

MY NAME IS RED: WESTERN INFLUENCE AND CLASH OF CULTURE

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Abstract

This article mainly focuses in exploring the impacts of Western influence on Ottoman culture especially depicted in Orhan Pamuk's novel, *My Name Is Red*. It learns the ways in which Western artistic styles, philosophies, and social norms which spread and clashed with traditional Ottoman values and practices. Using literary analysis method which focused in related materials, related sources, and the novel itself. This analysis delves and try to find roots of specific examples of cultural conflict that might be caused by western influence, such as exploring the tension happened in the novel between traditional miniature painting style and Western oil painting, where painter who deeply rooted to traditional ways, struggling to adapt with many new techniques introduced and developed by western artists. Next is the clash between Islamic and Christian worldviews which intensified because of the existing western influence, and challenges faced by Ottoman women in navigating a rapidly changing society and even how unsatisfied they are with the current system. Ultimately, the study aims to explain the complex interplay between tradition and modernity in the context of colonial encounter and cultural exchange and eventually answers why the problem happen and how to avert, adapt, or even understand the reasoning behind those cultures.

Keywords: Orhan Pamuk, Western influence, Social Change, Culture

INTRODUCTION

Culture is an Important way of life, it is very important as culture are the identity of a group of people. Culture is the behavioral identity that make people as unique or distinct from the rest of the world, this behavior can include language, norms, technology, architecture, social institutions, arts, fashion, food, political establishments, music, and religion. Without culture, there's no identity. Culture doesn't come from inside or people born with it, it must be learned. It happens to and by people of specific or exclusive territory and must be learned this exclusivity also the one that make culture thrive. Culture is very susceptible by another, especially external factors, challenges such as natural change or contact, so culture rarely remain the same once it had contact with another culture. A contact with different culture are always a turning point for a culture. There's many factor that encourage this meeting of two culture, like war, invasion, and cultural exchange.

One of the most important change happened because of exchange between eastern and western culture. Eastern culture that focusses on traditional values and familiarity and the ever-changing western culture, one of the examples of this can be seen at the novel *My Name Is Red* this novel explores the time of ottoman empire, specifically it's art and culture in the past, when the west culture starts to seep inside. *My Name Is Red* is a significant work of Orhan Pamuk, one of the most prominent Turkish novelists, Pamuk also have received a Nobel Prize in literature. Many of his works are around themes of identity, modernity, culture, and politics. *My Name Is Red* explores the clash between cultural conservatism and reformation inside Ottoman empire that grow internationally



and face challenges making a connection with others with vastly different culture and customs.

For the Ottoman empire the 16th century was a crucial period as it was at its peak, a vast and powerful empire stretched across Europe, Asia, and Africa. But, as the expansion happens, eventually the Ottoman empire have contact with the Western Europe, and this contact is the lead of the cultural exchange that about to happen between these two cultures. The exchange are seen with excitement and tension by Ottoman empire as this exchange with the west can be seen as source of new idea and technology, but also can also seen as a big threat to the traditional Islamic culture kept by the Ottoman empire.

At that time the empire also one of the center of knowledge, the major center of Islamic scholarship, with madrasas or Islamic schools attracting scholars from the entire east and Islamic world. Their approach in emphasis of rationalism are very instrumental in the development of Philosophy, Science, literature and other branch of knowledge. The Ottoman empire was already a diverse society, the population are very diverse and already made up with Muslims, Christians, jews, and many ethnic backgrounds, this diversity give a very unique scene at the Ottoman empire, although clash in politics, religion, and social status are not possible to avoid completely this people have a sense of unique cultural unity, even though The Ottoman empire are influenced and based of Islamic traditions.

My Name Is Red mainly focused in conflicts between tradition and innovation in Ottoman empire arts, as their contact with the west exposes them to new technique and style that very different than the Ottoman current style and techniques. In arts, the ottoman empire have a very unique methods, the artists in the Ottoman empire known for their various forms, for example, they excel in calligraphy, miniatures, ceramics, textiles, and many others. With the most unique are calligraphy, as other than art form it also can be used as a way of expressing religious devotion. Calligraphy in the Ottoman empire were so prevalent that it was one of the most essential element of the Ottoman empire visual culture.

In *My Name Is Red* the novel focused on conflict between the group of miniature painters who's struggling to comply with the changes of artistic landscape, the traditional Islamic art and the new western style that beginning to emerge. Some of the painter eager to use the new style while many choose to preserve the traditional style, this novel explores the approach of art to reflect the clash in culture and politics. In short, the novel *My Name Is Red* exploring the clash in the 16th century Istanbul. This novel also provides the rich portrayal of the traditional Islamic culture and the tension it has with the western influence that start to enter the region.

This research uses a literature approach, to find out the cultural aspects and its conflict inside the *My Name is Red* novel, including topics about cultural clash between art styles of western and eastern, its connection to religion and how the western culture clash with Ottoman empire religious values, feminism and politics. Other primary and secondary materials such as journal, books, sites and others also used to strengthen and increase the accuracy. Relevant data from past research may also be used to strengthen and giving more context about the details of the events and materials this research mainly using quantitative method of Systematical literature review as data obtained are mainly from reviewed documents.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Culture is by nature easily diffused and changed and of course very prone to changes especially by other cultures. *My Name Is Red* explore the clash between tradition and innovation in Ottoman empire, showing the two side where one chooses to preserve the old and the other to embrace the new. As mentioned before this eventually happen because of the Ottoman empire growth, exchanging culture to improve self with the risk of losing identity. While the West promote dissolution of individual identity, the eastern philosophy values the collective identity and togetherness (Bishnu, 2024) which show us how contrast the difference between the two cultures and makes it seem very impossible to mix.

But in this novel, Pamuk take the historical background to a period when at that time both east and west influenced each other. But as expected the west influence at the east not embraced by all, for example can be seen from this excerpt “Odd single leaf pictures-curiosities that would please European Travelers” (Pamuk, 2010: 23) in this sentence, the narrator sees the western style just a thing to please the European, not their real art that show their cultural heritage that might influence travelers. But culture is very frail so eventually it’ll merge, just like found this except.

“Our Sultan’s Portrait painted in Venetian Style” (Pamuk, 2010: 110). This excerpt describing us a mix of both east and west, the sultan, leader of the east painted in Venetian style of the westerners, showing the one of the first step towards the mix of culture.

Art and Culture

The Central theme in the novel *My Name Is Red* is the tension between cultural conservatism and reformation. This novel also explores the clash between traditional Ottoman art and the newer arts especially those with western influence. Ottoman empire already have remarkable arts such as calligraphy, but this doesn’t stop the painters to explore more especially the younger ones, some even start to embrace the changes. In the novel *My Name Is Red* artists are depicted as both vulnerable yet powerful, as their work just subjects of the sultan’s desire or what he wanted, so they have power, yet restricted by the political power they get that makes them powerful, so they lack freedom of expression.

This background also serves that the arts division in the Ottoman empire and the artist’s will to change isn’t so simple as they also have connection to politics. This also implies the change that will undergone Istanbul if the artists decided to change, as the politics of the palace will also affected. For example in the novel *My Name Is Red* the power of art can be seen from the character Black according to (V. Keerthi, 2023) “Depiction of character Black, a talented artist who uses his art to challenge the political and cultural status quo who view his style as challenge to their authority.” This commentary shows us how much the artists are appreciated at that time and how can they affect the entire political situation with their arts.

And based on this culture we can take example from one of the conflict because difference of culture where painters didn’t sign their arts where can we see from this excerpt “The old masters of Herat tried to depict the world the way God saw it, and to conceal their individuality they never signed their names” (Pamuk, 2010: 431) but at western culture they sign their arts to prevent theft and many other problem, this act seen as disrespect to the old culture and also a huge risk if you’re a government affiliated painter at that time.

Next example we have a special culture of eastern paintings where they never make painting like the original object due to religious background, but one of the characters uses the Frankish method that depict things like the original ones like wahat we can see from this excerpt “But when he saw that I wasn’t that affected by his declaration that Enishte Effendi made use of the perspective techniques of the infidels, that beast divulged the following. “There’s one final picture. In that picture Enisthe desecrates everything we believe in. What he’s doing is no longer an insult to religion, it’s pure blasphemy” (Pamuk, 2010: 135). The new style considered blasphemy as it’s defying the unwritten laws eastern painter have used for almost an eternity which also brings us to clash of religion.

Islamic Traditions and Values

Other than arts *My Name Is Red* also explore about tensions in Islamic tradition, as we already know, this novel take place in Istanbul, and The Ottoman empire is a Muslim state that very respect and use Islamic values and Islamic traditions so all the cultural and political identity are following Islamic traditions. This novel also explain about how Islamic values and belief are included in every aspect of Ottoman culture, including arts and politics. Many of the characters in this novel also have and depicted as someone who deeply devoted to Islamic values. One of the characters Enishte believed that Islamic tradition must be preserved in art. “Enishte words reflect the belief that Islamic art should reflect the divine order of the universe and that it is a means of expressing faith and devotion to God. (V. Keerthi, 2023) that statement show how devoted Enishte is. In the other hand, the new non-Islamic ideas comes from the west making a tension between art and Islamic tradition. Which depicted by another character Elegant Effendi, who believe that to remain relevant and evolve, ottoman art must incorporate the western technique and adapt. Which suggest that the century old history of Ottoman empire being threatened and challenged.

And as expected not many characters in the novel see the new technique in positive light, some also sees it more radically, that the new outside technique is a threat that would corrupt the value of Ottoman arts. “your reliance on the methods of the Venetians as well as your mingling of our own established traditions with that of the infidels will strip us of our purity and reduce us to being their slaves.” (Pamuk, 2010: 176). This excerpt show us how extreme the characters oppose the new art styles to be integrated into local arts. This statement mostly connecter to Islamic traditions to not make idols or something depicting or similar to a living creature in fear of the wrath of God.

And another example from this excerpt “Indeed, no one has anything to say against decoration, but pictures are forbidden by our faith...However, as we make use of the methods of the Franks, our painting is becoming less focused on ornamentation and intricate design and more on straightforward representation...This was exactly the pretext sought by the Erzurumis, who were desperate to find an aspect contrary to the religion” (Pamuk, 2010: 424). It is explained in that excerpt that when we use the method of the Franks, our painting is becoming less focused on ornamentation and intricate design and more on straightforward representation. It is showed that, this is an aspect contrary to the religion (Fahirah, 2011). Different from the franks developed by Christians, in Islamic method it is not allowed to paint things in straightforward representation like the franks method as in the holy Koran it is forbidden and also displeased by our prophet, which means the Frankish method are contrary to Islam.

Feminism

And lastly the role of women, in the novel *My Name Is Red* women in the ottoman empire are marginalized and subordinate to men and often denied access to education and employment. But in the novel, the character Shekure despite all the setback achieved quite success in the field of art by commissioning a book and politics by helping to solve the mystery behind the murder. But her contribution overshadowed by more prominent male characters.

The novel *My Name is Red*, the events happened in the Ottoman empire. In normal terms female have no freedom of mind, and have no hand in social, cultural, and even economic fields. Shekure are one of the rare ones that make herself visible and succeed. In the novel of *My Name is Red* other women are rarely seen, as according to the historical background most women at that time stay at home when the men go outside to work, which definitely make them rarely appear and sometimes neglected.

In Shekure's dialogue we can see that she always try to find a place for women in society. In her eyes the Ottoman society strict rules make it hard for women to have rights, most women described as doesn't have rights to breathe, making them unable to live their own live or decide their own future.

"Don't be surprised that I'm talking to you. For years I've combed through the pictures in my father's books looking for images of women and great beauties. They do exist, if few and far between, and always look shy, embarrassed, gazing only at one another, as if apologetically. Never do they raise their heads, stand straight and face the people of the world as soldiers and sultans would. Only in cheap, hastily illustrated books by careless artists are the eyes of some women trained not on the ground or on something in the illustration—oh, I don't know, let's say a lover or a goblet—but directly at the reader. I've long wondered about that reader (Pamuk, 2010: 48).

Based on that excerpt, Shekure believes that women names aren't written in history and they don't have right to stand for themselves, while comparing it to sultans and soldiers that always look straight and challenge the world. Even in illustrated books they always depicted as weak and worthless. Which makes her wonder why. As a woman she has to deal with different problems, but that doesn't mean that her problems are less than a man's problem. In this novel, Pamuk help show and highlight how hard it is to live as a woman, especially a widow at that time, as shown in this excerpt.

"when I realized how many lonely women like me with missing soldier-husbands there were in Istanbul, I resigned myself to my fate." (Pamuk, 2010: 49)

Even without context, the miserable tone can show us how suffering she is and woman with same fate as her. She also shares the details of her experience.

"They wanted me to do the kitchen work, wash the clothes and even go out to the bazaars to do the shopping in her stead. I didn't protest by saying "Am I the type of woman to take on such drudgery?" I swallowed my pride and went to work. But when that brother-in-law of mine Hasan, now without his slave girl to take into his room at night, began forcing my door, I didn't know what to do" (Pamuk, 2010: 49-50).

Shakure tells the details when she treated similar as a slave, her problems with her father-in-law and brother-in-law, as Shekure take the role of their slave after they sell their slave. Her terrible experience fortunately avoided by her own craftiness, but what about other woman that isn't as crafty as her.

In this novel, after becoming a widow, Shakure's father-in-law consider her as slave and Hasan specifically consider her as object of pleasure, as at that time women are related to two things; housework and sexual pleasure and have no other uses. Because of those things the rebellious and clever Shekure wants to be heard, wants to be free, want to be seen. She rejects the traditional role of woman of inferior, submissive and dependent, although she isn't completely opposing the patriarchal in this society, she want women who treated unfairly to be at least get their freedom and she want to write her name in history, as a woman.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion this novel by Orhan Pamuk, *My Name Is Red* offers an exploration of the cultural and artistic tensions within the Ottoman Empire during a period of significant transformation in the 16th century. This novel delves into the clash between traditional Islamic values and the emerging influence of innovative Western artistic techniques, East and West, and Art and Politics. This conflict is mirrored in the characters, who represent various perspectives on this cultural battle.

The novel shows the powerful relationship between art, politics, and religion in the Ottoman empire. The artists, while ever talented and innovative, are constrained by the political needs. They wonder whether to embrace Western influences or adhere to established Islamic norms, as the new ones seems against their religion and everything they believed all this time. Then it also talks about problem with women's rights which never seem to be applied properly wherever and whenever it is where a civilization exists.

Lastly, the novel *My Name Is Red* highlights the fragility of cultural identity in facing against of globalization. The Ottoman Empire, once a powerful and influential civilization, forced to confront the challenges of modernization and the preservation of its cultural heritage. This novel serves as a reminder of the delicate balance between progress and tradition, and the possible consequences of cultural assimilation.

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