rootedness functions in a way that enables Rakim to comfortably incorporate European cultural elements in his identity. Rather than a rejection of the foreign, it is Rakim's comfort in belonging to the cultural spaces of both the East (Ottoman) and the West (Europe), allowing him to experience a kind of cosmopolitanism which Bruce Robbins defines as involving a "mode or degree of belonging" (193) rather than a complete detachment.

## **II. Felatun Bey: The Homeless *Alafranga Dandy* of Tanzimat**

The story of Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi takes place in the heyday of the empire's Westernization process. It is a moralizing tale grounded on a comparative observation of the

daily endeavors of its heroes. This comparative observation consists of the simplest things of Rakim and Felatun's daily lives such as their family background and kinship ties, upbringing, and work ethic. However, more than any of the portrayed events of Rakim and Felatun's lives, the act of comparison itself makes up the foundation of the plot. This constant comparison between the two figures centers on the satirical depiction of Felatun as the ridiculously "over-Westernized" snob and the idealization of Rakim as a subject that every Ottoman could aspire to. The failures of Felatun are not only designed to accentuate the very attributes that elevate Rakim's character, but they also deliver a well-grounded criticism of the definitions of Westernization during this particular period in the Tanzimat era. Grounded on the idea that the Tanzimat project of Westernization, in its aim of redefining the Ottoman society through European influence, was leading the Ottomans to be detached, and eventually, alienated from their own sense of identity. As the common thread of criticism directed towards the architects of Tanzimat program focused on them being "so Europeanized that it would have been immaterial whether they had taken their ideas from the Koran or Gospels, but that it believed in neither" (Ubicini qtd. in Mardin 1965; 40), the dissident opinions on the issue of Westernization tried to construct a new method that incorporated what they deemed to be the authentic components of Ottoman culture. The Young Ottomans, a group of political dissidents who make up the first link in a chain leading down to the Young Turks and Republican ideology, blamed the Tanzimat elite with a superficial understanding of Westernization. Ahmet Mithat Efendi's depictions of Felatun as a satire of these superficial appropriations of the West align him with the Young Ottoman theories of alternative modernity and criticisms of overt-Westernism. What is innovative in Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi is the portrayal of cultural alienation and detachment as the very

reasons that prohibit the Ottoman subject from belonging to the coveted space defined as “Westernized way of life”, rather than a rejection of it.

There is a certain type of detachment that Felatun is experiencing in relation to Ottoman culture, and this is accentuated every time he tries to prove himself his British friends, the Ziklas family, only to be pathetically ridiculed. Felatun’s lack of knowledge in even the simplest things like the Ottoman-Turkish alphabet or the lyrics to a contemporary Ottoman song leads him to be constantly corrected by this European family and vocally rejected at the same time. This detachment is coupled with a mode of Westernization that leads him to even mimic a religious ceremony, mourning his father’s death in the *alafranga*<sup>3</sup> way by wearing black for weeks, overlooking the Islamic custom of mourning. His shallow comprehension of what he interprets as the “European” lifestyle reveals itself through the abusive relationship he has with his French mistress, a relationship which he stays in for the sake of the *alafranga* life. The outlines of this detachment are traced back to Felatun’s childhood and father. The father figure is the only member of Felatun’s family that the narrator elaborates on before introducing Felatun to the readers, forming a direct connection between Felatun’s character and his father’s shortcomings. Mustafa Meraki Bey is described as an upper-class gentleman who belongs to “the *alafrangas* of Istanbul from fifteen or twenty years ago (...) who suddenly leapt from an extreme *alaturka* lifestyle to an extreme *alafranga* one” (Ahmet Mithat 2). As an *alafranga* of the previous decade, this suddenness in the transition from one way of life to the other is representative of the “blunt and merciless” (Mardin 1965; 83) transformation the Tanzimat project had created in the Ottoman society. Just as there exists a subtle connection between Felatun’s failures, his

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<sup>3</sup> *Alafranga* came to define the Westernized way of life, outlook and an identity based on Western cultural elements in the nineteenth century Ottoman society. The opposite of this term was *alaturka* which represented traditional Ottoman values and practices.

childhood and the suddenness of the transition his father experiences, there is also a connection between this suddenness and the misconceptions of Mustafa Meraki Bey. These shallow aspirations reveal itself first and foremost through the domestic space of Mustafa Meraki Bey. The “domestic arrangements” of their home is found “a bit odd” due to the atypical family structure Mustafa Meraki Bey builds after the death of his wife. He hires an elderly lady as a nanny, a Greek to manage the household, an Armenian as a cook and moves to a stone mansion in the cosmopolitan Beyoglu district, all symbols of an *alafranga* lifestyle and all stemming from the recent “social progress in Istanbul” (Ahmet Mithat 2). Starting from the domestic space, the same cultural appropriations seep into all areas of their lives, from the education his children receive to their kinship ties. Again and again, Mustafa Meraki Bey is portrayed as the worst role model a son could have. Besides the monthly income of “twenty thousand kurus” which accustoms Felatun to a laziness and terrible work-ethic, these superficial aspirations for the West become the only inheritance Mustafa Meraki Bey leaves his son.

Felatun Bey’s inadequate education, superficial pleasures and concerns, lavishness and the ridiculous positions he puts himself in throughout the novel makes him the first “*Alafranga Dandy*” of the Tanzimat novel, a character that became an enduring trope to reappear extensively not just in the nineteenth century novels but also in early republican literature.<sup>4</sup> This character was neither an invention of the Tanzimat novel nor of Ahmet Mithat Efendi. It was a well-established cliché of the traditional caricatures and stage plays of the previous literary tradition, but it was during the Tanzimat era that this beloved trope would be paired with that layer of society whose members were the most fervent followers of the Westernization movement: the

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<sup>4</sup> Other iconic examples of the extravagant *alafranga* dandies would appear in Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem’s *The Carriage Affair* (*Araba Sevdasi*, 1898), Huseyin Rahmi’s *Always in Love* (*Sipsevdi*, 1911), Omer Seyfettin’s *Efruz Bey* (1919) and Yakup Kadri’s *Kiralik Konak* (1922)

urban elite. And not surprisingly, as the person who produced some of the first examples of Turkish literature, it was Ahmet Mithat Efendi's Felatun Bey which first tied the knots between this figure and the Tanzimat elite being accused of over-Westernization. Through the reconfigurations of this character, Ahmet Mithat was able to point to the dismantling of the society through the Westernization program as well as render a criticism of the political agents of the process. In this sense, the *alafranga* dandy of the nineteenth century Tanzimat novel is closely reminiscent of the "Superfluous Man" of nineteenth century Russian literature. As a character to appear continuously in nineteenth century Russian literature, it was regarded as embodying the anxieties and pitfalls of Russian society after its encounter and active engagement with European modernity. Therefore, what David Patterson remarks about the "Superfluous Man" can easily be applied to the *alafranga* dandy of the Tanzimat novel: "Not just as another literary type, but as a paradigm of a person who has lost a point, a place, and a presence in life: the superfluous man is the homeless man" (2). Interestingly enough, Felatun's story as a man who has lost his "place" ends with his physical exile from the heart of the empire, Istanbul, to the provinces as a governor after he is robbed of his entire fortune by his French mistress (Ahmet Mithat 127-128). Pitted against the homeless man that Felatun is, Rakim emerges as the opposite in terms of his embrace of the *alaturka* way of life, Ottoman community and "home". This embrace, however, does not trap Rakim to a parochialism but rather allows him to open himself to what Shameem Black describes as "the strangeness of an expanding world" (45) through the security of belonging and attachment.

### **III. Rakim Efendi: A Cosmopolitan Ottoman**

Unlike Felatun Bey, Rakim grows up in an impoverished household in the typical Ottoman neighborhood of Tophane. After the death of his father and mother, his nanny Fedayi

takes over the responsibility of making an income just enough to let young Rakim get an education. Besides educating himself on such diverse subjects as “physics, chemistry, biology, law, history and geography”, he also learns “Arabic grammar and syntax” and acquires “a substantial knowledge of Hadith and Quranic exegesis” with the encouragement of his nanny (Ahmet Mithat 10-11). He has a fondness for Ottoman classics as well as French novels, poetry and play. He embraces every opportunity to educate himself through his diligence, using the foreign newspapers he reads through his job at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to learn about European affairs and diplomacy. This initial introduction of Rakim to the readers reveals three fundamental discrepancies between Rakim and Felatun: education and upbringing, social background and family ties.

We only witness the nature of the relationship between Felatun and his father in the only conversation they have in the novel regarding the reasons behind the days getting shorter. This exchange not only exposes their shared ignorance but also the depthless ground their relationship stands on. Neither Felatun nor his father knows the reasons of this natural phenomenon, but more important than that, Mustafa Meraki Efendi is too shy to admit his own ignorance and chooses to support his son’s false theories in an attempt to win Felatun’s approval. Rakim, on the other hand, is always careful to listen to his nanny’s advice and is genuinely concerned with her well-being and approval. This concern for Fedayi leads Rakim to buy a female slave to ease her workload around the house, but this relationship turns into a form of kinship between the three where Rakim and Fedayi work together to restore Janan’s health, give her a proper education and groom her to be a member of the family. This collaboration between family members, the mutual respect in the domestic space and the pleasure they derive from each other’s company is a rudimentary part of Rakim’s daily life. Rakim is happy to go home every evening and see his



nanny's face at the door, share his earnings with her and build their home from a "decrepit three-room henhouse" to a renovated, modern space, "respectfully redecorating it according to his tastes" (Ahmet Mithat 9-13). Similar to every other characteristic of Rakim's identity, his tastes connote a mixture of European cultural artifacts as well as Ottoman ones. The detailed description of his house is one of the concrete examples of the key role the domestic space plays in imagining Rakim's character as well as his desire to blend Ottoman and Western elements: "To the right of the living room, facing the street, were two bedrooms, and across from the glass door was the third bedroom, and to its left, a bathroom. In the past, all the rooms opened directly onto the living room, but with the renovations, Rakim had a wall of wood slats and plaster built to create an L shaped, one-meter-wide corridor to separate the bedrooms from the living room" (28). There is an emphasis on an increasing urge for private individual space that did not exist there before, but which Rakim deemed necessary to add. While his own room is decorated nicely with modern beddings and a view to his own garden, his nanny's room continues to resemble "those old-fashioned rooms with built in wardrobes" and "*alaturka* beddings" (29). The whole renovation process from the old house to the new one produces a clear hybridity where pre-existing structures are not abolished but kept, with the addition of Western decorations and divisions that Rakim chooses carefully: "Paint the inside nicely, cover the walls with paper, put some nice rugs on the floor, place a small couch in the living room, add a mirror and a sideboard, and hang a fine painting on either side of the mirror. (...) How nice this little room will look with a piano across from the stairway entrance!" (28).

The robust descriptions of Rakim's family life and household point to an interesting aspect of Rakim's identity when this domesticity and kinship are read through an understanding of "rooted cosmopolitanism" defined by Kwame Anthony Appiah as being "attached to a home

of his or her own, with its own cultural practices, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people” (618). Rakim’s attachment to his family, home and the genuine pleasure he derives from them extend to a self-assured embrace of Ottoman cultural practices and traditions. He is quite well versed in Ottoman poetry to instill a genuine appreciation of *Divan* literature in his British pupils Margaret and Jan. He prefers making excursions in the Ottoman tradition rather than the fashionable *alafranga* modes of socializing and invites Josephine, his French mistress, to enjoy this for herself. He dines the *alaturka* way and exposes the privacy of his home to let the British Ziklas family experience the distinct customs of Ottoman dining. In all these instances, Rakim provides space for his European friends to experience the pleasures he personally derives from his roots. And this appreciation is something that is genuinely welcomed by all members of the Ziklas family and Josephine, who harbor a respect and admiration for Rakim through this very embrace and attachment that he embodies. It is through this attachment that Rakim and his friends are able to offer and experience the pleasure of “other, different places that are home to other, different people” that Appiah elaborates on. But it is also through this attachment that Rakim exhibits a certain kind of comfort in inhabiting spaces that are representative of the West to the Ottoman imagination in the nineteenth century.

From his education to his manners, from his linguistic skills to social activities, Rakim embodies a blend of different cultural practices. Nowhere in his comparison of Felatun and Rakim does Ahmet Mithat Efendi present Rakim as a figure untouched by the transition the empire was going through in the cultural exchange with West. Both figures are representational of a rupture, of something undeniably new. In describing the physical relationship between Rakim and Josephine, Ahmet Mithat makes it clear that he does not envision the salvation to be a

return to the past and a denial of the present cultural transformations. “We already told you we are not describing the manners of an angel. We are describing the true nature of a young man who knows how to protect his honor and to live decently and genuinely *alafranga*. But above all we are describing someone of our times” (Ahmet Mithat 42). Rakim as an Ottoman who has a close circle of European friends, frequents the theaters, reads and speaks French quite well and enjoys the dinner parties at the Ziklas household, Rakim is not rejecting a European way of life, but is also not detached from what Ahmet Mithat regards as belonging to the space of “home”, both physical and cultural. He is open enough to “encounter all kinds of men and women (...) including some very independent French ladies” in the Ziklas household, with a hint that this space becomes a testing ground of his morality and overall character, but Rakim emerges triumphant by “never losing his decorum” (52). Whereas Felatun fails through a “homelessness” and detachment in this exact space, Rakim thrives on the security of his identity and rootedness. Shameem Black’s definition of cosmopolitanism as an ethics of “recognizing the world through the home”, with the conception that “those who immerse themselves within kinship networks and family spaces ironically emerge as the most flexible cosmopolitan thinkers, while those who evade the power of the domestic also fail to flourish as transnational citizens” (46) represents itself in Rakim throughout the novel, but perhaps is more clearly outlined in his definition of civilization. While on a boat excursion in a typical *alaturka* fashion that entails bringing along “refreshments” and waking up as early as the dawn to seize the “Ottoman morning pleasures”, Josephine continuously emphasizes the positive aspects of the “Ottoman way of life” in contrast to the European one. Centering on the idea that “everything about the Turks is better than the Europeans” (87), these remarks are met by Rakim in the following fashion: “The morning, the sea, and this beautiful place... these are all God’s creations. We owe our boat to the civilizational

progress of mankind. These are all blessings that one should appreciate” (89). Rather than being the property of a single culture, usually that of the West as it was coming to be accepted by the intelligentsia of Tanzimat, Rakim defines it as the common endeavor of humanity and tries to subvert the comparatist perspective of Josephine’s juxtaposition.

In Turkish literary studies, Ahmet Mithat Efendi is generally regarded as a supporter of Westernization and an openness to Western culture, but only through a protective filtering of what elements are to be carefully chosen and adopted. This protectiveness leads to such diverse labels of him as “guardian of change” (Parla 24); a guardianship that can also be perceived as bordering on parochialism and puritanism by some. One particular focus on Ahmet Mithat’s philosophy of protective Westernization has been through his conceptions of home and domesticity. Discussing the relationship between displacement and modernity in the Tanzimat novel, Zeynep Uysal argues that the anxieties caused by modernization projects, especially in the first phase when it was under the heavy imposition of the West, were reflected on characters being physically displaced due to the loss of authority (277). With a focus on Ahmet Mithat, Uysal studies how the domestic space acts as a kind of fortress against the swift transitions and upheavals of Westernization in most of his novels: “Ahmet Mithat creates a perfect, ideal inner space and presents it to the reader. This ideal space is almost like a projection of the closed, communal structure of traditional Ottoman society. As this structure was going through a transition on the outside, home acts as a fortress against the currents of change on the inside” (284). Indeed, home and family are not only recurring themes in most of his novels, but there are examples like *Karnaval* (1881) where domestic space functions as the core protective element against the destructive components of Westernization (Parla 36-37). But the emphasis Uysal places on protection and enclosure that comes through the communitarian structure of traditional

Ottoman culture, I argue, is not applicable to *Felatun Bey and Rakim Efendi*. Rakim's Westernization is ideal because it is controlled and rooted where Rakim acts as the agent to filter and choose which aspects of the West and traditional Ottoman education to study and blend, just as he projects an agency in slowly improving his home, his income and building his family. Where Felatun's loss of place is traced back to a childhood and domestic space shaped by uncontrollable transitions, Rakim's openness comes from this agency which filters and embraces Ottoman communitarian values as much as Western ones. As Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar points out, whereas many of his contemporaries found home and family to be strange, Ahmet Mithat immersed himself in it (Tanpinar qtd. in Uysal; 277). While Tanpinar connotes a kind of entrapment with this enclosing, the attachment to home, communitarian values and protective filtering become the very elements that allow Rakim to experience the pleasures of different cultures. Whereas Felatun is trapped in a never-ending struggle to inhabit the spaces of Western culture, Rakim is representative of an effortless belonging to the world at large.

#### **IV. Grounds of Comparison: The Ziklas Household**

While belonging, attachment and a cosmopolitan Ottoman identity are traced back to the characters' roots and homes, thus acting as constitutive elements in the identities of Rakim and Felatun, the Ziklas household and the relations within that space function in establishing one of the central devices of the novel: comparison. Comparison acts as the very ground on which Ahmet Mithat delivers his theory on Westernization and Ottoman identity through the constant juxtaposition between the ideal Rakim and satirical Felatun. Besides the constant jumping back and forth between Felatun and Rakim's daily lives, the actual juxtaposition between the two takes place in one space more than any other: The house of the Ziklas family. Rakim becomes the tutor of the youngest daughters of Mr. Ziklas, a British merchant who moved his family to

Istanbul to live comfortably with the fortune he made back in England. This business relationship grows to be so close “that the family no longer saw him as only a teacher. They respected him so much that they considered him a family friend and an honorable, well-mannered, modest, wise, and mature individual.” While these positive feelings towards Rakim help delineate the characteristics that make him so appealing to begin with, they make a complete contrast with the family’s overall negative observations of Felatun. Socializing with each other more often in the Ziklas household than any other space, the incidents taking place in their house are some of the most detailed exposures of Felatun’s ignorance, shallowness and overall failings that turns him into the satirical figure that he is. We know from the overview of his childhood that Felatun Bey has an inadequate education and superficial concerns, but we witness this for the first time when, in an attempt to “try to appear like Plato in front of the English family” (23), Felatun questions Rakim Efendi on his teachings of Ottoman alphabet to his British pupils, only to be exposed in his lack of knowledge on such a basic subject. “Come on now! How is it possible that Felatun didn’t know the alphabet?” (3) asks the narrator, but the shortcomings of Felatun continue to be exposed in front of the Ziklas family. Margaret and Jan declare him to be “just right for a coffeehouse” rather than being a “parlor gentleman.” He is rejected on the grounds that he does not know “his own alphabet and can’t get the beginning of a song right” (46). Rakim is called to dinner parties to “save his two pupils from their anguish”, the anguish being Felatun Bey’s presence (38). These rejections end with the physical exclusion of Felatun from the family’s home whereas Rakim continues to be respected like a family member.

What do these rejections of Felatun by the European characters mean? Why are the failings of Felatun’s Westernized aspirations exposed in the Ziklas household more than any

other space in the novel? Erdag Gökner makes the following remark about the history of the Turkish novel: “In Turkey, the development of the novel and modernization are entwined” (8). What is exposed when this entwined history is interrogated is a mindset of comparison that “classifies, assimilates, and finally evaluates its objects in a universal field” (Melas 4). That universal field in the nineteenth century Ottoman mindset had come to be Europe, something they were collectively beginning to accept as what Rey Chow describes as a “grid of reference.” According to Chow, this grid of reference that Europe had become functioned as the “operating table” that enabled “thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences” (Foucault qtd. In Rey Chow; 293-294) to the non-Western world in the nineteenth century. This was becoming quite emphasized for Ottomans in the nineteenth century who had come to accept Europe as a presence to which “nations all over the world were turning to” (qtd in Hanioglu; 11). The meanings assigned to this idea of Europe are similar to the process of Westernization in Greece where Europe emerged as a presence that made itself felt as a whole to the Greeks in an overwhelming way. As Gregory Jusdanis explains: “It could not be ignored and indeed was simultaneously admired and despised, emulated and feared. Greek intellectuals imported into Greece concepts they felt belonged collectively to Europe” (89). This double binding politics of Westernization stuck between admiration and repulsion, imposition and agency were grounded in relations of power that re-defined a Europe with imperialist expansions to the rest of the world. And it was within this double binding relations of power that the agency and passion Ahmet Mithat put forth in imagining a new Ottoman identity that the Ziklas household and all its European inhabitants nevertheless emerged as the spectators that functioned as a grid of reference.

## Conclusion

It was through the complicated politics of Westernization that a new community and identity were beginning to be constructed and the novel came to be adopted as the very space for this development. It was also through this engagement with the West that the birth of the novel in Turkey came to be defined as “translations and imitations of the European novels” rather than emanating from the birth of capitalism and the bourgeoisie like its European model (Moran 9). Even the first novelists of Tanzimat like Namik Kemal defined the novel as a symbol of the progress of European civilization whereas the traditional narrative devices of Turkish-Ottoman literature were regarded to be “childish and unrefined” and unfit for such a “civilized age” (Kemal qtd. in Moran; 13). Ahmet Mithat had to construct his definitions of the ideal Ottoman identity that would embrace the authentic as much as the strange in this specific context, visualizing this embrace to bring the essentialized notions of the West and East on common grounds by re-defining civilization as belonging to all humanity. With his embrace of what he defined as authentically Ottoman, a protected engagement with the foreign and the politics of that engagement, Ahmet Mithat laid the grounds of imagining an identity that would come to be defined as a “Turkishness” grounded in “an abandon and summons to return to the self, an enthrallment and fear of losing the self, admiration of the foreign and xenophobia forced to live side by side in a single soul” (Gürbilek 15). Ahmet Mithat is a figure who has been excluded by the Republican ideology, marginalized as the defender of parochial values of Ottomanism and Islam whereas his contemporary Namik Kemal was embraced as a “founding father” with his formulations of “fatherland” and “liberty” (Esen 2013; 15). But it was the agency and contradictions that went into building the ideal Ottoman subjecthood in *Rakim* that opened the ground for imagining that “Turkishness” and the many voices residing in that “single soul”.



## Chapter 2: An Unlikely Heroine, An Unlikely Modernity

### I. Introduction

*The Clown and His Daughter (Sinekli Bakkal)*, was published in English in 1935 and later translated into Turkish the same year. Set during the last years of the autocratic regime of Sultan Abdulhamit II in late nineteenth century, *The Clown and His Daughter* tells the story of a Muslim girl, Rabia, and her upbringing in the traditional Ottoman neighborhood of Sinekli Bakkal. As part of a period in Turkish literature that was preoccupied with the question of building a modern and authentic national identity, *The Clown and His Daughter* both contributes to these efforts as well as putting forth a critique to contemporary definitions. This critique come first and foremost through the figure of Rabia, whose visible embrace of un-orthodox Islam in her identity is antithetical to the secularization thesis of the Republican project of modernization. As a strong female figure who exerts her free will in embodying a Muslim identity, Rabia is fashioned as “a dissonant, and even dissident, figure to be representing Turkish modernity in the 1930s” (Göknar 153). Besides Rabia’s religious identity, the novel also proposes an alternative modernity through the trope of marriage between Rabia and the male protagonist Peregrini, representing a synthesis between East and West. However, while this synthesis between the East and the West, Islam and Christianity is realized under the philosophy of “Oneness” as proposed by Muslim mysticism, arguing that their differences can co-exist within such a frame, the trope of conversion in the figure of Peregrini acts as a necessary catalyst for such a synthesis to take shape. Through the trope of religious conversion and Muslim mysticism, *The Clown and His Daughter* subverts the national “conversion to modernity” program of the 1930s by re-inscribing the repressed elements of Islam, gender and tradition into the national program of Westernization.

## II. An Unlikely Heroine of the Early Republican Novel

“She prayed five times daily as naturally as she dressed or washed, and fasted the thirty days of Ramazan. There seemed to be no emotion connected with those performances, and she was almost mechanical in the practice of her religion. It was an early habit, and it was a healthy one” (Edip 104). Rabia, the heroine of *The Clown and His Daughter*, is portrayed as a resilient, intelligent and determined figure from the first moment she is introduced. What is rather unusual about her is that throughout the story of her maturation from childhood into motherhood, she is unwaveringly described as a “typically Muslim girl” (Edip 128), regularly performing ritual prayers and earning her living as a Qur’an chanter. Religion, indeed, is not only essential in understanding Rabia’s character, but also Halide Edip’s criticisms as to the nation-state’s reformulations of Turkish identity in relation with Westernization discourses. As a novel framed by several binary opposites, Rabia’s story of growing up under the influence of different households, all representative of particular-layers of late Ottoman society, signals to the opposing social elements that Rabia must negotiate with while constructing her own subjectivity. As a bildungsroman and an early Republican novel focusing on a Muslim girl, Rabia’s negotiation with the opposing cultural discourses surrounding her life both portrays and subverts the tropes of “conversion” from empire to nation-state in fundamental ways.

Rabia is the daughter of Tevfik, a shadow puppeteer (*meddah*)<sup>5</sup>, and Emine, the daughter of the local mosque’s Imam. Emine, brought up with a stern understanding of religion by her

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<sup>5</sup> Meddah is the name given to traditional story tellers who performed in front of small crowds, usually in coffee-houses, incorporating important narrative techniques which would prove to be influential in the birth of the modern Turkish novel: “The meddah represents an aesthetic of traditional oral narration that enables the development of Turkish literary modernity, and modern novelists owed much to the narrative style of the meddah” (Boratav 3).

father, and Tevfik, a joyful and creative *meddah*, create a mismatched union from the very beginning. As one of the many binary opposites in the novel, this mismatched union ends in Tevfik's exile when he uses his own wife as a subject in his shadow plays, something that is regarded as a crime in the Hamidian regime (1878-1909) which "no Muslim, no Turk with any decency, could allude to in public" (Edip 16). Emine moves back to her father's house with Rabia, subjecting her daughter to a life of "'thou shall nots' decreed by the Imam" (17). Growing up without any expression of joy or playfulness, Rabia is home-schooled by her grandfather to be a Qur'an chanter. When her extreme talent gets noticed by Sabiha Hanim, the wife of the Minister of Public Security, Rabia enters the colorful and lively life of Selim Pasha's mansion. Located at the patrician section of Sinekli Bakkal, a neighborhood representative of traditional Ottoman culture, this household introduces Rabia to a life full of differing voices through the figures of Vehbi Efendi, the Muslim mystic and musician; Peregrini, the Italian ex-monk and pianist; Selim Pasha, the Minister of Public Security; Selim Pasha's only son Hilmi and his circle of friends as members of the dissident group the Young Turks. Rabia, with her extreme talent in singing and Qur'an chanting, soon becomes an inseparable part of the social gatherings in the mansion, and specifically, the meetings in Hilmi Bey's room. However, as much an active participant as she is, Rabia also becomes the main subject of the conflicting political opinions between these figures. This position in which Rabia finds herself is representative of the larger phenomena of "the question of woman" (Göle 28) that became an integral part of the debates on transitioning into a westernized, modern society in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods.

In *The Forbidden Modern*, Nilüfer Göle studies the practice of Muslim veiling and religious identities in relation to the politics of Westernization and modernization in the late

Ottoman and early Republican context of Turkish history. Göle argues that gender played a central role in these discussions, with “the question of woman” being defined not only in relation to the social conditions in which women lived, but also in relation to the issues of “culture and civilization” (29). Göle traces the history of these phenomena to the early nineteenth century when the Westernization projects first began, and continued well into the early Republican reforms:

The debate among Ottoman elites on the ways and limits of Westernization at the end of the nineteenth century reveals the significance of the unsettled link of modernization with cultural identity and, in turn, with gender. While the Ottoman Westernists argued that only the emancipation of woman from religious constraints and traditional ties would bring on the civilizing process, the Ottoman conservatives conjured that according such freedoms to women would inevitably lead to the breakdown of the moral fabric of society. (...) In this debate, the Westernists eventually triumphed over the conservatives with the success of the Turkish Kemalist Revolution in 1923 (13).

In *The Clown and His Daughter*, when Selim Pasha and Hilmi Bey notice the young Rabia’s exquisite skills in singing, their conflicting political opinions gets projected onto Rabia and her education. As a proponent of the superiority of the West and its culture, Hilmi declares that Rabia “must be cured of that constant legato, that whining, monotonous Arab diction” (Edip 40). For this to be achieved, he proposes to have Rabia trained by the Italian musician, Peregrini: “Two years under his tutelage would improve her voice so greatly... she would be good enough for a European stage” (40). Selim Pasha, who sees nothing but “rapaciousness, a gross materialism, hypocrisy, and lack of reserve in Europeans” (41) decides to have Rabia trained by

the dervish Vehbi Efendi, with the aim of protecting her authenticity. More than a generational conflict between father and son, this debate exposes the tensions between Hilmi as a member of the Young Turks and Selim Pasha as a minister of Sultan Abdulhamit, the very monarch the Young Turks conspired against and finally overthrew in 1908.<sup>6</sup> As Hilmi sneers away at such concepts as “Islamic civilization”, he draws a direct link between the “degradation” of women and Ottoman traditions: “There is something essentially wrong with the women of our country. (...) They are being used for nothing but pleasure and the propagation of the race – they are all slaves, although the chains they wear are sometimes golden” (43). As a member of the Young Turk opposition, Hilmi’s condescension of “Islamic civilizations” and Ottoman values are in line with their ideology which “favored the Western notion of universality in opposition to tradition, and particularly, Islam” (Göle 29). The Young Turk movement, although “a link in the historical chain of Ottoman westernization and bureaucratic modernization” (Hanioglu 7), enacted a certain rupture in the efforts of the previous westernization theories which tried to create a synthesis between Ottoman/Islamic and European notions of culture. By claiming that “There is only one civilization, and that is European civilization; therefore, we must borrow Western civilization with both its rose and its thorn” (Abdullah Cevdet qtd. in Hanioglu; 17), they formulated their ideology on a devotion to “science and progress” and a repression of religion’s role in public and private life (Hanioglu 13). This group, which brought on the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918) in Ottoman-Turkish history, underlies the project of secular modernity of the early years of the Republic, which not only aimed for a complete alignment between European culture and the new nation, but preached a “wholesale conversion to

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<sup>6</sup> Sultan Abdulhamit II ascended the Ottoman throne in 1876 and ruled as an absolute monarch, eventually overthrown by the Young Turk revolution of 1908-1909. His rule has been the subject of great controversy. He is marked as a bloody tyrant who enacted a “draconian censorship which prohibited any discussion of political matters, especially anything related to liberalism, nationalism or constitutionalism” (Zürcher 82-83). His fear of being overthrown resulted in an extensive network of espionage in the empire.

modernity” (Göknaar 26). What connects both projects is not only their effort to relocate religion’s role and visibility in redefining the new Turkish identity, but also the role they assigned to the social position and public visibility of women in introducing “the ideals of modernity into the collective imagination of a Muslim country” (Göle 29). For both the Young Turk and nationalist ideology, women’s bodies, appearance and identities turned into the very site that represented the success or failure in the endeavor to create a Westernized/modern society.

The young Rabia stays silent throughout the argument between Hilmi Bey and Selim Pasha, but nowhere else in the novel is Rabia portrayed as a timid and silent woman, object to the desires and decisions of those around her. Her character is best summarized through her music teacher and mentor, Vehbi Efendi’s views on her: “She could steer her way through... She must be trusted to do so, for she was profoundly intelligent, the sanity of her mind was remarkable. Even at her age, she judged clearly and decided justly” (Edip 102). These attributes of Rabia reveal themselves in various stages of her life, beginning with her father’s return from exile and her decision to move in with him: “‘I want to live with my father, Efendim.’ She had been looking with confidence into Selim Pasha’s face, but all of a sudden she turned to Tefvik, and snatching his hand, stood before him. She was taking charge of her big, helpless father” (Edip 87). Similarly, when she is old enough “to go behind the veil” and “separate herself from the company of men” as a Muslim woman, Rabia intervenes on behalf of her father and objects to being removed from the gatherings of Hilmi Bey, especially from seeing Peregrini: “‘Father,’ Rabia was saying in a solemn tone, ‘I mean to see the signor always’” (Edip 127-128). This agency is exercised most fervently when the issue of marriage between a Muslim/Ottoman woman and Christian/European man becomes inevitable. Rabia’s insistence on knowing the

possibility of such a union is met with clear restrictions: “But what happens if anyone marries a Christian in spite of the law? the girl insisted, knitting her brows. ‘I suppose the people in her street would stone her and her Christian lover to death. It is one of the unbreakable laws, Rabia’” (Edip 129). This leads Rabia to dictate the terms of their marriage by having Peregrini convert to Islam and take on a new identity as a resident of Sinekli Bakkal. Throughout all these transitions, Rabia emerges as a character who navigates from one phase of her life onto the other on her own terms, even if this is realized within certain limits. Rabia’s identity is grounded on making her own decisions, which entails avoiding certain modes of patriarchal control while embracing her religious identity at the same time. Such attributes of Rabia as a visibly Muslim woman transgresses the discourses which limited the agency/visibility of women in accordance with the principles of westernization/modernization in the Young Turk and, especially, in Republican eras. *The Clown and His Daughter*, as a coming-of-age novel centered on this unlikely heroine, not only puts forth a gendered criticism of the modernization theories of these two periods in Ottoman/Turkish history, but also subverts the tropes of the early Republican novel and the role it was assigned in “converting” the Muslim/Ottoman subjects of the empire to the secular-modern Turks of the new nation.

### **III. “Turning Turk”: Conversion to Modernity**

A novel written in the early 1930s, *The Clown and His Daughter* belongs to early Republican period in modern Turkish literature which Erdag Göknar argues to have been defined by “The Secular Masterplot”<sup>7</sup>. As part of the nation-building project, the novels written in the

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<sup>7</sup> Early Republican novels that supported the secular masterplot began with adaptations of recent historical events, most notably the Allied Occupation of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. These novels were also supported by new nationalist historiographies. Broadly speaking, “the secular masterplot was predicated on a four-part emplotment that traced the stages of secular conversion: (1) Colonial Encounter, (2) Anatolian Turn, (3) Imagined Turkishness, and (4) Cultural Revolution” (Göknar 26).

early Republican period not only adopted an “‘Empire to Republic’” historiographic framework” (Göknaar 25), but their “Secular Masterplots” attempted to redefine Turkishness by “encouraging the Sunni Muslims, who overwhelmingly constituted the citizens of the new nation after decades of ethnic cleansing and population exchanges, to actively begin thinking of themselves as modern Turks” (Göknaar 25). These “modern Turks” had strict obligations in terms of appearance and language, but what Halide Edip is interested in intervening with most is the repression of religion and how women’s bodies became the sight to appropriate the location and visibility of Islam in formulating a nationalized, secular and modern identity. Besides its heroine Rabia, the novel exposes historical and ideological links between the Young Turk ideology of the Hamidian era and the early Republican program of modernization to question as well as criticize this “conversion to modernity” project encouraged by the “Secular Masterplot” of early national literature. One such character that opens the space for Halide Edip to expose the connections between Young Turks and Republican modernization is Shevki, Hilmi Bey’s close friend and the most fervent member of the Young Turk opposition. During a discussion on the conflicted relationship between the individual and nation, Shevki intervenes to make the following remark:

If ever the Young Turks become a ruling power, I will see that the Vehbi Efendis, in short all mystic thinkers and their Orders, are ruthlessly exterminated. They cannot wield worldly power, but they manage to keep alive a spiritual energy which saps the vitality of a nation, which leads to dreaming and retards material progress. After all, material progress is the only thing which counts; the rest is a useless dream (65).

*The Clown and His Daughter* ends with the 1908 revolution which put the Young Turks in charge of the empire until the end of the First World War. Similar to the “emerging nationalist



intelligentsias in the colonies (*of Europe*)” (Anderson 118), they had access to various models of nation and nationalism that they “distilled from the turbulent, chaotic experiences of more than a century of American and European history. (...) In varying combinations, the lessons of creole, vernacular and official nationalism were copied, adapted, and improved upon” (Anderson 140). For the Young Turks, these “varying combinations” produced the specific formula of Turkish nationalism that proposed an easier transition to a Westernized/modernized country. The leading Young Turk theorist of nationalism, Ziya Gökalp, came to define nation as the “natural social and political order” which had a supremacy over the individual (Zürcher 136). Defining Anatolia as the heartland of the Turkish nation, “Gökalp argued that Turkish culture needed to be protected from the deleterious impacts of Islam and negative effects of Arabic and Persian cultures” (Göle 45). According to his formulations, it was crucial to return to the “original sources of culture” so as to “resurrect the pre-Islamic past” which he believed were completely compatible with European civilization (Göle 44-45). Concluding that “societies which are foreign to each other in terms of their cultures and religions may converge in civilization” (Gökalp qtd. in Göle; 44), he overcame the heated conflict between an overt-Westernism and conservative Islamism regarding the limits of adopting European culture. These definitions of Turkish nationalism, with the emphasis of an original Turkish culture untainted by Islam and its compatibility with Europe, came to be crucial in the transition from empire to nation-state and the creation of the new Turkish identity. The official ideology of the new nation-state had definitive ideological parallels with the Young Turk regime in its aim of “secularizing and modernizing society” (Zürcher 180), which Halide Edip unmasks with Shevki’s recurring definitions of the “well-run state” and “true civilization.” Shevki, who is mockingly called the “future builder of the State” and a “destroyer” as an inevitable historical force (Edip 67) is

continuously positioned against the teachings of Muslim mysticism represented by Vehbi Efendi. Whereas Vehbi Efendi puts forth the possibility of melting away binary opposites and even historicity itself under a philosophy of “oneness”, Shevki dreams of creating a “well-run state” which “neither oppresses nor depresses” but eradicates “those who mar its order and threaten its equilibrium” (Edip 65). And just as Shevki predicts, among those that mar the order of the state in the Republican era comes Islam, even in its most un-orthodox and traditional formulations: “In 1925 the religious shrines (*türbe*) and the dervish convents (*tekke*) were closed down. (...) These measures met with stubborn resistance from the population. Tekkes and türbes played an important role in everyday Muslim life” (Zürcher 180-181). As the novel exposes and plays on this link between Shevki’s fervent support of the authoritarian state with the Republican era policies, it also positions the nation-state as a colonizing force whose engineerings of a new identity entailed an eradication and repression of the beliefs and customs of both society and the individual.

In his discussion on the relationship between conversion and modernity, Peter van der Veer points to the intricate connection between conversion and its role in colonialism. Focusing on the examples of British colonial rule in India and Thomas Macaulay’s infamous aim of creating a class of “mimic men” through British education, van der Deer argues that “the nineteenth-century colony was an ideal arena for heated debates among the British about the location of religion in modernity, and about experiments in secular education that could not yet take place in Britain. Conquest and conversion’s relationship to each other stood precariously in India, Britain’s largest colony” (3). Although conversion in this context is used in the sense of apostasy, the relationship Macaulay draws between religion’s role within society and the “civilized” subject has clear parallels with the Young Turk and Republican discourses of

blaming Islam for the so-called backwardness of Ottoman society: “These are the systems under the influence of which the people of India have become what they are. They have been weighed in the balance, and have been found wanting. (...) Our duty is not to teach, but to unteach them- not to rivet the shackles which have for ages bound down the minds of our subjects, but to allow them to drop off by the lapse of time and progress of events” (Macaulay qtd. in van der Veer; 4). In such a framework that treated religion as the obstacle to modernity, conversion came to be a necessary colonial tool in the creation of “brown gentlemen” (Macaulay qtd. in van der Veer; 3). The national/Republican project of re-formulating the “Turk” from its initial definition as an “ambivalent ethnoreligious term used historically by outsiders to designate Muslims” to a nationalized insider site of identification (Gökner 24-25), most fervently through re-locating religion visibility, turned the “conversion to modernity” project into a “civilizing mission” similar to Macaulay’s, but employed by the nation-state itself. In these formulations, the nation-state was now “usurping the colonial position” that had hitherto been assigned to the European colonial powers (Gökner 31). As Shevki, representative of state power and ideology in Halide Edip’s novel, delineates the definition of “true civilization” in opposition to Vehbi Efendi’s own theories, the emphasis on the erasure of tradition and the past for the sake of modernity points to the core philosophy the state came to employ in this process:

‘I dream of a set’ the harsh and strident voice of Shevki continued, ‘wherein only the wicked, the corrupt, the tormentors of men will figure. Our own bloody sultan and his camarilla- a set which will be condemned for ever to relive their abominable acts for the coming generations. I am all for teaching the gospel of Hate, a hate which will make the future generations raze to the ground every scrap of the old, rotten world wipe the slate clean, make a waste and a desolation of

what was the Past. Then and only then can we create the True Civilization' (Edip 99).

Indeed, within the framework of “conversion to modernity” in the Republican era, Shevki’s insistence on the “desolation of the Past” came to be practiced as an influential tool: “The new nationalized ‘Turk’, shedding the defeated Ottoman Islamic worldview, would have Islamic scriptures, sermons, and preaching in pure Turkish/Turkic, and give women public visibility (...). The contradictory message of Republican state modernization was: ‘Be proud of being Turkish/Muslim ... change everything about yourselves’” (Gökner 26). Herself a subject of the “change everything about yourselves” policies of the early Republic, Halide Edip’s intervention through the figure of Rabia and her secure sense of identity within religion and tradition turns *The Clown and His Daughter* into both a political criticism and an alternative to such “civilizing missions” employed by the state. Rabia’s negotiation with the opposing social and political forces in her life, her triumphant agency in determining her own subjectivity through the embrace of the traditional Ottoman life in Sinekli Bakkal and the mystical philosophy of “oneness” preached by Vehbi Efendi puts forth the possibility of a modernity that is not the outcome of authoritarian rupture/erasure, but a “progressive outgrowth of Ottoman Islamic traditions” (Gökner 151). For such an outgrowth of modernity from a traditional Muslim society, Halide Edip formulates Vehbi Efendi’s un-orthodox/traditional Islam as the theoretical framework to create the desired synthesis between binary oppositions. This synthesis, as the crucial element that cements Halide Edip’s proposal for alternative modernity and identity, soothes out the contradictions both within Rabia’s identity and gives birth to a different kind of “conversion” to modernity.

#### **IV. Tradition, “Oneness” and Synthesis**

Vehbi Efendi, who belongs to the Order of Dancing Dervishes, is hired by Sabiha Hanim as the music teacher for the young people of the mansion. What attracts Sabiha Hanim to this order, as well as Vehbi Efendi, is “the subtle humor of the old Sheikhs regarding life, both of the present and the hereafter” (Edip 21-22). When Rabia meets the dervish for her first music lesson, she gets equally captivated by the music and his philosophy: “Thus began Rabia’s music lessons, and as they progressed the rhythm that runs through all Oriental music, and perhaps through the Oriental soul, gradually penetrated her very being” (54). Rabia, growing up between the harsh principles of her grandfather and the joyful, carefree life at her father’s house, comes to embody a “dual nature” (102). She is seen to have contradictory elements within her character, a “puritanical tendency, the readiness to think and take a definite decision” due to her rigid early training and an “intense capacity for attachment to human beings” she picks up from her father (102). Those closest to Rabia are all aware of these qualities which make her “a distinct and original personality” (102), but the one person who emerges as a source of comfort to guide her through life is Vehbi Efendi: “He was sure of his own hold on the girl’s mind, and that without making a continual effort, like Peregrini. He soothed her, his words gave her peace and strengthened her” (103). Under the guidance of these principles, Rabia comes to achieve a unity and an intact identity that is revealed the most when she chants the Qur’an: “The contradictory aspects of the girl’s nature blend in those moments. She achieves oneness in her chant... she attunes herself to the Infinite” (98). The effect of this philosophy of “oneness” is not only limited to creating a wholeness within Rabia, helping her construct a synthesis between the oppositional voices and discourses surrounding her life, but also enables the eventual union between herself and Peregrini, and by extension, East and West.

As two characters who are constructed as opposites of one another, Peregrini and Rabia's union "represents a metaphoric union of 'East' and 'West'" (Göknar 153) in the novel. Peregrini, with his background, personality and learning, establishes himself as a model for Hilmi Bey and his Young Turk friends, representing the model West for them:

Apart from his musical talents, his wit and learning, his knowledge of the Turkish language, literature, and philosophy, and his quick judgement, had enabled him to impose himself upon them as a pattern. The fact that he had defied the all-powerful Catholic Church was a factor in their friendship for him. They believed that they had cast off the bonds of religion, holding as they did that Islam was responsible for every obstacle to progress. They thought of Peregrini as a kindred soul in his bitter and critical attitude to religion. (Edip 59)

However, in depicting him as a representation of the West, he also comes to be essentialized in the imagination of these characters. As Vehbi Efendi watches uneasily the effect Peregrini has over Rabia, he comes to fear certain qualities of him and his negative influence over her: "The abstract mind behind all this, its acuteness, its ability to detach itself from an emotional personality, was disquieting. Here was the extreme and dangerous intellectuality of the student, the ruthless and logical reasoning which ignored the illogical and unreasonable issues of human nature. (...) It warped his heart, and bred in him a vanity, a coxsureness, which might eventually blind and destroy it" (103). Vehbi Efendi, just as he watches over and comforts Rabia, also aims to guide Peregrini in curbing the harsh and dangerous elements of this pure intellectuality. However, for Peregrini, this guidance is formulated subtly through the love and union between himself and Rabia, which Vehbi Efendi is the first to imagine the possibility of: "Was it possible that Rabia, in future years, might be the force that would burn to ashes the

satanic intellectual pride of Peregrini?” (103). Both for Rabia and Peregrini, whose characters are essentialized to a certain extent to represent the Ottoman East and European West, are guided by and eventually brought together under the guidance of Vehbi Efendi’s teachings of love, unity and “oneness”. These principles come to function as a space where Rabia and Peregrini’s conflicting differences can co-exist without the need to change, influence, or overcome one’s nature for the sake of the other. In its function to synthesize the binary opposites rather than compare them, Vehbi Efendi’s philosophy of “oneness” serves to “let each entity be rather than violate each in the name of comparison” (Radhakrishnan 23), aiming to break down the discourses of comparison and hegemony articulated by the Young Turk and Republican projects of Westernization.

Vehbi Efendi’s philosophy of un-orthodox and traditional Islam is at the heart of the story in *The Clown and His Daughter*. For a novel that constructs and works through multiple binary opposites, be it between Young Turks and Ottoman tradition, East and West, nation-state and the individual, the teachings of Vehbi Efendi function to soothe out the differences and propose an alternative path again and again. This philosophy not only aims to articulate a new discourse that enables the self to disinvest itself from binary constructions, but also aims to open a space of recognition for both the Self and the Other through their differences:

‘There are no two Powers such as God and the Devil’ Vehbi Efendi was saying.

‘There is a single reality, a single force. The universe, in its various aspects (...) is but the manifestation of a supreme Creative Force. All these things are merely the parts of a great and ever-changing picture. Good and bad, ugly and beautiful, God and Devil, they are all invented names. Behind it all, and in it all, is the self-created and self-creating Unity; creating and recreating perpetually, casting its

shadows on the screen which we call the Universe. Where the light falls most strongly we have a clue to that Unity- and that is Love (...) The only thing that matters is to cherish Oneness, the consciousness that we are parts of a Great Loving Force' (61-62).

Vehbi Efendi's religious philosophy articulates the impossibility of clear cut distinctions, but it also marks a terrain for formulating a new sense of identity and with it, a new kind of unity that is based on embracing the constructed nature of distinctions and separations. Such a philosophy is reminiscent of what R. Radhakrishnan puts forth as "bringing into existence a new formulation of a 'we'" (22). In his discussion of the Self-Other problematic and discourses of power inherent in the act of comparison, Radhakrishnan argues for an alternative framework which may enable the recognition of the "many worlds within one world" (21). Basing his argument on the fact that "the world is one in reality but irreducibly plural in knowability", he asks in what sense we are "one and of the same world" and in what sense we are of different worlds: "If the One world worlds differently in Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and secularism, [...] where and how should comparison be situated: in the one, the many, or in an ecstatic mode that constantly reorganizes the apparatus of recognition?" (24-26). While Radhakrishnan comes to the conclusion that the objective "oneness" of the world must still be recognized historically, eventually leading to the possibility of "dire misrecognition" (26), Vehbi Efendi's, and thus Halide Edip's approach still attempts to formulate an "inclusive and nondenominational humanism which mandates love and friendship and solidarity" in which humanity exists as an "indivisible collectivity where every human being partakes of the spirit of that collectivity" (Radhakrishnan 27). The question that Radhakrishnan puts forth with how the "One world worlds differently" in distinct historical/geographical



settings is provided with one particular answer by Vehbi Efendi with his definition of True Civilization:

I dream of a set of shadow-figures which will be made to illustrate and to teach to children Love and Brotherhood. Buddha, Jesus, and Mevlana, and humbler saints and messengers of Love should be the principal figures, acting the most impressive scenes of their lives. With appropriate music and libretti conceived by great artists the future generations would be reared in thoughts and sentiments which would create the True Civilization (Edip 99).

This definition of True Civilization does not only stand in clear opposition to Shevki and the nation-state's own definition; it also points to a utopian space that is beyond the circularity of one's own frame of reference which, in the end, hopes to bring into existence "a new 'we'" (Radhakrishnan 22). In the context of the comparison between Ottoman tradition and European modernity in the Westernization/modernization discourses, Vehbi Efendi's philosophy of "oneness" aims to melt away elements of hegemony and power from the comparative perspective that had been haunting these processes in Ottoman/Turkish historical context. This utopian philosophy of bringing forth a new kind of unity is embodied by the marriage between Rabia and Peregrini in *The Clown and His Daughter*, where both the theory of unity through love and Peregrini's "conversion" to participate in that union function to challenge those discourses of comparison articulated by Shevki, Hilmi, and even Selim Pasha with his unrelenting belief in the superiority of Ottoman culture.

Vehbi Efendi's influence over the union between Rabia and Peregrini is felt throughout their relationship. Rabia, who accepts the strong hold the dervish has over her life, seeks his

approval for Peregrini's conversion more than anybody else's. Furthermore, it is Vehbi Efendi who warns Rabia of the possible pitfalls of this union, consisting mostly from "the incompatibility of their characters, rooted in the difference of their worlds, their cultures and the rest" (265). Indeed, the married life that Rabia and Peregrini lead is not an easy one. Peregrini, who has now taken the name Osman, misses the intellectual, metaphysical and political discussions which he used to enjoy with his friends. Rabia, on the other hand, finds his way of exhausting "every interest into shreds by over-indulgence" as well as his desire for long hours of abstract conversation very tiring and prefers to measure his compatibility with this new life in a subtle way: "She studied his moods through those errant airs, measured his nearness to her by the proportion of minor tones that crept into his playing by the incursion of Oriental rhythms into his brilliant Western harmonies" (280-282). However, Vehbi Efendi's warning that "the Past might stand between them" (265) is gradually overcome by their mutual effort in allowing a space for their differences to co-exist. From the house that they live to the subtle changes they begin to witness in their identities, their union is one that is grounded on synthesis and compromise. And again, it is Vehbi Efendi who observes the success of this new unity: "It was a success, this marriage. Contentment oozed out of her every movement. Vehbi Efendi thought that something in her had slowed down. (...) It was not so easy to decipher Osman in his new life. Though he had talked with his old gusto in the room upstairs, there was longish spells of silence during which he sat motionless. One couldn't have imagined it in Peregrini" (297-8). Peregrini's conversion and the marriage becomes the very space where these characters who "belong to such different worlds" (265) learn from one another and re-construct themselves in relation to one another, but it is Peregrini who goes through a much more pronounced transformation through conversion. His conversion not only becomes a necessity in curbing the harsher elements of his

former identity, but it is also put forth as a necessity for his participation in both Rabia's life and the traditional Ottoman life at Sinekli Bakkal

Peregrini's conversion to Islam to marry Rabia is a prerequisite for his participation in modern Muslim family life in Istanbul as well as a catalyst for the "cosmopolitan Muslim modernity" (Göknaar 157) that is in direct opposition to the Republican "conversion to modernity". Peregrini as the ex-monk and Italian musician first enters the neighborhood of Sinekli Bakkal and Rabia's house with a marked difference and alienation:

His movements were brusque, and he looked sharply about the shop. Sinekli Bakkal was a Moslem quarter, and the poor Christians in the neighborhood did not wear felt hats. This must be a foreigner from the aristocratic alien quarter. He had been able to penetrate into the houses of the rich; even the Palace had hardly any secrets for him. Yet he did not know how he would be received in this grocer's shop (Edip 92).

From this outsider position, Peregrini is converted to an insider as an inhabitant of the neighborhood: "'Elders of Sinekli Bakkal!' Selim Pasha's powerful voice rang through the hall. 'I introduce our new neighbor and our son-in-law Osman Efendi. May he find happiness in his new home and in his new state. May you all find in him a kind and loving neighbor'" (275-276). Being a kind and loving neighbor of Sinekli Bakkal comes with certain obligations, such as going to the coffee-houses once a week, as Rakim informs Osman: "They will take you for a stuck-up aristocrat if you don't get more intimately acquainted with your neighbors. After all, you are an inhabitant of the poorer section of the Sinekli Bakkal" (Edip 278). Indeed, Osman does grow more and more accustomed to his life at Sinekli Bakkal, taking to the coffee-house at

the neighborhood “like fish to water”, re-introducing Rabia’s estranged grandfather into her life and, more importantly, seeing Sinekli-Bakkal and its culture as the very element that could fix and ground an identity that has been subject to conflicting cultures. Speaking of the future of their child, Osman refutes Rabia’s desire to send their kid to the American missionary school where he would be educated in the European method: “You must keep your son away from everything that is not Sinekli-Bakkal. (...) Those who are subject to different cultures will have to face a hell of a struggle in their hearts and minds. (...) I should like my son to be harmonious being; no contrasts, no hostile influences tearing at him, pulling his mind hither and thither. You do not know how mixed natures suffer” (305). For Osman, as his conversion to Islam turns into a conversion of a resident of Sinekli Bakkal, the neighborhood and its traditions present themselves as the antidote to the forces of history which subject the individual to binary oppositions. A conflict that he has been subject to as a European and Orientalist living in Istanbul, Osman comes to perceive Sinekli Bakkal as the utopian space where the next generation is grounded in a more stable identity, and thrives under a different kind of modernity.

## **V. Conclusion**

*The Clown and His Daughter* is a novel that is interested in proposing a different construction of modernity and identity rather than a deconstruction of such concepts. Rabia, although a dissident female figure representing the Republican formulas of the Westernized Turkish identity, still marries the Italian Peregrini, signaling to the presence and acknowledgement of Europe within Halide Edip’s theory of alternative process of Westernization. What is different in Rabia’s, and the nation-state’s, coming-of-age narrative in Halide Edip’s novel is the space opened up by folkloric practices of religion, tradition and a conversion that allows a European to “Turn Turk”, but an infinitely different Turk proposed by

the Republican formulas. Within such a context, Rabia's Muslim identity and Peregrini's conversion into the traditional and Muslim space of Sinekli Bakkal create clear oppositions to the secularized appropriations of the modern Turkish identity. The Republican formulations to compare and overcome the binary oppositions they perceived between tradition/modernity, Ottoman/European, and empire/nation through a complete oppression of one over the other are explicitly opposed with the theory of synthesis and "oneness". By incorporating both gender, where Rabia dictates the terms of the union between herself and Peregrini, and religion, two elements that became the fundamental sites of appropriation by the colonizing policies and discourses of the nation-state, Halide Edip aims to both rescript and redeem them.

### Chapter 3: “Why Am I What I Am?”: A Tale of Captivity

#### I. Introduction

*The White Castle*, published in 1985 and translated into English in 1990, is the first Orhan Pamuk novel to use the early modern Ottoman Empire’s cultural history as its theme. Set in late seventeenth-century Istanbul, it is the story about a Venetian’s captivity under an Ottoman scholar, Hoja. Framed as a manuscript of a memoir found and translated by a present-day historian, Faruk Darvinoglu, the re-imagination of the early modern encounter between an Ottoman master and a European slave provides a space for interrogating the binary discourses centering on identity, history and modernity for the multiple author(s): Faruk, who represents a crisis of national identity and historiography; the Venetian/Hoja, for whom the encounter initiates an excruciating destabilization of such notions as Self/Other; and finally, for Orhan Pamuk, who connects the Republican present with the empire’s complicated engagement with Western Europe and the relations of power inherent in that engagement to deconstruct fixed definitions of identity. Serving as an interruption of the present, the past enables Pamuk to go back to a transformative period in the empire’s history and re-imagine it through articulations of difference, uncertainty and hybridity as a challenge to binary discourses of power. Such articulations of difference and hybridity in *The White Castle* not only function to deconstruct not only the Orientalist discourse of East/West, Self/Other, but also subvert the nation-state’s fixed definitions of Turkishness and modernity by exposing the subtle connection between these two poles.

#### II. Captivity

One of the seminal themes of *The White Castle* is that of captivity. The trope of captivity works in multiple layers in the narrative, connecting the Venetian slave, Ottoman Hoja and Faruk Darvinoglu through their figurative and literal confinements. Captivity is not only the theme that lays the ground for the Venetian and Hoja's encounter, thus setting the story itself, it also opens the space for challenging the orientalist discourses inherent in tropes of captivity. This deconstruction begins specifically by connecting the legacy of Miguel de Cervantes to the nameless narrator of the manuscript/memoir "The Quilter's Stepson", thus linking *The White Castle* to a tradition of Orientalizing narratives. Through this connection, the binary constructions of East/West and Self/Other in the early modern tales of captivity are positioned to frame the relationship between Hoja and the Venetian from the very beginning.

The Venetian's tale of captivity under the Ottomans begins abruptly: "We were sailing from Venice to Naples when the Turkish fleet appeared" (Pamuk 1990; 15). Amidst the shrieks of horror coming from the deck, the narrator seeks refuge in his cabin amongst his books, thinking that "the thoughts, the sentences, the equations in the book contained the whole of my past life which I dreaded to lose" (17-18). Here we begin to see the allusions of a life split in two by the experience of captivity: "In those days I was a different person, even called a different name by mother, fiancée and friends" (18) says the narrator, strengthening this idea of captivity as a shattering experience. Before these implications are subverted, proposing a liberation of the Self through the experience captivity, they are further strengthened by the narrator's encounter with the supposed descendant of Cervantes during his first days in Istanbul: "He'd lost an arm, but optimistically said one of his ancestors had lived through the same misadventure and survived to write a romance of chivalry with the arm he had left. He believed he would be spared to do the same" (20). Cervantes had been a soldier before he took up writing. He participated in

the Battle of Lepanto, a vicious sea battle that took place in 1571 between the imperial armies of the Spanish and the Ottoman Empire. This battle left a lasting impact on the author, for this is where he “received wounds as a result of which he lost the use of his left hand” (Veguez 103). This experience was followed by his more traumatizing incarceration in 1575, when the ship carrying Cervantes was attacked by Muslim pirates and he became enslaved in Algiers, then under the control of the Ottoman Empire. Cervantes spent five years in Algiers under house arrest. According to Roberta Vequez, “There were many temptations to become a Muslim. (...) Many succumbed, but Cervantes, in fact, tried to escape four times in five years. After he returned from captivity, Cervantes reshaped his encounter with Islam into literary material in the various genres that he cultivated” (104), the most famous one being “The Tale of the Captive” chapters in *Don Quijote*.

“The Tale of the Captive” chapters have caught the attention of many scholars, not the least for containing substantial biographical information on Cervantes's own life but also for the role captivity played in his writings. According to Maria Antonia Garces in *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive's Tale*: “The story of his traumatic experience continuously speaks through Cervantes's fictions. His oeuvre is haunted by images of captivity: cages of all sizes, Christian captives, galley slaves, and female prisoners, some used as translators, others confined to special prisons” (1). This traumatic experience of captivity and its various representations in writing is something that the Venetian, Hoja, and Faruk all share with Cervantes, not to mention Orhan Pamuk. “The Captive's Tale” chapters in *Don Quijote* introduces Viedma as a former slave captured during the Battle of Lepanto. As he tells the tale of his captivity to the group assembled around the dinner table, his focus turns to his master, the renegade Hassan Pasha, who was also the real-life captor of Cervantes in Algiers (Vequez 102). In Viedma's account, Hasan Pasha's



extreme cruelty gets attributed to his murderous nature, filled with a rich history of impaling, hangings and beatings (Veguez 104-105). Orientalism, defined by Edward Said as a discourse that enabled European culture to gain “in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and underground self” (61-62) finds its vivid representations in Viedma and Hassan Pasha’s relationship, by the end of which Viedma achieves liberation with a strengthened sense of Self, based on “Ibero-Christian ethnonational identity” set against the cruelties of the “Terrible Turk”, an early-modern discourse which scripted the Turks (Ottomans) “as a barbaric horde and an abiding threat to civilization” as Europe’s nearest Muslim neighbors (Almond 58).<sup>8</sup> In his discussion of the trope of captivity and its essentialization of Islam in the early modern European travelogues, Erdag Göknar makes the following argument about “The Captive’s Tale” in *Don Quijote*: “The captive’s tale isn’t simply an Orientalizing historical genre that scripts “Turks” (read Muslims) as villains. It is also a seminal narrative in the establishment of the modern novel. (...) Considered from this perspective, the role and the scripting of “Turks” is central to the emergence of the form, predicated on the experience of intercultural encounter and exchange in the Mediterranean” (103). The narrator’s encounter with Cervantes’ supposed descendant in *The White Castle* exposes the text’s engagement with such binary constructions which established the Ottoman Empire as the Other of early-modern European imagination, and later of the new nation-state of Turkey, only to be gradually re-written by the Venetian’s own narration of captivity as an experience of breaking away from such essentializing discourses.

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<sup>8</sup> Erdag Göknar categorizes this trope of the “Terrible Turk” prevalent in European history and culture as the “discourse of the Turk”, summarized in the following statement: “Based in the epic Mediterranean encounter between Christianity and Islam, the “discourse of the Turk” functioned to explain and contain Muslims based on reductive essentializations. This variety of orientalism purported to know, describe, and explain “Turks” and Islam”. In the contexts of early modernity, the discourse of the Turk delegitimized Muslim power embodied in the Ottoman Empire. In the modern era, the process continued to delineate and construct Islam in need of colonial and national intervention. (25).

These orientalist implications in the memoir are soon followed by unexpected subversions in the Venetian's approach to the encroaching subjugation, beginning with the anticipation of captivity itself: "While we waited on a calm sea for the Turkish ships to draw alongside, I went to my cabin, put my things in order as if expecting not arch-enemies who would change my whole life, but a few friends paying a visit" (17). Thanks to his pragmatism, the captive both escapes being put to the galleys and earns the protection of the influential figure of Sadik Pasha, who introduces the Venetian to the Ottoman scholar, Hoja. Aware of the Venetian's Renaissance education in "astronomy, mathematics, physics", Sadik Pasha decides to put these attributes to good use by pairing him up with Hoja to design fireworks for the upcoming royal wedding, thinking they would not only assist each other but "complement one another" (36). More than captivity and enslavement, this relationship with the man wanting to be only called Hoja, meaning master and teacher, becomes the most transgressive and transformative experience for the narrator, leading to a process of redefining his own sense of identity.

Beginning with the fireworks project, the master and slave embark on a series of experiments and inventions that include a siege-engine to turn the tide over for a waning Ottoman Empire, write tracts on such diverse subjects as astronomy, apocalyptic visions, cautionary tales and finally, confessional writings that include their sins, dreams and childhood memories. Initially held back by the uncanny resemblance he recognizes between himself and Hoja, the narrator gradually discovers the passions, desires and the peculiar captivity Hoja himself seems to be undergoing: "He was watching me, he seemed to want to learn something from me, but wasn't yet sure what it was" (38-39) remarks the uneasy narrator as they discuss their first experiments. This thirst for knowledge is soon revealed to be a desire to learn everything: "Later he said I would teach him everything. (...) It would take me months to find

out what this ‘everything’ was. ‘Everything’ meant all that I’d learned in primary and secondary school; all the astronomy, medicine, engineering, everything that was taught in my country” (57). But regardless of the subjects themselves, the narrator observes a certain uneasiness and anger in Hoja as he plans to design a cosmography more comprehensive than Ptolemy’s and build a House of Science located in Istanbul. All these projects are haunted by one burning desire: “When the pasha returned he would gain favor by his plans. (...) He would infect all of us with the curiosity and enthusiasm that burned in him, he would sow the seeds of a new revival” (64). This dream of a Renaissance in Istanbul remains unattainable; both Sadik Pasha and the child sultan whose patronage he is seeking approach his projects with indifference. As he gets fixated on the question of “Why did he (Sadik Pasha) stop there, why didn’t he go further?” (58), he searches for various means to spark their enthusiasm. However, his failure to achieve this leads him to ask the one question he gets captivated by: “Who can know why a man is the way he is anyway?” (89) and “Why am I what I am?” (114).

The disappointment and anger towards indifference grows into the fascination of the mind, its “compartments” and “drawers” and what makes one mind so different than another for asking certain questions. Fools becomes a derogatory term he uses to describe everyone in the empire but himself: “I’m thinking about the fools. Why are they so stupid? (...) Don’t they have any corner inside their heads for storing knowledge?” (88). These questions directed to his Venetian slave are not met with an answer, but they do lead to a sense of separation between himself and the rest of the society, and finally centers on a comparison between these fools, himself, and what he calls the Others: “What he really wanted was to learn what ‘they’ thought, those like me, the ‘others’ who had taught me all that science, placed those compartments, those drawers full of learning inside my head. What would they think were they in his situation?”

(112). A comparison reminiscent of Ottomans Empire's troubling Westernization projects which placed Europe as the model to be emulated, Hoja's fixation on these Others, their minds and their lives increases in parallel with the news of Ottomans' defeats against the Europeans. He prophesies an impending doom even with the news of victory for the Ottoman navy, labeling them "the last of merely fleeting successes, pathetic wriggings of a cripple soon to be buried in the slime of idiocy and incompetence" (112). He pens cautionary tales for the child-sultan filled with examples of European imperial expansion and the destruction of those, like the Aztecs, who "never changed their ways and paid no heed to science" (94). His figurative captivity in a disinterested Ottoman society ends in the captivity of a never-ending comparison between the Self (Ottoman) and the Other (European). As Hoja's obsessive question of identity comes to be centered on the difference between "Us" and "Them", the master and slave continue to write apocalyptic visions of the empire's future:

Did we understand 'defeat' to mean that the empire would lose all of its territories one by one? We'd lay out our maps on the table and mournfully determine first which territories, then which mountains or rivers would be lost. Or did defeat mean that people would change and alter their beliefs without noticing it? We imagined how everyone in Istanbul might rise from their warm beds one morning as changed people; they wouldn't know how to wear their clothes, wouldn't be able to remember what minarets were for. Or perhaps defeat meant to accept the superiority of others and try to emulate them: then he would recount some episode from my life in Venice, and we would imagine how acquaintances of ours here would act out my experiences dressed up with foreign hats on their heads and pants on their legs (Pamuk 186).

The allusions in these visions to the westernization projects of the Ottoman Empire and, later, nation-state of Turkey, creates a connection of the past with a yet un-realized future, renewing and refiguring the past “as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (Bhabha 7). The yet to be realized territorial losses, which created the need for emulating the West in the eighteenth century<sup>9</sup> and the republican “Cultural Revolution”<sup>10</sup> grounds Hoja and Venetian’s “visions of defeat and destruction” as a crisis of identity, Westernization and modernity, a crisis embodied in the present by the translator of the text: Faruk Darvinoglu. As a historian purged from his job at the university after the 1980 military coup, Faruk’s discovery of the “The Quilter’s Stepson” posits the manuscript and these apocalyptic visions as interventions on the present. As Erdag Göknar argues in his seminal work *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel*, “*The White Castle* begins the important work of redefining the Ottoman legacy as a related crisis of literary modernity” (96). The link between the past and the present, between Faruk and Hoja as captives of a comparative discourse of “Us” and “Them”, as well as the “self-conscious juxtaposition of the post 1980 coup and a seventeenth-century story set in Ottoman Istanbul during a period which saw the final unsuccessful Ottoman siege of Vienna (1683)” (Göknar 96) reveals the important connections the novel is making between the crisis of identity, of both Faruk and Hoja,

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<sup>9</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek explains the initial reasons behind the Ottoman Empire’s systematic intellectual engagement with the West, which had been established in “one direction, from Europe to the Ottoman Empire” as a project prompted by military losses: “The Ottoman Empire failed to win two wars against the Russian and Austrian Empires (...) These two wars alerted the Ottomans to Western military changes and the resulting shift in the balance of power between the Ottoman Empire and the West” (4-5).

<sup>10</sup> Erdag Göknar terms the vigorous modernization reforms of the Republic taking place between 1923 and the late 1950s as the “cultural revolution”: “The cultural revolution embodied all of the basic tenets of the European secularization thesis. (...) In keeping with this thesis, over the next 15 years a series of laws and decrees, based on European models, permanently reordered Turkish culture and politics. A revolt against Ottoman and Islamic tradition, the cultural revolution affected all aspects of public and private life, including language, law, politics and dress. The dominance of this authoritarian civilizing mission lasted until 1950s, which marked the end of the single party period of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s Republican People’s Party” (24).

and the shifting power structures between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. With *The White Castle*, Faruk, and by extension Orhan Pamuk, begin the important task of interrogating national self and society by connecting the nation's present with a past where the fixed conceptions of "Self" started taking shape in tandem with such shifting relations and discourses of power.

### **III. Crisis of National Identity: Faruk Darvinoglu**

Faruk Darvinoglu as a character is first introduced in Orhan Pamuk's previous novel, *Silent House* (1983), which tells the story of three generations of a dysfunctional family caught in the century-long history of modernization and nation-building. The manuscript is excavated from a forgotten space described as a "dump that even the young governor dared not call 'archive'" (Pamuk 1985; 8) in Gebze, on the outskirts of Istanbul. Faruk declares the text to be found during one of his summer rummages in the Gebze archive in 1982, two years after one of the bloodiest coups in Republican history.<sup>11</sup> Faruk himself states his own situation vis-à-vis the coup in the preface: "Since my friends and I had been forced to withdraw from the university, I had taken up my grandfather's profession of encyclopaedist" (8). The grandfather in question, Selahattin, is another central figure from the *Silent House*. Exiled from Istanbul by the leader of the Young Turks, Selahattin settles down in provincial Gebze and takes up the project of authoring an encyclopedia which in its entirety will enable the East to finally "catch up to Europe": "I think about the necessity of science and how we're so backward because we lack it, I

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<sup>11</sup> Erik Zürcher explains the scope of violence of the 1980 coup in the following statement: "The generals saw their task as saving democracy from the politicians and purging the political system. (...) In the first six weeks after the coup 11,500 people were arrested; by the end of 1980 the number had grown to 30,000 and after one year 122,600 arrests had been made. (...) Respectable trade unionists, legal politicians, university professors, teachers, journalists and lawyers, in short, anyone who had expressed even vaguely leftist (or in some cases Islamist) views before September 1980 was liable to get in trouble" (292-294).

truly understand now our need for a Renaissance, for a scientific awakening” (Pamuk 1983; 64). Similar to Hoja’s passionate desire of “sowing the seeds of a revival”, Selahattin imagines his positivist encyclopedia to realize this dream by proving to the East that God is dead. As a historian without a job and a distrust in the discipline itself, Faruk enters the contested space of the Ottoman archive to complete his grandfather’s encyclopedia, which symbolizes the “materialist, positivist, and empiricist world-view” (Göknaar 98) of Republican modernization, but translates himself, literally and figuratively, out of the captivity of these national discourses with his (mis)translation of “The Quilter’s Stepson”.

The archive as an institution plays an important role in deconstructing the discourses of the nation-state as it turns into a space for transformation and resistance for Faruk: “In its intertextuality and inter-temporality -uncatalogued manuscripts heaped together- the archive functions as a subversive space beyond the control of disciplinary discourses of the Republican state apparatus. (...) The Ottoman archive is in fact a counter archive to Republican secular modernity” (Göknaar 97). This argument that proposes the Ottoman archive to contrast Republican secular modernity is based on the rupture constructed between the nation-state and empire. The reform programs, dubbed as “Kemalist reforms” after Kemal Atatürk<sup>12</sup>, were initiated right after the declaration of the Republic in 1923. Based on the basic principles of “secularization of the state, education and law; the attack on religious symbols and their replacements by the symbols of European civilization; and finally the secularization of social life and the attack on popular Islam it entailed” (Zürcher 195), the Kemalist reforms were designed to generate a complete rupture between the Ottoman Empire and the new nation-state. This

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<sup>12</sup> Considered to be the founding father of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rose to the leadership of the armed resistance during the Allied Occupation of the Ottoman Empire (1918) and then the Independence War (1921-1922). After the victory of the Independence War and a process of “consolidating political power”, Mustafa Kemal became the first president of the Turkish Republic (Zürcher 170-174).

rupture occurred through the adoption of the Latin alphabet in place of the Ottoman script, followed by the language reform “which aimed to purge the Turkish language of its Ottoman vocabulary and syntax and replace them with a newspeak” (Parla 2008; 28). In line with Benedict Anderson’s definition of nation as an imagined community “conceived in language, not in blood” (145), the newspeak succeeded in obliterating the past by making it inaccessible to the generation born after 1925, necessitating the formulation of a new history and an immutable definition of identity (Turkishness) along with it. Overlooking the history of the Ottoman Empire, the official historiography attached itself to a more distant and almost mythical past of the “original” Turks of Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> The aim was to break away from the Ottoman Empire, now described as the “enemy”: “The real enemy of the Turkish Nation was that semi-theocratic medieval state, that oriental head which had not seen the light of positive sciences. The real enemy was not outside, it was inside” (F. Rifki Atay qtd. in Eldem; 322). The Ottoman Empire was thus marked by the modern Turkish nation as the Islamic and Oriental Other that prevented the Turkish people from reaching “the level of contemporary civilization”<sup>14</sup> in the first place. With the aim of reintroducing “the identity marker ‘Turk’ in a positive, progressive way”, these modernizing reforms of the nation created a new identity through an “engagement with, and in opposition to, stereotypical discourses about the ‘terrible’, ‘unspeakable’, and ‘lustful’ Turk” that were prevalent in European narratives (Göknaar 24-26). Such an engagement, however, produced

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<sup>13</sup> This thesis of the national history began to be formulated in the First History Convention held in 1932. The papers presented at this convention argued that the Turks, from their exalted and mythical origin, had migrated all over the globe to create the ancient civilizations of the Hittites and Sumerians. “The language of all these civilizations were said to have evolved from an ur-Turkish, a claim that the conference papers called the Sun-Language Theory” (Parla 2008; 30).

<sup>14</sup> First uttered by Kemal Atatürk and soon adopted as the founding principle of the Kemalist modernization project, this phrase signals to Europe and its concepts of development and modernity as the model to be emulated



a national identity with an “internalized orientalism” (Göknaar 93) that constructed “Ottoman” and “modern” as binary oppositions.

#### **IV. “Beyond” the Nation: Ambivalent Mimicries, Hybrid Identities**

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that “an ethnically cleansed national identity” can only be achieved “through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the cultural contingent borderlines of modern nationhood” (5). The encounter between the Venetian and Hoja in *The White Castle* is the very space where “the complex interweavings of history” take place in the context of Ottoman/Republican modernization history. However, besides being erased from the collective memory of the nation-state, it also functions as a text located “beyond” fixed borders. Homi Bhabha defines the “beyond” as “neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past...(…) We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (3). This moment of transit makes it possible “to think beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities and to focus on moments and processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (3). *The White Castle* as a “palimpsest of identity and history” (Koroglu 1999; 154), a product of a hybridized form of narration and (mis)translation is not only situated in “the beyond” of the national sphere where identities are imagined on borders and denigrations of the past, but more importantly, deconstructs the discourses of power that engenders such rigid definitions in the first place. Faruk, by reconnecting with a seventeenth-century Ottoman cosmopolitan culture against the republican discourses of Turkishness, finds the possibility to transgress these definitions and move beyond to “a transnational and translational sense of hybridity of imagined

communities” (Bhabha 5), embodied first and foremost by the relationship between Hoja and the Venetian.

If the “beyond” provides the terrain for elaborating “strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself”, thus enabling “a hybrid imagined community” (Bhabha 1-2), this space emerges first and foremost from the complex relationship between the Venetian and Hoja and their interrogations of identity and Otherness. As a relationship shaped around the notions of ambivalence, mimicry and uncertainty throughout the novel, it signals to a multi-layered and complex formulation of selfhood from their very first encounter:

The resemblance between myself and the man who entered the room was incredible! (...) It was as if someone wanted to play a trick on me and had brought me in again by a door directly opposite the one I had first come through, saying, look, you really should have been like this, you should have come in the door like this, should have gestured with your hands like this, the other man sitting in the room should have looked at you like this. Then I decided he didn't resemble me all that much (...) As he sat down facing me, I realized that it had been a year since I last looked in a mirror (Pamuk 1985; 28).

In “Of Mimicry and Man” Homi Bhabha defines mimicry as “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” as the process of creating “a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (85-86). It is a tool of power where identification, the desire to create a reformed Other, creates the very

violence of colonial discourse. In the subverted dialectic between the European slave and Ottoman master, it is the European who desires to mimic the gestures of the Ottoman, to be in his image and place when they first meet. He feels an increasing uneasiness as the object of desire under Hoja's gaze: "For in those first days he continually scrutinized me as if he were learning something and the more he learned the more curious he became. (...) I believe Hoja enjoyed this. He could sit and watch me to his heart's content, if only by the dim light of a lamp" (32). However, Hoja continuously oscillates between an admiration and condescension towards this figure who he sees as an unattainable source of knowledge and a fool like the rest of his society. Ambitious to overcome "the gap" between his knowledge and the Venetian's, the Hoja approaches his slave to help him: "Help me,' he said abruptly. 'Let's think about them together, I can't make any progress on my own" (72). The power is subverted once again, as the Venetian plays the part of the elder brother in this new equation: "In the beginning I felt more like the solicitous elder who agrees to review his old lessons so as to help his lazy little brother catch up" (47). Neither Hoja, as the master who pines for the knowledge and lives of Others, nor the Venetian as the slave who cannot claim the discourse of Western colonial power, can embody a position of hegemony throughout this relationship. Yet, it is this constant shift of power between the two that opens the space for ambivalence inherent in colonial discourses of power: "... the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. (...) The menace of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (Bhabha 86-87).

This indeterminacy inherent in mimicry is exposed at another crucial moment when Hoja, fixated on the question of identity, resorts to writing as a means of reaching a resolution. First,

the master forces the slave to write down his memories, dreams and fears to help Hoja discover what differentiates the minds of Others, these people who “constantly thought about themselves” (97). Drawn in with the Venetian’s dreams of switching identities, Hoja finally agrees to write about himself to discover what “sets him apart from his fools”. But this quest of finding their true identities transgresses into being a mutual effort undertaken by both at the same time: “He said we must sit at the two ends of the table and write facing one another: our minds, confronted by these dangerous subjects, would drift, trying to escape (...) only in this way could we strengthen each other with the spirit of discipline” (102). So they begin, not only writing about petty childhood memories, but delving into the darker side of their lives. As the Venetian watches Hoja “slowly unravel (...) each time losing more of his self-confidence and self-respect” (112), it becomes impossible to think of identity through the notions of totality, determinacy and wholeness for either of them, for the slave claims to be losing his balance too. After reading and learning everything about one another, they finally stand in front of the mirror together and gaze at their reflection: “I looked, and under the raw light of the lamp saw once more how much we resembled one another (...) The two of us were one person!” (137). Overcome by the anxiety of this realization, the narrator makes a gesture with his hand to verify that he is still himself, only this is reciprocated by mimicry: “But he imitated my gesture and did it perfectly, without disturbing the symmetry of the mirror image at all. He also imitated my look, the attitude of my head, he mimicked my terror I could not endure to see in the mirror” (137-138). But this mimicry too is something that is shared by the two of them; we cannot identify if it is the Venetian mimicking Hoja or vice-versa, for it is both, constantly switching back and forth: “He was right, I too wanted to say and do the things he said and did, I envied him because he could take action when I could not” (139). If being “almost the same, but not quite” creates an ambivalence which

not only disrupts the colonial desire of creating a static, reformed Other, but transforms the very process into “an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a partial (incomplete/virtual) presence” (86), then the mutual mimicry of Hoja/Venetian as two equally “partial” and incomplete identities, each as a mimicry of the other, functions to eradicate any possibility of hegemony of Self over the Other. Furthermore, the ambiguity surrounding the positioning of power is paralleled by the ambiguity of their shifting conceptions of selfhood:

I had a recurring dream: we were at a masked ball in Venice reminiscent in its confusion of the feasts of Istanbul: when the ‘courtesans’ took off their masks I recognized my mother and fiancée in the crowd, and I took off my own mask full of hope that they would recognize me too, but somehow they didn’t know it was me, they were pointing with their masks to someone behind me; when I turned to look, I saw that this person who would know that I was me was Hoja. Then when I approached him, in the hope that he would recognize me, the man who was Hoja took off his mask without a word and from behind it, terrifying me with a pang of guilt that woke me from my dream, emerged the image of my youth (214).

The narrator of this dream reads like the Venetian, but there is an indeterminacy to this as emphasized by the multiple layers of identity exposed here. The complexity of these layers is not only limited to the dream sequences, but is something the text plays with throughout the story. The narrator continuously sees images of the Hoja as a ghost-like apparition of himself: “I was bewildered to see someone moving through the trees, as if flying; it was me, but with a long beard, walking silently on the air” (44). These multiple layers in their identities, dreams of switching places and certain repetitions and gaps in the narrative lead to a complete indeterminacy of the narrator’s real identity. Is it the Venetian or the Hoja telling the story, we

constantly ask, but the answer is neither and both, Self and Other, structured to remain unidentifiable, just as the master/slave gradually discover and finally accept themselves to be.

As a novel centered both on the question of identity as well as its slippage from certainty, the ambiguous identity of the narrator further hinders the possibility of reaching any finite resolutions. As Michael Pittman argues, “Throughout the novel, the identity of the narrator/author is put into question in a series of omissions, substitutions, and deferrals” (64). Indeterminate identity of the narrator is a theme the novel weaves into the story from the very beginning. “I kept trying to track down the author of my story, but the research I did in Istanbul libraries dashed most of my hopes” (9) declares Faruk in the preface, adding that this is a figure “who clearly enjoyed reading and fantasizing” (9). This enjoyment of reading and fantasizing even brings forth the possibility that the narrator is fabricating these memories, leading the reader to question the truth of the events as well as who is telling the story: “Now, as I recollect my memories and try to invent a past for myself” (62) declares the narrator, and goes on to describe the excruciating process of writing and reading each other’s childhood memories and most intimate secrets “(...) as I try to reconstruct his scribblings and my own experiences, relying only on my imagination, I’m not frightened any more of being overwhelmed by details that fascinate me so much” (105). Furthermore, Faruk’s loose translation and his vocalized distrust of history puts forth the possibility of this memoir being completely or partially a fabrication of his. This unattainability of certainty and truth within the text works to question grand narratives that surround the encounter between Hoja and Venetian on a larger framework: “The text not only resists grand narratives about the authors, but also resists or undoes the solidification of a series of historically dichotomized identities, including Europe and the East, or the West and Turkey, or the West and the Muslim world, etc.” (Pittman 64). As the fixed and

authentic definitions of Self and Other are slowly and painstakingly questioned, then deconstructed by Hoja and the Venetian, Faruk Darvinoglu and Orhan Pamuk begin to interrogate the discourses of power and comparison that shaped the relationship between the Ottoman Empire, Western Europe and the nation-state of Turkey, proposing a more complex re-figuration of history and subjectivity.

The unattainability of fixed categories and authenticity, be it identity or binary discourses, is symbolized most clearly by the unsuccessful siege of the Doppio (double) Castle at the end of the novel. Labeled as the White Castle by the narrator and Hoja, they encounter this fortress during the Ottoman army's expedition to the Polish towns refusing taxation. Described by the ambitious Hoja as the "last chance" for the Ottoman Empire to "rouse itself and take action" (216) once more, he and the Venetian accompany the sultan with the uncanny siege engine they design to "ruin the enemies of the empire". As Hoja talks passionately about the need to take action and rise up again, firmly believing in a victory for the Ottomans with the help of their bizarre invention, he begins to search for definitive answers and resolutions as the army makes its way into the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. These definitive resolutions center on his desire for power and victory as well as questions of identity and difference. His search for what is inside a man's mind and what differentiates men grows into torturous questioning sessions of the villagers: "A little earlier they had been talking about 'them' and the insides of their heads and now, when I saw the fascination on their faces and heard Hoja ask the old man a few things through the interpreter (...): what was his greatest transgression, the worst thing he had done in his life?" (225). As they make their way through the muddy lands of Polish villages, Hoja becomes less certain about the attainability of an answer to his question as well as the

success of his siege engine, which the army casts as a harbinger of bad luck. When they finally reach the still unconquered Doppio Castle, they also reach the only resolution the text offers:

After the sun had set and we learned not only that Huseyn Pasha the Blond had failed, but that Austrians, Hungarians, and Kazaks had joined the Poles at the siege of Doppio, we finally saw the castle itself. It was at the top of a high hill, its towers streaming with flags were caught by the faint red glow of the setting sun, and it was white; purest white and beautiful. I didn't know why I thought that one could see such a beautiful and unattainable thing only in a dream. In that dream, you would run along a road twisting through a dark forest, straining to reach the bright day of that hilltop, that ivory edifice; as if there were a grand ball going on which you wanted to join in, a chance for happiness you did not want to miss, but although you expected to reach the end of the road at any moment, it would never end (245).

Any notion of monolithic categories, identities of difference constructed on a comparison between Self and Other, black and white undergoes a destruction with this final acceptance of the “dream-like” unattainability of the Doppio Castle. Without waiting for the final attempt of conquering the castle, without even discussing it, the narrator and Hoja mutually decide to switch places: “I knew now that many of the things I'd experienced for years as coincidence had been inevitable, that our soldiers would never be able to reach the white towers of the castle, that Hoja was thinking the same thing (...) I remembered how once, years earlier, to provoke him to talk about himself, I had spoken of a childhood friend of mine with whom I'd developed the habit of thinking the same thing at the same time. I had no doubt he too was now thinking of the very same things” (246-247). The game of shifting identities comes to an end as they embrace being



“doubles” of Self and Other, as “ambivalent mimics” of each other in a state of mutual belonging, just like the ants they once described in their cautionary tales for the child-sultan: “But now everything is three-dimensional, reality has shadows, don’t you see; even the most ordinary ant patiently carries his shadow around on his back like a twin” (78). This final acceptance of an indeterminate, partial yet double identity leaves both characters in a peaceful resolution that translates into the text and the memories themselves as they go over the memories from their past lives once more: “These stories have seemed to me mere reflections of my fantasies, not the truth, but then I believed them: my sister’s stutter was real, as were the many buttons on our clothes and the things I had seen from the window overlooking the garden behind our house” (248). It is not the claim to truth, completion or hegemony that matters to the narrator, but an awareness of the constructed nature of these claims that the author embraces in his own memoir. With this resolution, as Jale Parla argues, narration in *The White Castle* functions to actively subvert the orientalist discourse which constructs “East as a dark shadow of Europe” (97). “In formulating power, literature can deconstruct as much as construct the discourses that help shape it. It can help put on various masks as much as unmask certain things in constructing identities” (Parla 97). In the context of *The White Castle*, narration, in the end, becomes another “third-space” of hybridity where Hoja/Venetian as well as Faruk Darvinoglu/Orhan Pamuk narrate/translate themselves out of fixed sites of identity and grand narratives, to interrogate and construct their own definitions.

## **V. Conclusion**

In the preface, Faruk Darvinoglu describes his method of translation as a highly creative and ambiguous process: “After reading a couple of sentences from the manuscript I kept on one table, I’d go to another table in the other room where I kept my papers and try to narrate in

today's idiom the sense of what remained in my mind" (13). Instead of a literal word-to word translation, Faruk narrates the sense of what has remained in his mind, grounding his translation between the old Ottoman Turkish and highly purified modern Turkish in memory and a subjective narrative voice. For Faruk, "part of the text's appeal is that it contains a component beyond disciplinary control, one that is literary" (Gökner 99). Furthermore, the appeal of the literary takes place when he is still stuck in the dilemma between history and fiction, a central conflict of *Silent House* that haunted Faruk throughout the novel: "They may accuse us of harboring ideologies and filling the heads of our contemporaries with more or less false notions about themselves and their world, but I've no doubt that the true appeal of history is the pleasure of the story; the power to divert us" (Pamuk 1983; 126). Faruk's dilemma between the literary and historical comes to a resolution as he develops his personal theory of narration grounded on a mixture of the historical and fictional that is also conscious of its construction, which he realizes by converting the manuscript, "The Quilter's Stepson", into the novel, *The White Castle*. As Faruk's discovery and translation of "The Quilter's Stepson" makes the denigrated cultural memory of the Ottoman Empire legible to the nation again, Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* deconstructs the discourses of Turkish modernity and Westernization that aimed to create a stable identity on the synthesis of the West and the East, a synthesis that ended in internalizing binary oppositions. The Doppio Castle remains unattainable, along with the desire for hegemony and a fixed identity; Pamuk, on the other hand, scripts these "defeats" as the very space where a truly hybrid identity and, by extension, community, can be imagined.

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