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A STUDY OF RELIGIOUS ISSUES INORHAN PAMUK'S THE WHITE CASTLE

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Abstract
The present paper delves into the deep-seated conundrums about faith and secularist activities in Turkey that are prominently displayed Pamuk's narrative. It also discusses Pamuk's depiction of the dominant value system, moral norms and religious standards in modern Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. The protagonist constantly find himself in unpleasant and perplexing circumstances due to the ongoing battle to define his religious identity. The clash between secularist values and religious fanaticism remains a contentious issue in contemporary Turkey.
Key words : ***Turkey, Islam, Ottoman,History, The white castle***

Historical Background:
After formation of a Republic, Turkey underwent a drastic change in political, social, religious, cultural, socio-economic, educational and legal realms. The nation established an exceptional example in the contemporary time with its revolutionary changes. In 1934, the Turkish parliament conferred upon Kemal Pasha the title 'Ataturk', the father of the Turks. There is no doubt that it was Kemal Pasha who made revolutionary changes in Turkey and changed the Ottoman Turkey into a contemporary secular country. Secularism and liberalism became the basic foundation of the new Republic of Turkey. Religion was completely isolated from Politics and other concerns of the state. The party of Ataturk dominated the whole Republic till 1945. In the modern Turkey, military plays a crucial role. The nation witnessed military coups multiple times but it restored its democracy each time. In the current century, Turkey suffers from fanaticism and extremely radical religious ideologies. Turkish literature strongly expresses the feeling of uneasiness and insecurity in the minds of Muslims. Turkey, like several other secular countries, confronts the prospect of terrorism begotten by different terrorist organizations. However, secularism and liberalism play a crucial role in the politics of Turkey. Turkey's break up with the Islamic traditions has created dramatic changes in the Republic. The country got religious schools and the Caliphate abolished within several months after it was declared Republic.

Education was secularized following the independence in 1923. Religious education was replaced with secular and scientific education. The creation of madrasas and mosques was halted. Ataturk made alterations in language at a rapid pace. The new Latin alphabet superseded the Persian and Arabic alphabets. The judicial system was established based on current models of European countries. The new civil code from the Swiss Civil Code was adopted. It allows a Muslim individual to marry a person with another belief. The headscarf was forbidden in the government offices, such as schools, universities, courts and other locations. Women were bestowed with equal rights and privileges in contrast to their counterparts. Regarding women's rights, Turkey was significantly ahead of the European countries.

Furthermore, the change of alphabet disconnected Turkish residents from their cultural heritage, and they were distanced not only from their history but also from the religious life of their forefathers. In "The Sacralization of Secularism in Turkey", MaeydaYegenoglu makes the following remarks about the cultural stagnation that exists in Turkey:
The main social, political and cultural conflict between the secularists and the Islamists is rooted in the exclusion of Islamic culture, ways of life and codes from the public domain as legitimate markers of Turkish identity. Current demands formore public visibility of Islamic identity,

aesthetics and ways of life should be seen in the light of this historically rooted split. (Yegenoglu 2-3)

Yegenoglu argues that people started to be cognizant of their religious identity, and this consciousness grew in the latter half of the 20th century. By the time, Turkey had experienced the emergence of religious extremism and political Islam which persistently provoked ideological and physical conflicts with the secularist parties and forces.

Islam in Turkey emerged due to the persistent efforts of Arabs during the country's formative years. "The Arabs gained control of the Mediterranean Sea after defeating the Byzantine fleets during the early ninth century" (Rao 129). Arabs used force to defeat the Byzantine Empire, the dominant power at the time, and establish the dominance of their faith. They made their initial settlement in the country. Islam thereupon flourished in Turkey and solidified its distinct cultural glory and Islamic identity. However, under the influence of the West, Kemal Ataturk discarded this established structure of Islam in Turkey. He introduced secular reforms and instituted harsh penal codes for individuals who sought to follow the Islamic faith. Consequently, he eradicated the Islamic tradition that had existed in Turkey from the start of the ninth century.

Certainly, Ataturk ushered in a period of economic growth and social transformation in Turkey. However, as Turkey's material prosperity increased, the value system of the previously prosperous Turkey deteriorated. Islam was seen as an impediment on the way of the progressive European lifestyle. Dramatic alterations in the name of modernity and an apathetic attitude toward Islam caused a major alteration in Turkish society. Pamuk tackles the nuanced realities of his country's Islamic society and sheds light on modern Turkey by setting his characters in the historical backdrop.

Women in Islamic nations have traditionally expressed displeasure with the strict laws imposed by their patriarchal governments. Turkey is one of the Islamic countries in which women have historically held a subordinate position. The position of women in modern Turkey is changing and they are striving for identifying their role in the Turkish society. History bears witness that women have undergone great deal of suffering and adversity in the past centuries. The Ottoman era is a crucial historical period that must be addressed in this regard. The Ottoman Empire which controlled Turkey for more than six hundred years was one of the wealthiest and most influential Islamic empires. This Empire was strictly patriarchal. Males were prioritised because they were seen as more capable. "Women's putative physical and moral weaknesses rendered them subject to men. As a general rule, women were economically dependent on men and derived their social positions from their husbands and fathers" (Zilfi 16). Women's conditions were significantly worse during the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Society of Turkey was entirely "silent on the subject of woman. It was even improper to talk about her" (Safarian 141). Some changes took place under Sultan Mahmud II's rule. Indeed, in 1867, the first organisations for women were founded. These organisations were primarily cultural and educational in character and they paid no attention to the social position of women. Following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, the movement for women's freedom in the Ottoman Empire gained momentum. The result was that a large number of women began to produce poetry and fiction. They wrote for the periodicals devoted to women and expressed opposition against the Ottoman's treatment with women. The conventional structure persisted considerably longer in Ottoman society. The transition from traditional to modernity and the Westernisation of society began late in Turkey. Gradually, women gained freedom and the ability to express themselves in various fields.

Women's rights in Turkey were firmly established during 1920s and 1930s. In fact, a significant improvement in their position was seen under the reign of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He championed the rights of women by putting them at the centre of society. He proclaimed that men and women are equal in both social and political matters. Therefore, Ataturk may be seen as a feminist who firmly launched the movement in Turkey to modernise society and improve women's roles and status. Since the 20th century, a number of authors, both male and female, have attempted to undermine the notion that women are inferior by breaking their conventional roles. This binary

opposition persists in Islamic or Eastern nations and women suffer as a result of living in male-dominated societies. Various critics and authors in these nations have attempted and are still attempting to improve the position of women.

Pamuk's vision of Turkey is characterised by a deep-melancholy representation of a magnificent culture deeply ingrained in Islam. Thus, Orhan Pamuk presents his characters in an endless quest for their cultural and personal identity as they suffer from inner turmoil and challenges caused by their religious beliefs and practices

The White Castle:

In *The White Castle,* Pamuk provides a substantial discourse on the religious identity issues that were important in seventeenth-century Ottoman Turkey. The novel focuses mainly on the identity problem and cultural and moral angst experienced by Ottoman citizens. It also references the religious ideology, practices and conventional belief systems that were prevalent during that period. The events in the narrative also reflect the conflicts between cultures in contemporary Turkey.

ErdagGoknar points it out in “Orhan Pamuk and the Ottoman Theme”:The self-conscious juxtaposition of a seventeenth century story set in Ottoman Istanbul to the post 1980 coup is significant and gives us important clues to what the Ottoman theme means to the author. Importantly, these two distinct historical times are sutured through the narrative structure in a way that makes an implicit argument (Goknar).

The story examines how the Ottoman state and its citizens foster their religious commitment. Religious identity is given the highest priority. This is seen in the opening of the novel. The narrator is from Venetian origin. He is enslaved in Istanbul after being captured by Turkish troops in the Mediterranean. He is well-versed in astronomy, mathematics, physics, painting and medical science. He describes how the Turkish behave with Christians and Westerners. Turkish invaders seize the narrator's ship and his belongings. They brutally torture Christians and set Muslim slaves free. The shackled Muslim slaves transform into masters and enslave their western masters. "The Muslim slaves, loosed from their chains, were shouting with joy, and a gang of them set about taking vengeance right away on the men who had whipped them" (The White Castle 15).

Pamuk alludes to the fact that there are significant expatriate inhabitants in Istanbul. Most notably these expatriates are Italians who probably are responsible for making Istanbul a cosmopolitan city. The narrative depicts that the common practice of Ottomans was to convert captives to Islam. It contains several shreds of evidence that most expatriates were forced to abandon their Euro-Christian beliefs and even their names. After being captured, the Venetian slave encounters a “Genoese captain", one of the converts, who treats him with courtesy due to the narrator's education. On the other hand, the captain's brutality toward other Christians heightens the narrator's internal turmoil. "But this privilege cost me dear; the other Christians who were put to the oars despised me instantly" (The White Castle 16). It is also highlighted that the religious insignia on their flags were also disrespected. "They hoisted their banners on every mast and at the bottom hung our flags, our icons of the Virgin Mary and crucifixes upside down, letting hotheads from the city who jumped aboard shoot at them" (The White Castle 16).

The hostility between non-believers and believers is remarkable when the narrator describes the picture of the Christian slaves noticed by the people from both sides of the road in Istanbul City. The Turkish pirates seize the western Christian galleys every year and imprison its passengers and crew. The Christian slaves are mishandled and some of them arekilled. The religious struggle is also sharply delineated in the narrative. The Christians pertaining to the west and Muslims to the east stand eye to eye, creating a long-lasting battle. Western Christian slaves are compelled to adopt Islam, or on rejecting it, they are tortured. The narrator encounters several transformed western individuals who encourage him to accept Islam. They had to change their faith because they wished to live a peaceful life. “A former slave who had converted to Islam many years before advised me not to run away. If I became a Muslim as he had done, I could make a

freedman of myself, but nothing more" (The White Castle 20) The narrator realizes that converting to Islam is the only way for him to live a dignified life.

When the narrator is brought before the Pasha, the Pasha's first demand is to change his religious identification. The Venetian slave's scientific acumen, particularly his skill in orchestrating fireworks, has immensely pleased the Pasha. He is sure that the Pasha will even guarantee his freedom if he converts to Islam. "Suddenly he said that if I became a Muslim he would make me a freedman at once" (The White Castle 29). The narrator is taken aback by the Pasha's demand and is unable even to consider losing his religious identity. He asks the Pasha to make arrangements for his return journey to Italy and sends the Pasha his best wishes. It infuriates the Pasha. "When I said I would not abandon my faith, the Pasha was furious. I returned to my cell". (The White Castle 29) The Pasha calls the slave back to his presence and tries to educate the narrator by outlining the qualities and beauty of Islam:

> In a sudden moment of courage, I said I would not change my religion, and the Pasha,surprised, called me a fool. After all, there was no one around me whom I would be ashamed to tell I had become a Muslim. Then he talked for a while about theprecepts of Islam. When he had finished, he sent me back to my cell (The White Castle 29).

The narrator's steadfast approach stems from his great faith in Christianity. Despite the Pasha's death threat, he maintains his stance. "They said the Pasha had commanded that I should be beheaded at once if I would not become a Muslim" (The White Castle 30). Later, during the preparations for his death, the executioners approach him. They castigate him that he "was the enemy of God and Muhammed" (The White Castle 31). Despite all compulsions and torments, the narrator remains unmoved. He does not accept Islam. After seeing the obstinate behaviour of the narrator, the Pasha changes his mind. Instead of killing the narrator as planned, the Pasha assigns the Venetian to Hoja. So, the Venetian slave is now Hoza's personal slave. The master signifies indigenous Turkish wisdom whereas the slave being a young Venetian scholar and engineer signifies the western science. The master and the slave have such a striking physical resemblance that it is too difficult to identify as to who is who. The narrator lives at his master's mansion and works with him. Hoja aspires to build a rocket that can reach as high as the moon. The slave narrator mocks at his master's ignorance. He tells the master that the moon is extremely far distant. This communication between the two demonstrates the dominance of thewestern knowledge over the traditional eastern one. Whatever the western slave explains to his master, he listens with attention but shows little interest in it. The western slave imparts all his sophisticated knowledge to his master and educates him in astronomy, medicine, engineering etc.

When plague strikes the city, Hoja adheres to old religious beliefs. The Turkish people consider that the illness or epidemic is 'God's Will.' Hoja too believes that the plague is the 'Will of the Almighty.' According to his Turkish customs, if a man is predestined to die, he will die. No one can prevent him from dying. The mysterious notion of the disease is beyond the narrator's ken. The narrator thinks logically and objectively. He advises Hoja to keep social distancing from one another because the disease is communicable. The religious Hoja being absolutely shorn of scientific temperament, attempts to become braver, labelling the narrator a coward. When Hoja is not around, the narrator goes outside to understand the circumstances better. While walking along Istanbul Street, he encounters numerous other Italian converts and gets to know their new names:

> When Hoja went to school, I flew out into the streets. I searched out the Italianconverts I'd managed to meet during the eleven years I had spent here. One of them, known by his new name Mustafa Reis, had left for the dockyards; the other Osman Effendi, wouldn't let me in at first although I knocked at his door as though I would beat it down with my fists (The White Castle 71).

Osman Effendi chastises the narrator for failing to believe what is going on out there. Further, he asserts that because the narrator is still a Christian, he cannot logically absorb things. "He said I was scared, he could see it in my face, I was scared because I remained faithful to Christianity! He scolded me, a man must be a Muslim to be happy here" (The White Castle 71).

They were so firmly committed to their faith that they were willing to go to any length to uphold it. It demonstrates how people in the period adopted and internalised Islam.

The plague spreads in all the areas of the city. The writer presents two perspectives on disease: a scientific perspective and a religious or superstitious one. However, Hoja, the protagonist is not living the life of a devout Muslim. The townspeople blame him for spreading the disease with his unorthodox behaviour. It is evident from the words of a guest who visits Hoja and the narrator: With the spleen of a merchant criticising the goods he intends to buy, ourvisitor added that the neighbours were saying that Hoja ate his food at a table like an infidel instead of sitting down cross-legged; that after paying purse upon purse of money for books, he threw them on the floor and trod on the pages in which the Prophet's name was written; that, unable to placate the devil within him by gazing at the sky for hours, he lay on his bed in broad daylight gazing at his dirty ceiling, took pleasure not in women but only young boys, I was his twin brother, he didn't fast during Ramadan and the plague had been sent on his account (The White Castle 77).

Hoja remains unconcerned, despite being accused of spreading the disease. He accepts the scientific mindset instilled in him by the Italian slave. He convinces the Sultan to stop the crowded marketplaces, regulate the entry of people into the palace, bring 500 cats, and so on. However, society is unable to accept scientific attitudes and reason. People are not even concerned about the epidemic at this point. The superstitious residents of the palace refer to plague as God's will for people's sins, and no one should question it. "Disease is God's will and if a man is fated to die he will die" (The White Castle 72). Hoja uses the slave's scientific expertise to manage the spreading of disease. His instructions and ideas are followed by the young Sultan who adopts his calendar to end the disease. On the other hand, religious organisations argue that it is a sin against God's will. The Ottomans reject Hoja's initiative, arguing that it is an effort to compete with God. "To make war on the plague was to oppose God" (The White Castle 92).

Hoja gets to know from his slave that the plague is a catastrophe that can only be stopped by taking precautionary measures. He requests that the Sultan should limit his contact with others in order to protect himself. Strangers are not permitted to enter the palace, and everything is strictly monitored. During the plague epidemic, the local religious people oppose Hoja's stance, which they call "against God's will." Hoja, with the help of his slave's western scientific knowledge, eventually succeeds in controlling the deadly disease and wins Sultan's favour. In this endeavour, the scientific viewpoint clashes with the religious mindset. It is a conflict between religion and reason.

In this way, in *The White Castle*, Pamukemphasises the complexities of the belief system in seventeenth-century Ottoman Turkey. The narrator of the book, an alienated "other" is unwilling to give up his religion in favour of the personal benefit. The narrative gives an unbiased view of the religious and cultural conditions of Turkey through the eyes of a Venetian slave. It also highlights the role of scientific temperament in society.

Conclusion:

The novel *"The White Castle"* is a literary masterpiece about the fascinating encounter between a Venetian and an Ottoman doppelganger who represent several elements of the cultural conflicts between Islam and Christianity. It is set in the mediaeval age of the 17th-century Ottoman Empire. Pamuk presents a religious identity issue in Turkey through the Venetian slave who is captured by Turkish soldiers in the Mediterranean Sea. He is forced to embrace Islam if he wishes to live peacefully in Turkey. On his refusal to change his religious identity, the Turkish troops prepare a death sentence for him. Here, Pamuk stresses the complexities of the belief system of 17th Ottoman Turkey. The writer also depicts the vast gap of knowledge between the eastern and western nations. He highlights that when Plague spreads in the city, Turkish citizens consider it a Will of God. They view the epidemic from a religious and spiritual perspective and ignore the scientific and intellectual perspectives. They consider the epidemic as God's retribution for sins committed by humans. Their blind religious faith is in contrast to the slave's scientific and logical perspective. However, Hoja with the help of his Venetian slave's scientific knowledge controls the

epidemic in the city and ultimately wins Sultan's favour. Thus, the plague incident highlights the disparity between traditional religious beliefs and scientific knowledge. By the conclusion of the book, the two identical men, Hoja and the Venetian slave, switch their identities and places and lead entirely different lives. These characters also represent the clash of eastern and western civilizations.

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