

“I was he and he was I”: Mimetic Study of Orhan Pamuk’s *The White Castle*

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ABSTRACT: *This study analyses Orhan Pamuk's The White Castle (1985) through the lens of René Girard's mimetic desire. The research investigates how people's mimetic inclinations are the fundamental cause of the East-West conflict, proposing that the relationship between these two regions is deeply rooted in mimesis. By analysing the characters and their interactions, this study reveals societal interaction on the individual and societal levels. Moreover, this paper demonstrates that Pamuk's characters can be understood as Girardian subjects, which is demonstrated through the shift in their identities. The significance of this study lies in its innovative approach to understanding Pamuk's literary oeuvre and its contributions to the broader discourse on cultural dynamics between the East and West through a mimetic lens. By applying Girard's mimetic theory, the research offers fresh insights into the characters' shifting identities and motivations, guided by processes of imitation, which have been previously overlooked in the existing literature.*

Keywords: Mimesis, Triangular Desire, Girardian Desire, Over-reactive mimesis, Mimetic theory, East-West, Imitation, Shifting Desires

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Introduction

Introduction

In this study, Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* (1985) is explored through the lens of mimetic theory by René Girard (1965, 1977, 1986, 1987, 1991, 1996), a French philosopher. As an internationally renowned Turkish writer, Pamuk's novels revolve around creating an interwoven narrative of historical, philosophical, and cultural threads, thus forming a tale that reflects multiple facets of human nature and connections. Initially, critics perceived Pamuk's earlier works as derivative of Western literary traditions. However, over the subsequent three decades, he persistently honed his skills and produced great works, thus acquiring the Nobel Prize in literature in 2006.

The White Castle (first published in 1985 and English translation in 1990) was set against the backdrop of the 17th-century Ottoman-Habsburg wars, marked by a series of conflicts and crises. The story of this novel revolves around a Venetian man being captured and sold to an Ottoman who was curious about Western knowledge and intellectual trends. Through this novel, Orhan Pamuk explored his much-interested topic of doppelgängers, depicted through the interrelation of a master-slave who shared an uncanny physical resemblance (McGaha 86-87). This dynamic aligns closely with Girard's mimetic theory, particularly in their depiction of imitation, desire, and rivalry. In addition, engaging with the Western world, blurring identity boundaries, power dynamics, and cultural encounters are a few themes of Pamuk's *The White Castle*.

René Girard was a French philosopher who devised the mimetic theory in the mid-20th century, positing mimesis and violence as the origin of human culture. Girard's mimetic theory has been drawn from various disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, sociology, and such. Thus, utilizing this interdisciplinary framework can offer a nuanced understanding of literary works, as it can allow the integration of diverse perspectives.

René Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (first published in 1961 and English translation in 1965) is one of the foremost works in which he introduced his ideas of human desire, to which he first referred as "triangular desire," "desire according to another," and "imitated desire" to lay the foundation of his theoretical concept (2, 4, 21). The first pillar of Girard's mimetic theory deals with the concept of triangular desire and its vertices (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel* 2, 83; Palaver 46). In his later work, Girard used the term "mimetic desire" (*Violence and the Sacred* 148) to refer to the phenomenon of triangular desire, treating this two as interchangeable.

In mimetic desire, Girard argued that people have nothing to desire on their own, so they imitate the desires of others around them (Deceit 2, 4, 21). For Girard, this phenomenon of imitation is what defines most human association, as will be seen reflected in Pamuk's selected novels. This analysis seeks to establish the concept of Girard's mimetic desire amongst Pamuk's characters by placing them as the pioneers of the Girardian subject and identifying their mediators and objects of desire. Which is portrayed through the characters of Hoja and the Venetian slave of *The White Castle*.

Hoja, as a victim of the mimetic contagion of Ottoman society, imitates the Venetian slave, whom he subconsciously considers superior. In a similar sense, the Venetian slave also imitated Hoja's behaviour of mimesis and depicted Girard's mimetic tendencies. Moreover, as a consequence of mimetic desire, Girard argues for the presence of mimetic rivalry, model-obstacle dynamics, mimetic doubles, and over-reactive mimesis, which are also proven and seen in this study of Pamuk's novel (Palaver 13, 136; Violence and the Sacred 165; Deceit 101).

Employing a qualitative research method accompanied by an in-depth analysis of *The White Castle*, this research study addresses the following questions: How does triangular desire manifest itself in the relationship between characters and contribute to their formation and evolution of overlapped identities? How character's mimetic desires can be interpreted as a metaphor for the relationship between East and West? How does the ambiguity surrounding the characters' identities and the blurring of boundaries between them relate to Girard's notion of doubles or reciprocal mimesis?

Lastly, in light of Girard's arguments, one of the main endeavours of this research is to illustrate that mimesis is at the root of the East-West dynamic. The use of a new theoretical lens to study Pamuk's work will open a path to new interpretations as well as serve as proof for Girard's theory. Briefly put, this study's objective is to depict the phenomenon of mimesis—central to human relations and civilization—in Pamuk's *The White Castle*. By offering a Girardian lens on this text, this research seeks to uncover novel insights into East-West conflict and cultural identity while expanding the existing body of literature on Girard's universal theory and Pamuk's oeuvre.

Literature Review

Prior to beginning with the textual analysis of Orhan Pamuk's selected novels, it is necessary to highlight the studies that have been undertaken for the purpose of building the theoretical concept and thematic understanding of this study.

René Girard has applied his concepts of mimesis and triangular desires in his own works. Girard examined William Shakespeare's plays through the mimetic lens in *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare* (1991). His insight regarding the characters who exhibited mimetic tendencies due to their familiarity with growing up with each other has offered significant understanding for analysing the characters of Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*.

If one is to narrow down the previous works on Pamuk's *The White Castle*, then two main aspects can be concluded from the topics in which most of the research is done: exploration of self (identity) and the dichotomy of East and West. For the most part, these two aspects intermingle, as most of the previous studies mainly concerned themselves with discussing this identity shift in an East/West context by utilizing different lenses of theories and theorists.

In resonance with the current study, the first research paper is by Samanta Soumya, titled "East-West Dichotomy in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*." Soumya's study employed the theoretical framework of Orientalism by Edward Said to depict the tightly interwoven ideals and complexity of West and East (202), the loss of identity reflected (203), and analysing the novel as an example of Orientalism because of the Ottoman's inferiority complex (204). Despite these aspects, Soumya's work lacks insight into this aspect from historical, social or behavioural aspects of characters and Ottoman society.

Continuing with the theme of East-West, a similar study has been done by Adile Aslan Almond titled "The Subversion of East and West in Orhan Pamuk's novel, *The White Castle*." Similar to Soumya's study, Almond argued that the characters of *The White Castle* Hoja and the Venetian slave are symbols of East and West, respectively, who depict mutant identities because of their inability to keep a solid or individual personality (2). To deduce this, the lens that Almond employed was Orientalism and Occidentalism. Thus, exploring the ideas of fictionalized narratives, East-West dynamic, and Hoja and the narrator's subverted role as master-slave (2,6-7).

Another research that dealt with the theme of East-West disparity was Rajani Malla's *Blurring the Boundary Between the East and West in Pamuk's The White Castle*. The perspective with which the current study mostly concerns itself is Malla's exploration of the "hegemonization" of the West over the Eastern countries (1-2) and its dimension in Pamuk's characters. For this, Malla has utilized the lens of Edward Said's Orientalism and New Historicism. Malla's insight into the inferiority-superiority dynamic between characters and East-West has evidenced and broadened the concept of authority when seen through the lens of the triangular desire between the master-slave relationship of Hoja and the Venetian slave.

Similar to Malla's work, the perspective of New Historicism has also been undertaken by another study titled "A New Historicist Approach to Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*" by Gökçen Kara. Kara's work has evidenced Pamuk's depiction of social life in the 17th century, through which the author has intended to interrogate the Ottoman identity that took a disoriented shape in the proceeding years. One more research that has helped in exploring this Ottoman identity in Pamuk's work is "Orhan Pamuk and the "Ottoman" Theme" by Erdağ Göknaar. These studies have supported in building a consensus for insight into the current study as it involves the East-West historical analysis to depict the phenomenon of mimesis in society and amongst Ottomans.

Likewise, another work that broadens the theoretical concept of Pamuk's *The White Castle* from the lens of Orientalism is Beyazıt H. Akman's research. Akman argued that Pamuk's work had borrowed the legacy of European Orientalist writing, proving that Pamuk undermined not only the Ottoman identity but the accomplishments of the Ottoman as a state as well (59, 63). Also, Nehal Mohamed Abdelwahab's "Cultural Melancholy as Represented in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*" made use of melancholy to build an understanding of the character's individual cultural and historical experiences (68), which placed them on two divergent sides of superiority and inferiority (80).

To conclude, these studies contribute to the broader context of the East-West relationship and utilize various theories. However, the studies mentioned here also limit *The White Castle*'s thematic and broader sense solely to the division of East/West disparity. Thus, Girard's mimetic theory—unlike Homi. K. Bhabha and Edward Said—do not concern themselves with the post-colonial context or the Ottoman context. It simply refers to human associations based on their mimetic tendencies, as illustrated previously. Therefore, what these studies discuss—focusing on nationalist identities and discussing the change of Hoja's identity as a symbol of Ottoman's cultural identity failure—is not essentially the concern of this study.

From a look at the existing literature and works on Pamuk's novel, it is noteworthy to conclude that most of them seek to answer how and in what ways the West has exerted its influence on the East from a post-colonial lens. However, this research study seeks to bring Pamuk's work out of this thematic confinement and into the area of dissecting human relations and connections. Through Girard's framework, this research endeavours to use Pamuk's work to dissect characters, their actions and behaviours as a mirror for the East's imitating the West, an insight into characters' intentions and the manner in which their actions and intentions ended up shaping the society into that of cycle of mimesis. Hence, this study would not only fill the gap in the knowledge of mimesis but will also contribute to building a new perspective on the psychological dimensions of

Pamuk's works. This research intends to conclude the ways there is a structure of mimesis to human desire, which will serve as evidence and contribution to the purpose Girard started his work.

Analysis

This section intends to uncover the intricate ways mimetic dynamics have shaped human relations, societal structures, and political structures in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* using René Girard's concepts of mimetic theory. By illustrating characters' mimetic dynamics as a metaphor for East-West conflict, the purpose of this study is to explore the roots of human relations and civilization within mimesis. Thus, proving that mimesis or mimetic tendencies of individuals can be seen as the basis of East-West dynamic.

One prevailing connection can be seen between Girard's work and Pamuk's novel when the historical setting of the latter is explored. It sheds light on how mimesis or mimetic desires are an indispensable aspect of Pamuk's work. Through *The White Castle*, Orhan Pamuk reconnoitred a period of Ottoman history that was shadowed by Western influence, thus resulting in the intertwined complexity of East and West, the transition of the Ottoman Empire to the modern Middle East, and eventually the loss of Ottoman identity (Göknar 34; Soumya 198–199; Almond 1-2; Rabêlo et al. 4; Akman 4; Kara 591; Haliloğlu 111; Malla 3). Undertaking this East-West discrepancy—as epitomized in *The White Castle*—through the lens of René Girard's mimetic desire, the phenomenon of mimesis can be articulated as the root of East-West conflict in the historical, social, and political context.

Pamuk's *The White Castle* takes place in the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century, specifically during the reign of Mehmed IV (r. 1648–87). Europe had a significant impact on Ottoman history during this time, as seen by the social, political, and economic dimensions that many historians, researchers, and academics have identified. After the subjugation of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, Sultan Mehmed II began his attempts to convert the city into a capital as great as in the times of Roman emperors, which led to Istanbul being regarded as a centre of innovation in knowledge or architecture (Inalcik 18).

Amidst this, Istanbul's port became a hallmark of Ottoman trade, which eventually evolved into what Edhem Eldem described as "a cultural melting pot where east and west met around trade" (148). Consequently, Istanbul became a means of crossing borders between Ottomans and the rest of Europe, which was further augmented by European communities that fled or were imprisoned due to war and settled in Istanbul (Kafadar 597, 617; Eldem 148–9).

Furthermore, during the Ottoman's interaction with European merchants and the communities that began to settle in Ottoman cities (such as Istanbul), they built an "amalgam" of "civilizations of Europe as well as the Middle East to fashion a new society" (Goffman 16–17). When Ottoman merchants found themselves lacking in the techniques in correspondence to the merchants well-versed in Western knowledge of business, the Ottomans started to employ "Western-European commercial techniques" to compete with them (Goffman 17–18).

It is evident so far that when the Eastern part of the world, as represented by the Ottomans, came into contact with the knowledge and discoveries of the West, its influences sparked an increased interest in knowledge, customs, and combat weaponry among both the general population and the Sultan himself. Moreover, the "interest in things Western" that began with Sultan Mehmed II was taken upon by his successors. Eventually, they and their nation started seeing the discoveries concerning "science and technology" as European (Kafadar 618–619).

Subsequently, the Ottomans, when faced with Europeans well-versed in advanced commercial, trading, and technological information that was new to them, developed an inferiority complex due to envy and thus formed "a desire to take after the West" (Soumaya 204–205). Thus far, the trade that began in the fifteenth century has fused into the Ottoman Empire's emerging and immense interest in European states, economics, knowledge, and discoveries (Goffman 17–18).

The consequence of all this was, as noted by Goffman that till the 1700s, it was almost perceived as a universal notion of the "Ottoman Empire as a European state," and it was due to the significant impact of the West on Ottoman culture during the preceding centuries (18). If one is to look at this brief overview of Ottoman historical insight through a Girardian lens, then it can be inferred that mimesis in Ottoman society began with Mehmed II's desire to imitate the Roman emperors and transform Istanbul into a similar political and religious hub, which later spread like a plague in society. Girard called this societal mimetic plague "contagion" (Girard, *Deceit* 97) or "mimetic contagion" (Girard, *Things Hidden* 19; *The Scapegoat* 135).

As evident from the name itself, mimetic contagion refers to the spread of mimesis or imitation of desire from one person to another in close proximity, thus, with time, grasping the whole community under its wave (Girard, *Deceit* 99; *Things Hidden* 19). In mimetic contagion, not only mimetic desires but other processes, such as violence, also become contagious (Girard, *Deceit* 99; *The Scapegoat* 135). This phenomenon is pretty evident when seen in the context of

Ottoman society, in which the desire of the "supreme imitator" (the Sultan) was imitated, thus causing the spread of desire and imitation (Deceit 97).

From the discussion of the historical background of Pamuk's work so far, it can also be concluded that the East-West disparity or conflict finds its roots in the phenomenon of mimesis. Just like how Girardian subjects imitated the desires of ones they admired, the Ottomans imitated the desires of their most esteemed figure (Sultan), which resulted in a mimetic crisis and eventually tuned Ottoman society into a split image of the West.

Accordingly, just as mimetic desire leads to mimetic crisis, the Ottomans' mimesis of the West leads to a crisis of unstable identity and loss of real identities. Other than that, it can also be inferred that human beings (subjects) who are a part of Ottoman societal mimesis would shape their desires according to the people surrounding them due to contagion, which would ultimately define their object of desire—as pertinent in Hoja's and the Narrator's cases.

3.1 Triangular Desire: Hoja's Model of Girardian Mimetic Desire

According to Girard, desire is fundamentally mimetic, involving a subject, an object of desire, and a mediator/model who influences the subject's desires, with all three aspects connected with each other in an imaginary triangle (Deceit 2, 83; Palaver 46). Here, subjects imitate mediators they admire because they lack anything of their own to desire (Girard, Deceit 2–6, 7; Girard Reader 36). This is evident when Hoja saves the Narrator from the execution, demanding in exchange "everything" the Venetian learned in Europe— "astronomy, medicine, engineering" (Pamuk 23). This interaction reveals both Hoja's object of desire (Western Knowledge) and establishes the Narrator as a mediator.

However, before meeting the Narrator, Hoja's mediator was Ottoman society itself, which had already fallen into mimetic contagion. This is also proven by the previous studies, which have positioned Hoja and the Venetian slave (Narrator) as representatives of the East-West dichotomy (Soumya 203; Almond 2). Therefore, as an Ottoman and symbolic figure of the East, Hoja exemplifies mimetic contagion through his desire to acquire Western knowledge and technology. Girard has also stated that a subject "no longer chooses the object of this own desire" (Deceit 1-2), as seen in Hoja's case, whose desires were predetermined by his mediators—first the Ottoman society, then the Narrator.

Hoja's and the Narrator's relationship demonstrates what Girard called "internal mediation," occurring when "the physical spheres of the narrator and the subject cross" (Deceit 9–10; Palaver 59). This was because Hoja's mediator was within his reach, and thus, so was the illusion of reaching his desired object. Consequently, Hoja's mediator shifted after the appearance of the Narrator since

now Hoja had a direct path through which he could reach his object of desire. If seen metaphorically in the shape of a triangle, the path now became a line connecting Hoja as subject to his mediator (the Narrator) and both of them to the subject's object of desire.

Not to mention, this arrangement creates a complex power dynamic between them. The West's technological superiority fostered a "dominant discourse" positioning Eastern culture as inferior (Malla 1, 10, 14, 23). With time, this generated resentment amongst Turks that stemmed from the Ottoman Empire's faded glory (Haliloğlu 118–119; Mohamed Abdelwahab et al. 80–81). Hoja's conflicted attitude toward the Narrator also reflects this broader East-West tension. Hoja perceived the Narrator's "superiority and difference" but was "irritated because he believed that I [the narrator], too, was aware of it" (Pamuk 25–26). In Hoja's eyes, the Narrator, due to his Western knowledge and upbringing, has a superior position, but he refuses to acknowledge it.

This also aligns with Girard's assertion that the subject's conviction in the superiority of the item he desires is formed by the mediator's perceived superiority (Palaver 77) because the subject would not have thought of the particular model as his target of desire if this had not been the case. In this light, Hoja's subconscious acknowledgment of the Narrator's superiority also explains why he initially refused to position the Narrator as a teacher. Where he insisted that they were "companions who studied together" (Pamuk 23), indicating that instead of giving the Narrator a superior position as a teacher despite learning from him, Hoja was acceptable on setting the Narrator, now his slave, in an equal position of a companion.

As the novel progresses, Hoja's pride shatters after the clock he made fails to garner the interest of others (Pamuk 29, 32). In this incident, Hoja's growing sense of inferiority manifests itself when he pleads, "Help me," while also admitting that he could not "make any progress on my own" (Pamuk 36). This eventually reached a stage where he turned all of his attention to the Narrator and admitted that he could not do anything without the Narrator's approval (Pamuk 59). Hoja's action and this incident illustrated the Ottomans' growing sense of inferiority in the face of the inevitable ascendancy of the West.

Meanwhile, the Narrator observes that Hoja's crisis stems not from wanting the Narrator's help but from desiring what "they" thought, "those like me [the Narrator], the 'others' who had taught me all the science" (Pamuk 45). Evident from this excerpt is also Hoja's loss of faith in himself, the self, which is a symbol of the East and its knowledge, thus shifting his focus toward "they." Here, it is evident to interpret who "they" refers to in Hoja's case: the people who are like

the Narrator, the superior Westerns who possess knowledge that he wants to acquire.

Ultimately, Hoja was Girard's subject who was "torn between two opposite feelings toward his model—the most submissive reverence and the most intense malice" (Deceit 10). Hoja simultaneously desired Western knowledge while resisting acknowledgment of Western superiority, encapsulating the East-West mimetic struggle that defined Ottoman society's relationship with European modernity. In addition, this compels him toward submissiveness in front of the Narrator—the mediator who possesses his object of desire. However, on the other hand, Hoja's pride as an Ottoman who could not accept the West's superiority stops him from fully acknowledging and accepting the Narrator's superiority.

3.2 Triangular Desire: The Narrator's (the Venetian Slave's) Model of Desire

After building upon Hoja's triangular desire model, let us dive into the Narrator's mimetic model. The Narrator initially occupies the mediator's position in Hoja's mimetic triangle, which ends up creating a "model-obstacle" dynamic, where the Narrator, due to his perceived superiority, becomes the one to regulate Hoja's access to Western knowledge (Girard, *Violence and Sacred* 153; Palaver 128–129). This is evident in various instances, particularly when the Narrator deliberately obstructs Hoja's learning as he assumes indifference toward Hoja's experiments (Pamuk 25). The Narrator believed that "to debate the particulars of his [Hoja's] 'ideas'... [would] delay my return," so he "never openly disagreed with Hoja" (Pamuk 24). This shows that the reason behind the Narrator's behaviours was his initial desire—freedom from Ottoman enslavement, which was in Hoja's control. It can be seen that this also created an inverse power relationship where, despite being master and slave, each controlled the other's access to their desired object.

Initially, the Narrator's desire for freedom forms a direct line rather than a triangle, as there is no mediator between the subject and the desired object. However, as the story progresses, three factors end up transforming the Narrator's desire: physical resemblance to Hoja, the envy of Hoja's social position, and Hoja's prolonged denial of the Narrator's freedom.

Girard argued that when an object is "possessed too stubbornly, it can lose its appeal" (*A Theatre of Envy* 22). thus, with the continuous denial of the Narrator's freedom by Hoja, the Narrator's desire for freedom turns into a "hyper-real" or "metaphysical object" (Palaver 124). This means that the desired object has taken only an imaginary position and no hope of physical acquirement, which is

evident in the Narrator's case due to his indefinite denial of the freedom he desired. This is evident when, after fifteen years of living in Istanbul, the Narrator acknowledges, "my mind has long accepted that my mother was dead...I had no country and no purpose" (Pamuk 90). With the persistent denial of the physical attainment of the Narrator's desired object, his longing diminishes over time, and even he no longer desires freedom. Another evidence of this is when he escaped after eleven years only to voluntarily return to a place he now called "home" (Pamuk 75–76). Hoja's place, which he was confined and once described as "small, oppressive, and unattractive," became the one to be recalled as "missed the smell of home" (Pamuk 15, 77).

The Narrator's change of desired object is yet another example of Girard's mimetic contagion, as the Narrator, due to his psychical resemblance and contact with Hoja, also falls into a pattern of mutual imitation. This is similar to the Girard's study of characters of Helena and Hermia in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, whom he identified as "doubles" (*A Theatre of Envy* 43). Mimetic doubles refer to subjects imitating the mediator to the point of losing their own self, and eventually, the boundaries between the mediator and the desired object fade. This becomes apparent in the Narrator's case from the start of the novel, when the first that the first emotion that overcame the Narrator when he saw Hoja was similar to seeing one's reflection and following it was the sentiment of envy—when he imagined himself in place of Hoja's revered position (Pamuk 13).

When the Narrator returned after running away, he fully indulged himself actively in work assigned to Hoja by the Sultan (Pamuk 77-78); the Narrator felt, as he watched Hoja like he was watching himself; moreover, he felt "as if his sufferings and the defeats were my own" (Pamuk 91, 94). This in-depth identification with Hoja is an unswerving indication of the boundaries that have started to blur between them to the point where the Narrator starts seeing Hoja's life and his experience as his own. This instance indicates the complete death of the Narrator's initial object of desire and its change. From the discussion so far, it would not be wrong to attribute the reason behind this change of desired object to contagion—seeing Hoja imitate him, the Narrator also mimicked Hoja's behaviour of imitation.

Later in the story, when Hoja parades as a minister alongside the Sultan, and Narrator witnesses this scene while standing amongst the crowd and realizes that: "I should be by his side, I was Hoja's very self! I had become separated from my real self..." (Pamuk 86). This excerpt suggests that the Narrator's desire has shifted from wanting to reclaim his prior existence to wanting to become Hoja to the point of losing his sense of individual identity. He also felt that "the person I once had been had left me and gone," and "in him [Hoja], I could recover the

enthusiasm I had lost" (Pamuk 95). The Narrator now desired Hoja's very own self; he saw himself as Hoja—which was shaped both by their facial resemblance and Hoja's acting as an obstacle to the Narrator's initial desired object. Thus, the Narrator's triangle of desire transformed—with him as Girardian subject, Hoja became his object of desire and mediator as well.

This complex and recursive structure further blurs the East-West dichotomy as the Western Narrator paradoxically desires to become his Eastern double, completing the circle of mutual imitation and identity dissolution that characterized Pamuk's exploration of mimetic desire.

3.3 Over-reactive Mimesis: Hoja's and the Narrator's Overlapped Identities

Till now, Hoja and the Narrator are seen as each other's mimetic doubles; thus, Hoja's desired object also transitions toward the Narrator's being to mirror the Narrator's shift toward desiring Hoja's identity. This mutual transformation leads to what Wolfgang Iser described as "overlapped identities" in Girard's work; this state progresses through the stages of "instinctual human behaviors," "overreaction," and finally toward the complete dissolution of boundaries between selves (37). Moreover, Girard also asserted that the ultimate goal of mimetic desire is "the mediator's being" (Deceit 53).

Scholars have also noted that Hoja and the Narrator's identity swap manifests not merely in imagination but in reality (Malla 31), which leads to multiple studies concluding unstable Ottoman identity as a central theme in Pamuk's work (Rabêlo et al. 12; Soumya 198; Bayrakceken and Randall 193; Anuja and Pramila 26).

In the initial stage, which later leads to overlapped identities, Hoja exhibits curiosity toward the narrators, which is nonetheless restrained by pride. When they first met, the Narrator observed that Hoja was "watching me; he seemed to want to learn something by was not yet sure what it was" (Pamuk 15). Hoja's early hesitation and curiosity toward the Narrator can be seen as an instance of instinctual human behaviour. Also, Hoja's pride, despite learning the Narrator's astronomical knowledge, made him "reluctant to say anything that would reveal his curiosity" (Pamuk 16). All of these can be seen as reactions that are derived from instinctual human emotions, but this eventually leads to an overreactive stage when Hoja's mimesis intensifies. One can also interpret that by making the Narrator his slave, Hoja managed to satiate both his pride and curiosity as he could gain knowledge as much as he wanted from the Narrator, who was now his slave. However, the bigger thing at play was mimesis—guiding both the pride and the curiosity.

Later, when Hoja's pride shattered due to his failures, the self-doubt starts overwhelming Hoja as he becomes unable to act without the Narrator's help/approval, leading him to question, "Why am I what I am?" (Pamuk 36, 42, 48). Hoja started questioning his own self, which became clear during the incident when the Narrator suggested writing about oneself as self-exploration. Hoja responded to this suggestion by demanding from Narrator to demonstrate it first, which he later began to imitate, mirroring everything the Narrator was writing, even to the extent of imitating his movements and dreams (Pamuk 50-51, 66).

Other than imitating the Narrator to the extent of removing boundaries between their selves, mimesis reached another extreme when Hoja used violence, tying the Narrator to the chair and forcing him before a mirror while almost naked (Pamuk 55). As they stood together in front of the mirror, Hoja prevented any independent movements from the Narrator and claimed that "he had taken possession of my spirit, just as a moment before he had mirrored my movements, whatever I was thinking now, he knew it" (Pamuk 71). Hoja also insisted they could exchange places merely by swapping clothes, repeating "that I was he and he was I" (Pamuk 73-74). This mirror scene and Hoja's actions symbolize mimetic reflection itself—just as mirrors reproduce actions exactly, the mimetic desire compels the individuals to imitate their mediator's being to the extent of removing any boundary between the subject and the mediator. Overall, this textual excerpt not only sheds light on the phenomenon of Hoja's desire for the Narrator's being but also the extent of overlapped identities. Hoja started seeing himself as the Narrator, and the Narrator also eventually started seeing himself as Hoja.

Thus, this identity transformation reaches its last stage of complete dissolution of selves between the subject and the mediator—where both Hoja and the Narrator replace each other. At the end of the novel, when Hoja's weapon failed, which he made for the Sultan's army, Hoja feared that he would be punished. Thus, he chose to flee. Hoja assumed the Narrator's identity before becoming an Ottoman slave—as he could recall clear details of the Narrator's life. Changing into the Narrator's clothes, Hoja (who now acted as the Narrator) fled (Pamuk 129-130). This real enactment of seamlessly replacing each other's selves is also a symbolic representation of the completion of both characters' mimetic journeys. The Narrator and Hoja acquired their end product of mimetic desires, where they both flawlessly replaced each other as if no distinction was there between them in the first place.

Furthermore, this dissolution of boundaries between characters metaphorically challenges the East-West dichotomy, blurring the boundaries and rendering them interchangeable, as shown through Pamuk's characters, which easily replaced

each other East-West identities. To briefly put, mimesis ultimately revealed the constructed nature of identity boundaries, whether between individuals or civilizations.

Conclusion

This study started with the intention of tracing the Girardian mimetic pattern in Orhan Pamuk's work so that a nuanced understanding of processes that shape human culture and societies can be demonstrated. The purpose was achieved with compelling insights into Pamuk's *The White Castle*. The analysis from the Girardian lens revealed a layered interplay of mimetic desire. The objective that this analysis was set to reveal, Pamuk's characters of *The White Castle* depicting mimesis through their triangular desires, was proven as the evidence and textual instances transcended the phenomenon of overlapped identities. This research argued and proved that the East-West conflict found its basis in the mimetic tendencies of individuals. Thus, this mimesis, which had taken root in Ottoman society, would inevitably manifest its effect on the desires of its inhabitants. This was then proven through dissecting the triangular desire in Pamuk's characters, Hoja and the Narrator (the Venetian slave).

Mimetic nature is an innate human response, and as such, individuals are shaped by their mimetic nature, as demonstrated by the characteristics of Hoja and the Venetian slave. Because it is this nature that defines their desires, motivations, and actions and thus gives patterns to their behaviours, from this, it was seen that mimesis can progress to the point where people can even take on the identity of their model or mediator and replace one another.

Unlike the prior studies on *The White Castle*, in which most of the focus was solely on the Hoja's identity shift in an East-West context, the focus on studying the same pattern in the Narrator's character has not been done. This significant gap is tackled and covered here in the current endeavour, where the motivation and intention behind the Narrator's identity shift are answered through his mimetic nature. Along with its significant contribution to the existing literature, this study also has its limitations when it comes to fully grasping the narrative structure of Pamuk's selected novels; nonetheless, the limitations of one study can pave the way for future possibilities in another.

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