

Disintegrated Selves

Dissociative Disorders and Colonial Anxiety in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*

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Tim Arango, of *The New York Times*, claims that “conspiracy theories about Western plots to undermine Turkey run so deep in the nation’s collective psyche that only the language of psychology is suitable to understanding them.” Arango locates the origins of Turkey’s anxiety about Western intervention in the Sèvres Treaty of 1920, according to which former Ottoman territories were to be dissected and parceled out to the powers of the Entente. Even though the treaty was never put into practice, it left a mark on the country’s collective consciousness. “Analysts have used the terms ‘phobia,’ ‘trauma’ and ‘syndrome’ to describe the country’s mindset,” Arango continues, “ever since Sèvres [...] Turkey as a nation has been suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder.” What emerges from Arango’s analysis is that, in the Turkish context, the neurotic goes hand in hand with the shadow of Western interference. I agree with Lerna Yanık that “though neither Turkey nor its precursor Ottoman Empire was ever colonized, both entities have had an uneasy relationship with the ‘West’ and displayed the reflexes of a post-colonial country” (83). In his 2006 assessment of Turkey’s postcoloniality, Erdağ Gökner explains that Turkey has been affected by forms of “semi-colonial” occupation:

As the late Ottoman state fell into the position of being semi-colonized, the legacy of this semi-colonization, or colonial encounter with Europe, informed the breadth, scope, and legacy of severity of the Kemalist cultural revolution that gave shape to the Republic of Turkey. And though it is a commonplace to hear modern Turks boast that Turkey – meaning the Ottoman state and the Republic – was never colonized, history presents us with a quite different account. (37)

Here Göknaar refers to the Ottoman Empire's nineteenth-century cultural and financial dependency on Europe, but the occupation of the empire's territory by the Allied powers after World War I and during the Turkish War of Independence qualifies as a "colonial encounter" as well.

This study applies Arango's hypothesis to the realm of literature and focuses on the interconnections between the colonial and the neurotic in Orhan Pamuk's novel *The Black Book* (1990), which articulates a critique of Western imperialism and imperial nostalgia through the language of psychological discomfort. Pamuk published *The Black Book* (*Kara Kitap*) in Turkish in 1990.¹ The story is set in Istanbul in the 1980s and develops around the sudden disappearance of Rûya, a mysterious woman who sleeps by day and reads by night. Rûya's husband, Galip, expects to find her in the company of his brother in law Celâl – a charismatic journalist whom he has always revered and envied – only to discover that Celâl, too, has vanished. Hoping to learn about Rûya's whereabouts, Galip delves deeper and deeper into Celâl's life and writings, to the point that he begins to impersonate his brother in law. The chapters that follow Galip's adventures alternate with excerpts from Celâl's columns for the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*. Galip's search for Rûya – Turkish for 'dream' – can be read as a metaphysical journey through the individual's and the country's Self, as many of the places Galip visits in the course of his frantic peregrinations, many of the stories he is told by men and women he encounters, "bear upon the central question whether it is possible for a man to be himself" and are "metaphor[s] for the collective unconscious of Istanbul" (Wright 149, 150).

Both Arango and Pamuk verbalize the aftermath of Western interference with Turkey's political or cultural sovereignty through the language of neurosis: if the former casts the Treaty of Sèvres as the moment that threw the country into "posttraumatic stress disorder" (Arango), the latter locates the originative trauma in the Kemalist reforms of the early twentieth century, suggesting it may be at the roots of the characters' neurotic behaviors. The Kemalist model established itself in 1923, with the birth of the Republic of Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Kemalism remained Turkey's leading ideology until the 1980s, when Neo-Ottomanism, a political doctrine endorsing a revival of Ottoman culture, proposed a shift from Kemalism's Westward trajectory. Kemalism lay strong emphasis on secularism, the separation of state and religion, radical Westernization, and an idea of Turkish identity primarily based on ethnicity. Kemalist reforms, determined to eradicate the Ottoman heritage from the coun-

1 The first English translation by Turkish American novelist Güneli Gün came out in 1994, followed by a new translation by Maureen Freely in 2006.

try's collective self, included the banishing of Islam from school curricula, the closing of Sufi schools and religious centers, the introduction of the Latin alphabet, the expulsion of Arab and Persian terms from the Turkish language, and the forced assimilation of non-Turkish ethnicities as 'Turks' (see Çandar 89). *The Black Book* narrates the experiences of Istanbulites who, decades after this profound disruption of their cultural system, display the symptomatology of dissociative disorders. Dissociative disorders, Spiegel and Cardeña explain, may develop as a consequence of traumatic events, "involv[e] alterations in the relationship to the self [...], to the world [...], and to memory processes," and include amnesia, multiple personalities, and depersonalization or derealization (367-368).²

As Dietmar Meinel writes in his introduction to this volume, "fiction [...] shows very little concern for diagnostic exactness, as mental disorders are routinely romanticized or vilified, bent to suit aesthetic and narrative choices" (14). Accordingly, Pamuk does not delve into diagnostics nor does he name his characters' psychopathologies, which unfold at the level of language, metaphor, and imaginary. Moreover, these nameless conditions – which I loosely identify as dissociative disorders – are of intensely literary quality: characters drift off into fictional worlds of Western cinema and literature. Germane to the sphere of literary and cinematic imagination rather than that of clinical rigor, these psychopathologies constitute the bedrock of a "poetics of neurosis" that pervades the novel. The term neurosis, expunged from medical discourse when deemed "too elusive for a proper diagnosis of psychological disorders" (Meinel 9) proves useful to tackle the poetics and politics of Pamuk's literary, loosely described psychopathologies. The aim of this study, therefore, is not to diagnose Pamuk's subjects, but to investigate the complexity of the neurotic imaginary in *The Black Book*, which Pamuk 'bends' to articulate a critique of cultural imperialism.

In *The Black Book*, dissociative disorders such as those mentioned above are a means to tackle the contended specter of the colonial in Turkey, alternately exposed and dismissed in public and scholarly discourses. According to Kader Konuk, for example, Turkey appropriated Western culture on its own terms (see *Mimesis* 87). The modernization and Westernization policies adopted by the Ottoman Empire starting in the nineteenth century were, Konuk notes, the product

2 This article employs psychology studies from the 1990s contemporary practitioners of the field would probably dismiss as dated. Yet, this article is not preoccupied with achieving state-of-the art clinical accuracy. In order to show the interrelatedness of *The Black Book's* literary language and the language of psychological analysis, it is imperative to refer to studies that are contemporary to the novel.

of “an autonomous decision” and seeing late Ottoman and early republican Turkey as subjected to Western cultural hegemony would therefore be “too narrow, if not misleading” (10). Thus, Konuk prefers to consider Ottomans and Turks as “agents, not victims, of Westernization” (10). The narrator of *The Black Book* presents the reader with a view on Western cultural interference in Turkey that echoes Gökner’s specter of the semi-colonial.

In a chapter called “We Lost our Memories at the Movies,” *The Black Book*’s third person narrator conspiratorially describes a scenario in which Istanbulites are deprived of agency and appear as acquiescent victims of European and North American cultural imperialism.

The first step would be to establish a new state along the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. But instead of bringing in new settlers to populate this new state, as their predecessors had done a thousand years ago, they would turn the old inhabitants into “new people” tailored to serve their purposes. [...] Those charged with this task would quickly guess that the only way forward was to rip away our memories, our past, our history. It was known that Turkish children attending the shadowy missionary schools in the back streets of Beyoğlu and the hills overlooking the Bosphorus had once been made to drink a certain lilac-colored liquid [...]. But later on, the Western block’s “humanitarian wing” had declared this reckless initiative too dangerous on chemical grounds and switched to a gentler approach that promised longer-lasting results: the new plan was to erode our collective memory with movie music. (126-127)

The passage continues by mentioning a variety of cultural products that, by invading the Turkish market, contribute to the erasure of the country’s collective memory: “church organs, pounding out chords of fearful symmetry, women as beautiful as icons, the hymnlike repetition of images, and those arresting scenes sparkling with drinks, weapons, airplanes, designer clothes” (127). The new wave of colonization affecting Turkey does not rely on the establishment of settlements nor does it happen through relocation. The implantation of a “new state” depends instead on an induced amnesia, resulting in the complete erasure and renewal of the local inhabitants’ consciousness. The Istanbulites, who give in to the idea that their survival depends on their willingness to “rip away [their] memories, [their] past, [their] history,” are awarded very little agency in the process of Westernization of their country, described later as a “terrible plot being perpetrated on them” (127).

By employing the language of neurosis to narrate the uneasy relationship between post-Empire Turkey³ and the West, *The Black Book* brings the connection between the colonial and the neurotic to the foreground in the tradition of Frantz Fanon's postcolonial landmark study *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). To construct the neurotic Istanbulite of *The Black Book*, Pamuk resorts to three, loosely described dissociative disorders. First of all, amnesia, which entails a limited or extended loss of memory and personal identity; second, multiple personality, in which the subject presents "two or more different personalities"; third, depersonalization (or derealization), which alters the perception of the self and the world as "unreal or otherwise fundamentally changed" (Kihlstrom, Glisky, and Angiulo 117).

CITY OF AMNESIA

Definitions of amnesia position the phenomenon in the field of medicine and psychopathology, generally describing it as a loss of memory caused by brain injury, psychological traumas, shock, or illness.⁴ Amnesia presents itself in a variety of forms, including, among others, the inability to remember events up to a particular moment, often the disruptive episode that originated this condition (retrograde amnesia), and the inability to record events that followed it (anterograde amnesia). In an interview with Pamuk, Eleanor Wachtel interrogates the author on his choice to define Turkey as a land affected by amnesia.⁵ Pamuk answers that his use of the word refers to

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- 3 For an accurate theorization of "post-Empire imaginaries" refer to Barbara Buchenau and Virginia Richter, *Post-empire Imaginaries? Anglophone Literature, History, and the Demise of Empires* (2015). I resort to this term as it can be argued that Turkey is both postimperial and postcolonial. In the Turkish case, as Donna Landry puts it, "the postimperial is not a rival to the postcolonial but its comrade" (127).
 - 4 See entries in the *Merriam-Webster* and *Oxford English Dictionaries*. For clinical definitions of amnesia see also "A Neuropsychological Study of Fact Memory and Source Amnesia" (1987) by Arthur P. Shimamura and Larry R. Squire; and "Episodic Memory, Semantic Memory, and Amnesia" (1998) by Larry R. Squire and Stuart M. Zola.
 - 5 References to amnesia as a collective problem affecting Turkey as a consequence of Atatürk's reforms recur frequently in the press and in the work of another internationally renowned Turkish author, Elif Shafak. Her article "Memory-less Turkey/Amnesiac Turkey" (2017) is one prominent example.

the attempts of the Turkish Republic to Westernize. They thought – and I think this was the major mistake of the founders of the Turkish Republic – that they could Westernize this country if they forgot the past. [...]. So in the country there was a huge sense of *amnesia*, but nothing new to fill the void. This is what I am critical of. (Pamuk in Wachtel 63; emphasis added)

In this excerpt, Pamuk blames the condition of national amnesia on the “founders of the new republic,” Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the ideologues of Kemalism. Although Kemalism implemented a Westernization from within, to put it with Konuk, that happened on Turkey’s own terms (see *Mimesis* 87), characters in *The Black Book* juxtapose the Kemalists’ Westernizing efforts with the specter of Western colonial interference. Spiegel and Cardeña describe amnesia as the basic component of all dissociative disorders, in so far as personal memory is the key to a unified sense of self (see 372). In a similar way, the novel suggests that continuity with the past is essential to a nation’s cultural identity, and the rupture with the imperial legacy causes the fictional population of the city of Istanbul – once the capital of a vast empire – to wonder who and where they are. All Istanbulites who present dissociative disorders in *The Black Book* – Galip, a film extra, and a journalist who thinks he is Marcel Proust – are first and foremost amnesiacs. The state of permanent or temporary alienation they find themselves in is due to the rupture between their present lives in a systematically Westernized Turkey and their cultural heritage.

In *The Black Book*, Istanbul appears as a ‘double city.’ While the surface succumbs to the succession of new names and empires – the Achaemenid, the Roman, the Eastern Roman, the Ottoman – the remnants of the defeated civilizations tumble into Istanbul’s subterranean passages and canals and are consigned to oblivion. Yet, these “old, discarded objects that make us who we are” (Pamuk 188) gradually accumulate and compose a hybrid ‘museum’ underground. *The Black Book* suggests that yet another colonizing power has taken over the surface, one without settlers, whose goal has been “to establish a new state along the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles” by turning “the old inhabitants into ‘new people’” (126). This new colonizing agent is not political, but cultural, as European and American literature, films, and commodities are forcing Turks into alienation and imitation of foreign cultural practices. The city on the surface plays a crucial role in *The Black Book*’s critique of Kemalist policies of Westernization, whose influence extends until the time of the narration, the 1980s.

In Pamuk’s novel, the Westernized city on the surface appears as a space of meaninglessness and dispossession where cultural identity has been compromised by policies that encouraged the individual to adopt different aesthetics and

sets of values, thus creating a sense of rupture between Istanbul's rapid urbanization and the city's history, between monumental buildings and their lost relevance, between citizens and the spaces they inhabit. One character, for example, drives through a deserted Istanbul at night and feels a hiatus between urban elements and their function, as if they had forgotten it or they were unable to perform it.

We travelled [...] up hard narrow lanes whose sallow streetlamps cast more shadows on the ground than light. We passed [...] crumbling wall, broken chimneys, fountains that had gone dry, sleepy mosques that suddenly looked more like sleeping giants and left me trembling with fear [...], we passed through our great public squares with their empty pools, forgotten statues, and broken clocks. (314-315)

This rupture triggers neurotic responses in Galip as well, who contemplates the city from the top of a minaret and hallucinates about an underworld – frightening but luminous – within the shapeless surface city.

It seemed to him that the mosque and the concrete hovels below him and even the smoke rising from their chimneys were illuminated from within. He could almost believe that he was looking at the surface of a planet that had yet to find its final shape. The domes of the city and these vast stretches of concrete, stone, tile, wood, and Plexiglas were coming apart, and in the cracks you could just see the underworld's molten glow. (198-199)

Rita Sakr underscores the neurotic relationship between Pamuk's Istanbulites and their lived spaces as she interprets Galip's *flanerie* across Istanbul as driven by a "paranoid search for hidden meaning" (170). His inability to connect landmarks of Istanbul's cityscape to their geopolitical function is, for Sakr, the result of "compulsive-obsessive reading practices as he walks and reads the signs of Istanbul" (170).

The predominant psychotic condition affecting the surface city is, undoubtedly, amnesia, to be understood as a condition affecting the entire Turkish culture and not merely individual citizens. As he roams through the city, Galip stops "to read faces" (Pamuk 223). A small crowd stationing in front of a movie theatre informs him that

on Sunday afternoons people in this country escaped boredom by watching dreams imported from abroad [...] their sad dreams and sadder memories were fast fading from their minds; the line of dark bare trees running down the center of the avenue told him that they would grow darker still as evening fell, to signify the sorrow of an entire nation. (223)

The small crowd becomes metonymic of “people in this country” who are losing their memory as a result of their weekly consumption of Western films (“dreams imported from abroad”); in the same way, the trees lining a street downtown become barer and darker in response to “the sorrow of an entire nation.” The breaking of the multiple connections between a people and its history causes not only an individual memory loss but a collective one: a national amnesia. As Ian Almond remarks in his article on *The Black Book*: “this loss of identity is [...] not just the death of the self, but of the collectivity to which it belongs” (82). Almond also points out that national identity has been lost “to something else,” namely “to the cultural and economic centers of North America and Europe” (82).

In the novel, the problem of imitation goes hand in hand with the narrative of amnesia as if in a vicious circle: Turks imitate Western habits, clothing, and gestures because they conform to new identitarian narratives that erased their Ottoman culture, and vice versa, they have taken on imitating “the European models to which [they] were meant to aspire” so passionately that they cannot remember their original identity any longer (Pamuk 61). Amnesia and erasure, in fact, feature prominently in the construction of Turkey’s modern self: “ideas of what it means to be Turkish,” Amy Mills explains, “are [...] created through actions to remember and to forget particular histories” (386). On overground Istanbul, everything is “a copy of something else,” people are “at once themselves and their own imitation” (Pamuk 165). The surface city, which a character in the book calls “ghost city” (249), is populated by “amnesiac” citizens “long resigned to the certainty that their memories would never return to them,” irremediably detached from what Celâl calls “inner essence,” “innocence,” and “true identity” (61).

THE EMPTYING OF THE SELF

The use of a vocabulary of psychopathology to outline and critique the semi-colonial quality of Westernization in Turkey is not limited to amnesia. While the previous section has introduced the rupture between Istanbulites and the architectural elements in the city on the surface, it is important to remark that a similar process of disconnection also affects the Istanbulite’s physical body.

A first example for this kind of bodily dissociation can be found in chapter six of *The Black Book*, titled “Bedii Usta’s Children,” in which Celâl tells the story of the legendary Bedii Usta, the “first undisputed master, the patron saint” (59) of Turkey’s mannequins. Already forced to move his business to the under-

ground as, according to the Islamic authorities, the perfection of his creations offended the Creator himself, Bedii Usta saw in the Westernization of the country an opportunity for success, hoping that the Kemalist cultural revolution could revive the forgotten art of mannequin-making.

In the great westernizing wave of the early years of the Republic, when gentlemen threw aside their fez to don panama hats and ladies discarded their scarves in favor of low-slung high heels, mannequins began to appear in the display windows of the finest clothing stores along Beyoğlu Avenue. These however, were brought in from abroad, and when he first set eyes on these foreign mannequins, Bedii Usta was sure that the day he'd awaited for so long was upon him. (60)

Unfortunately, the diffusion of mannequins “brought in from abroad” – replicating Eurocentric canons of beauty – create a fracture between Turkish bodies and the gallery of desirable bodies exhibited in department stores. Once again, Turkish shopkeepers prove uninterested in Bedii Usta's work due to the excessive resemblance between his mannequins and the “real Turks,” as “they did not look like the European models to which we were meant to aspire,” Celâl explains in his column, “they looked like us” (61).

What can be observed in Pamuk's characters is, to put it with Homi Bhabha, “a process of identification in the analytics of desire” (xxx). In this situation, the desire for the Other becomes the primary locus of identification for the Self, who empties of its former characteristics, of its “person and place” (xxxi), to exist exclusively in the articulation of desire. Identification is accompanied in both cases by an “evacuation and emptying of the I” (xxxii) and, as the following passages illustrate, by a rejection of one's own corporeal schema.

[The customer] is not going to want a coat he sees worn by someone who looks like the swarthy, bow-legged, mustachioed countrymen he sees ten thousand times a day in our city streets. He wants a coat worn by a beautiful creature from a distant unknown land, so he can convince himself that he, too, can change, become someone new, just by putting on this coat. (Pamuk 61)

In *The Black Book*, the Istanbulites prefer not to be reminded of the familiar corporeality of their fellow nationals, whose ethnic markers such as body hair are exaggerated and presented as undesirable: they prefer to evacuate their Self and their corporeal schema to fill it with the desire for the Other.

It is the desire for identification with the Other that drives the evacuation of the Istanbulite's self, who is invested in the effort of ‘becoming’ someone else,

or, as Bhabha notes, “in the elusive assignation of myself with a one-self,” which inevitably causes “the elision of person and place” (xxx). Celâl echoes this point very closely: “Turks no longer wanted to be Turks, they wanted to be something else altogether. This was why they’d gone along with the ‘dress revolution,’ shaved their beards, reformed their language and their alphabet” (Pamuk 61).⁶ This process of self-evacuation and the extraction (“elision”) of the subject’s consciousness from “person and place” (Bhabha xxx), lends itself to a psycho-analytical reading. It is in fact reminiscent of the symptomatology of the depersonalization or derealization disorder, which Sedeño et al. describe as a “syndrome characterized by a disruption of bodily self-awareness” (14) and by a “sense of detachment and disconnection from the body” (1); in other words, “an experience of feeling estranged or alienated from the surroundings” (1). The desire to reject one’s corporeal schema to assimilate to the white, Eurocentric models introduced by the ideologues of the country’s Westernization conjoins depersonalization within a critique of European interference.

According to Fanon, the process of “whitening” – which I deem comparable to Turkey’s Westernization as the model is, in both cases, Eurocentric – throws the subject in a neurotic condition and puts his/her psychological well-being in danger of disintegration. For this reason, Fanon speaks of “hallucinatory whitening” (74), namely, the person of color’s obsessive desire to “*turn white or disappear*”; a desire so pervasive – Fanon explains – to put their “psychic structure [...] in danger of disintegration” (75; emphasis in the original). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines hallucination firstly as “the mental condition of being deceived or mistaken, or of entertaining unfounded notions [...], an idea or belief to which nothing real corresponds” and, secondly, as “the apparent perception (usually by sight or hearing) of an external object when no such object is actually present.” Spiegel and Cardena list hallucinatory phenomena as part of dissociative symptomatology (see 367), which allows them to be integrated in the discussion of Pamuk’s poetics of neurosis.

The Black Book includes a compelling example of hallucinatory whitening in conjunction with what appears as multiple personality disorder: in chapter fifteen (“Love Stories on a Snowy Evening”), an old journalist who believes he is Proust embodies the process of cultural whitening with particular emphasis on its neurotic quality. He reminisces about the plot of Proust’s masterpiece *À la Re-*

6 Here, Celâl implies that a general cultural hollowness in the aftermath of the fall of the Ottoman Empire has laid the basis for a cultural revolution that drove the Turks towards Euro-conformity. Nevertheless, the adoption of Western aesthetics exacerbates the process of “evacuation and emptying of the I” (Bhabha xxxii).

cherche du Temps Perdu as if it were part of his own memories, “until his face stream[s] with tears of pain and joy” (372), and he imagines the characters of the novels to be physically present in his apartment: “He’d turn to his imaginary maid and say, ‘No, Françoise,’ – loud enough for his tabby cat to hear him – ‘Albertine did not forget to take this ring with her, and there is no point in sending it on, as she’s going to be coming back to this house very soon’” (372). In light of these two quotations, however, the Proustian journalist’s behavior is best explained through the lens of the multiple personality disorder. Among the criteria for a diagnosis of this affliction, in fact, Spiegel and Cardeña list “the existence within the person of two or more distinct personalities” and “an inability to recall important personal information that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness” (372). Moreover, the journalist’s alter ego, Proust, and the characters he hallucinates are French: the Europeanization that the journalist neurotically pursues is reminiscent of Fanon’s “whitening,” as both Fanon’s subjects and Pamuk’s journalist desire to emulate European culture, ways, even skin color (see Sardar xiii).

The old journalist’s neurotic identification with the characters of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* or with Proust himself corresponds to an emptying of the I, which is then filled by Proustian fiction. The figure of the journalist is reminiscent of Fanon’s black subject as s/he makes contact with the white society of the metropolis: “if his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego [...]. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth” (Fanon 119). Emptied of his everyday-life Turkish Self, Pamuk’s journalist relies heavily on his Proustian alter-egos for self-esteem and self-legitimization: “whenever something upset him, whenever he had to deal with rudeness or cruelty from coarse, insensitive, greedy, uncultured philistines, he’d console himself by thinking, ‘Who cares? I’m not really here anyway, I’m at home, in my bed, reading of Albertine asleep in the next room’” (Pamuk 371).

Not only does the journalist supplant his personal experience and memories with those of the characters of a European novel, he wishes they would take over the entire country. Pamuk’s journalist feels nauseated by his compatriots who display the corporeal and behavioral markers he has evacuated from his Self.

It was because no one here knew who Albertine was, or even knew who Proust was, that this country was in such a wretched state [...] but one day, if this country ever produced people capable of understanding Albertine and Proust, yes, maybe then these poor mustachioed men he saw roaming the streets would begin to enjoy a better life; [...] it was because they didn’t read Proust [...] that they were so evil and thickheaded. (373)

In doing so, the journalist also demonstrates an incapability of feeling empathy and a fundamental estrangement from the world surrounding him, both of which are markers of a dissociated personality (see Sedeño et al. 1). Incidentally, his complete identification with Western narratives make him an instrument of government propaganda: he promotes the agenda of the Kemalist Westernization process, its “over-obsession” (Taspınar 14) with a Western trajectory, and its aspiration to change “the whole fabric of Turkish society” (Kili 385) by encouraging the population to consume (and, in this case, be consumed by) Western cultural products.

In both Fanon and Pamuk, corporeal and cultural whitening – understood as the overpowering desire to become the white Other – brings about the collapse and emptying of the individual’s self. Pamuk explicitly depicts what Fanon calls “hallucinatory whitening” as pandemic in Turkish society from the 1920s until the time of the narration. The Turks, Celâl explains, “were discarding their old ways, [...] each and every thing they did was an imitation,” which caused a collective “loss of innocence” (63).

CINEMA AND DEPERSONALIZATION

Bedii Usta’s son notices a widespread change not only in his compatriots’ fashion inclinations but also in their way of moving. The Istanbulites gradually replace “their stock of everyday little gestures” with “fake, new, ultimately meaningless ways of moving” (63). Initially the two struggle to identify “whom these people were imitating, whom they had as their models for change,” until Bedii Usta’s son cries out: “It’s because of those damn films!” (63).

The Proustian journalist is not the only character in *The Black Book* who longs for dissolution within the forms and contents of Western imagination. The novel includes the story of a waiter who takes on a job as an extra in a film production.⁷ When for the first time he watches the film in which he starred, the man does not recognize his body as his own – “his back, shoulders, and neck were not, in fact, his own” (365). Even his voice felt as if “it belonged to some-

7 Even if the film is a Turkish production starring Türkan Şoray, characters in the novel generally refer to the cinematic form as a Western import. In the passage mentioned previously, for example, films are “dreams imported from abroad” (223); in “Bedii Usta’s Children,” Celâl writes that films were “brought in from the West canister by canister” (63).

one else” (365). When describing a patient affected by depersonalization, Sedeño et al. note that the subject reported “anomalous body experiences. Additionally, his voice sounded distant and unfamiliar to him and the experiential component of agency was lacking” (2). Spiegel and Cardeña explain that the so-called depersonalization or derealization disorder includes a variety of phenomena including “a mild sense of detachment from one’s experience to drastic alterations of mind-body perception, such as out-of-body experiences” (373). The way the two authors further define depersonalization is particularly suited to the “dreamlike” (Pamuk 366) cinematic experience of the film extra, as the subject of depersonalization feels s/he is “an *outside observer* of [his/her] body or as if in a dream” (Spiegel and Cardeña 373; emphasis added). The waiter welcomes the experience with “a most delicious fright” (Pamuk 366) and with the hope that his alter-ego on the screen may grant him to “embark in a new life” (366). Like the Proust aficionado, who read and re-read *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* “for the rest of his life,” and “reaching the end of the book, [...] went straight to the beginning to read through to the end again” (370), the waiter spends many years “in the vain hope that he may catch another glimpse of himself” (366). *The Black Book* does not clarify what exactly happens when the waiter sees himself on the screen: is the waiter the man in the film? Has his appearance been modified through “trick photography” (366)? Yet, the experience of seeing himself projected into a medium that is connected, as the cinematographic art is, to the West and the U.S., of being cast into a different universe of values, is a thrilling experience. So much so that he will devote the rest of his life to the hallucinated search of his cinematic double – a completely delusive and yet flattering version of himself.

In *The Black Book*, Western literary classics notwithstanding, cinema has a more relevant function in the process of Westernization. Edibe Sözen suggests that “American cinema has been allowed to dominate the [Turkish] market” (Sözen in Raw 81) and *The Black Book* seems to voice this concern. “Yes it was because of those damn films – brought in from the West canister by canister,” Celâl explains, echoing Bedii Usta’s son, “that the gestures of our people used in the streets began to lose their innocence” (63). Western movies and their impact on Turkish culture are discussed again in chapter eleven, evocatively titled “We Lost our Memories at the Movies.” Here, films are presented as the primary means of erasure of Turkish cultural memory and (a debatable notion of) pre-colonial authenticity. Movie music is addressed as part of “the new plan [...] to erode [Turkish] collective memory” (127) and movie theaters are represented as dystopian spaces where Turks are metaphorically “blinded by the proliferation of new images” (127) or robbed of their knowledge. The book especially mentions

“a peasant boy from Malatya who’d fallen into the habit of going to the movies once a week, and who realized, on the way home, that he’d lost his memory, along with everything he’d ever learned” (127).

Pamuk stresses the role of cinema in bringing to the surface neurotic behaviors produced by the imposition of Western cultural forms in a non-Western context. The irreconcilability of the local’s self-perception and cultural memory with the imposed European schemata, fantasies, and worldview produces, in the local’s consciousness, phenomena that recall “an ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic” and the perception of “living in an error” that Fanon discusses in *Black Skin, White Masks* (148). *The Black Book* showcases how this “error” – a flawed mimetic process oriented towards the repression and stigmatization of the colonial subject’s corporeal schema – is encouraged by Westernization and colonial projects worldwide. Like the Proust fanatic, the film extra also unwittingly acts as a facilitator for the Westernization of the country: “as for those who identified with the stars they saw on the screen – our new masters refused to see them as ‘sick’ or ‘in the wrong,’ enlisting them instead as partners in the project” (128; emphasis added). Although the novel remains ambivalent with regards to the identity of these “new masters,” it is legitimate to consider this a reference to Western interference in Turkey. In the logic of the text, by willingly replacing their own personalities with those of “stars they saw on the screen” or European literary figures, Turks would become the “new people” (126) these new imperial masters aspire to produce.

In *The Black Book* the uncritical absorption and reproduction of Hollywood beauty paradigms causes alienation on multiple levels: in other words, the characters become unreadable to each other. When Galip meets Belkıs, a long-lost female acquaintance, he resorts to cinematic references to describe her appearance: “She had combed her hair back in the style of Ava Gardner in *55 Days at Peking* and painted her lips with the same Supertechnirama Red” (444). Most importantly, the cinematic details Galip notices in Belkıs’s appearance confuse him, as he is unable to ‘read’ his friend: “it seemed as if she was wearing a mask. If he took that mask by its Supertechnirama lips and pulled it off, he’d have no trouble reading the face underneath, but he still had no idea what it would mean” (448). The issue on unreadability in *The Black Book* does not merely concern the impossibility to access the ‘Turkish face’ under Belkıs’s ‘white mask,’ but expands into the realm of language, addressing the rupture between signifier and signified.

To conclude this analysis, it is worth touching upon the issue of estrangement and alienation, which feature as symptoms of dissociative disorders along with lack of empathy: Sedeño and his co-authors, for example, mention a patient

who felt he was “walking in a world [he] recognize[d] but [didn’t] feel” (1). For Fanon, the emigrants who return from the metropolis to their homeland are highly exposed to the risk of experiencing alienation from their culture of origin due to their thorough assimilation of Western/white cultural paradigms and their capacity to navigate them. Fanon explains that the educated colonial subject “feels at a given stage that his race no longer understands him. Or that he no longer understands it. Then he congratulates himself on this, and enlarging the difference, the incomprehension, the disharmony, he finds in them the meaning of his real humanity” (7). By the same token, the film extra and the Proustian journalist feel abandoned, rejected, or repelled by their fellow citizens who do not demonstrate a comparable (i.e. neurotic) level of absorption in Western culture. The journalist found no one “with whom to share his excitement” for Proust, and, when confronted with the “rudeness or cruelty” of his fellow Istanbulites, would “console himself” (371) by self-contentedly taking shelter in a fictional Proustian universe. The waiter who thought he had caught a glimpse of his real self in a film also lived his delusion in complete isolation, as “none of his friends and relatives seemed too interested in these confusing, spine-tingling, dreamlike substitutions” (366). Both the waiter and the journalist doubtlessly felt that “[their] race no longer underst[ood] them” (Fanon 7). When analyzing the figure of the “returnee” (7), the ‘whitened’ Antillean who returns home after a long stay in the metropolis, Fanon stresses that the returnee “assumes a critical attitude towards his fellow islanders” (7), which can be said for some of Pamuk’s Westernized Istanbulites, including the hypothetical customer who is “not going to want a coat he sees worn by someone who looks like the swarthy, bow-legged, mustachioed countrymen he sees ten thousand times a day” (61).

The Black Book’s portrait of Westernized Turkey as ridden with neurosis and of Kemalism as generative of collective amnesia begs the question whether the novel may be read as a site of Ottoman nostalgia. The notion of cultural authenticity and an idealized precolonial unity is in fact ubiquitous in *The Black Book*, as a number of characters (e.g. Bedii Usta and his son, Galip and Celâl) embrace notions of cultural authenticity at some stage. Yet, the novel consistently undermines them: not only does it expose the quasi-colonial neurosis produced by Kemalism but also dismisses the return to the Ottoman past as a fantasy. An indication of the novel’s ultimate skepticism about cultural authenticity rests in the fact that formulations such as “the special thing that makes us who we are” (62), “loss of innocence” (63), or “the thing [...] that came ‘from us’” (63), often appear in inverted commas or reflect the personal views of a specific character such as, for example, Bedii Usta’s son, whose frenzied manners invite questioning.

But perhaps the most illustrative example is to be found in “The Mystery of the Letters and the Loss of Mystery,” where Galip chances upon a seventeenth-century poem about a mystical past of cultural wholeness and an idyllic village where an undisturbed harmony existed among speakers, signifiers, and signified.

In the poem’s distant Golden Age, action and meaning were one and the same. Heaven was on earth, and the things we kept in our houses were one with our dreams. Those were the happy, happy days when everything we held in our hands – our tools, our cups, our daggers, our pens – was but an extension of our souls. A poet would say tree and everyone who heard him would conjure the same perfect tree [...]. For words were so close to the things they described that [...] poetry mixed with life and words with the objects they signified. (626-627)

The smooth continuity in the Golden Age described in the passage above seems antithetical to the unreadability of faces and objects in twentieth-century Turkey, and to the amnesia affecting citizens as well as objects, making them oblivious of their identity and function. This mythical past is reminiscent of the words of Stuart Hall, who points out that identity in postcolonial or diasporic contexts may be regarded either as a layered compound of native and imported features, or, alternatively, “as a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’ [...]”. This ‘oneness,’ underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence” (223). But the exaggerations and hyperboles that punctuate Pamuk’s passage – “heaven was on earth,” “those [...] happy, happy days,” “everyone,” “the same perfect tree,” and later, “those happy, distant, timeless days” (627) – suggest that this projection of a wholesome Ottoman past is located outside history, in the realm of folklore and the imagination.

A POETICS OF DISSOCIATION

Interconnections between literature and dissociative disorders are hardly coincidental. First of all, the latter possess an exquisitely literary nature, as they “raise fundamental questions about the nature of self and identity and the role of consciousness and autobiographical memory in the continuity of personality” (Kihlstrom et al. 117). Secondly, John F. Kihlstrom, Martha Glisky, and Michael Angiulo identify two conditions that, among others, may favor the development of dissociative disorders: these are “fantasy proneness” and “absorption” (117). To the authors, a fantasy-prone personality is characterized by a “deep, pro-

found, and long-lasting involvement in fantasy and imagination” and “live much of the time in a world of their own making,” in which they are likely to be fully absorbed, ultimately letting it transform and restructure their “phenomenal self and world” (120). As Rita Felski suggests in *Uses of Literature*, similar practices appear to be involved in the very act of engaging with a cultural text, as reading is about “intoxication rather than detachment, rapture rather than disinterestedness,” it is “a yielding that is not abject or humiliating, but ecstatic and erotically charged” (51). The idea of “fantasy-prone” personalities as a breeding ground for dissociation due to their proclivity to permanently dwell on “reminiscences, images, and imaginings” (Felski 51) explains how the domains of literature and neurosis may seem adjacent or overlapping.

It also comes as no surprise that dissociative disorders appear compatible with the articulation of an imperialist critique in Turkey. When shifted from the level of the individual to the level of the collectivity, categories such as “autobiographical memory” and “the continuity of personality” (Kihlstrom et al. 117) lead to vaster questions about collective memory and historical continuity that were central to Turkish culture in the passage from empire to republic and have catalyzed the interest of much Turkish literature in the twentieth century and beyond. In *The Black Book*, the dissociated psyche of the individual becomes a synecdoche for a dissociated culture. Most importantly, dissociative disorders lend themselves to metaphorical usage within a critique of imperialism. Amnesia, multiple personalities, and depersonalization disrupt an individual’s identity, memory, and sense of self – the very three categories colonial domination seeks to undo. The productive intersection of literature, dissociation, and Turkish history in *The Black Book* suggests that the novel articulates meaning through a poetics of neurosis. The novel employs the vocabulary of neurosis to imagine, in a strictly fictional universe that demands to offer neither historical nor medical lessons, the effects of Westernization on Turkey’s collective self.

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