

# I. Introduction: What is (not) Turkish American Literature

In a 2005 interview with Khatchig Mouradian, Turkish American sociologist Fatma Müge Göçek laments the lack of dialogue between Turks and Armenians, exposing what she sees as the Turkish state's tendency to construct historiography in a way that suits a nationalistic agenda. Göçek begins and ends the interview on a hopeful note, claiming to have seen the signs of a postnational turn in Turkish cultural discourse and self-representation. For her, literature plays a crucial role in the articulation of more inclusive historiographical practices. Göçek praises Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak as the authors who are most invested in capturing the full "spectrum of meaning in [Turkish] society" and who highlight "the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural fabric of Turkish society, past and present" (Göçek in Mouradian 12). The publication of Shafak's first novel in English, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*, in 2004 and Orhan Pamuk's Nobel Prize for literature in 2006 indeed projected Turkish literature beyond the national borders and sanctioned its presence in world literature.<sup>1</sup>

A series of cosmopolitan, binational writers of Turkish origin with strong biographical and literary ties to the United States have become prominent over the last decades. In their writings, they engage with the national horizon of Turkish literature but also explore the relationship between Turkey and America, turning to the U.S. as to an omnipresent interlocutor. I term this group of writers and their work "Turkish American literature." The term has been used in the past, but mostly in reference to the status, work, and biography of individual writers and never with the aim of delineating a literary phenomenon open to canonization and theorization.<sup>2</sup> I understand Turkish American literature as defined by the

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1 On the concept of "world literature" see Franco Moretti's "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) and David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature* (2003).

2 See for example Gönül Pultar's "Ethnic Fatigue: Başçılar's Poetry as a Metaphor for the Other 'Other Literature'" (1998) and "Güneli Gün's *On the Road to Baghdad*: Travelling Biculturalism" (2005); for a sociological study on the making of Turkish American identity in the United States, see Alice Leri's *Who is Turkish American?: Investigating Contemporary Discourses on Turkish Americanness* (2014). Historical studies on Turkish communities in the U.S. include the volume edited by Kemal Karpat and Deniz Balgamiş *Turkish Migration to the United States* (2008) and the work of İlhan Kaya, such as *Shifting Turkish American Identity Formations in the United States* (2003),

effort to question, revise, or dismantle the monocultural narratives of Kemalism, open a bicultural dialogue with the United States, and propose a multicultural identitarian model for Turkey that is strongly reminiscent of paradigms of American multiculturalism. The Kemalist model established itself as the country's leading ideology in 1923, with the birth of the Republic of Turkey under the leadership of its first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Kemalism places a strong emphasis on secularism, the separation of state and religion, radical Westernization, and an idea of Turkish identity primarily based on ethnicity. The Kemalist reforms, determined to eradicate the Ottoman heritage from the country'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' (Çandar 89).

In my definition, Turkish American literature strives to overcome the discourses of Kemalism and seeks to redefine Turkey as a diverse, multicultural space. Albeit critical of Americanization as an outcome of Kemal's radical Westernization, these texts are informed by U.S. practices of multiculturalism and postmodernism.<sup>3</sup> In fact, they challenge the nationalist doctrine of Kemalism by resorting to aesthetics of polyvocality, polyvalence, and multilingualism, and by focusing on borderland sensitivities and hybridity politics. This translates into a strongly bicultural literature, "nor Turkish, nor American, yet both" (Pultar, "Travelling Biculturalism" 49), whose uniqueness deserves to be studied and discussed as it offers fundamental insights into Turkish culture in its global and transnational declensions. In fact, Turkish American literature as I am discussing it here fits imperfectly in Turkey's national literary scene and, in contrast to migrant writing produced by larger migrant communities (such as Greek

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"Turkish-American Immigration History and Identity Formations" (2004), and "Identity and Space: The Case of Turkish Americans" (2005).

- 3 In *Multiculturalism and the American Self* (2000) Boelhower and Hornung define multicultural policies in the U.S. as a series of attempts "to advance models for the creation of a society in which the different cultures would coexist on the basis of shared human values" (vii). The editors of the volume refer to Horace Kallen's enthusiastic description of cultural pluralism as "a mosaic of people, [...] a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind" (Kallen in Boelhower and Hornung vii). The quotation is useful to underscore the centrality of metaphors in Boelhower and Hornung's concept of multiculturalism, including the melting pot, the mosaic, and the salad bowl. The evolution of these metaphors is connoted by a desire to define multiculturalism in America as a model that "involves not the elimination of differences, but the perfection and conservation of differences" (Kallen in Boelhower and Hornung viii).

American or Armenian American literature), it cannot be defined through models of migrant literature in English.<sup>4</sup>

Another salient theme Turkish American literature engages with is the contested legacy of the Ottoman Empire. If in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 military coup d'état in Turkey the AKP's neo-Ottomanism has come to signify the seemingly irreversible rise of political Islam, religious radicalization, and authoritarianism, up to the early 2000s Turkish American literature strongly invoked a revival of Turkey's Islamic identity and looked at the legacy of the Ottoman Empire as the key to unlock a cosmopolitan future for the country. Turkish American texts present the empire's diversity as irrefutable proof of the nation's intrinsic potential for multiculturalism and tolerance of diversity. Ottoman history covers roughly six centuries and it is necessarily composed of very heterogeneous phases. Discourses of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity – whether historical or romanticized – refer to the 'classical age' of the Ottoman Empire (1300–1600), when the Ottoman rulers showed great openness towards ethnic/religious minorities, accepting their presence as part of the empire, allowing them to practice their faith, and integrating them in Ottoman identitarian narratives.<sup>5</sup> Béatrice Hendrich writes that “the Ottoman rulers were interested in the functioning of state affairs, not in creating a ‘Muslim state,’ or in putting an

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4 Studies on migrant literature in America include Werner Sollors's *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American literature* (1998), Rebecca Walkowitz's *Immigrant fictions: Contemporary Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2010), Rachel Lee's *The Americas of Asian American Literature* (1999), and Carol Fadda-Conrey's *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014).

5 The late Ottoman Empire (1700 to 1923), by contrast, did not prove to be a model of tolerance. Quite to the contrary, it “took a hostile stance toward its own ethnic and religious minorities” (Konuk, *East West Mimesis* 4). Kader Konuk considers the unsuccessful siege of Vienna (1683) as a turning point that activated the Westernization mechanism. Westernization reforms extend throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, culminating in the *Tanzimat* era, which witnessed a “fundamental reorganization of Ottoman society” on the administrative and cultural levels (Konuk 7). In his article “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery,” Selim Deringil argues that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire had relinquished its notorious system of tolerance and “began imitating the Western colonial empires” (Deringil 312). This implied a consolidation of the imperial center and a marginalization of the provinces, which were Othered according to the Othering criteria of Western empires (ibid). Ussama Makdisi concurs in locating a “paradigm shift” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which transformed discourses of hybridity lying at the basis of Ottoman self-representation and state regulation into “an imperial view suffused with nationalist modernization rooted in a discourse of

end to religious diversity in the empire (Hendrich 16–17). This attitude of *laissez faire* and pragmatism limited the rulers' interference in the organization of non-Muslim communities, and facilitated the relatively unproblematic coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups (Armenians, Jews, Kurds, and Greeks, among others), as the majority of these were allowed the right to practice their religion and maintain their identity. However, Turkish American literature tends to indulge in romanticized representations of the Ottoman Empire, exaggerating its tolerant and diverse character – a behavior that borders on imperial nostalgia<sup>6</sup> and presents complications worth investigating.

Scholarship about Turkish American literature is scanty, which is probably attributable to the contested quality of the term “Turkish American.”<sup>7</sup> Before the early 2000s, configurations that mixed Turkish and Western literary forms were regarded with skepticism by Turkish scholars and critics, who were cautious in validating a hybridization between the Turkish and the Western selves. Ahmet Evin's assessment of the early Turkish novel dismissed the hybridization of Western forms with local contents. To Evin, the unity of a novel would necessarily be blemished by “the incompatibility of [Eastern and Western] themes,” as abysmal structural defects would ensue from the unbridgeable distance between Turkish and European “methodologies and concerns” (Evin in Moretti 62). Jale Parla's analysis of Turkish fiction in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – a century that had been marked by intensive Westernization reforms – develops along similar lines. For Parla, late Ottoman literature reflected the inevitable “crack” provoked by “different epistemologies that rested on irreconcilable axioms” (Parla in Moretti 62).

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progress” (Makdisi 769). The Armenian genocide in 1915 was the tragic climax of a change of perspective that had begun decades earlier.

- 6 Ottoman nostalgia is a discourse that glorifies “the imperial age and its cosmopolitanism, contrasting it with the parochialism and exclusionist ideology of the nation state” (Bechev and Nikolaïdis 82).
- 7 Attempts to address Turkish American literature thus far have defined the “Turkish American” in strictly sociological terms. Numerous studies (e.g. the work of Frank Ahmed, Kemal Karpat, and, more recently, İlhan Kaya and Alice Leri) have focused on Turkish American communities in the United States, and investigated the implications and meaning of the Turkish American condition. Yet, perhaps due to the limited literary output of these first- and second-generation migrant communities, little attention has been given to the “Turkish American” as a literary category. The studies carried out by Gönül Pultar and Kader Konuk have certainly constituted the most prominent and visible sources on this topic thus far. Hopefully the forthcoming volume edited by Verena Laschinger by the title *Turkish-American Literature* (2016) will mark a step forward towards a more substantial outlining of the field.

In her 1998 article “Ethnic Fatigue: Başçılar’s Poetry as a Metaphor for the Other ‘Other Literature,’” Gönül Pultar invites us to problematize the concept of Turkish American literature. Pultar begins by stating that the number of Turkish immigrants in the United States is small and the members of the Turkish American community who are active in the literary arena are very few. On the one hand, works in Turkish by Turkish American writers do not concern themselves with the American mainstream or multicultural America, nor do they refer to the experience of the Turkish individual on American soil (Pultar 125). The few novels that are written in English “adopt the attitude of the consensual American” (Pultar 126). In Pultar’s analysis, Turkish American literature is either too Turkish to be American, or too American to be Turkish.

Turkish American individuals seem to be caught in the paradoxically unproductive situation of not being discriminated against enough – at least specifically as Turkish Americans – to resort to literature to assert their ethnic identity. Yet, they remain isolated from the “predominantly different” American society that is supposedly “too positioned in the ontological space of the Other” to allow productive contaminations (Pultar 124). The problem highlighted by Pultar is that the Turkish and the American spheres hardly ever intersect. For this reason, the “putative juncture” (126) between these two selves, sparking the possibility of an ethnic Turkish literature in English, appears elusive.

In his study of world literature, Franco Moretti notes that everywhere the modern novel arises “as a compromise between West European patterns and local reality,” and notes that the historical forces that regulated the relationships between the West and the “local reality” kept changing, and so did the result of their interaction (Moretti 64). Hence, if Turkish American literature was an unthinkable phenomenon in past decades, this does not mean that it must remain forever unthinkable. My contention is that Turkish American literature – defined as a corpus of texts written in English that establish a compelling bicultural connection with the United States – not only exists, but needs to be addressed as a significant expression of world literature. Although Turkish American literature began to catch the public’s eye in the early 2000s, thanks to the visibility gained by Elif Shafak in the Anglophone market, it can be retrospectively extended to works produced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Writers who could be part of such a canon of Turkish American literature according to my definition include Halide Edip, Selma Ekrem, Shirin Devrim, Güneli Gün, Alev Lytle Croutier, Judy Light Ayyildiz, Elif Shafak, Elif Batuman, and Serdar Özkan. In this study, I will focus on a core group of writers who have adopted English as their literary language and extensively engage with issues of

ethnicity, identity, and dual citizenship. These are Halide Edip, Güneli Gün, Alev Lytle Croutier, and Elif Shafak.

Halide Edip (1884–1964) was a prominent scholar, author, political activist, and one of Turkey’s first and most vocal feminists; she is remembered as a “figure of controversy in modern Turkish history” (Gökner, *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy* 150). She fought in Atatürk’s army in the War of Independence, earning the nickname of “Corporal Halide.” Once one of Kemal’s closest collaborators, Edip subsequently lost the favor of the Turkish leader, who branded her a traitor and publicly maligned her as the woman who “wanted an American mandate” over Turkey (ibid.). She and her husband chose self-exile in England and France. Edip travelled extensively, also to the United States, where she delivered lectures and public talks. Her literary production in English strives to present Turkish history and culture to European and American readers. She returned to Turkey in 1939 to embark on a political and academic career in her homeland. The autobiographical and non-fictional works she originally wrote and published in English in the 1920s and 1930s (*Memoirs of Halide Edip* in 1926, *The Turkish Ordeal* in 1928, and *Turkey Faces West* in 1930) were not translated into Turkish until the 1960s, when her status as a scholar and a patriot was re-evaluated.

Güneli Gün was born in Turkey in 1939. She is the author of *Book of Trances: A Novel of Magic Recitals* (1979) and *On the Road to Baghdad* (1994). Based in Ohio, she taught creative writing and women’s studies at Oberlin College. She became known as Orhan Pamuk’s translator, as she authored the first English translations of *The New Life* (*Yeni Hayat*, 1994; tr. 1998) and *The Black Book* (*Kara Kitap*, 1990; tr. 1995). In 2006, Maureen Freely revised and re-published both translations. Gün’s writing incorporates elements of magical realism and North American postmodernism, and draws inspiration from Ottoman folklore and the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Her literary production, especially *On the Road to Baghdad*, is marked by the influence of the American postmodern author John Barth, who claimed to have “served as a midwife in [Gün’s] delivery upon our writing scene” (Kadir 63).

Born in Izmir, Alev Lytle Croutier moved to the U.S. when she was 18. She studied comparative literature in Oberlin, Ohio. Eventually she moved to San Francisco where she founded a publishing firm called Mercury House. She is the author of two novels (*The Palace of Tears*, 2000, and *Seven Houses*, 2002), non-fictional works (*Harem: The World behind the Veil*, 1989, and *Taking the Waters*, 1992) and numerous articles and contributions to anthologies. In her interviews and non-fictional works, Croutier frequently reported being the granddaughter of a harem lady. This sapient self-exoticization allowed her to

offer her American readership a supposedly first-hand account of one of the most secret spaces of Turkish culture, the harem, presenting herself as a unique mediator between cultures.

Elif Shafak is the author of numerous novels both in Turkish and English. Her most widely read works in Turkish include *Pinhan* (1997), *Mahrem* (*The Gaze*), and *Bit Palas* (*The Flea Palace*, translated by Fatma Muge Göçek). Her first novel in English, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*, was published in 2004, followed by *The Bastard of Istanbul* in 2007, *The Forty Rules of Love* in 2010, *Black Milk* in 2012, *Honour* in 2013, and *The Architect's Apprentice* in 2014.<sup>8</sup> Shafak often describes her life and work as being infused with cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. Throughout her childhood, Shafak followed the highly mobile life of her diplomat mother. She was born in Strasbourg and spent her teenage years in Madrid, completed her studies in political science, international relations, and women's studies in Turkey and the United States, and worked at the University of Michigan and the University of Arizona. The recurrent concerns in her writing are the promotion of a cosmopolitan sensitivity for both Turkey and America, the condition of women, Islamic mysticism, and the retrieval of the Turkish Ottoman heritage. Shafak undoubtedly stands out as the most popular and globally acclaimed author analyzed in this study.

The work of these writers is particularly interesting in so far as it extends the label of Turkish American literature beyond the sphere of immigrant life-writing to literary works in English that do not produce immigrant success stories or what is commonly understood as migrant fiction, namely, fiction that relates the experience of first- or second-generation migrants struggling to balance two cultural traditions in U.S. territory. Literary works by Edip, Gün, Croutier, and Shafak present predominantly Turkish settings and characters, but are at the same time written for an American market and an American audience. Besides, most of these authors' biographies do not qualify for full inclusion into what is commonly understood as 'ethnic' or 'migrant' American literature, which demonstrates the necessity to address a Turkish American literature that is not the product of Turkish American biographies. Edip travelled to the United States frequently, lectured at American universities, and entrusted her work to American publishers, but never failed to return to Istanbul, which remained her place of residence. The same is true for Shafak, who lived in Boston, Michigan, and

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8 This volume addresses novels by Shafak in which the United States features prominently, but it might have lost its relevance as a theme in her most recent novels. The question whether it still plays a role in her writing remains open.

Arizona for years, but eventually returned to Istanbul. Only Gün and Croutier moved to the United States in their formative years.

If the biographies of these authors are too strongly rooted in the country of origin and thus do not fit the notion of ‘Turkish American,’ their work does. “Literary classification,” Rebecca Walkowitz claims in her essay “The Location of Literature,” “might depend more on a book’s future than on a writer’s past” (23). “Migrant literature,” Walkowitz reminds us, “is not written by migrants alone” (ibid.). Designed for and distributed on the North American literary market as well as the Turkish one, works such as Shafak’s *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *The Forty Rules of Love*, Croutier’s *Seven Houses*, Gün’s *On The Road to Baghdad*, and Edip’s autobiographical volumes function, in this sense, in more than one national context. The way in which these novels reimagine their home country as a global and transnational space, target the American readership, and use English as a literary language allows them to develop beyond Turkish borders and across two national dimensions. Pultar’s 1998 study underlines the difficulties presented by the canonization of these texts in either cultural tradition. My analysis hopes to move beyond this point, acknowledging the impossibility of affiliating these texts with a single cultural tradition. My solution is to envision Turkish American texts as travelling texts that escape affiliation with one cultural context, and therefore cannot be claimed as either ‘Turkish’ or ‘American.’ At the same time, these texts turn their lack of solid affiliation into a productive tool to read one cultural context through the lens of the other.

A useful conceptual framework that allows for a theorization of Turkish American literature, in so far as it does justice to the ‘travelling’ quality of these texts, is cultural mobility. The model was introduced in the social sciences in the early 2000s by sociologist John Urry and later found its way into literary studies thanks to the work of Stephen Greenblatt and others in the seminal volume *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (2009). The cultural mobility model helps to explain the movement of texts as well as people, suggesting that the two are related. Greenblatt and his co-authors claim that an understanding of a text’s mobile nature and transnational character presupposes an understanding of physical movements. Mobility is a necessary component of literatures that are undergoing a post- or transnationalization and, as Rüdiger Kunow affirms, “perhaps the prototypical experience of our time” and of “the current ‘post-national constellation’” (Kunow 245), characterized by what Habermas called “‘disenclavement’ of society, culture, and the economy” (Habermas 48). On a similar note, Reinhard Meyer Kalkus (one of the contributors to *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*) questions the viability of the national literature model for those writers who “compose their

works in one of the great languages of global intercourse (e.g. English, French, Spanish, or Arabic)” and who “not only live between cultures but address readers outside their own lands or origin” (Meyer Kalkus 96–97). Since the texts I analyze in this study are written and published in English and address audiences located abroad, I build on Kalkus’s argument to stress that Turkish American literature reaches beyond the borders of Turkish ‘national’ literature<sup>9</sup> and should not be labeled as such. Cultures, Greenblatt claims, are not generally understood as mobile and fluid but, quite to the contrary, as local and fixed. In fact, Greenblatt envisions cultures as entities whose power lies in the “ability to hide the mobility that is [their] enabling condition” (Greenblatt 252). This statement seems to apply to the Kemalist policies of erasure of the Ottoman legacy. By way of contrast, cosmopolitanism, a condition Turkish American literature aspires to, appears as a “utopian vision of mobility” (Greenblatt 18). Cultural mobility theories also help framing Turkish American authors not as migrants, but as a cosmopolitan elite of “frequent travelers, easily entering and exiting polities and social relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports and credit cards” (Calhoun 873), who imagine and write the world from a vantage point that is not necessarily accessible to the “working or low-income transnational class” (Binnie 9).

Besides being the product of authors with highly mobile, hardly nationalizable biographies, Turkish American literature presents and discusses a variety of spaces that can be read through the lens of cultural mobility theory. The gardens and courtyards analyzed in Chapter Four transform as Turkey re-orient itself from the East to the West. They reflect the country’s passage from empire to republic, and undergo a reshaping due to the popularization of new cultural influences – Americanization in particular. The Ottoman utopia, in Chapter One, projects the empire as a space open to be traversed by diverse cultural artifacts and practices: the identity that results from this openness is necessarily one in constant flux. The Ottoman Empire itself, with its codes of Othering and belonging, is a mobile entity for Shafak, who, in *The Bastard of Istanbul*, resuscitates it on American territory in the form of an online community called “Café Constantinopolis.” Its Istanbulite counterpart, “Café Kundera,” instead, is a highly fluid

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9 I am aware that ‘Turkish literature’ is, per se, a contested notion; yet, it is beyond the aim of this study to define what Turkish literature is. Erdağ Göknaar uses the terms “Turkish literary field” (Göknaar, “Secular Blasphemies” 305), “Turkish literary context” (302), and “Turkish literary modernity” (312) to express literary activity within the border of the Turkish nation. By Turkish literature, in opposition to Turkish American literature, I mean non-diasporic works of literature published in Turkey, in Turkish, by Turkish publishing houses.

and unstable space whose walls are covered with photographs of far-away destinations customers can travel to with their imaginations – including the United States. The orphanages in Chapter Two witness the coming and going of children during the War of Independence, some of them forced to convert from Islam to Christianity or vice versa.

Theories of cultural mobility help us identifying the function of these spaces, which remind one of containers that showcase “moment[s] in the process of transnational mobility in which ‘here’ and ‘there,’ or ‘them’ and ‘us,’ intersect and interact in processes of mediation and negotiation, adaptation/acculturation or rejection/expulsion” (Kunow 260). The most indicative locus of mobility in the Turkish American literature presented in this study is perhaps the iconic ferry crossing the Bosphorus, imagined in almost oppositional ways in Edip and Shafak (Chapter Two). Mobility theory would point at the ferry as an important textual element that showcases the connection between “different forms of travel, transport and communication” and “the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and various spaces” (Urry 6). The limited space of the ferry magnifies the ongoing negotiation of social, (post) colonial, and ethnic conflicts in a historical moment of passage (end of the empire, rise of Atatürk’s republic).

The chapters in this book negotiate Turkish American literature as a cohesive corpus of fictional texts that present reoccurring narratives, images, and literary practices. These narratives include the intense engagement with imperial nostalgia (in Chapter One), with the rewriting of history and religion from a matrifocal perspective (in Chapter Two), with the use of Sufism as a common ground between the American and Turkish cultures (in Chapter Three), and with botanic and natural imagery (in Chapter Four). To underscore the ubiquity and wide-range applicability of these narratives, the chapters in this volume address some of the most essential categories of literary analysis, from space (Chapter One), down to history and religion (Chapter Two and Three), and nature (Chapter Four). Ultimately, these narratives can be retrieved in both fictional and non-fictional works by authors of Turkish American literature. For this reason, my study will mostly focus on novels, but also take into account essays, autobiographies, and interviews with the authors, as these texts are also replete with signs of and references to the narratives mentioned above.

Turkish American narratives are ingrained in the Turkish political debate in so far as they express a strong rejection of Kemalist discourses and hope to articulate a more inclusive identity for the nation of Turkey. Turkish American literature appears, therefore, as highly political. In her perceptive interview, Göçek charges the

Kemalists with severing the connection between the Turks and their own past, manipulating historiography, and controlling the circulation of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> More inclusive identitarian narrations, according to Göçek, can be achieved by integrating the cultural elements that the Kemalists had banned from Turkish historiography to fulfill the dream of a modern, Westernized Turkey. The works I am referring to as Turkish American integrate into Turkey's postnational, multicultural self the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, the role of Islam as a pillar of Turkish collective consciousness, Islamic heterodox beliefs such as Sufism, and the silenced histories of marginalized groups such as former imperial minorities and women.

### **The Significance of the United States in Turkish American Literature**

Since the centrality of the Turkish nation for authors of Turkish American literature is indubitable, one of my urgent questions regards the position of the United States and its cultural narratives within Turkish American literature and, vice versa, the relevance of Turkish American literature for American Studies. In her 2004 presidential address to the American Studies Association entitled "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies," Shelley Fisher Fishkin called for an opening of the field of American Studies that would bring representations of America produced outside the United States into view. To this day, Fishkin affirms, this project of de-centering and re-centering the focus of American Studies "remain[s] work in progress" (Fishkin 21). Fishkin invites American Studies scholars to understand "how the nation is seen from vantage points beyond its borders" (20); she also imagines that in the future scholars will make "more of an effort to seek out the view from *el otro lao* [the other side]" (24). Here, Fishkin quotes Gloria Anzaldúa and therefore strongly addresses America's relationship with its own southern borderlands. But the scope of transnational American Studies as Fishkin imagines it expands beyond immediate borders to include "a broad array of cultural crossroads shaping the work of border-crossing authors [...] that straddle multiple regional and national traditions" (32). The Turkish American literature analyzed in this study is certainly an example of transnational literature that explores affinities and contact zones

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10 "The position that emerges in Turkey," Göçek writes, "is unfortunately one based on the ignorance of our own past, partly because of the partial knowledge that exists out there in what passes as Turkish scholarship and also because, as a consequence of the alphabet reforms, people cannot read the original Ottoman texts themselves, and the translation of those Ottoman sources into Latin script has been controlled by the government as well" (Göçek 4).

between the U.S. and Turkey, defining the U.S. as one of Turkey's most significant cultural interlocutors.

Fishkin also redraws the boundaries of ethnic fiction, whose current canons seem to contribute to North American ethnocentrism, in so far as their focus lies with “the proverbial immigrant who leaves somewhere called ‘home’ to make a new home in the United States” (24). American studies scholars, Fishkin suggests, should rather engage with other literary phenomena addressing diversity and the “endless process of comings and goings that create familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national borders” (ibid.). These processes, according to Fishkin, have been addressed by transnational American scholars who work with increasing interest on how U.S. culture abroad has helped “societies outside the United States negotiate aspects of their own cultures” (33). The study of this kind of interaction, for Fishkin, should not necessarily be framed and dismissed as cultural imperialism, which “turns out to be too simple a model to understand how culture works” (33), and she encourages to devise new models to make sense of the American presence abroad. Turkish American literature is connected to transnational mobility rather than migration, since some of the core authors of this study have returned to Turkey after having traveled to or lived in the United States. The frequent travelling that constitutes the foundation of Turkish American literature is reminiscent of Fisher Fishkin’s “endless process of comings and goings” that reshaped the dynamics of migration and now calls for a revision of the parameters of ethnic fiction. These highly mobile biographies result in a literary production with a bicultural focus and a tendency to read Turkish cultural identity through the lens of their experience of America, focusing on the American presence – commercial or cultural – in the homeland. As much as Turkish American texts ponder how deeply U.S. presence has shaped identitarian discourses in Turkey, this is hardly ever dismissed as ‘imperialism.’

On the one hand, Turkish American literature engages with the Ottoman and the Islamic traditions, on the other hand, it incorporates Western – and, more specifically, American – cultural narratives and spaces in the construction of Turkey’s identity. The American element has a special significance in this web of references because, even in the era of globalization, Winfried Fluck affirms, the U.S. remains a paradigmatic, agenda-setting society. Thus, Fluck continues, “it is still a major issue for the rest of the world whether, how and to what extent it is subject to, or affected by, American power” (Fluck 73). The difference between Westernization and Americanization, for example, is of paramount importance in the Turkish context. Fluck defines the two phenomena in broad brush-strokes, arguing that Westernization is “the process by which secular values of Western

societies such as the doctrine of individual rights, religious freedom, liberal democracy, or civil society become the inspiration for value change,” while Americanization indicates “a process by which specific elements are adapted from American society and culture” (Fluck 31). Both processes are usually equated with modernity and modernization. Fluck adds that “the issue is not one of an ‘either-or’ choice, since the terms ‘modernity,’ ‘modernization,’ ‘Westernization,’ and ‘Americanization’ describe different aspects of cultural development in Western societies and have a different explanatory range” (31). Westernization and Americanization in Turkey are interconnected processes, but correspond to different periods and different understandings of modernity.

Westernization has a longer history that possibly dates back to the Ottoman Empire’s unsuccessful siege of Vienna (1683), which, according to Kader Konuk’s *East West Mimesis*, triggered the first Westernization reforms as a response (6). Successive waves of Westernization reforms followed that historical moment. The *Tanzimat* (1839–1876) appears as one of the most radical, as it programmed a fundamental restructuring of Ottoman society. Interestingly, Konuk refers to the *Tanzimat* as a “Francophile” age marked by an “appropriation of French culture” (7), which indicates that 19<sup>th</sup>-century Turkey adopted France as the flagship of modernity and progress. Turkey’s Westernization reached its peak with Atatürk’s republic, which “called on Turkish citizens to identify as Europeans, even while seeking political independence from Western European countries” (8). As this brief passage has pointed out, the late-Ottoman and Kemalist Westernization projects are for the greatest part, although not exclusively, an ‘Europeanization’ enterprise.

As Laurence Raw claims in his essay “‘Communicating America,’ Validating Turkey,” Americanization can also be read in connection with the Kemalist project of modernization of the country, although not primarily (Raw 84, 87). Americanization in Turkey started in the 1950s, when the electoral victory of Adnan Menderes’ Democratic Party in 1950 marked the end of the unchallenged rule of Kemalism. The fascination with America increased in the following years: in October 1957, President Celal Bayar declared that Turkey aspired to emulate the U.S. so that one day it could become a “prosperous and populous ‘Little America’” (Bayar in Mufti 1). The statement was adopted as a slogan by Bayar’s Democratic Party. The Fifties were a crucial decade in Turkish-American relations: In 1947, Turkey was included in the Marshall Plan, sent 15,000 troops to Korea in 1950, and was admitted to NATO in 1952 – which, as Nuri Bilge Criss notes, many considered “an extension of the United States” (Criss 473). In addition, the U.S. was contributing generously to the improvement of Turkish agriculture, industry,

and transportations (Bozdoğan 118). The Fifties marked the shift from Kemalist Westernization to Americanization: a phenomenon that was informed and facilitated by the long tradition of Westernization, but also modified its goals and ideals. During this time period, Sibel Bozdoğan notes, “the meaning of ‘Western’ shifted considerably, from ‘European’ to ‘American’” (116). The prominence of the U.S. in Turkish foreign policy created a widespread enthusiasm for the values generally associated with America – i.e. “increased literacy, increased mobility, a new spirit of enterprise, the use of communication technologies, urbanization” among others (ibid.) – and encouraged Turkish citizens to emulate them, in the conviction that, Bozdoğan explains, they “would give way to new patterns of thought and behavior” (ibid.).

Several studies equate Americanization with modernization or modernity. Yet, in a Turkish context, it is necessary to differentiate between late-Ottoman/Kemalist modernity, bound to the European experience, and the idea of modernity connected to Americanization from the 1950s on. On the one hand the modernization process enforced by Atatürk in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was rooted in the concept of secularism (in Turkish, *laiklik*), derived from the French ideal of *laïcité*, which determined the complete exclusion of religion from the affairs of the state. “Since the 1930,” Cihan Tuğal confirms in “NATO’s Islamists: Hegemony and Americanization in Turkey,” the Turkish state favored “a more or less authoritarian exclusion of religion from the public sphere”; Kemalist “modernization,” according to Tuğal, “constitute[d] categorical proof of the disestablishment of religion in Turkey” (7–8).

On the other hand, Americanization in the Fifties was still understood in the context of modernity and expected to bring about urbanization, the rise of commercial culture, and progress (Ferenbach and Poiner xiv), but it left a larger space for Islam in the public sphere. “America was perceived as the ideal democratic society by the followers of DP [Democratic Party],” Bozdoğan argues, “including religious and traditional Turks who admired the freedom of religious expression in America as an alternative to the much-resented radical secularism of the Kemalist revolution” (Bozdoğan 118). In addition to that, Americanization in Turkey had been influenced by debates and publications relative to “modernization theory.” Two of its seminal texts addressed Turkey very closely: namely Bernard Lewis’s *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1961) and Daniel Lerner’s *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (1967). Although modernization theory enumerated religion among the factors that prevented the progress of a country and was therefore to be limited, Americanization in Turkey developed parallel to Islam’s renewed public visibility. This implies that Turkey

did not passively replicate American models, but adapted them to its current political situation and imaginary.

Fluck claims that there are two Americas, and two ensuing models of Americanization. One “has a distinctive economic and social structure”; the other, which he calls an “imaginary America of the mind,” is a “deterritorialized space that is filled with a selection of objects of choice [...] a sheer endless reservoir of interesting cultural forms” (Fluck 28). The flow of cultural products, rather than the fascination for the U.S. as a geographical territory, is central to the understanding of Americanization in Turkey and the role it played in the shaping of its identity. In *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations*, Heide Ferenbach and Uta Poiger reflect on how “images and products ranging from American movies and music to fashion and architecture, made by industries based in the United States [...] ha[ve], by offering alternative modes of identification, been crucial in the shaping of new identities” (Ferenbach and Poiger xiv–xv). It is this shifting, malleable “America of the mind” that the novels in this study principally address, and they investigate the possibilities in which the heritage of Americanization can be integrated in Turkish identity, tradition, literature, even language.

In my study, I examine the ways in which the U.S. served as an influential interlocutor capable of affecting and molding Turkish American literature’s understanding of Turkish national identity. In *Multiculturalism and the American Self*, Boelhower and Hornung argue that European societies have followed the American example in shaping their own multicultural discourses. Thus, due to America’s “special status as the number-one immigration country” and the “advanced” status of multiculturalism debates in North America, the U.S. multicultural model has become the leading one globally (Boelhower and Hornung viii). By the same token, Bechev and Nicholaïdis claim that the current discourse on multiculturalism in Turkey “stems from the particular experiences of various Western European and North American societies dealing with immigrant communities” (Bechev and Nicholaïdis 82). The case of Turkish American literature, where multiculturalism is understood as a conglomeration of Ottoman and American practices of multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence, certainly complicates the picture. The ubiquitous examples of cultural diversity that the United States presents facilitate the rediscovery and treasuring of Turkey’s own multicultural past and potential in Turkish American texts, where the Ottoman multicultural model is frequently combined with American narratives.

The United States is frequently represented as the agent making Turkey’s multicultural future possible and as a privileged neutral space where resilient imperial

conflicts (e.g., between Armenians and Turks, or Greeks and Turks) can be renegotiated. Göçek's residence in the United States, for instance, profoundly changed her perception of her own country. Göçek reports that the elements that allowed her to 'see' the Armenian question in Turkey were American liberal education and its tradition of the freedom of the press. "[Before I came to the U.S.]," Göçek explains, "I myself wasn't aware of what happened, because there are no sources that I could have read and critically studied other than the ones that presented the Turkish State's version of history. This was, of course, very hard to overcome and I was able to do so because I came to the U.S. and continued my scholarship" (Göçek in Mouradian 3).

There is much to be gained from analyzing Turkish American literature as a phenomenon that develops independently from what is considered either as 'canonical' ethnic American or migrant literature. Pultar addresses this issue in her 2005 article "Güneli Gün's *On the Road to Baghdad*: Traveling Biculturalism," where she argues that the relationship between Gün's novel *On the Road to Baghdad* and the United States develops along bicultural or transnational lines. *On the Road to Baghdad*, Pultar writes, "is a bicultural novel, not purely American (ethnic or multiculturalist) fiction, not purely a Turkish novel" (49). Pultar also states that Gün's novel is not comparable to works by 'ethnic' or multicultural authors such as Amy Tan or Maxine Hong Kingston, in so far as migrant literature in America configures itself mostly as life-writing. This kind of fiction, for Pultar, contains "the renderings on paper of American experiences, [...] consisting of the engagement of American authors with their parents' non-American culture" (Pultar 48). Although U.S. narratives of multiculturalism remain center stage, the factor that grants Turkish American literature its detached and unique status is a seeming 'marginality' of the American element, in favor of an overwhelming preponderance of the effort to reconfigure Turkish identity as a transnational, hybrid, multicultural construct.

A comparison with the more widely researched field of Turkish German literature, for example, reveals many similarities but also one fundamental difference. In her article "Re-Thinking and Re-writing Heimat," grounding Turkish German literature in the social reality of migration, Heike Henderson refers to Turkish German women writers as migrant writers (Henderson 229), a category that encompasses first- and second-generation immigrants. In some ways, Henderson's theorization of Turkish German literature is applicable to Turkish American literature. For Henderson, Turkish German authors do not lament the loss of home but re-write a concept of home that opens up to the possibility of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism (Henderson 226, 229, 239). Most

notably, “they offer a concept of Heimat that allows for cultural differences and provides a chance to feel at home in a world of transnationalism and multiculturalism, thus challenging the racist concepts of exclusion or forced assimilation” (239).

Similarly, Turkish American literature decisively reacts against the Kemalist rupture with Turkey’s imperial past, which triggered a comparable feeling of cultural loss, and advocates the articulation of more inclusive identitarian imaginations. However, the element that includes Turkish German literature into the canons of migrant literature and excludes Turkish American literature from the same category is precisely the concept of Heimat. For Turkish German authors, Henderson writes, “what is at stake [is] the political landscape of Germany, the question of whether Germans are willing to include minorities and migrants in their understanding of Heimat or not” (229). The quote sheds light on the fact that Turkish German literature places the emphasis on the country of destination, Germany, which also corresponds to Heimat, as “they all claim Germany as their home” (239). The agenda of Turkish American literature is at the same time identical and antipodal to that of Turkish German literature, as it reflects its concerns but directs them elsewhere. In Turkish American novels, in fact, the Heimat remains the country of origin, which is reimagined through the cultural narratives of the culture of destination, the United States.

The lack of an experience of permanent migration in the United States and the prevalence of Turkish settings and locations do not prevent authors of Turkish American literature from integrating American cultural narratives into the construction of a multicultural Heimat. Turkish American novels acknowledge the profound impact of Westernization and, specifically, Americanization on the young Republic of Turkey – two phenomena that had been encouraged by the Kemalists. Not only do Turkish American novels embrace the outcomes of Westernization in Turkey, they also try to reintegrate the linguistic, religious, political, and artistic heritage of the multicultural Ottoman Empire, targeted by the Kemalists as a period of obscurantism and barbarity and expunged from the nation’s cultural memory. The Turkish identity Turkish American literature promotes is highly syncretic, revealing the history of the country as multilayered and composite, rather than as the product of a state-driven selection of acceptable mono-ethnic components.<sup>11</sup> Turkish American literature (above all Shafak

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11 This syncretic view of the country’s identity separates Turkish American novels from other Turkish novels that have transcended the national borders to become world literature and negotiate all the different components of Turkish culture, such as the work of Orhan Pamuk. While Shafak’s fiction is indebted to American frames of thought in

and Croutier) tends to allow the cultural and material products of Americanization to shape Turkish identity without equating them to loss, but to enrichment and growth. For example, American and Turkish characters which come into contact with each other – or strive to combine the Turkish and American sides of their mixed identity – seem to achieve a beneficial degree of completeness or find relief from their insecurities regarding their own selves. In Croutier's *Seven Houses*, the idea of an Americanized Turkey is contemplated with curiosity and expectancy, and welcomed in so far as it leads to a more complex manifestation of Turkish culture. Ultimately, Turkish American literature differentiates itself from both Turkish migrant literature and Turkish literature, constituting an independent province of world literature which engages Turkey and the U.S. in an intense cultural dialogue. It is the aim of my study to reflect on this dialogue and, when possible, to facilitate it.

## Turkish American Literature and the “Transnational Turn”

### A Gentle Empire

The dominant polarity between constructions of empire and nation can provide fruitful insights into Turkish American politics and poetics. Turkish American literature rejects the narratives of Turkish nationalism, but at the same time, in a slightly contradictory fashion, it poses the problem of imperial nostalgia.<sup>12</sup> The discourse of Ottoman nostalgia in Turkey, which became prominent with the rise of neo-Ottomanism and its revival of the country's imperial past, portrays the Ottoman Empire as an exceptionally benevolent one, unacquainted with the brutality of European imperialism. In a way that is reminiscent of

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numerous ways, Orhan Pamuk's work – especially *The Black Book* (1990) and *The New Life* (1991) – regard the Americanization of Turkey as an indelible stain that brought the country to the ultimate loss of its identity or to the realization of the impossibility of having an identity. All manifestations of Turkish identity – whether pre-Ottoman, Ottoman, or Republican – dissolve under the overpowering Western presence. *The Black Book* and *The New Life* exude a sense of loss and abandon, which Ian Almond describes as “the sadness of one's selflessness [...] the melancholy of losing one's identity to someone or something else,” namely, “to the economic and cultural centers of North America and Europe” (Almond 82).

- 12 On imperial nostalgia see Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) and Paul Gilroy's *After Empire* (2004) and *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005).

Frank Kelleter's concept of American non-imperial imperialism,<sup>13</sup> recent debates<sup>14</sup> about the Ottoman Empire have strived to define it as a non-empire, exempt from the norms and practices adopted by Western imperial powers. Most strikingly, Turkish American literature invites to look at Turkey's imperial experience to overcome nationalist frames of mind. Thus, Turkish American literature subscribes to the idea of a non-imperial Ottomanism, choosing to equate the transnational condition with the vision of the Ottoman Empire as a multicultural space and a gentle domination.

In her article "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism': Discourses of Liminality and Hybridity in Post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy" (2011), Lerna Yanik makes abundant use of secondary sources on American Exceptionalism to describe and contextualize what she terms "Turkish Exceptionalism." It becomes evident that American Exceptionalism, more than any other national manifestation of Exceptionalism, remains the main object for comparison and confrontation in the definition of Turkish Exceptionalism. In its American expression, exceptionalism corresponds to "the idea that the development of American culture has taken place under conditions of its own [...], conditions that are different in constellation and degree from those of other countries" (Fluck 60). In a more critical register, exceptionalism may also overlap with the conviction of being exempt from the flaws that stain the history of European countries.

In the Turkish context, by way of definition, exceptionalist narratives find expression in both imperial and post-imperial Turkey. What defines 'Ottoman' exceptionalism is the myth of a gentle empire, whose ways and practices differ substantially from those of other imperial ventures.<sup>15</sup> Scholarship about the

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13 Kelleter defines American imperialism as "anti-imperial imperialism": "the desire to escape from European-style imperialism" and its "classical imperial aspirations" (Kelleter 31–32).

14 See, for example, Donna Landry, "The Ottoman Imaginary of Evliya Çelebi: From Postcolonial to Postimperial Rifts in Time" (2015).

15 "Unlike the case of the Spanish empire in the New World, which was predicated on the relentless conversion and Christianization of the entire indigenous population," Ussama Makdisi explains, "the Ottoman state sought to manipulate and regulate rather than to overcome the multi-religious nature of the empire (Makdisi 774). This lasted until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which "saw a fundamental shift from this earlier imperial paradigm into an imperial view suffused with nationalist modernization rooted in a discourse of progress" (769). The paradigm shift that overcame the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by the rise of a 'Turkish' rather than 'Ottoman' sensibility and by the diffusion of a form of Ottoman Orientalism based on the idea

Ottoman Empire has been representing it as a tolerant system where diverse ethnic and religious groups could peacefully coexist and enjoy the possibility of acquiring wealth, power, and influence.<sup>16</sup> Islam was the official imperial religion, but other creeds, such as Judaism and Christianity, were allowed to prosper. The Ottomans' tolerance for diversity earned them an 'exceptional' reputation in history, one that finds its most emblematic expression in Edward Said's statement to the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*: "I hate to say it, but in a funny sort of way, it worked rather well under the Ottoman Empire, with its millet system. What they had then seems a lot more humane than what we have now" (Said, "My Right to Return" 447). Many other voices reinforce this perspective. Urban studies scholar Maurice Cerasi writes that "the Ottomans had not brought a pre-existing, therefore imposed, culture" (Cerasi 134), thus mitigating the disruptive force of the Ottoman imperial venture. Ottoman domination, Cerasi continues, introduced in the conquered territories a "novel" principle of cultural synthesis that gave "to all, even when in conflict, the sense of belonging to a common culture in daily life" (*ibid.*).

'Turkish' exceptionalism<sup>17</sup> (not to be confused with 'Ottoman' exceptionalism) refers to the modern Turkish nation state primarily in two ways. First, Turkey's glorious imperial past would have granted the country an 'exceptional' status even after the demise of the empire; for this reason, the perspective of becoming the victims of colonization and foreign occupation was received with intense

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of a primitive and barbaric East that could be redeemed by means of the Ottomans' *mission civilisatrice*. Even before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, equating the Ottoman model with the contemporary understanding of multiculturalism amounts to a misreading and a romanticization of the Ottoman domination.

16 See Landry's "The Ottoman Imaginary of Evliya Çelebi: From Postcolonial to Post-imperial Rifts in Time" (2015); Cerasi's "The Formation of Ottoman House Types: A Comparative Study in Interaction with Neighboring Cultures" (1998); and Mills's "Narratives in City Landscapes: Cultural Identity in Istanbul" (2005) and "The Place of Locality for Identity in the Nation: Minority Narratives of Cosmopolitan Istanbul" (2008).

17 For a more complete understanding of Turkish Exceptionalism see the work of Turkish political scientist Serif Mardin, especially "Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today" (2005). On the myth of Turkey as a 'model democracy' in the Middle East see Meliha Benli Altunisiç's "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East" (2005). For the notion of Turkish 'negative' Exceptionalism, implying that foreign agents worked against Turkey because of its 'uniqueness,' see Lerna Yanik's "Turkish Exceptionalism and its Critics" (2014).

shock and perceived as an outrageous paradox.<sup>18</sup> Second, due to processes of radical Westernization and the separation between state and religion enforced by the Kemalists, Turkey appears in the national and global imagination as an ‘exceptional’ Muslim democracy. Historian Bernard Lewis, for example, approvingly declared that, among Muslim countries, “Turkey *alone* has formally enacted the separation of religion and the state” (Lewis in Çandar 94, emphasis added).

The term ‘Turkish exceptionalism’ in its application to Turkey’s post-imperial modernity appears in numerous studies, and views differ as to what it means. Gönül Pultar’s and Donna Landry’s definitions of Turkish exceptionalism are especially relevant to my study. Pultar addresses it as an epiphenomenon of Kemalism, while Landry includes it in the neo-Ottomanist paradigm. In “Ethnic Fatigue,” Pultar claims that Turkish exceptionalism has been

“imagined” – whatever the historical facts may be – from 1923 onward by the founding fathers of the Republic, and drummed since, in Jacobean fashion, into every schoolchild of Kemalist Turkey. [...] [T]he acquisition of United States citizenship is usually a source not of pride but of shame among Turkish-Americans, who feel the need to explain it away apologetically as due to professional obligation. (Pultar 126)

In the excerpt, Pultar refers to the Kemalist understanding of Turkish exceptionalism, which celebrates Turkey’s unique development from Eastern empire to Westward looking, modern republic. The subsequent Westernization waves in Turkey, which have contributed to the genesis of this kind of Turkish exceptionalism, explain Pultar’s passing references to the French context (“Jacobean”) and the American one (“founding fathers”). Pultar describes Turkish exceptionalism as a reason for anxiety for Turks in the U.S., as the sense of belonging to such ‘exceptional’ nation seems to discourage Turkish citizens from acquiring a second citizenship, and hence it is significantly cast as an obstacle to the transnational condition. Here Pultar claims that a sense of Turkish exceptionalism started to pervade public discourses in Turkey since 1923, but, as my argument has shown, imperial history before the foundation of the republic has been exceptionalized as well, although in a different way.

Donna Landry’s definition differs from Pultar in so far as she does not consider Turkish exceptionalism as a byproduct of Kemalism, but of the more recent political and cultural ideology of neo-Ottomanism. She highlights the

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18 “The vulnerable Ottoman polity, disgraced by the Armenian genocide, riven by ethnic violence and famine as well as militarily defeated, had become a state to which the European powers could dictate terms that would have been unthinkable in previous centuries” (Landry 136).

connection with Turkey's imperial past and present colonial anxieties. Landry identifies "Turkey's sense of exceptionalism" as a post-Kemalist phenomenon and connects it to Turkey's "newly expressed desire to serve (once more) as a global player" (Landry 152). "The attempted abolition of the Ottoman past from official Republican history," Landry continues, "rendering it a perpetually lost object, encrypted and incapable of being mourned, has been producing some disturbing spectres on the Turkish political scene as well as some hopeful ones" (ibid.). In her article, Landry defines Turkish exceptionalism as twofold, bearing connections to both imperial nostalgia and imperial anxiety. On the one hand Turkish exceptionalism resides in the neo-Ottomanist desire to "exert more 'soft power' – political, economic, diplomatic, and cultural influence – in formerly Ottoman territories" (Taşpınar, "Three Strategic Visions" 2) and to emerge as a mediator between Western democracies and the Middle East. On the other hand, Landry's definition hints at the "spectres" left by the impossibility to mourn the loss of the Ottoman Empire. One of these would be the Sèvres syndrome (Landry 152): a phobia of foreign interference and violation of Turkish national sovereignty by European states, which Landry describes as "symptomatic of unresolved attachment despite Republican attempts at a rupture from the Ottoman past" (152). It owes its name to the Sèvres Treaty (1920), by which the Ottoman Empire was to be dismembered and parceled out to European states.<sup>19</sup>

Yanık's analysis of Turkish exceptionalism is particularly relevant for the purpose of this section as she highlights the connections between the neo-Ottomanist rhetoric of multiculturalism and a specific form of Turkish exceptionalism. Yanık traces this kind of rhetoric back to the "Özal years,"<sup>20</sup> when Prime Minister Turgut Özal, remembered as one of the main ideologists of neo-Ottomanism, urged a re-evaluation of Turkey's Ottoman legacy and thus challenged the strictly anti-Ottoman discourses of Kemalism. "The Özal years," Yanık argues, "were a milestone in the way Turkish history was hybridized to shape Turkish exceptionalism, as Turkish elites revised 'multiethnic' and 'multireligious' to mean 'multicultural'" (Yanık, "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism'" 84). In this passage,

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19 Landry describes the Sèvres Syndrome as a "legacy of fear and anxiety, however irrational," that has "left profound scars" and affected Turkey's relationship with the West ever since the Treaty of Sèvres, albeit the Treaty itself was never put into practice. Landry sees the Sèvres Syndrome as "symptomatic of unresolved attachment despite Republican attempts at a rupture from the Ottoman past" (Landry 134–135).

20 Turgut Özal (1927–1993) served as Turkey's prime minister twice, from 1983 to 1989, and as President from 1989 to 1993. He was the founder of the Motherland Party (ANAVATAN).

Yanik identifies the hybridization policies of neo-Ottomanism as exceptionalist policies, translating the factual coexistence of several ethnic and religious groups into a system of harmonious peace and “Ottoman justice,” implied in the modern understanding of the term ‘multiculturalism’ (ibid.).<sup>21</sup> All the aspects that will inform what I shall term Ottoman Utopia in Chapter One, and, more generally, the projections of cultural hybridity that populate Turkish American texts – pluralism, harmony, multiculturalism, good governance, stability, order, and peace (ibid.) – are listed by Yanik as the outcome of a “‘selective reading’ of Ottoman history” that ultimately contribute to the shaping of Turkish identity as an exceptional nation that emerged from an empire that we may call discursively “anti-imperial.” What can be concluded is that Turkish American literature, albeit hoping to achieve a denationalization of the culture, distances itself from the exceptional discourse promoted by the Kemalists – based on a selective reading of Turkish history – to embrace a different one – based on a selective reading of Ottoman history.

### ‘Unearthing’ and Embracing the Colonial Past

Archeological practices that aim to metaphorically ‘disinter’ the empire’s intangible heritage appear to be crucial to the transnationalizing discourse of Turkish American literature.<sup>22</sup> In Shafak’s fictional work, these ‘archeological’ efforts lead

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21 Not only has the Ottoman Empire been equated to a “unique source of multiculturalism,” but also to a “globalization” process *ante litteram* (Davutoğlu in Yanik, “Constructing Turkish ‘Exceptionalism’” 86).

22 From an American Studies perspective, Pease writes that “the globalization of American Studies involved scholars in the work of recovering the memory of America’s disavowed imperial past so as to erect [...] newly forged interpretive frameworks” (Pease 267). Völtz explicitly blames American exceptionalism for the burial of this imperial past: “[Americanists] retrieved an imperial legacy that American Exceptionalism had disowned” (Völtz, 27). Within the field of American Studies, the recovery of the disavowed colonial past seems to be carried out through an ‘archeological’ process of recovery. Americanists describe the colonial experience, and the transnational dimension it is necessarily associated with, as an existing substratum of violence and oppression made indiscernible by centuries of denial. Völtz speaks of the American transnational experience as something “invisible or inaccessible,” “obstruct[ed] and conceal[ed]” by the force of nationalism. The task of transnationalism, at this point, is to disrupt nationalist narratives and “recover” America’s cultural multiplicity (Völtz 362–363). Fluck, Brandt, and Thaler argue that America’s global past had fallen victim to an “institutional amnesia” (Fluck et al. 6), consequently, the retrieval of the disavowed colonial past is – perhaps romantically – conducive to a lost organic whole. “Nationalism,” Völtz argues,

to the recovery of Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic phrases, which appear in her texts often without a translation. “I do not only try to *unearth* the stories that have been *buried under the ground* by the Kemalists,” Shafak explains, describing her own creative process, “I also try to *unearth* the words that have been kicked out of Turkish language. *I bring them back*” (Shafak, “Linguistic Cleansing” n.p., emphasis added). The idea of an organic national identity resurfacing from the disinterring process appears in Shafak in the shape of an “unreasonable synthesis” (Shafak, “Making Sense of Irrationality” n.p.), constituted by Turkey’s numerous “discordant parts” (Shafak, “Once the Sick Man, Now the Chimera of Europe” n.p.) and contradictory selves. Shafak therefore defines her own writing as an attempt to bring the forgotten imperial heritage to the surface, in order to restore Turkey’s multifarious selves. To accomplish this unearthing, Shafak resorts to the instruments of transnationalism. She shifts the focus of Turkey’s identitarian narratives from a monocultural discourse to a multicultural one, fully acknowledging past and present cultural interconnections and how they shape Turkey’s self-perception. Shafak’s work shows her willingness to integrate the colonial past in Turkey’s present identitarian narrations.<sup>23</sup>

In Turkey, the linguistic, cultural, and religious legacy of the Ottomans is not the only aspect of Turkey’s imperial past identified by the Kemalists as an obscure pre-national Other and ejected from the ideological construction of the nation. One finds a variety of abject bodies that the nationalist discourse does not address: non-Turkish and non-Muslim minorities were associated with the pre-national experience and therefore divested of meaning in the Republican framework, or forced to partake in it by assimilating into a mono-ethnic idea of

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“is the disturbing force that tries to obstruct and conceal organic flows of culture. Transnationalism [...] recover[s] an original organicism” (Völtz 363).

- 23 American Studies theories resort to similar depictions of a disavowed past that go beyond the archeological semantic field into that of mourning. In the U.S. context, Pease evokes the concept of “melancholy” related “not to the impossibility of mourning a lost object, but to the impossibility of Americanist scholars giving up on an object that was not lost and that they could not forget” (Brown in Pease, *Re-Mapping the Transnational Turn* 28). Moving to the Turkish context, Landry speaks of Ottoman history as of “a perpetually lost object, encrypted and incapable of being mourned” (152). For Landry, the impossibility of mourning the dead as a natural part of a nation’s coming of age has been the cause of humiliation, and anxiety in Turkey. Landry also quotes Mahmud Mutman in “The Nation Form,” according to whom the Ottoman legacy is a loss that cannot be properly articulated, but that “cannot be simply rejected either” (Mutman in Landry 152).

Turkishness.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the dramatic events tied to the imperial experience, such as the Armenian genocide or the Kurdish struggle for independence, remain unresolved issues that haunt the national present. Turkish American literature follows an itinerary of liberation of the individual from the fixed modes of belonging and self-representation prototyped by Kemalism. Turkish American literature incorporates abject identities into alternative historical narrations, complicates official historiographies with unofficial ones by women and ethnic minorities, and promotes interaction between those who do fall within the criteria of national citizenship dictated by Turkish nationalism and those who do not.

The field of transnationalism is very much in flux and there is no such thing as an accomplished transnational condition. The transnational agent, invested in the production of transnational identities, inhabits a void between the negation of previous nationalist models and the trans-nation – that is, a fully actuated transnational reality. The melancholia triggered by the yearning for a yet unachieved transnational condition becomes ‘emplaced’ in Turkish American literature through spaces that sensitize the reader about the necessity to develop a transnational conscience, which entails an open confrontation with the imperial past. The following chapters, especially Chapter One and Two, will be concerned with spatial representations of the transition from empire to republic, and from an imperial dimension to a nationalist one. Other spaces, instead, reflect a condition of restlessness and instability in which the monocultural discourses of Kemalism have plunged Turkish citizens. One of these is doubtlessly Café Kundera, a café in Shafak’s *The Bastard of Istanbul*. Café Kundera is a space that exposes the limitations of nationalism and shows that this model has entered a crisis. The arrival of an Armenian girl, Armanoush, puts this aseptic space of unchallenged nationalism face to face with the abject Ottoman Other and with the ignominious events that the modern Republic of Turkey had ejected. Armanoush’s appearance

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24 U.S. nationalism also erased the individual subalterns that constituted its imperial experience. Subjects of Euro-American colonialism such as Native American tribes and African Americans, to put it with Briggs and McCormick, are “construed as signs of a colonial moment before the nation, or, if acknowledged to exist in the present, an unruly and ungovernable people who cannot be fully incorporated in the citizenry” (Briggs and McCormick 642). In this scenario, scholars of transnationalism are first of all endowed with the task of inaugurating new channels of interactions between the nation and those subjects that do not match the nationalist criteria of citizenship. Secondly, they develop different representations of the past by retrieving those that have been obscured by nationalist discourses, integrating them into present identitarian narratives.

reveals that the space of Café Kundera is permeated with narratives of disavowal, and has not yet turned into a successful transnational space. Armanoush appears as a “liberatory” person in Bhabha’s sense, one of those figures who “initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change [...], themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity [...] caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation” (Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” 21).

*The Bastard of Istanbul* also follows the transition of the Turkish protagonist Asya from a condition of cultural amnesia to one of awareness – a transition that is made possible by the interaction with an Armenian character. In *The Bastard*, Asya responds to the invitation to apologize in the name of the nation of Turkey for the Armenian genocide (Shafak 262). At this moment, the individual dissociates from the nation: “I have nothing to do with my state,” Asya protests, “I am an isolated individual” and yet she does apologize for the pain her ancestors have caused to the ancestors of the Armenian characters in the novel (261–262). The nation’s imperial past is therefore addressed and discussed: under these premises, the transition towards the transnational imaginary is finally possible.<sup>25</sup>

## **Beyond Empire: A Postcolonial Reading of Turkish American Literature**

Considering its extensive engagement with imperial formations, I suggest that Turkish American literature can be read through the prism of postcolonial theory, or at least through some of its analytical concepts. Although Turkey has never been officially colonized, and, according to Kader Konuk, it appropriated Western culture on its own terms (Konuk, *Mimesis* 87), postcolonial theory emerges

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25 Transnational American studies holds that nation-building processes in the U.S. excluded histories of Native Americans, of enslaved people, and of those who dwell at the physical and social borders of the country (see Pease, *Transnational Turn* 28). Halide Edip’s autobiographical volumes, published a few years after the foundation of the republic, are driven by a similar need to question the exclusive narratives around which the nation was being built, and proposes alternative models where diverse voices could be integrated. *The Turkish Ordeal* subverts the official Kemalist historiographies and divests the mythical figure of Atatürk of its heroism, portraying the Turkish War of Independence as the successful outcome of collective efforts; she celebrates the courage of women left in the villages and entrusted with the onerous task of (re)constructing the nation. Most importantly, she views Turks and imperial minorities as united by the same grief.

as a suitable instrument to illuminate the intricacies of the imperial and colonial experiences in Turkey.<sup>26</sup>

I derive my use and understanding of the term ‘postcolonial’ from the seminal text by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature* (1989). As a starting point, the three scholars define the ‘postcolonial’ as a category that “covers all cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 2). Yet, their initial definition opens up to cover more contested spaces, and portrays the colonial experience as a much more ambivalent phenomenon, to the extent that, nowadays, postcolonialism is considered “one of the most diverse and contentious fields in literary and cultural studies” (Ashcroft et al. 193). The three authors are extremely cautious in defining the term: they manifest skepticism about “putting barriers between those who may be called ‘post-colonial’ and the rest,” as the attempt to excessively contain the imperial discourse would affect the possibility to express its complexity (Ashcroft et al. 200). The Turkish context greatly benefits from the openness of the postcolonial model towards contested colonial experiences like the Turkish one, and the lack of an official “moment of colonization” (Ashcroft et al. 194) does not prevent the postcolonial model from representing a valid reading tool for Turkish American literature. Here, I am most inclined to define postcolonialism as a “reading strategy” (Ashcroft et al. 201) that may be applied to national cultures after the departure of the imperial power. Ideally, for Turkey, the notion of the postcolonial would have to cover the Turkish national experience as an example of postcolonial *and* postimperial modernity – one that marks the peculiarity and uniqueness of the Turkish context.

For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, postcoloniality is much less a historical condition than a ‘reading tool’ that may be applied to a variety of national realities affected by imperial processes. This concept can be adapted to meet the exigencies of my material: an evaluation of the “efficacy” of the postcolonial model to interpret a certain cultural reality (can I use postcolonial theory to read Turkish

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26 In *East West Mimesis*, Konuk employs Bahbha’s concept of mimicry to examine the anxieties connected to Turkey’s Westernization. She states that some compelling parallels can be drawn between imperial dynamics in the British Empire and Republican Turkey, but she clarifies that her intention is not to equate “colonial strategies in British India with Turkey’s self-imposed appropriation of Western culture” (87). The necessity of this comparison, instead, has been recently voiced by Mikhail and Philliou, Landry, and Aymes.

American literature?) would replace “the debate over the validity” of the postcolonial label (is Turkey postcolonial?) (Ashcroft et al. 201).

Donna Landry and others apply the postcolonial framework to the Ottoman Empire, which has often been excluded from the discourses on Empire formulated by postcolonial scholars thus far. “Postcolonial literary studies,” Landry states, “up to now dominated by the aftermaths of European, especially British and French, colonialism, needs to address the question of comparative imperialisms beyond the European” (Landry 127). The postcolonial framework has been used in connection with Ireland, earlier imperial and colonial periods, the European Renaissance, and many other instances (Ashcroft et al. 201), but its application to the Ottoman and post-Ottoman world is relatively recent. Landry’s essay “The Ottoman Imagery of Evliya Çelebi: From Postcolonial to Postimperial Rifts in Time” and Selim Diringil’s “They live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Postcolonial Debate” establish parallels between the Ottoman and the British imperial experiences. On a similar note, Marc Aymes’ “Many a Standard at a Time” and Alain Mikhail and Christine Phylliou’s “The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn” encourage scholars to evaluate the Ottoman Empire in a comparative light and to position its aftermaths within a postcolonial framework. These studies demonstrate that “the very question of empires, colonies, and nation-states is entering a new phase of investigation” (Landry 127) and the demarcation borders of the postcolonial, like those of the transnational, are still in the process of being defined.

## The Postcoloniality of Turkey

Lerna Yanik argues that “through 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” (Yanik, “Constructing Turkish ‘Exceptionalism’” 83). In his 2006 assessment of Turkey’s post-coloniality, Erdağ Göknaar 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. (Göknaar, “Orhan Pamuk and the ‘Ottoman’ Theme” 37)

Here Göknaar refers to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural and financial dependency of the Ottoman Empire on Europe, but the occupation of the empire’s territory by the

Allied powers after the First World War and during the Turkish War of Independence qualifies as a “colonial encounter” as well. I agree with Landry’s powerful claim that “the postimperial is not a rival to the postcolonial but its comrade” (127), with which she opens her study on Evliya Çelebi. This is especially true in Turkey’s case, as the nation that rose from the Turkish War of Independence was not only a postimperial nation – being the successor to the Ottoman Empire – but a postcolonial one as well (see Landry 154). The new national formation, which contained part of the former imperial soil, also included portions of former imperial minorities who were never part of the ruling Muslim elite. They had thus far occupied the position of colonial subjects, but instead of inhabiting a “far-flung colony” they resided in the “imperial metropolis and its closest hinterland” (Landry 154). Furthermore, Landry adds, the struggle for independence led by Kemal and the successive political developments reacted not only against “the imperialist ambitions [...] of the external Great Powers but also against internal imperial Ottoman institutions” (ibid.). Landry’s observations concur with Göknaç, who reiterates that “even though Turkey was never colonized, the official discourses of the Republic fabricated a clear distinction between the new national formation and what had come before, casting the Ottoman state centered in Istanbul as the ‘colonizer’ of Anatolia and the Turks” (Göknaç, “Secular Blasphemies” 310). In other words, the Kemalists attempted to both eliminate the possibility of a foreign domination and to dismantle internal imperial structures – and they saw the two as intimately connected, as the realization of the former would have depended on the connivance of the latter.

Ottoman financial dependency on and cultural indebtedness to the Western powers started in the post-*Tanzimat* era (19<sup>th</sup> century) – much earlier than the collapse of the Empire, which brought about the specter of partition – and culminated with the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. In her article, Landry uses a markedly metaphorical terminology that best clarifies the psychological impact of the European expansionist program in the former Ottoman territories. To describe the latter, Landry uses metaphors in the field of physical discomfort, such as “partition and acquisition fever” and a “European fever to possess the whole of the former Ottoman domains” that left “deep scars” on Turkish culture (135). These metaphors suggest the extent to which the possibility of a partition affected Turkey’s psyche. The characterization of the Treaty of Sèvres as a “death warrant” provides further evidence of its shocking reception. Landry’s sharp language, clearly sympathetic to the Turkish cause, is reminiscent of Edip’s language of open distaste for Europe’s expansionist designs during the War of Independence. Edip condemns the Allied powers as occupiers, persecutors and invaders (Edip,

*Ordeal* 61, 106) who aim to “[convert] Turkey into a series of colonies” (*Ordeal* 112) or, alternatively, to “exterminate Turkish rule in Asia Minor and replace it by a vast Greek empire” (*Ordeal* 162). Edip’s outrage never targets the United States, whose presence in Turkey is motivated, for Edip, by humanitarian reasons only. By so doing Edip perpetuates the myth of America’s exceptionally ‘unimperial’ interference. Chapter Two of this volume, entitled “Rewriting History and Religion,” will expand on that.

### **Turkish American Literature and the Postcolonial Imagery**

The subtle coexistence of the colonial and the imperial in Turkey begs the question whether the postcolonial framework is an effective reading tool for Turkish American literature. A cluster of recurring themes and ideas that are central to both postcolonial theory and Turkish American literature suggest it is. These themes are place and displacement, botanic and natural imagery, syncretism, and resistance.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin describe the concern with place and displacement as a major feature of postcolonial literatures: the rift between self and place is where the postcolonial identity crisis is located. This theme finds large resonance in the present study: the discomfort provoked by the vanishing of familiar architectures and the proliferation of unfamiliar ones will be the object of Chapter Four. My investigation of gardens and botanic imagery shows how the disappearance of what I call ‘Ottoman nature’ – that is, nature used as a symbol of the country’s Ottoman heritage – emblemizes Turkey’s passage from empire to republic. Chapter One, instead, addresses imaginary representations of the Ottoman Empire that ensue from the aspiration to bridge the fracture between the master narratives informing Turkish modernity and the history of the territory on which it stands.

In both chapters, the experience of place is undistinguishable from the experience of language: the lost connection with the inhabited space corresponds to the incapability of finding words to describe it. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin affirm that the

gap [which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it] occurs for those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place, for those whose language is systematically destroyed by enslavement, and for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power. (Ashcroft et al. 9)

This gap between the experience of place and language is adopted by Shafak, most directly in an interview entitled “Linguistic Cleansing,” where she claims that

linguistic cleansing is something comparable to ethnic cleansing. Imagination shrank, culture and information couldn't flow from one generation to another. We have generations of people who don't know the things their grandparents know, who cannot read the writing of their grandparents, who cannot read the names or who don't know the meanings of the street names. (Shafak, “Linguistic Cleansing” n.p.)

For Shafak the Kemalist language reform – which sought to minimize the Arabic and Persian lexical presence in Turkish – is akin to practices of ethnic cleansing. Kemalist language policies are thus paralleled to strategies of ethnic levelling. The Ottoman alphabet was “a mixture of many things, a multiethnic fabric” that the Kemalists changed “in a day” (ibid.). Besides equating linguistic with ethnic cleansing, this passage addresses the rupture of the unity of self, language, and place. Not only has the language reform isolated the younger generations from their cultural tradition (the “writing of their grandparents” allows access to “the things their grandparents know”), it has also simultaneously created a distance between them and their national space. Unable to read street names, they lose the possibility to navigate the city and country they live in, both geographically and culturally.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, questioning the “appropriateness of an imported language to describe the experience of place in postcolonial societies,” which the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* underline as a “classic and all-pervasive feature of postcolonial texts” (9), is particularly relevant for Turkish American literature, for which both English and Turkish are connected to different forms of Westernization. Turkish American literature represents a paradoxical scenario in which the search for national identity – not necessarily a diasporic one – is carried out in English, and presents narrative situations in which both languages are equally contested, equally insufficient. Edip wrote her autobiography in English, directing it to an Anglophone and international readership. Translations into Turkish only appeared in the 1960s, and bore important modifications that minimized

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27 This rift is also clearly expressed in Pamuk's *The Black Book*, whose protagonist is consumed by his own inconclusive attempt to reconstruct the connection between the speaking subject, the signifier, and the signified. A postcolonial critique is very evident in *The Black Book* and *The New Life*, where one finds expressions of outrage against a not always intelligible constellation of imperial occupiers that seem to include Western as well as Westernizing forces such as Europe, the U.S., and Kemalism.

the narrator's skepticism towards Kemal and his doctrines. Edip's work was banned from the Turkish cultural sphere for decades after publication, but also inaugurated a tradition of bicultural writing such as Turkish American literature. By the same token, Shafak's use of English has been harshly criticized in Turkey. "It caused a lot of reaction and bitter criticism in Turkey when people heard I had started writing fiction in English," Shafak admits in an interview, "people took it as a cultural betrayal" (Shafak, "Critical Outtakes" n.p.). Her literary production in Turkish, prior to the publication of *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* in 2004, was also perceived as politically oriented and became the target of antagonism due to her use of Ottoman, Arabic, Persian, and Sufi terms (ibid.). Rather than supplanting the mother tongue, English provided Turkish American authors with "an alternative medium which guaranteed a wider readership" (Ashcroft et al. 24) and a platform for the expression of a postnational identity. Besides, the use of English may be understood as central to the achievement of a cosmopolitan condition and global citizenship<sup>28</sup> (May 206), which is very much at the core of Turkish American literature. On a deeper level, nevertheless, a postcolonial analysis sheds light on the critical choice between a new, unfamiliar national language that became unsuitable to describe the national space (Turkish) and an overly familiar foreign language (English) – both bearing the mark of colonial, neocolonial, or, to use Erdağ Göknağ's term, semicolonial interference (see Göknağ, "'Ottoman' Theme" 37).

Turkish American literature can also be related to postcolonialism by way of the recurrence of botanic imagery and garden symbolism. An increasing volume of scholarship has illuminated the significance of nature in postcolonial literature. Among the most relevant works one finds Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010) and *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literatures* by Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Geetha Ganapathy-Doré (2011). These publications explore the "foundational importance of animals and environmental concerns in theorizing the 'postcolonial'" (Ashcroft et al. 216) and show the suitability of "plant metaphors" to express the postcolonial condition, as they stress "age, experience, roots, tradition, and, most importantly, the connection between antiquity and value" (Ashcroft et al., 9). These elements are often indicative of a precolonial Eden that is set in contrast with an urbanized, green-less colonial modernity. The

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28 See Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights* (2012): "English, as the current world language or lingua mundi, is central to achieving both [cosmopolitanism and global citizenship]" (208).

destruction, loss, or ‘bulldozing’ of ancient gardens and trees most significantly haunts Croutier and Shafak. Chapter Four will conduct an analysis of nature in Turkish American literature, focusing on its relevance for the debate on cultural hybridity and syncretism.

The centrality of botanic symbols and garden imagery in representing Turkey’s passage from Empire to Republic finds substantial correspondences in postcolonial literature, which denounces how “the scramble for modernization has enticed developing countries into the destruction of their own environments” (Ashcroft et al. 213). Another point of conjunction between postcolonial and Turkish American literature is the representation of gardens as precolonial utopias featuring the unity of self, language, and place. The desire to retrieve the Ottoman garden and the precolonial, or in the Turkish case imperial, state is manifest in Turkish American literature. *The Empire Writes Back* is adamant in excluding the possibility of a return to that original state, but the issue is dealt with differently in Turkish literature and Turkish American literature. If on the one hand the courtyard in Pamuk’s *The Black Book* is a space of loss and despair, nature in Turkish American literature combines practices of destruction and recreation. The vanishing garden is reconstituted under different forms and conditions, and botanic symbols accompany the stories of dispersal and re-aggregation of diasporic communities. One example for this is the Armenian family in *The Bastard of Istanbul* who, separated by the genocide, is reunited again thanks to a pomegranate brooch. The brooch allows an Armenian American character to recognize its bearer as his long-lost sister and convince her to follow him to the U.S., where the Armenian American community thrives in the folds of American multiculturalism. In another passage of the book, the pomegranate appears as a symbol for the disintegration of the Empire and the subsequent diaspora: “Once a pomegranate breaks and all its seeds scatter in different directions, you cannot put it back together” (Shafak, *The Bastard* 232). Yet, the novel contradicts this assumption by showing the reconstitution of clusters of Ottoman communities in the United States under the umbrella of a functioning multicultural model. To put it with Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, nature in postcolonial literature – gardens in particular – offers “newly ambivalent versions of the trope of loss and possibility [...]. The reconstituted [...] garden thus becomes a space redolent of possibility” (214).

The different understanding of the garden in Turkish American and Turkish literature paves the way for the next theme that features prominently in postcolonial and Turkish American literatures, namely, the issue of syncretism. The tension between de-colonization and syncretism informs both the Turkish and the

postcolonial literary debate. On the one hand, some voices argue that, within the framework of postcolonial studies, colonization is a contingent phenomenon that can be gradually but effectively wiped out from a country's collective consciousness (Ngugi in Ashcroft et al. 28) to enable what Ella Shoat calls "the assertion of culture prior to conquest forms" (110). Hence, colonialism does not represent a constitutive part of a nation's self and should be expunged from it through a process of recovery of the precolonial state, which preserves the authentic self of the nation intact. On the other hand, numerous critics and authors position themselves in favor of integrating the colonial experience into the cultural and political debate about a nation's identity, hoping to achieve a synthesis – a "syncreticity" (Ashcroft et al. 28) – of the precolonial and the colonial conditions. This category of texts, as opposed to the first, "espouse a cultural syncretism which, while not denying ancestral cultural affiliation, sees [the nation's] destiny as inescapably enmeshed in a contemporary, multi-cultural reality" (Ashcroft et al. 30).

In my analysis, the opposite poles in the debate on decolonization and syncreticity are represented by Pamuk's strongly anticolonial works, *The Black Book* and *The New Life*, and Turkish American texts.<sup>29</sup> Pamuk is by no means comparable to postcolonial authors who take a stance in favor of the decolonization of the culture as a historically viable option – such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, quoted in *The Empire Writes Back*.<sup>30</sup> For Pamuk, the delusional itinerary towards the recovery of an original, precolonial wholeness deceives its undertakers, who eventually give in to the shifting quality of notions such as cultural authenticity, and settle on a perspective of irremediable identitarian emptiness. By contrast, Turkish American texts are representative of the syncreticity argument in Turkey, as they recognize the inevitable nature of syncretism and hope to promote an inclusive understanding of the local culture rather than an exclusive one.<sup>31</sup> In "Notes on

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29 This study includes in-depth analyses of Pamuk's texts as a counterpart to Turkish American literature. Thus, Turkish American literary practices can be viewed in comparison with those of a Turkish author who writes in Turkish and is canonized as 'world literature.' By presenting the Pamuk phenomenon as similar and contingent to Turkish American literature, but not quite the same, I aim to stress the uniqueness of the Turkish American imaginary and legitimize its status as separate from what is understood by world literature in Turkish. Pamuk's peculiar position vis-à-vis Turkish American literature will be addressed in detail in Chapter One.

30 See Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1994).

31 Ella Shoat addresses the polarity between syncretism and resistance in her essay "Notes on the Postcolonial." The emphasis on hybridity/syncretism interferes with the search for a shared precolonial identity "as an archeological excavation of an idealized,

the ‘Post-colonial,’ Ella Shoat warns her readers that syncretism or “hybridity”<sup>32</sup> often feature as umbrella terms that do little justice to “the diverse modalities of hybridity,” among which she lists “forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (110). Thus, she urges to consider location and perspective when engaging with manifestations of the hybrid or the syncretic, and to address the “differences between hybridities” (110). Two main factors define hybridity/syncretism in the Turkish context and in Turkish American texts: first, a merging of the imperial and postimperial with the colonial and the postcolonial. Turkish American literature displays reflexes that have been ascribed to postimperial centers (e.g. imperial nostalgia and imperial melancholia, presented in Chapter One), while at the same time articulating responses that are generally associated with the sensitivity of the colonized (e.g. hyper- and re-Orientalism, in chapter Four). Second, popular narratives of Turkey as a bridge between East and West translate, in Turkish American writing, into the invocation of a merging of the disavowed Ottoman Islamic legacy and the successive Westernization measures that have projected Turkey towards Western politics, ethics, and aesthetics.

### **Postcolonialism and Resistance: A Critical Perspective on Turkish American Literature**

Both Postcolonial and American Studies reserve a prominent role to resistance, which Fluck identifies as the nourishing utopia of American culture (Fluck 69). Homi Bhabha warns us about underestimating the subversive potential of texts that, in one way or another, traverse national borders and appear as hybrid formations. When one ignores the colonial disruption underneath the ‘English’ mimetic surface of a text, one forcibly re-inscribes the text into the hegemonic Anglophone tradition (Bhabha in Ashcroft et al. 33). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin build on Bhabha’s argument and suggest that texts gesturing at the complexities of imperial relations contain “global energies for interchange, circulation and transformation” that “may become weapons of resistance” (Ashcroft et al. 213).

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irretrievable past” (119). Shoat also asks whether this fiction of precolonial unity – which permeates Pamuk’s mystical Golden Age – is necessary to enable the possibility of colonial resistance.

- 32 In “Notes,” Shoat uses the terms hybridity and syncretism almost interchangeably. Here, I use syncretism in opposition with de-colonialization, but given the centrality of the botanic imagery in Turkish American literature, this study will privilege the term “hybridity.”

Postcolonial scholars like Bhabha or the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* are inclined to consider every postcolonial text as a potential locus of resistance, as long as it addresses, in form or content, how cultures interact within the frame of colonialism.

This viewpoint on resistance is counterbalanced by another influential text on postcolonialism: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, which critiques the postcolonial excitement with the hybrid as a liberatory form.

What if theorists are so intent on combating the remnants of a past form of domination that they fail to recognize the new form that is looming over them in the present? [...] [W]hat if a new paradigm of power [...] has come to replace the modern paradigm and tile through differential hierarchies of the hybrid and fragmentary subjectivities that these theorists celebrate? In this case [...] the postmodernist and postcolonialist strategies that appear to be liberatory would not challenge but in fact coincide with and even unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule. (Hardt and Negri 138)

Hardt and Negri do not stop at denouncing the hybrid as an insufficient critique of the subtler dynamics of contemporary global power, but also point at how the disintegration of national paradigms of thought is instrumental to new forms of global power to legitimize themselves. "The world market," Hardt and Negri warn, "tends to deconstruct the boundaries of the nation state. In a previous period, nation states were the primary actors in the modern imperialist organization of global production and exchange, but to the world market they appear increasingly as mere obstacles" (150). Hardt and Negri invite caution in considering postnationalism as a liberatory ideology, as it could amount to another way to dismantle old paradigms of power to legitimize new ones. Or, in a world literature scenario, it may traverse the boundaries of nationalist discourse only to subscribe to the hegemonic Anglophone tradition.

An example of how Turkish American literature may pose resistance to Kemalism but not to structures of global power is the romanticization of the Ottoman Empire. The retrieval of a highly idealized imperial past and its refurbishing as a feasible societal and political model for the future is reminiscent of Hardt and Negri, who argue that the call to overcoming the limitations of the national may coincide with a return to empire:

Postmodernist theorists point to the end of modern sovereignty and demonstrate a new capacity to think outside the framework of modern binaries and modern identities, a thought of plurality and multiplicity. However confusedly or unconsciously, they indicate the passage toward the constitution of empire. (Hardt and Negri 133)

The phenomenon of Ottoman nostalgia is not limited to Turkish American literature, but resonates more vastly in the literature and scholarship from and about

the former Ottoman territories. Landry affirms that the rift in time that separates the conflictual national present of the former Ottoman territories from an idealized multicultural history should be traversed in order to “regain imaginative access to the Ottoman past” (Landry 141), embracing the myth of Ottoman citizenship as a system based on heterogeneity, borderlessness, and tolerance. Ultimately, Landry advocates “the recovery of Ottoman history” as “an opportunity for coming to terms with a past that offered an alternative future, an alternative Enlightenment from the path that was chosen” (ibid.) and states that “it has become possible to consider Ottoman precedents and alternatives to present violence” (ibid.). Although, on a geo-political level, the “constitution of empire” has not yet come to pass, the dangers intrinsic to neo-Ottomanist revivals have become evident in recent times. After pushing the country into an alarming climate of intolerance, repression of fundamental liberties and human rights, suspension of democracy, and religious radicalization, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has earned the derogatory nickname of “Sultan”<sup>33</sup> (especially in the German press) – one that powerfully underscores the politics of authoritarianism that characterize imperial domination and gestures at the crisis of the Ottoman utopia. The dramatic developments of recent Turkish politics – from the 2016 coup d’état to the persecution of intellectuals and vocal public figures and Erdoğan’s repeated threats to dismantle gender equality measures – have proven the fiction of an Ottoman-inspired present to be a collective delusion.

While Landry encourages the use of a romanticized Ottoman Empire as a tool of resistance against the tenets of Turkish nationalism, such as religious and racial homogeneity, the suppression of difference, and the indisputable value of borders in marking who is inside and who is outside, Hardt and Negri invite caution in validating the cosmopolitan and the postnational as “liberatory” models.

The structures and logics of power in the contemporary world are entirely immune to the “liberatory” weapons of the postmodernist politics of difference. [...] Despite the best intentions, then, the postmodernist politics of difference not only is ineffective against but can even coincide with and support the functions and practices of imperial rule. [...] The postmodernist theories focus their attention so resolutely on the old forms of power they are running from, with their heads turned backwards, that they tumble unwittingly into the welcoming arms of the new power. (Hardt and Negri 142)

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33 Consider for example the following headlines (my translations): “Erdoğan [sic]: Vom religiösen Häftling zum türkischen ‘Sultan’/Erdoğan: From religious prisoner to Turkish ‘Sultan’ (*Die Presse*); “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [sic]: So wurde er zum türkischen Sultan”/Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: This is how he became the Turkish Sultan” (*Focus*); “Sultan Erdoğan [sic], der Vizekanzler”/Sultan Erdoğan, the Vice-chancellor” (*Die Welt*).

The last passage can be used to describe the trajectory undertaken by Turkish American literature vis-à-vis the Ottoman utopia. Formulated as a critique of Turkish nationalism – intended as an imported political fiction that did not respect the deep-seated multiculturalism of the Ottoman territories – the Ottoman utopia promotes imperial nostalgia on the one hand and a U.S.-centric model of cosmopolitanism on the other, as the Ottoman model that should inspire Turkish modernity is informed by American discourses of multiculturalism. Chapter Three will focus more closely, for example, on Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* and the commodification of Sufism for the American market.

As I hopefully clarified in this introduction, theoretical frameworks such as global and U.S. transnationalisms or migrant literature can be productively employed in the study of Turkish American literature, but these texts cannot be unequivocally labelled as representative of either Turkish, American, or migrant literature. The postcolonial framework offers appropriate instruments for a detailed analysis of literatures that are located in between two cultures, and which describe a colonial or imperial condition, but my material cannot be univocally categorized as postcolonial literature. I am aware of the variety of different approaches that can be adopted when looking at these texts. My study functions as an incentive for further research in the field of comparative literature that may cover the literary production of these authors in Turkish, or study Turkish translations of works they originally published in English. Evaluating the status and role of Turkish American literature within the landscape of Turkish national literature, or even attempting to define the latter, is beyond the purpose of my research. My scope here is investigating, and, when possible, facilitating the exclusive literary dialogue between America and Turkey these texts have opened. I am interested in asking where American literature, culture, and public debates become significant to read and understand Turkish American literature. This analysis comes from the conviction that the study of Turkish American literature can support scholars of American transnationalism in reaching their objectives: namely, the extension of the American Studies paradigm to non-American realities and views from 'the other side(s),' and the diversification of their working materials.