

## Shifting Identities in Mediterranean Narratives: A Study of Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* and Metin Arditi's *Le Turquetto*

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### Abstract

The current study examines the representation of Mediterranean identity in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* and Metin Arditi's *Le Turquetto*. The purpose of the paper is to uncover how both novels challenge the stability of their protagonists' identities to highlight the fluidity of the 16th and 17th century Mediterranean's cultural makeup. With the explorations of Mediterranean homogeneity by Mediterranean historians such as Braudel, Matvejevic, Horden and Purcell taken as a starting point, the close reading of both novels show that Pamuk and Arditi's representation offers an unorthodox understanding of the unique types of identities the region can invoke and inquires into its historically complex interplay between East and West. This examination concludes that through the portrayal of characters who find themselves compelled to acclimate to unfamiliar surroundings, both Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* and Metin Arditi's *Le Turquetto* end up providing a deeper understanding of the Mediterranean as a site of cultural blending and transformation.

**Keywords:** Mediterranean Literature, World Literature, Turkish Literature, Orhan Pamuk, Metin Arditi

### Akdeniz Anlatılarının Değişken Kimlikleri: Orhan Pamuk'un *Beyaz Kale*'si ve Metin Arditi'nin *Turquetto*'su Üzerine Bir İnceleme

#### Özet

Bu çalışma, Orhan Pamuk'un *Beyaz Kale* ve Metin Arditi'nin *Turquetto* adlı romanlarında Akdenizli kimliğinin temsilini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, her iki romanın da 16. ve 17. yüzyıl Akdeniz'inin kültürel yapısının akışkanlığını vurgulamak için kahramanlarının kimliklerinin istikrarına nasıl meydan okuduğunu analiz etmektir. Her iki romanın da yakın okunması ve Braudel, Matvejevic, Horden ve Purcell gibi Akdeniz tarihçilerinin Akdeniz homojenliğine ilişkin araştırmalarına yapılan atıflarla, bu analizin sonuçları, hem *Beyaz Kale* hem de *Turquetto*'nun bölgenin çağrıştırabileceği benzersiz kimlik türlerine ilişkin alışılmışın dışında bir anlayış sunduğunu ve Doğu ile Batı arasındaki karmaşık tarihsel etkileşimi sorgulayabildiğini göstermektedir. Bu makale, yabancı bir çevreye uyum sağlamak zorunda kalan karakterlerin tasviri yoluyla, bu eserlerin kültürel bir harmanlama ve dönüşüm alanı olarak Akdeniz'in daha derin bir şekilde anlaşılmasını sağladığını savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Akdeniz Edebiyatı, Dünya Edebiyatı, Türk Edebiyatı, Orhan Pamuk, Metin Arditi

## 1. Introduction

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, empires and monarchical republics reigned supreme in and around the Mediterranean. And while these lands belonged to their rulers and not their peoples, the very people of these places belonged to the lands in which they lived, more so than to the states to which their lands belonged. People living around the Mediterranean did not necessarily identify with their states or nations, but with each other. As Braudel (1949/1972) asserts in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*: “Before the nationalism of the nineteenth century, peoples felt truly united only by the bonds of religious belief...” (p. 824). Thus, religious divides were the only discernible conflicts of the time, and even then, it was not unusual to see Judeo-Christian and Muslim quarters closely situated with ongoing commerce between them - both material and cultural. Daniel Vitkus (2003) points out that to foreign observers, the “cosmopolitanism they observed in renowned Mediterranean centers like Venice, Constantinople, Cairo, or Jerusalem” (p. 15) was shocking. The people living around the sea, meanwhile, identified with one thing that they had in common, a similar heritage that belonged not to any land, but to the sea in between these lands: to the Mediterranean. To borrow from Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000), these people produced literature that not only was in the Mediterranean, but of the Mediterranean (p. 2). Consequently, claiming that the literature produced in such places to be part of a national literature, while it is suffused in such images of transcontinentalism would be a failure in recognition of its homogeneity, instead of a more broadly encompassing world literature (Gnisci, 2005, p. 263). In this sense, the term “Mediterranean Literature” serves the point well, by highlighting this fluidity of identity and homogeneity of cultural experience. This is certainly not the only way to look at these texts, but “by displacing the nation as the default category of analysis” (Kinoshita, 2014, p. 314) this framework of looking for the Mediterranean in such texts is “a project of reterritorialization” (p. 314).

The two novels that this study will be focusing on are modern interpretations of this common past in question, a time that seems to have all but evaporated under nationalism. These novels not only concern themselves with the people of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Mediterranean people, but they also deconstruct national belongings and are representations of the defining characteristic of being Mediterranean, depicting “a continuous exchange” (Gnisci, 2005, p.

263). The fluidity of their main characters' unorthodox identities serves their point of departure quite well as they establish the people of the region as unified in how they are uniquely different. Horden and Purcell (2000) claim that "the paradox of the Mediterranean is that all-too-apparent fragmentation can unite the sea and its coastlands in a way far exceeding anything predictable of a continent" (p. 24) and that its "cohesion and sense of identity exceed anything normally associated with real peninsulas" (p. 24). Similarly, Armando Gnisci (2005) sees the Mediterranean as "a hybrid meeting place, a receptacle of affinities and contrasts in which the net of exchanges has produced a long-lasting multiform experience of inextricable fusions and of differences that have remained intact" (p. 264). Written as a dirge for this nostalgic past, Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* is an argument for the sublimation of a Mediterranean rapport between cultures and its emerging double-identities, forever destroyed by the emergence of the nation state. Featuring the literal and metaphorical representation of the Mediterranean's most significant features, *The White Castle* features the story of an Italian slave and his Turkish master's difficulty in accepting each other as one another's shadow, because of their disturbing similarities and undeniable differences, a metaphor for the relationship between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. Reminiscent of postmodern criticisms of metanarratives, the ending to Pamuk's novel remains hauntingly complex, as the narrative is seized up by a confusing shift in narrators. On the other hand, the second novel this study will focus on, Metin Arditi's *Le Turquetto*, features a Castilian-Jew with a dream to become a painter in 16<sup>th</sup> century Constantinople, his escape to Venice while taking on a Christian identity, becoming a painter of significant renown and finally his return to Constantinople 45 years later under Muslim guise, to face the ghosts of his past. Both *The White Castle* and *Le Turquetto* offer insightful perspectives on the shifting and homogenous nature of Mediterranean identity through their exploration of the cultural and historical complexities of the region and its interplay between East and West.

## **2. The Double-Identities of Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle***

Set in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and during one of the biggest political turmoils of modern Turkish history, *The White Castle*'s preface acts as a framing device, through Faruk Darvinoğlu's perspective and narration as he tells of his discovery of an Italian scholar's experiences in 17<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul as a slave. Beginning with this preface, and as continued throughout the novel, Pamuk attempts to decentralize the emphasis on the narrator, who is an obvious analogue for Pamuk himself. We are to assume that the subsequent chapters – where the actual story begins – are told by the Italian scholar, yet Darvinoğlu, as the translator, has final say of what details

we are going to be privy to. While this metanarrator is not necessarily an unreliable narrator, with this framing device it is easy to question the narrator's "omissions, substitutions, and deferrals that mirror Foucault's concerns about the role of the novel and notions of objectivity in texts and discourse" (Pittman, 2012, p. 64). Throughout the novel, we are impelled to pay attention to this indeterminacy and fluidity, until the very last chapter, where the narrator is no longer recognizable. As the frame narrative that jumpstarts the novel foreshadows what is to come, the ambiguities and complexities with which the reader is served the narrative, aims to create a sense of distance and detachment from the story being told. This blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, and Faruk Darvinoğlu's presence in the novel as both narrator and a character, allows Pamuk a metafictional quality in the novel that comments on the relationship between the nature of storytelling and the nature of identity and self-perception. Erdağ Gökner (2013) asserts that this metafictional property, "by identifying the constructed nature of history and identity, functions to question the authority of master narratives such as nationalism, secularism, and modernity" (p. 98).

The first chapter of the novel marks the beginning of the actual story, with the narration of the Italian scholar, who proclaims that he was "a different person" (Pamuk, 1991, p. 14) back then, and who still "see in dreams that person who used to be [him], or who [he] now believes was [him]" (p. 14). Throughout the novel, he is transformed into a different person, as he foreshadows in the beginning, amidst his capture. Captivity, which plays a central role in many Mediterranean narratives – both as a literal and a metaphorical theme – is featured throughout the novel. The literal aspect of the narrative's contact with captivity arrives very early, as the narrator is captured by pirates and sold into slavery in the Ottoman Empire. Because he is a knowledgeable individual, presumably much more so than other slaves he shares this fate with, he catches the attention of powerful men in the empire and is subsequently bought by a wealthy Ottoman scientist that the narrative only refers to as Hoja. This man, who serves as a seemingly secondary, yet arguably more significant character, appoints the narrator as his personal slave and assistant. On top of this literal connection with piracy and captivity, the metaphorical dimension of the novel also explores a theme of captivity and slavery in relation to the Ottoman Empire's relationship with Europe, where the empire is presented as a place of captivity, a place where the individual's sense of self and identity is trapped and distorted. This theme is also explored through Hoja, as he is presented as a captive of his own desires and beliefs, further developed throughout the narrative as he and his slave get to know each other in their countless writing sessions around a table – that the narrator has built, in the image of a Western fixture – instead of on a cedar or the floor. Pittman (2012) argues that these

sessions contribute to their disassembling and reassembling of identities: “The process of... writing, dreaming, conversation, and comparison as a means of attaining knowledge of Self and Other results in a decentering and a conflation of identities” (p. 69), while also being emblematic of this selfsame conflation reflected in “the complexities of influence, collaboration, distance, and destruction embodied in the discourse of East and West” (p. 69).

Through his experience as captive and slave, physically and emotionally trapped in the Ottoman Empire, the Italian man struggles with his sense of self, as he tries to reconcile his European self with his new Ottoman identity. The novel’s exploration of the themes of identity, self-perception, and fluidity, consolidates the story as a Mediterranean narrative focused on the image of a mirror, providing “a skewed reflection that produces a kind of schizophrenia in perception and therefore self-conception” (Pittman, 2012, p. 69). Hoja is reflected through this mirror as the master of the house in no other aspect but name; a slave of his own curiosity and desire to know and understand the world. “Who can know why a man is the way he is anyway?” (Pamuk, 1991, p. 46), his famous question, reflects his skepticism towards everything that his society has decided to accept without question, a society that he can neither shun, nor completely accept. This suspicion, in time, turns him into a slave of his own longing to be European, and to be accepted by “them”, although he vehemently denies this in every opportunity. Hoja remains an arrogant and proud man, questioning everything and everyone in close proximity. Calling all others “fools”, Turks as well as Europeans, his only discernible goal is to understand who he is, and what his place in this world might be. This culminates in the appearance of his many faces he shows throughout the novel, one of which he very intentionally puts on to resemble his own slave. This intentional transformation comes as a surprise late in the novel, because Hoja’s fascination with his Italian slave is not immediately obvious in the beginning of the narrative.

In the very first scene that Hoja appears, the reader is made readily aware that he and the narrator look eerily alike. As the narrative progresses, the of them begin to act as each other's shadows, in Jungian terms. The shadow, here, refers to the unconscious aspect of the psyche that contains all the elements that the conscious self finds unacceptable or repressed. The novel presents Hoja, a Turkish Muslim who cares very little about family and friendship but is rather interested in the pursuit of power through knowledge as the narrator’s shadow. While the narrator, a European Christian with repressed curiosity and desire to know and understand the world, and whose only interest is to get back to his country but is forced to adopt a new identity and culture, acts as Hoja’s shadow. The narrator’s experiences as the shadow of this powerful man in the Ottoman Empire challenge his sense of self and forces him to confront

the aspects of his identity that he finds unacceptable or repressed. As he is forced to adopt a new identity and live as a Muslim – which he refuses to, but it ultimately amounts to nothing – he struggles to reconcile his European identity with his new Ottoman identity. This internal conflict represents his journey to integrate his shadow self, as he is forced to confront and accept the repressed parts of himself that he sees in Hoja, now his teacher as well as his master. Hoja is similarly reciprocal, proclaiming that the times have changed and “now everything is three-dimensional, reality has shadows” and “even the most ordinary ant patiently carries his shadow around on his back like a twin” (Pamuk, 1991, p. 49). The integration, then, of the two selves by the final chapter, clearly presents the idea that the integration of the shadow self is necessary for the attainment of a complete and authentic sense of self.

*The White Castle* represents Istanbul as a place where different cultures, religions, and languages coexist and blend together, a place where identities are fluid and changeable, and where the boundaries between self and others are blurred. In this way, Istanbul is presented as a counterargument to its European perception as a place of captivity. Gökner (2013) argues that: “this novel is Pamuk’s revision of the trope of the captive’s tale in a way that writes back to both European and Turkish national metropolises from the site of peripheralized Istanbul” (p. 102). In such a sense, the novel explores the theme of Mediterranean dualism by “deconstructing [its logic]” (p. 103), or the idea that there are two opposing yet interconnected forces at play in the region, not by discrediting or destroying it completely, but by providing more context. Pamuk symbolizes this stark dualism between East and West and its arbitrariness as a dualism embodied in the relationship between the narrator and Hoja. In how the narrator is initially fascinated by Ottoman culture and seeks to learn from Hoja, “rather than having his core identity strengthened and reified through the process of captivity”, he “experiences a transgression of boundaries, which in turn transforms religious, ethnic, and national identity into something approaching cosmopolitan subjectivity” (p. 103). Hoja, on the other hand, is the true captive by the middle of the narrative, while deeply interested in the Western scientific and philosophical traditions, stuck with the limitations of his upbringing.

Despite their similarities, the narrator is initially depicted as being rational and scientific, while Hoja is depicted as being more intuitive and spiritual. This dichotomy is further exacerbated by the fact that Hoja is also a scientist and a philosopher, making him a symbol of the integration of the East and the West. However, this integration is always overshadowed by the underlying tension between the two cultures, and Hoja is constantly torn between his Eastern and Western influences.

He'd go upstairs to the little room he'd made his private study, sit at our table which I'd built, and think, but I sensed that he wasn't writing, I knew he could not; I knew he didn't have the courage to write without first hearing my opinion of his ideas. It was not exactly want of my humble thoughts, which he pretended to scorn, that made him lose complete faith in himself: what he really wanted was to learn what 'they' thought, those like me, the 'others' who had taught me all that science, placed those compartments, those drawers full of learning inside my head. What would they think were they in his situation? (Pamuk, 1991, p. 54)

Ultimately, the dualism between East and West in *The White Castle* is a reflection of the larger historical and cultural conflicts between Eastern and Western Mediterranean regions, mostly represented by the Ottoman Empire in the East, and Spanish or Italian states in the West. Pamuk presents this dualism as a source of tension and conflict, but also as a source of potential growth and understanding. In this regard, Gökner (2013) asserts: "In Pamuk's hands, the traditional captive's tale has become a story of mutual conversion rather than othering" (p. 104). Through the complex and nuanced relationship between the narrator and Hoja, Pamuk suggests that it is possible for individuals to not only bridge the divide between these two cultures and find a way to integrate their different perspectives and experiences, but that these differences are not as stark or sedentary as what public discourse would have us believe.

Before the novel ends, Hoja recognizes that their writing sessions together have brought them together and revealed how similar they actually are. When Hoja tells the narrator while they are both naked in front of the mirror "Now I am like you" (Pamuk, 1991, p. 83), he means this literally. By the final chapter of the novel, the facade is completely dropped and Hoja reveals his true face to the narrator, while they are hard at work deploying the sultan's armaments at Edirne. The final words of the penultimate chapter read: "Exhausted, I lay down in his bed and slept peacefully" (p. 145). With that, the master and slave become one, leading to the final twist, revealed at the final chapter. Here, Pamuk wants the reader to initially think that the narration shifts to Hoja's perspective. Yet, subsequent paragraphs hint at the narration being done by the slave, as well as Hoja, what Erdağ Gökner (2013) calls an "indefinite narrator" (p. 109). The sacralization of the pronoun in its capitalized usage of "He" and "Him", as well as the entirety of the final chapter featuring this seeming shift should be read as an obvious reference to the West. "He was not a true friend of the Turks" (p. 159) but "...said we could be reformed" (p.159), and "wanted to save us" (p. 159). This is a narrative built on the

portrayal of the West centrally situating itself in the region and forcefully placing a self-peripheralization on the East, that must then be abolished, but only through its contact with the West. In this way, while we are initially made to think that either Hoja or his slave have left the Empire to live in Italy while the other stayed, in reality, they have become one; both narrating, in Italy and in Istanbul simultaneously.

### **3. Converted Identities of Metin Arditi's *Le Turquetto***

First published in 2012 and in French, *Le Turquetto* is a novel that has not yet been translated into English. Its author Metin Arditi, born in Turkey, but raised in Switzerland, has written many novels on similar themes, but in different settings. In *Le Turquetto*, there are three parts to the narrative, taking place in three different time periods, with the depiction of three different social and cultural circumstances. The first part takes place in early 16<sup>th</sup> century Constantinople, and tells the story of Elie, a Castilian-Jewish boy who loves drawing pictures. His father is very much against this, saying that an imperfect artistic depiction of the world that God created is an affront to Him, and is therefore a sin. But Elie, being a child, does not care, and keeps observing the world and drawing it after his daily walks with his father, who is sick. He draws the naked slave women while he peeps on his father during his day job as a slave trader. He even draws his dry nurse, Arsineé, while she makes sure the slaves are presentable and can be sold for a fair price.

In the first part of the novel, Elie is a child, completely pure and unaware of the troubles and opportunities that await him. Here, he is introduced to Islam and Christianity as a divergence in the identity of the people around him. One of his favorite people in the city, Djelal Baba is not only a Muslim, but he also produces ink for the city's scriptorium and thus acts as a missionary towards Elie by telling him that their religions are not actually that different from each other: Abraham is father to us all. We call him İbrahim. David is called Davout by us, and Salomon, Süleyman. We have one God. We speak to him in different languages, that's all (Arditi, 2012, p. 37). This is not only where we see Elie get introduced to the importance of inks and paints, which will become very important later in his life, he is also made aware of this religious and ethnic similarity, and its societally shunned points of difference. His subsequent conversation with Efthymios, an Orthodox Christian has a similar effect in this regard. While in Chora Church, a church that is famous for its depictions of Biblical stories, Elie draws whatever he sees with incredible accuracy for his age. He sees Virgin Mary and says: She is my mom! (p. 60), and Efthymios responds with: If you accept, The Blessed Virgin is the mother to us all (p. 60), a very similar remark to what Djelal Baba made previously. We

also learn during this conversation that although Elie is a Castilian-Jew, living in Constantinople, he was raised by a *Rum* dry nurse and thus can speak many different languages, including the language of the Orthodox Christians in Constantinople. This, in Efthymios's eyes, makes Elie one of them: You grew up on *Rum* milk. You speak our language. You know our churches and understand them better than anyone. And what's more, you are Jewish, as was our Lord (p. 62). With this revelation, that Jesus was Jewish, Elie is made aware of another important piece of information that will determine his fate. Afterwards, when his father dies during a slave transaction, guards discover him peeping and he runs away, getting on a ship to Venice to assume this Christian identity that Efthymios had somehow dreamt up and never looking back.

In the second part of the novel, 45 years have passed, and Elie is now known as "le Turquetto", because of how small he was when he first arrived from Turkish lands. He keeps his name as Elie, yet tells people that his name was Ilyas back in Constantinople, and that he was a *Rum* raised to be Christian Orthodox. Now, a respectable painter in Venice, he lives many years as both a lie, because he hides his true identity, but also as his true self, because he is a painter at heart. He transitions to Catholicism because of how difficult he finds life to be as an Orthodox, while he discovers the difficulties of being Jewish to be even more extreme by second-hand experience. He lives an easy life, all things considered, and realizes that in Constantinople, he could even be Jewish, but here he has to be Catholic. He is reminded of Ottoman tolerance towards other religions when Efthymios's words ring in his ear: Here in Balat, in Kadıköy, in Büyükkada, the Turks do not like monks, but they let them live in peace (p. 62). It is also important to mention that at this point in his life, Elie is married to a Catholic woman. An attendance to a Christian wedding, and his painting commissions of Christian subject matter thereafter, triggers a midlife crisis episode in him, where he starts to question who he is and how he came to be in Venice, so far away from who he was supposed to be. His feelings get further complicated when a sitting model for one of his Virgin Mary paintings turns out to be a Castilian-Jewish girl named Rachel. And when she speaks in the Castilian accent, which Elie has all but forgotten at this point in his life, he is reminded of his original family back in Constantinople. It reminds him of his father, his dry nurse – even his mother, who he never knew. Although he has a few escapades with Rachel, and seems as if he might fall in love with her, they are momentarily discovered by the clergy, and forced to never see each other as part of a business contract. A day later, she is killed, and this action hits the nail in Elie's coffin, where he can no longer act as if he is who he claims to be.

Filippo Cuneo, who commissions the painting of *The Last Supper*, scheduled to be completed in a few years' time for the Palazzo, is a nostalgic, and puritanical man. His main reason for the commission is to show Venice the distorted ways with which its artists have treated religious art for decades. He thinks that the city is sinking into fetid pleasures, and needs to wake up (p. 130). He is also the man who is vehemently against the relationship between Elie and Rachel, and is implied in the narrative to have had her killed. His plan is to reveal his commission painted by "le Turquetto" to the aristocracy of the city and show them the error of their ways through the beauty and simplicity of the work itself. It, however, does not go according to his plan. Coupled with his existential crisis, Elie decides to paint every apostle as another Venetian master painter that came before him, with the depiction of Judas as himself. With the revealing of the painting to every major figure in the city at once, all suspicions are raised towards Elie. Very quickly, they figure out that Elie was trying to raise his own message of himself depicted as Jewish, because he is. While interrogated by the Inquisition court, he confesses it all, and proclaims that Jesus Christ himself was Jewish. This is considered to be heresy by the court, and Elie is given a death sentence, scheduled to be executed in the very near future. When this day comes, however, he manages to get away from Venice, and back to Constantinople, where he will face his biggest challenge in figuring out who he is, bouncing back and forth the Mediterranean, unable to fit in one place or the other.

In the third and final part of the novel, he reconnects with what he feels he has lost as a child, which is traumatic to him, because there is almost nothing left. On top of being unable to find anyone he knew due to his current circumstances, he is also unable to paint, because if he does, someone might discover that he is the famed "le Turquetto", who was supposed to hang a few weeks ago in Venice, but somehow got away. He also lives as a Muslim now, on top of losing his Jewish identity, now losing his artificially created Christian one. He takes on the name Ali this time. This is not unprecedented, to see similar names being used throughout the Mediterranean coast, altered by the region's different religions: "Faiths changed people's names along the Mediterranean. Christians of all tongues and nations adopted Hebrew names from the Holy Scripture; Muslims adapted them..." (Matvejevic, 1987, p.173). This change in name and religion makes sure Elie is comfortable. Meanwhile, the backgrounded narrative implies a newly arrived intolerance towards Christians in the city, which only adds fuel to the fire in his perception that such small variations in identity make all the difference in the world arbitrarily. After decades of living as a Christian, he is able to feel this change in the city's attitude towards Christians, highlighted in the scene where Nikolaos, the new clergy in Chora Church is quite worried that his church will be converted into a mosque as recompense after

the Ottoman defeat at the battle of Lepanto by Venetian forces. Elie looks at the church, nostalgically, remembering his childhood, when Nikolaos asks him if he's there to launder (p. 260), and the possibility makes Elie question how much of this Christian identity he was able to leave behind in Venice.

Although Elie works as a porter, he is not a physically strong man, but makes do because he is a hard-worker. While working, he reconnects with Zeytine Mehmet, a war veteran amputee that used to be a beggar, now a merchant, having made a life for himself in the last 45 years. He becomes close friends with Zeytine and opens up to him, having a self-discovery in recognizing his own weaknesses and shortcomings in his friend. He decides to stop running, and in his friend's funeral, which comes a few weeks after their reconnection, he says a Jewish prayer, which the Imam allows. He says that he was born Jewish (p. 277), and this moment acts as a moment of enlightenment for him, where he is finally able to reconcile with his father's roots. Afterwards, he decides to find his father's grave, but is unable to. He feels like he has abandoned him. And not just him, but all of them; his friends, his dry nurse, his wife, his child. He feels he has betrayed his heritage as a Jew, when he got on that boat and claimed he was Christian. He betrayed the city of Venice, when he misused all the commissions to make a personal statement that seems unnecessary now in hindsight. But then, he realizes that he could no longer live a lie, no longer pretend that he was playacting these people named Ilyas, Elie or Ali separately. He was all of them at once, simultaneously living in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, as a symbol of its unique cultural makeup.

#### 4. Conclusion

Much like in Pamuk's narrator in *The White Castle*, Elie learns to become someone else to become himself in *Le Turquetto*, both circumstances being forcefully dictated upon them. Although they both have a choice to reject this transformation, this is no choice at all from their perspectives. The narrator in *The White Castle* could have converted to Islam, yet this would mean to exchange one rigidity for another. His solution is to inhabit the role of the European shadow in a city that and under a master that both aspires to be like him, yet despises him. In *Le Turquetto*, the circumstances are a bit different – almost exactly the opposite in fact, where Elie pretends to be what he needs to be to become himself, which includes converting from Judaism to Christianity, and to Islam. This is not a real conversion, as we understand it, because he is not a practicing devotee – yet it allows him to initially become this renowned painter, to ultimately survive and reconnect with his roots. This fluidity in identity is thus only made

available to both of these characters via the unique cultural and ethnic circumstances of the Mediterranean region.

Overall, both *The White Castle* and *Le Turquetto* can be seen as part of an umbrella that we might consider as “Mediterranean Literature” that explore the theme of cultural exchange and the shaping of identity. Through their depictions of characters who are forced to adapt to new environments, these works offer insight into the ways in which the Mediterranean is a place of cultural blending and transformation.

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