

SECULARISM IN PAMUK'S SNOW; A POSTCOLONIALISM STUDY

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Abstract:

Postcolonial criticism has always analyzed colonial power through the multifarious signs, metaphors and narratives of both the dominating and indigenous cultures, in other words, the cultural formations and representational practices can be understood as colonial discourses. Initially these discourses were examined primarily in terms of binary oppositions, as exemplified in Edward Said's notion of Orientalism. This paper explores secularism as one part of binary oppositions opposed to religion in Pamuk's Snow. Before the writer analyses secularism in this novel, thus he would like to discuss the concept of postcolonial theory, mimicry and hybridity, binary oppositions, then he focuses to discuss secularism as one part of binary opposition as opposed to religion in Pamuk's Snow.

Keywords:

Postcolonial Study, Secularism, Orientalism

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory derived from much the same empirical datum as multiculturalism, that of the collapse of European imperialism, and of the Britain Empire in particular. What multiculturalism meant to the former metropolises, postcolonialism meant to the former colonies. Postcolonial theory was initially very much the creation of "Third World" intellectuals working in literary studies within 'First World' universities. The key figures are Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, the first Palestinian, the second Indian, both Professors of Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and Homi Bhabha

is Indian and the Professor of English at the University of Chicago. The resulting combination of Third Worldist cultural politics and post-structuralist theory has become an important, perhaps even characteristic, feature of the contemporary First World radical academy. As with multiculturalism, the argument commenced not so much with a celebration of subordinate identity as with a critique of the rhetoric of cultural dominance, which sought to 'decentre' the dominant—white, metropolitan, european—culture. The central 'postcolonialist' argument is thus that postcolonial structure has entailed a revolt of the margin against the

metropolis, the periphery against the centre, in which experience itself becomes 'uncentered, pluralistic and nefarious'¹.

Moreover, Milner and Browitt² state that the origins of postcolonial theory can be traced to Said's *Orientalism*, an impressively scholar account for not of 'the Orient' itself but how British and French Scholarship had constructed the Orient as 'Other'. For Said, Orientalism was a 'discourse' in the Foucauldian sense of the term: 'an enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orientduring the post-Enlightenment period'. The 'Orient', he wrote, became an object 'suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum ...for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories about development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. Orientalism is—does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture. Moreover, it functioned by way of a system of binary oppositions in which the West, its possessions, attributes and ethnicities were valorised

positively against the inferior status of colonised peoples.

Furthermore, Gail Ching-Liang Low³ stated that Said's *Orientalism* emerges as a key moment in the development of postcolonial theory within the academy. Drawing on Foucault and Gramsci, Said's monograph is a polemical and critical study of the ways in which the Occident has sought to objectify the Orient through discourses of the arts and the human and social sciences. Said's definition of *Orientalism* as a 'discourse' was distinctively enabling for the emerging field of postcolonial theory because it enabled critics to see how different sorts of cultural and representational texts contributed to the formalisation of structures of power. Said sees an intimate connection between systems of knowledge and strategies of domination and control; hence his critique is an interdisciplinary interrogation of western intellectual, aesthetic scholarly and cultural traditions.

According to Young⁴, postcolonial theory as a "political discourse" emerged mainly from experiences of oppression and struggles for freedom after the "tricontinental"³ awakening in Africa, Asia and Latin America: the continents associated with poverty and conflict. Postcolonial criticism focuses on the oppression and coercive domination that

¹ Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (Eds.). 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*. Routledge: London.

² Milner and Browitt. 2002. *Contemporary Cultural Theory: An Introduction*. 3rd Edition. Routledge: London

³ Habib, M.A. R. 2005. *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. Blackwell Publishing. Oxford.

⁴ Young, R J C 2001. *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction*. London: Blackwell

operate in the contemporary world⁵. The philosophy underlying this theory is not one of declaring war on the past, but declaring war against the present realities which, implicitly or explicitly, are the consequences of that past. Therefore the attention of the struggle is concentrated on neo-colonialism and its agents (international and local) that are still enforced through political, economic and social exploitation in post-independent nations.

In addition, Young⁶ states that postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims: most fundamentally, to reexamine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to political and cultural identities.

Hans⁷ suggests that postcolonial studies critically analyses the relationship between colonizer and colonized, from the earliest days of exploration and colonization. Drawing on Foucault's notion of 'discourse', on Gramsci's 'hegemony', on deconstruction, and as the case may be, on Marxism, it focuses on the role of texts, literary and otherwise, in the colonial enterprise. It

examines how these texts construct the colonizer's (usually masculine) superiority and the colonized's (usually female) inferiority and in so doing have legitimated colonization. It is especially attentive to postcolonial attitudes—attitudes of resistance—on the part of the colonized and seeks to understand the nature of the encounter between colonizer and colonized with the help of, for instance, Lacan's views of identity formation.

Thus, from the above explanation, it can be understood that the term *postcolonial* is a problematical term. *Post*, in this study, is not *after* colonialism (the end of colonialism), but the effects of colonialism. This term may refer to colonialism done by the European countries towards the "East". It may also refer to any colonialism done by a certain country to other countries. The term colonialism here indicates the nature of "power" in a power relation among individuals (in everyday life). Thus, Bhabha's famous terms of hybridity and mimicry are suitable for this study.

Hybridity and mimicry are useful to characterize what postcolonial literatures are. Bhabha's hybridity is a complex argument concerning the notion of a "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" where the "continuities and constancies of the nationalist tradition which provided a safeguard against colonial cultural imposition" are disrupted by a process of negotiation and translation that "presages powerful

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

⁷ Bartens, Hans. 2001:214. *Literary Theory: The Basics*. Routledge. London)

cultural changes"⁸. Mimicry is trying to scrutinize the ambivalences portrayed in a text that builds new identities and maintains the difference at the same time.

Bhabha⁹ argues that opposition against the West is not a resolution to the paradox of the West. It only maintains the binary opposition of the West and the Rest. Therefore, to avoid the trap of the binary opposition, postcolonial studies focus on "hybridity". Hybridity is a third space, or a space in-between. It is the space that provides the words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. By exploring this hybridity, this "Third Space", we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. Hybridity is not a static heterogeneity of being but a potential of change. This change, however, is not linear (which ends up in the trap of binary opposition). Hybridity is an important point in studying Indonesian cultures.

BINARY OPPOSITIONS

The term 'binary' means a combination of two things, a pair, 'two', and duality. It is a widely used term with distinctive meanings in several fields and one that has had particular sets of meanings in post-colonial theory.

⁸Foulcher, K., Day, T. (2002). *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature*. Leiden, Netherlands: KITLV Press.

⁹Bhabha, H. K. (1994). Of mimicry and man: *The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse. The Location of Culture* (pp. 85-92). London: Routledge.

Wolfreys¹⁰ states that binary opposition refers to any pair of terms which appear diametrically opposed; therefore: good/evil, day/night, man/woman, centre/margin. In literal theoretical discourse, neither term in a binary opposition or pair is considered absolute. Rather, one term defines and is, in turn, defined by what appears to be its opposite. As the work of Jacques Derrida shows, any pair of terms, far from maintaining their absolute semantic value, slide endlessly along a semantic chain, the one into the other through the effect of difference. Also, Derrida makes clear how the apparent equivalence of terms is not in fact true: instead, in all binary oppositions, one term, usually the former of the two, is privileged over the other in Western thought.

The binary logic of imperialism is a development of that tendency of Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance. A simple distinction between centre/margin; colonizer/colonized; metropolis/empire; civilized/primitive; secular/religion; represents very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates.

Secularism

Secularism has a relatively high status in European public culture and

¹⁰ Wolfreys, Julian et al. 2006. *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*. 2nd Edition. Edinburgh University Press

politics as a fundamental principle of the modern state's religious neutrality. It acquired this rather unshakable reputation in the context of its role in conceiving of a political organisation of society able to put an end to the religious wars dividing the European continent in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Specifically, the liberal option of 'privatising' religion and maintaining a religiously neutral state is often viewed as a proven solution to prevent or ameliorate religious conflict and to limit religion's impact on people's lives and decisions.

As such, it has been identified as a basic premise of liberal democracy and has played an important role in the confrontation with fundamentalist Islam, but also with other religious fundamentalists and neo-conservatives. In these contexts, secularism has been invoked to defend democracy, women's rights, sexual minorities' rights, and is often regarded as indispensable to equality, parity and democracy. However, in reaction to secularism's role in legitimising politically contested decisions such as the French law prohibiting the wearing of 'conspicuous religious signs' such as headscarves, and 'large crosses' in public schools and similar Turkish laws, in recent years secularism has also become a contested concept, particularly in the context of postcolonial migration.

Based on the above explanation, thus, the writer would like to discuss secularism or atheism as one part in

binary oppositions as opposed to religion in Pamuk's Snow¹¹.

DISCUSSION

Once again, Ka found In discussing secularism or atheism as one part in binary opposition as opposed to the religion in Pamuk's Snow, the writer will explore the conflicts happened in the novel by comprehending the content of dialogues between the characters. In this novel, the conflict is complicated. Ka, the main character in the novel, is involved in various conflicts, which are actually not his own conflict . He is buried in conflicts among other characters such as Ipek and Muhtar, Blue and the State, or other people's conflicts. It seems that he doesn't take any solution for such complicated things happen during his presence in Kars. It is proved in chapter thirty five "I'm not an Agent for Anyone". He doesn't belong to a particular party or religious wings or any Islamic movement. He claims himself as secular, although in some instance he still remembers to God "The snow reminds me of God." (p.89). Ka doesn't show his own tendency whether he support the Islamic values or secular ones. His own conscience is devoted to happiness. In a conversation between Ka and Sheikh for instance, shows this evidence. "I saw you in my dream, Your Excellency, said Ka, "I am here to find Happiness" (p.102).

¹¹Pamuk, Orhan. 2004. *SNOW*. Vintage International

Apart from that, Ka is also framed by self-doubt; and god-doubt, as the question of his atheism constantly arises. However, Ka actually fearful that Islam doesn't accept half measures, and he was confused with split identity:

"himself overcome with the fear that he would find so shaming afterward. He also dreaded the things he knew they would say about him if he left. "So, what I shall do, Your Excellency?" he asked. He was just about to kiss the sheikh's hand again when he changed his mind. He could tell that everyone around him for this. "I want to believe in God you believe in and be like you, but because there's Westerner inside me, my mind is confused." (p.105)

Even when he thinks he believes, Ka clearly has a different conception of godliness, as he is reminded by one of the Islamic leaders when he describes it:

"I grew up in Istanbul, in Nisantas, among society people. I wanted to be like the Europeans. I couldn't see how I could reconcile my becoming a European with God who required women to wrap themselves in scarves, so I kept religion out of my life. But when I went to Europe, I realized there could be an Allah who was different from the Allah of the bearded provincial reactionaries."
 "Do they have a different God in Europe?" Asked the sheikh jokingly. ...
 "I want a God who doesn't ask me to take of my shoes in his presence, and who doesn't make me fall to my knees to kiss people's hand. I want a God who understand my need for solitude."
 "There is only one God," said the sheikh.
 "He sees everything and understand everyone – even your need for solitude. If you believe in him, if you knew he understood your need for solitude, you wouldn't feel so alone." (p.102)

The conflict spreads everywhere, even Ipek's family, which runs the hotel where Ka is staying, is half-torn, as Ipek's sister Kadife is active in the Islamist movement and a strong believer, while Ipek's marriage broke up over her husband's embrace of Islam and his unacceptable (to her) demand that she wear a head-scarf.

A locally televised performance, at which Ka also reads one of his poems, goes wrong, leading to a mini-coup and blackout, and a further clamp-down on the Islamists who, however, have much local support. The city remains cut off for a few days a world unto itself and the conflict continues, its many players as active as ever. Necip, one of the young brilliant Islamic activists was accidentally death by shot in this theatre. Sunay Zaim, the drama player and the director of the play was unintentionally shot death by Kadife with loaded gun. These two theatrical performance with each involving at least one shooting are the centre pieces of the book. In truly dramatic fashion, revolution is practised on the stage.

The next dialogue is between Ka and Necip, a young religious student who eventually dies when the growing tensions between secularists and Islamists explode during a televised event at the National Theater. Before Necip dies, Ka has a conversation with him in which he testifies to a belief in God that sustains many of the locals, but also to the fear that arises from this tension and the idea that only

Westerners can question God. Necip tells Ka about a dream he has had, in which he fears his own disbelief in God and that if it is true he will die. He further illuminates his fear by confessing:

I looked it up in the Encyclopedia once, and it said that word *atheist* comes from the Greek *athos*. But *athos* doesn't refer to people who don't believe in God; it refers to the lonely ones, people whom the Gods have abandoned. This proves that people can't ever really be atheists, because even if we wanted it, God would never abandon us here. To become atheist, then, you must first become a Westerner. (p. 153)

Necip's confession leads one to believe that the tension between East and West in Turkey is dependent upon Western influences that somehow direct human beings towards atheism. However, the main characters in *Snow* oscillate between religion and secularity until Ka appears on the scene to explain that one can have a mystical union with God and still have an open worldview.

Beside the dialogues between Ka as the main character who is regarded as a secular or atheist and other characters, there is another character that can be determined to have mental attitude as Westerner. It is Turget Bey as one character who wants to be accepted by the West, "I wish to prove to the Europeans that in Turkey, too, we have people who believe in common sense and democracy" (p. 295). It seems to him that if he can get the West to accept the fact that the people of the East are in many ways like the people of

the West than surely not only will the East be legitimate, but they will also not be the "other."

Ka has an ambivalence view in making a dialogue referring to hybrid. This can be seen from dialogue on page 153. "I wanted to be a Westerner *and* a believer," said Ka. This means that Ka has a split character.

There is a great deal of theology in Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow*. Basic theological questions, such as the existence of God, heaven and hell, and the consequences of atheism are addressed with stunning directness, both through the interlocutions of the characters and the musings of the narrator. Yet, the author undermines the serious and sincere articulation of religious issues by employing diverse narrative modes and strategies, such as psychological realism, intertextuality, irony, and the alternation of first-person and figural narration, that relativize but never fully cancel the signification of faith in the novel. Since this theological discourse predominantly pertains to Islam, two questions arise (against the backdrop of today's widespread global image of radicalized Islam). This can be seen from these dialogues between Ka and Mesut on page 89.

"Then tell me this: Do you or don't you believe that God Almighty created the universe and everything in it, even the snow that is swirling down from the sky?"

"The snow reminds me of God,"
Said Ka.

"Yes, but do you believe that God created snow?" Mesut insisted.

There was a silence. Ka watched the black dog run through the door to the platform to frolic in the snow under the dim halo of neon light.

"You're not giving me an answer," Said Mesut. "If a person knows and loves God, he never doubts God's existence. It seems to me that you're an atheist. But we knew this already. That's why I wanted to ask you a question n my friend Fazil's behalf. Do you suffer the same terrible pangs as the poor atheist in the story? Do you want to kill yourself?" (89)

A good example of such strategy is Ka's encounter with Sheikh Saadettin, a local religious figure who summons Ka to his house. When Ka follows the offer and meets the Sheikh, he seems to become seriously engaged in a conversation with the Sheikh on transcendence and his own search for faith:

'The snow reminded me of God,' said Ka. 'The snow reminded me of the beauty and mystery of creation, of the essential joy that is life.' (103).

"Do you have a different God in Europe?" asked the sheikh jokingly. He patted Ka's back.

"I want a God who doesn't ask me to take off my shoes in his presence and doesn't make me fall to my knees to kiss people hands. I want a God who understands my need for solitude." (104)

"I hope you will forgive me, but before I came here I had some thing to drink," he said again. "I felt guilty about having refused all my life to believe in the same God as the uneducated—the aunties with their heads wrapped in scarves, the uncles with the prayer beads in their hands. There's a lot of pride involved in y refusal to believe in God....., a God who will make us all more civilized and refined." (104-105)

During a conversation about God with the Islamist student Necip in Kars,

the student dismisses Ka's reassurance that he felt happy in Kars and wanted to be like everybody else in the city. This can seen on page 110:

"No, you're just saying that to console me, because you feel sorry for us. As soon as you're back in Germany, you'll start thinking God doesn't exist, just like you did before."

"For the first time in years, I am very happy," said Ka. "Why shouldn't I believe the same things as you?"

"Because you belong to the intelligentsia," said Necip. "People in the intelligentsia never believe in God. They believe in what Europeans do, and they think they're better than ordinary people."

Pamuk's interest in exile could at first be understood as a pure literary engagement. Thus, following Said's double-faced definition, the writer may conclude that the multiple tropes of exile in *Snow* indicate Pamuk's self-positioning in the modern Western literary tradition. However, the prevalence of 'exile' throughout Pamuk's oeuvre indicates that this "potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture" serves a specific purpose within Pamuk's thematic repertoire. It should be emphasized that the author's preoccupation with states of estrangement and displacement is closely connected to his critique of Turkey's cultural transformation. Consequently his treatment of 'exile' always relates to this specific context while also implying universal connotations. This can be seen from this expression on page 319:

"it is only natural that people of Kars wonder whether this suspicious character who fled Turkey many years ago and now lives in Germany has chosen to grace us with his company because he is some sort of spy. Can it be true that his efforts to provoke an incident at our religious high school resulted in his making the following statement to youths who engaged him in a conversation two days ago? "I am an atheist. I don't believe in God, but that doesn't mean I'd commit suicide, because after all God—God forbid—doesn't exist."

Furthermore, It may be useful to revisit the entangled meanings the words 'modern' and 'traditional' have acquired in the Turkish public sphere: While the modernists and secularists still adhere 'modern' to a Western-oriented mentality and lifestyle, from which religion is excluded, and view the manifestation of religious symbols as 'traditional' or 'backward,' the new Islamist activists, especially women, perceive themselves as 'modern' in a new sense. In order to establish an elite status, they attribute 'tradition' to the unselfconscious practice of Islam by the masses. To what extent and how does Pamuk explore this complexity? His oeuvre is dedicated to themes such as Turkey's stance between East and West; its Ottoman past and Western-oriented present; conflicts arising from old and new definitions of the artist, of faith and a non-religious lifestyle. Even though these themes seem to imply binary oppositions, Pamuk complicates dualities through various strategies, most notably the doubling of his fictional

characters and their switching of identities. In congruence with his other works, the author challenges in *Snow* binary modes of explanation on several layers. This can be seen from this expression on page 58:

".....The city of Kars and the people in it—it was as if they weren't real. Everyone wanted to die or to leave. But I had nowhere left to go. It was as if I'd been erased from history, banished from civilization. The civilized world seemed far away and I couldn't imitate it. God wouldn't even give me a child from my misery by becoming the Westerned, modern, self-possessed individual I had always dreamed of becoming." (58)

In addition to above expression, in his essay "In Kars and Frankfurt," Pamuk describes the motivation of his travels to the cities Frankfurt and Kars, that constitute the two poles of displacement in *Snow*, as "the chance to write of others' lives as if they were my own. It is by doing this sort of thorough novelistic research that novelists can begin to test the lines that mark off that 'other' and in doing so alter the boundaries of our own identities. Others become 'us' and we become 'others.'" In Pamuk's view, "putting ourselves in other's shoes" through the imaginative realm of the novel brings with itself a liberating effect. In this process, the 'other' as a figment of our own creation is undone. "The novelist will also know that thinking about this other whom everyone knows and believes to be his opposite will help to liberate him from the confines of his own persona." Applied to

Snow, the statement illuminates Pamuk's approach to the new Islamist movement, the center of the contested 'Turkish identity,' from the vantage point of a broader reflection on alterity. This leads us to the second component of *Snow's* intertwined thematic strands, the trope of exile.

CONCLUSION

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that secularism exists in Pamuk's *Snow*. It is as one part of binary opposition as opposed to religion. Secularism happened in the novel because Ka, the main character, and other characters were influenced by the western culture and identity (mimicry and hybridity).

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