

V. Ottoman Nature: Natural Imagery, Gardens, Wells, and Cultural Memory in Republican Turkey

Natural metaphors offer a considerable insight into processes of identity-making and identity-writing. The notion of hybridity is derived from botany,⁸⁴ as are the concepts of roots and transplantation. Franco Moretti speaks of the modern novel as “a wave that runs into the branches of local tradition” and likens the development of national and world literature to trees and waves respectively (Moretti 67). In a footnote, Moretti also reminds his reader of Miyoshi’s “grafting process,” Schwarz’s “implantation of the novel,” Wang’s “transplantation of Western narrative typologies,” and Belinski’s definition of the Russian novel as “a *transplanted* rather than *indigenous growth*” (Moretti 67–68, emphases in the original text).

The study of garden spaces and botanic symbolism in literary texts has been very fruitful in the field of postcolonial ecocriticism: recently, scholars inquired into the multifarious relationship between man and the environment in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Examples of such scholarly interest in the representation and significance of gardens in New Literatures in English are Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan’s *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, published in 2009, and *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature* (2011), by Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, a collection of essays on the theme of paradise which engage misconceptions of a mystic, precolonial, Edenic garden. These publications show nature and the notion of ‘paradise’ as arenas where colonial conflicts are re-enacted, and where Western conceptualizations of the East are re-evaluated and subverted. Among the narratives these texts aim to dismantle, one finds the precolonial paradise: a pristine space featuring a union of man and nature that Western colonialism has irremediably destroyed.

This recent branch of postcolonial approaches to botanic imagery helps to illuminate the function of gardens and natural elements in Turkish American literature. In brief, the following section sheds light on the significance of nature in this literature, aiming to demonstrate that floral and faunistic elements take up specific functions connected with a search for identity in post-imperial

84 In biology, genetics, and botany, a hybrid specimen is the offspring of parents belonging to different species. The term has now become a recurring trope in several other disciplines, and it indicates an element of mixed origin.

Turkey. In fact, even though the Turkish American novels I will discuss in this chapter were written in the early 2000s, they focus, at least partially, on the delicate historical moment (the first half of the 20th century) when Turkey ceased to be the center of an empire and became a republic. Nature – including images of gardens, courtyards, plants, animals, and other non-natural but nature-related symbols such as wells and a pomegranate brooch – is used as a device to tackle themes such as identity, migration, and cultural memory. Gardens in particular function as ‘border areas’ in turn-of-the-century Turkey, perched between Ottoman exoticism and the advancement of modernity. The disappearance of gardens – cast as remnants of Ottoman architecture – constitutes a synecdoche for the disappearance of Ottoman cultural memory in the country’s passage from empire to republic.

Ultimately, like many others tropes and motifs analyzed in the course of this volume, natural imagery articulates a response to Kemalist ideology by gesturing at a sudden rupture with the country’s Eastern, Islamic, and imperial components for the sake of a Western ideal of progress. My argument builds on Foucault’s conviction that discourse can be constructed when singularities are elevated to the status of concepts and allow for a rationalization of their context. This is the case for ‘Ottoman nature’ in Turkish American literature, within which, to cite Foucault, “it is things themselves [...] which imperceptibly turn themselves into discourse as they unfold the secret of their own essence” (Foucault, “The Order of Discourse” 66). The analyzed novels present images of trees, fruits, birds, flowers, and gardens as densely connoted cultural objects that open up a complex universe of meaning and contain within themselves discourses on the empire and the nation.

Primary sources in this chapter will not be organized in a chronological order. In fact, Pamuk’s novel, published in 1990,⁸⁵ precedes Croutier and Shafak by more than a decade. Elif Shafak’s *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007) and *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004) will be discussed first as they make the most extensive use of garden symbolism. A reason for that is the author’s fascination with Sufi literature, which draws from a considerable repertoire of botanic symbols. In her work, Shafak does not replicate the Sufi symbols proper, whose nature was principally mystical; she rather imitates the structure of Sufi literature more generally, creating her own net of botanic and ornithological metaphors in order to discuss questions of identity and cultural memory in the context of republican Turkey.

85 Page numbers relative to *The Black Book* in this study refer to Maureen Freely’s 2006 translation.

By doing so, Shafak also establishes a continuous correspondence between modern Turkey and its Ottoman heritage, of which Sufism is certainly a prominent part, undermining the Kemalist rupture with the country's imperial past. Alev Lytle Croutier's *Seven Houses* (2002) positions itself between Shafak's extensive use of garden symbolism and Pamuk's minimal, condensed one. Through the destruction of two gardens, *Seven Houses* stages the painful disappearance of the Ottoman world and the advancement of Westernization. Finally, the choice to discuss *The Black Book* by Orhan Pamuk as the last element of my analysis is due to the fact that it presents a most accomplished garden narrative (perhaps laying the basis for Shafak's and Croutier's discourses on Ottoman nature) and creates the most compelling interrelation among the various elements that compose it. Although Pamuk's work does not qualify as Turkish American literature by my definition, integrating *The Black Book* into an analysis of nature in Turkish American literature presents us with the possibility to compare the relevance of similar literary tropes in the Turkish and Turkish American literary scenes. In these terms, a comparison of Croutier's and Pamuk's gardens and wells will prove helpful, as both authors connect these spaces to cultural memory, but to different ends.

American Nature and Turkish American Natural Symbolism

When reflecting on the Turkish American use of natural symbols and gardens, it is important to note that the frame of reference is not the American tradition of pastoralism. The gardens of Turkish American literature are prominently urban gardens and courtyards, and natural symbols employed in the text are generated and imagined within an urban context by Istanbulites or American characters who inhabit the city. No "wilderness cult" or "inchoate longing for a more natural environment" enter the Turkish American imagination (Marx 5). The dissimilarity of these two garden traditions, the Turkish and the American, prevents the Turkish American characters in *Seven Houses* from deeply connecting with their Turkish matriarch's garden, failing to comprehend her attachment to it. In his seminal work *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx explores garden representations in American literature and culture, defining the garden as a key symbol of the American imaginary. Marx describes American garden imagery as principally connected to the pastoral ideal and to the romanticization of rural life. According to Marx, soon after its discovery America harbored dreams of "retreat in an oasis of harmony and joy" (Marx 3). Afterwards, a kind of natural escapism started to permeate the American sensitivity, which regarded urban life with skepticism and yearned "for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence

‘closer to nature’” (Marx 5). The theme of a withdrawal into nature, Marx wrote, is central to a remarkable number of American authors.

Postcolonial Studies offer a more suitable theoretical framework for Turkish and Turkish American gardens. In the postcolonial tradition, garden imagery is contingent with the myth of the colony as an untouched Eden and projects the colony as the opportunity for a new beginning in nature as well as a space open to exploitation and predation. Postcolonial writers use the trope of the ravaged garden, or the fallen paradise, to document the impact of colonialism on their homeland. Environmental exploitation is, in many cases, a metonymy of the exploitation logics of imperialism at large. Parallels between the demise of the postcolonial garden and the demise of Ottoman nature in Turkish American literature, annihilated by the republic’s vision of a more urban Istanbul, are evident and will be explored in this chapter. Nevertheless, postcolonial writers are also invested in dispelling the exoticist representation of the colony in the European imagination: as Said observes, the postcolonial is a “de-exoticizing category” (Said in Huggan 20). By contrast, some of the Turkish American nature analyzed in this study appears to be hyper-exoticized, but this does not exclude the possibility of a postcolonial reading of Ottoman nature. Postcolonial texts, in fact, also qualify as “exotic objects circulating within a metropolitan-regulated economy of commodity exchange” (ibid.) that present a problematic use of self-exoticism and “actively manipulate exoticist codes of cultural representation in their work” (ibid.). The American and the postcolonial frameworks should therefore be kept in mind, but the uniqueness of the material at hand calls for a more nuanced analysis.

In all the analyzed novels, representations of nature either replicate or condemn the depiction of the United States as a model for Turkey’s republican future and the Kemalist modernization project. Additionally, Shafak’s fig tree, birds, and pomegranates serve the purpose of connecting and comparing the Armenian and Armenian American processes of identity-making and hint at the possibility of re-enacting the cultural diversity of the Ottoman Empire in the United States, where dispersed Ottoman minorities can re-agglomerate into families and communities. In *Seven Houses*, the Americanization of Turkish culture is embraced as one substantial element of the Turkish collective self in the new millennium. Hence, nature in Turkish American literature invites a reflection on the role of the United States in the creation of Turkey’s national identity in the passage from the empire to the republic.

In their different representations of gardens, the texts present a variety of reactions to Americanization. Shafak’s skeptical stance regarding Turkey’s impetuous

Westernization and its open contempt for its Ottoman legacy curiously interferes with her portrayal of the U.S. as the heir of Ottoman multiculturalism. Croutier's Ottoman aristocrats seem relieved at the loss of their anachronistic villas, orchards, and estates and long to make a fresh start in an Americanized world. The characters' attitude of acceptance must not be confused with fatalism vis-à-vis the advancement of Westernization, it rather expresses a spontaneous optimism based on the view of Turkish identity as the result of different cultural legacies. Finally, Pamuk's *The Black Book* is the only text forwarding openly anti-imperialistic positions, clearly referring to Americanization as cultural imperialism, and blaming it for plunging Turkey into a condition of 'national amnesia.'

Fig Trees and Pomegranates: The Shaping of Post-Genocidal Armenian Identity in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*

Fig Trees: Beyond Negative Identities

The encounter with the fig tree in *The Bastard of Istanbul* occurs towards the end of the novel, when Aram, an Armenian Istanbulite, fantasizes about a fig tree tattoo.

The tattoo I would like to have is a gorgeous fig tree. But, unlike other trees, this one is upside down. My fig tree has all its roots up in the air. Instead of the earth, it is rooted in the sky. It is displaced but not placeless. (Shafak, *The Bastard* 254)

The image of the upturned fig tree explicitly connects to the realm of ethnicity and belonging. The theme of 'placelessness' recurs frequently in Shafak's work: Her fiction is replete with figures of displaced individuals who problematize the notion of national belonging. A celebration of placelessness appears, for instance, in *The Forty Rules of Love*, where Shams of Tabriz renounces geographical affiliation and declares that "[his] place is placeless, a trace of the traceless" (*Forty Rules* 183). In one of her numerous interviews, Shafak resorts to the figure of the upturned tree to describe her own past: "Sometimes I feel like a nomad lacking solid space. According to an old Islamic narrative there is a tree in heaven that has its roots up in the air. Sometimes I liken my past to that tree" (Shafak, "Linguistic Cleansing" 1). Shafak is probably referring to the Tübā Tree, a mythological tree that grows in heaven with its roots upwards.⁸⁶ Yet, Aram's curious idea

86 Shafak is probably referring to the Tübā Tree, a tree that grows in heaven with its roots upwards: "In [Heaven's] courtyard's riven center, planted he the Tuba-Tree;/ That a tree which hangeth downward." Yaziji-Oglu "The Book of Mohammed: The

and the cultural implications it evokes introduce a complex scenario that calls for a more detailed analysis.

The fig tree in all its varieties makes its appearance in numerous cultural and religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. In addition to the Tūbā Tree, the Ashvattha Tree⁸⁷ or Tree of Life of Hindu mythology presents the most striking resemblance to the fig tree pictured by Aram. The Ashvattha or Bodhi Tree is itself a variety of fig tree (*ficus religiosa*) and appears often in Hindu texts as a sacred tree and object of veneration. The *Bhagavatgita* describes it as growing with its roots in heaven and its branches hanging downward. This is a mystic interpretation of botanic characteristics proper to many varieties of the ficus genus, which generally tend to grow downward and develop aerial roots, according to what goes by the name of ‘geocarpic’ growth. The peculiar growth of geocarpic species of ficus, such as the bodhi or the bayan, is rich in suggestive interpretations. In Hindu Mythology, the Ashvattha Tree symbolizes the achievement of immortality through the sacrifice of the mortal body. Inspired by the almost parasitic nature of geocarpic fig trees, which strangle the host trees they grow upon, the myth of the Ashvattha Tree requires the death of a sacrificial victim willing to be suffocated by the Ashvattha Tree and eventually become the tree itself.

The episode involving Aram’s tattoo acquires new meanings if read in the light of Hindu mythology.⁸⁸ Both trees – Aram’s and the Ashvattha Tree – are fig trees, and not simply upturned, but rooted in the sky. As a consequence, the symbolism with which Aram invests his personal fig tree – displacement, and yet not placelessness – is multilayered. First, the fig tree is a transcultural symbol that simultaneously anchors him in different neighboring cultures. Second, it creates an indissoluble connection between Aram, an Armenian Christian, and the seemingly oppositional Turkish Islamic context where he was raised and feels at home. Third, the first two elements ultimately intertwine with the mythology

Creation of Paradise.” See also George Lechler, “The Tree of Life in Indo-European and Islamic Cultures.”

87 The spelling of “Ashvattha” has been derived from David L. Haberman, *People Trees: Worship of Trees in Northern India*.

88 Shafak is certainly familiar with Hindu mythology. She is an expert in religion, especially on mysticism, which is prominent in her fictional as well as non-fictional writing. Her most recent novel, *The Architect’s Apprentice* (2015), is partly set in India. Whether the Ashvattha Tree was on her mind when she wrote *The Bastard*, is hard to assess. Yet, this parallel speaks to the efficacy of the upturned tree as a transcultural symbol, and to its resonance within the context of displacement and belonging.

surrounding the Tree of Life, namely, immortality through sacrifice. Such interaction of different symbolic meanings connects the Tree of Life with some relevant aspects of the Armenian question in republican Turkey, as Aram is, in fact, Armenian. These aspects are, first, the feeling of displacement of the individual represented by the upturned tree, whose roots are in the contested idea of the Armenian nation, but who nevertheless feels grounded in a diasporic dimension that transcends national borders. Second, a component of pain, represented by what is known as the Armenian genocide: the forceful relocation of Armenian populations in 1915, which resulted in the death of over a million Armenians (Konuk, *East West Mimesis* 4). Third, a component of immortality represented by the necessity to perpetuate Armenian identity and memory in a post-genocidal era.

Aram's identification with the overturned fig tree pushes the discussion further. Aram's wish to have the fig tree tattooed on his own skin⁸⁹ reminds the reader of the sacrificial human being at the base of the myth of the Ashvattha Tree, who sacrifices himself and literally becomes the tree. In order to obtain the tree's wisdom, his physical body will have to suffer a painful death, whereas his spiritual nature will be immortalized in the tree and represent a source of wisdom for humanity. What correspondence does the mythical sacrifice of the man becoming the Ashvattha Tree find in the story of Aram, and, more generally, how does it influence the way the Armenian question is dealt with in *The Bastard of Istanbul*?

Most importantly for the purpose of this study, the fig tree also draws attention to the different ways in which – at least in Shafak's understanding – Armenians and Armenian Americans construct individual and collective identities. Categories of mobility and immobility can be brought to bear on these divergent constructions, as Aram's fig tree with roots up in the air gestures at the refusal to be stubbornly rooted into arbitrary concepts of nationhood and the rejection of geographical and metaphorical immobility. On the one hand, Armenian Istanbulites are seemingly immobile, as they still reside within the former territories of the Ottoman Empire. Aram himself, for example, admits that “[his] family history in [Istanbul] goes back at least five hundred years” (253). In *The Bastard*, however, Istanbul is

89 Zeliha, Aram's partner, speaks of Aram and the tree as if they were one being. She immediately understands that the fig tree would be a metaphor for Aram's own condition: “I'm fine with Aram's wish to have his roots up in the air” (254).

often represented as a mobile city, compared to a boat (“Istanbul is not a city, [...] it is a cityboat. We live in a vessel” 196) or to a conglomerate of highly unstable elements (“the city is a gummy, almost gelatinous entity at this moment, an amorphous shape half-liquid, half-solid” 214). Armenian Americans, by contrast, have left the territories of the Empire and live in a diasporic dimension, which would characterize their experience as one of mobility. Yet, in “The Return of the Ghetto,” Shafak defines Turkish migrants abroad as “far more nationalist, conservative, reactionary and religious than Turks in Turkey,” exposing their inflexibility as a consequence of their geographical and emotional distance from the quickly evolving, ever-changing society in the homeland (Shafak n.p.).⁹⁰ Similarly, Armenian Americans in *The Bastard* appear to be excessively dependent on the image of the Turk as colonial oppressor and lack the daily interaction that Istanbulite Armenians have with their Turkish neighbors. Thus, Shafak depicts Istanbulite Armenian as mainly interested in facilitating a peaceful coexistence than in keeping the historical enmity between Turks and Armenians alive in the diaspora and handing it down to future generations.

In *The Bastard*, Armenian American characters define themselves through their rage against the former colonial oppressors, using it as a source of self-validation and as powerful social glue. While Armanoush, whose family emigrated to the U.S. in order to escape persecution, is tormented by the choice between embracing her Armenianness and the burden of pain and loss it entails, or denying it for the sake of assimilating to the majority, Aram fully identifies with his ethnic background while at the same time cherishing the possibilities Istanbul’s multiculturalism offers in term of peaceful coexistence. The tree symbolism Aram literally *incarnates* represents an autonomous Armenianness that refuses to define itself through cultural hatred and, instead, moves on to a more integrative approach to Turkish culture.

Ultimately, Aram’s notion of Armenianness is tightly bound to the city of Istanbul and the cosmopolitan nature of the Ottoman Empire:

“This city is my city. I was born and raised in Istanbul. Armenian Istanbulites belong to Istanbul, just like the Turkish, Kurdish, Greek and Jewish Istanbulites do. We have first managed and then badly failed to live together. We cannot fail again.” (254)

90 It is legitimate to argue that this viewpoint does not apply exclusively to Turkish migrants, but to migrant communities in general, including the Armenian. In fact, in her article Shafak notes that the conservatism of Turkish migrants is not due to their “Turkishness,” but to their “immigrant psychology” (“Return of the Ghetto” n.p.).

The fig tree – a transcultural, transreligious symbol that crosses numerous cultural traditions – functions as a call for multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire’s former territories. It is reminiscent of Moretti’s tree as a synthesis of cultural unity and diversity, and a metaphor of how one springs from the other as in “one tree, with many branches” (Moretti 67). Offering a commentary on Aram’s condition of displacement, but not placelessness, the fig tree indicates the necessity for diasporic Armenians to stop defining their national belonging through the legacy of the imperial conflict with Turkey, but rather in terms of peaceful coexistence. Moreover, through the metaphor of the fig tree, Shafak invokes categories of belonging that enable the individual to express affection towards one’s place of birth without translating it into rigid nationalism. Perhaps, the figure of Aram can be best explained through Kwame Anthony Appiah’s concept of “rooted cosmopolitanism.” Rooted cosmopolitans, explains Appiah, can either reside in their country of birth or abroad, but from both standpoints they “nurture the culture and politics of their home” (Appiah 619) without embracing the logics of nationalism, which in Appiah’s reading would require uncompromising and uncritical adherence to such politics (Appiah 619–620). By contrast, the patriotism of rooted cosmopolitans expresses itself in the form of “moral aspirations” for their countries (620). Aram, like Appiah’s rooted cosmopolitans, is “attached to a home of [his] own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people” (618). Aram cherishes his native Istanbul *especially* for its potential to simultaneously be the home of “other, different people” as well as his own.

Pomegranates: Under two Empires

Similar to the fig tree, the pomegranate is also a transreligious, transcultural symbol. Pomegranates are used mainly as decoration in Judaism on religious garments and containers for the Torah scrolls; the pomegranate tree is mentioned in the Koran as one of the trees of paradise, and appears in Christianity in association with Mary. In the Classical and Christian traditions pomegranates are mostly a symbol of fertility and femininity. This is due to the shape of the fruit, recalling a womb containing many seeds; in Greek mythology the wifely goddesses Hera, Zeus’ spouse and patroness of domesticity, and Persephone are usually represented holding a pomegranate. Persephone presides over the seasonal cycle, as the myth depicts her commuting between the underworld, the residence of her husband, and the upper world, the dominion of her mother Demeter, goddess of abundance. According to the myth, when Persephone visits the underworld in winter, her mother’s mourning causes nature to wither and

decay, whereas during the rest of the year, when mother and daughter are reunited, the world is reborn into spring and summer. These combined references to maternity, death, and rebirth were inherited by the Christian tradition in the figure of Mary, often portrayed holding a pomegranate in traditional iconography. In association with Mary, the pomegranate is both a reference to her divine maternity and the passion of Christ. The redness of the seeds, contained in a fleshy envelope, bring to mind a ravaged body and the effects of a violent death, yet, the abundance of seeds suggests the possibility of rebirth as the fruit is often seen in connection with the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus the ideas of fertility, death, and rebirth associated with the pomegranate goddesses in Greek mythology converge in the figure of Mary holding the pomegranate. A similar combination of symbolic functions appears in the Armenian subplot in *The Bastard of Istanbul*. Once again, Shafak employs a botanic image belonging to the major monotheistic religions – but also common to other cultural universes such as the Hindu, the Parsi, and the the Egyptian (Verotta et alii 304) – to illustrate aspects of the Armenian experience in Turkey. Most significantly, the pomegranate is the symbol of the Armenian nation, where it also represents fertility, abundance, and marriage (Verotta et alii 304).

In *The Bastard*, the Armenian poet Hovhannes Stambouljian presents his wife, pregnant with their third child, with a pomegranate brooch:

He had also purchased [...] a graceful brooch in the shape of a pomegranate, delicately smothered with gold threads all over, slightly cracked in the middle, with seeds of red rubies glowing from within. It was a deftly crafted piece by an Armenian artisan in Sivas, he had been told. Hovhannes Stambouljian bought the piece as a present for his wife. (226)

Considering the pomegranate symbolism illustrated so far – including femininity, fertility and maternity – the brooch is easily explained as a well-wishing gift from a husband to his pregnant wife. Nevertheless, this only means scratching the surface of the rich textual significance of the pomegranate brooch in the Armenian subplot, as the parallel between the history of the Armenian family and pomegranate symbolism will eventually deepen.

Historical developments disturb Hovhannes Stambouljian's family idyll. In the days of the Armenian deportations, a group of Turkish soldiers burst into Stambouljian's house, seizing him, his wife, and their children. The death marches prove fatal to the woman and her unborn child and every trace of Stambouljian himself is lost. The shattering of the Armenian household coincides with some crucial aspects of pomegranate symbolism in the Christian tradition: as anticipated, the painful process of breaking the fruit's peel to reach the seeds, opening

up a soft, red interior establishes a connection with acts of physical violence and is related to the passion of Christ. In the hands of Mary or Jesus as a child, a broken or bursting pomegranate symbolizes the Virgin's maternity, but also hints at the violent death in store for her son. The brooch – “slightly cracked in the middle, with seeds of red rubies glowing from within” – carries a similarly ominous presentiment for the people involved, and the fragmentation of the household it was meant to protect.

The two apparently contrastive symbolic values attached to the pomegranate in the Christian tradition are thus combined in the fate of the Armenian mother and her shattered family. If, in the hands of Mary, a pomegranate signifies both motherhood and blood-spilling, the pomegranate brooch has the same function in the text: meant as a well-wishing gift to a pregnant woman from her well-intentioned husband, it foreshadows the death of its carrier and her unborn child. Evidently, the pomegranate symbolism in *The Bastard of Istanbul* transcends the private dimension – the fragmentation of an Armenian family due to the Armenian genocide – to enter a wider, collective one: the fragmentation of the Armenian population under the same circumstances. This step occurs after both Hovhannes Stamboulian and his wife have been killed on death marches, and their children have been separated; the son is brought to the United States as a refugee, whereas the daughter is rescued by a Turkish family, raised as a Muslim, and eventually married off to a Muslim man.

If in the first place pomegranate symbolism was used to address the issue of genocide through the ominous double implication of the pomegranate brooch, in the second part of the Armenian flashback the pomegranate brooch bears connections to the Armenian diaspora. Anticipating the destiny of Christ, the pomegranate also includes a hint to his resurrection and the hope for a kingdom to come. In other words, not only is the pomegranate an allusion to Christ's birth and death, but, most importantly, to his re-birth. This particular aspect of pomegranate symbolism is reflected in the second part of the Armenian flashback, addressing the survival of Armenian cultural memory and its revival.

The pomegranate brooch, taken by Stamboulian's son Yervant from the desk where he had left it before being deported, will allow for a late re-union between Yervant himself and his sister Shushan. Having formed a family in the United States, Yervant goes back to Turkey in search of his lost sister, who has married a Muslim man, converted to Islam, taken the Muslim name Shermin, and delivered her first child. The brooch is the only way for Shushan to identify her brother:

Though even the dearest memories of her childhood eventually vanished, the brooch remained vividly ingrained in her mind. And years later when a man from America appeared at her door, it would be this very brooch that helped her to fathom that the stranger was none other than her own brother. (326)

At the same time, it is the only connection left between Shushan and her long forgotten Armenianness, as the following quotations will illustrate:

This new name, religion, nationality, family and self she had acquired had not succeeded in overtaking her true self. The pomegranate brooch whispered her name and it was in Armenian. (328)

Torn between loyalty to her new household and the desire to join her family and community in America, Shushan/Shermin will make up her mind only after contemplating the pomegranate brooch: “As her mind had been reflecting and her heart aching without her knowing it, she ran to the drawer and held the brooch tightly in her palms, feeling its warmth” (328). Thanks to the brooch and the feelings of loss and belonging it resurrects, Shushan/Shermin decides to leave her Muslim household and follow her brother to reunite with her family and people: “Appealing for consolation that no one could give her, she stared at the Pidgeon’s Blood.⁹¹ Only then did she acknowledge what she needed to do.” (328)

In the two siblings’ reunification, the pomegranate has multiple functions. Firstly, it allows Shushan to identify the stranger from America as her lost brother; secondly, it reminds Shushan of her childhood and, most importantly, of her Armenianness, which she had to suppress for the sake of a new Muslim identity; finally, it is the decisive element convincing her to leave her husband to follow her brother to America.

Similar to the fig tree, pomegranate symbolism transcends the limits of the individual or familial level to define the history of collectivities, as it accompanies the re-aggregation of the Armenian community away from the territories of the Empire. In the Armenian subplot the United States is presented as a space where the Armenian families and community can reconnect.

The United States presents the characteristics of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and religious tolerance proper to the multiethnic Ottoman Empire Shafak describes in many of her fictional and non-fictional texts. Consider, for instance, the following lines from an interview with the author:

91 The variety of rubies decorating the brooch go by the name of pigeon’s blood (327).

[Turkey and America] have so many things in common – particularly in societies like Anatolia in the 13th century, where there were people from all kinds of religious backgrounds, all kinds of ethnic backgrounds, and there was an amazing exchange of ideas and, you know, daily habits. To me, this is something precious. (Shafak in Carruthers n.p.)

More examples of Ottoman cosmopolitanism can be found in *The Bastard of Istanbul*; the nostalgic words of a cook, for instance, evoke the notion of ethnic “intermingling” that characterize Shafak’s Ottoman Empire:

“The city was so cosmopolitan once [...]. We had Jewish neighbors, lots of them, we also had Greek neighbors, and Armenian neighbors... As a boy I used to buy fish from a Greek fisherman. My mother’s tailor was Armenian. My father’s boss was Jewish. You know, we were all intermingled.” (170)

The narrator also reveals that Stamboulian strongly believes in Ottoman cosmopolitanism and fears that imperial government is “abandoning Ottomanism for Turkism” (232), that is, replacing an all-encompassing view of citizenship with ethnically based nationalism.

Hovhannes Stamboulian believed that under the present circumstances Ottomanism was the best option for Armenians, not radical ideas. Turks and Greeks and Armenians and Jews had lived together for centuries and still could find a way to coexist under one umbrella [...] “We need to work together. Jews and Christians and Muslims. Centuries and centuries under the same imperial roof. We have been living together all this time, albeit on unequal ground. Now we can make it fair and just for all, transform this empire together.” (232)

In short, the Stamboulian family, fragmented by the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, is reunited under a new multicultural ‘empire’ that, in *The Bastard of Istanbul* as well as in other texts by Elif Shafak, retrieves and develops the ideas of multiethnic symbiosis that could not survive the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of Turkish nationalism, and Atatürk’s republic. The Armenian subplot – like the episode involving Aram and the fig tree – especially addresses the relationship between Ottoman Armenians and Armenian diasporic communities living in the United States, suggesting that the Armenian American communities live in a new multicultural space closely resembling the conditions of peaceful coexistence in the Ottoman territories.

This assumption correlates with another symbolic use of the pomegranate, appearing again in the text as a metaphor of the shattering of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent Armenian diaspora. The parallel emerges from a comment by an Armenian friend of Hovhannes Stamboulian, Kirkor Hagopian, in response to his companion’s utopian projections of an Ottomanist future.

“My friend, wake up, there is no together anymore. Once a pomegranate breaks and all its seeds scatter in different directions, you cannot put it back together.” [...] Hovhannes Stamboulian couldn't help seeing that image in his mind's eye: a broken pomegranate, red and sad. (232, 233)

The image opens a scenario in which the Ottoman Empire and its values of multiculturalism and tolerance have been compromised beyond repair, like a shattered pomegranate. The pomegranate metaphor has yet more implications: the abruptness implied in the act of shattering a pomegranate and the resulting red mash, once again, is a prophecy of violence. Moreover, the “scattering of seeds” mentioned by Kirkor Hagopian anticipates the diaspora which will necessarily follow the disastrous collapse of the empire. The two terms are in fact tightly related: the ancient Greek term for “pomegranate,” *polyspora* (multitude of seeds), shares its root with the term *diaspora*, meaning precisely ‘scattering of seeds’ in ancient Greek. The Armenian subplot and the image of a pomegranate brooch serve as a confutation of Kirkor Hagopian's statement on broken empires, as the Stamboulian family will finally, even though not completely, be reunited under a new empire.⁷

The pomegranate brooch physically and symbolically accompanies the eventful history of the Armenian family; from the family idyll in Istanbul, when Hovhannes's pregnant wife is presented with the brooch in the shape of a pomegranate, down to the family tragedy during the Armenian forced relocations, and finally to the ‘resurrection’ of the Armenian family in the United States. The Stamboulians' family narrative – peaceful life in Istanbul, relocation, genocide, and diasporic existence – transcends the family's private life and exemplifies the collective destiny of the Armenian community in the final years of the Ottoman empire, taking them from an integrated life as Ottoman minority across the 1915 genocide and finally to the diaspora.

As the discussion intended to show, botanic symbolism in *The Bastard* is dense and multilayered. The fig tree and the pomegranate are two poignant symbols that, being common to various religious traditions, show their interconnect-edness and thus highlight the novel's concern with mitigating cultural conflict. Additionally, they synthesize seemingly oppositional meanings such as birth and death, destruction and preservation. The fig tree is a powerful symbol in numerous cultural traditions – the Judaic, the Christian, the Islamic, the Hindu, and the Buddhist – and it appears in connection with the Armenian character Aram. The upturned fig tree Aram imagines is reminiscent of the *Ṭūbā* Tree in the Koran but it acquires new meanings if read in the light of Hindu mythology. In any case, Shafak resorts to the upturned fig tree to accentuate the significance

of Armenian cultural memory and identity in a post-genocidal era and discuss residual postcolonial dynamics in the age of the Turkish republic.

In a similar manner, the pomegranate appears in the chapters dedicated to Ottoman Armenians in the form of a brooch given by Hovhannes Stamboulian to his wife. The pomegranate is also a transcultural, transreligious element that acquires symbolic value in many cultural and religious traditions. In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, the multifarious symbolism attached to the pomegranate refers to both the fate of an Armenian family and, at the same time, of the Armenian community as a whole. The traditional association of the pomegranate with concepts of maternity and fertility makes the pomegranate brooch an ideal well-wishing gift to a pregnant mother, representing a family idyll and a period when the Armenian community is also described as “pregnant with innovative ideologies and ardent debates” (226). When found in combination with Mary and her child in Christian iconography, the pomegranate symbolizes Mary’s fertility and foreshadows the death of Christ. In a similar way, the brooch ominously foreshadows the Armenian genocide and the shattering of the family idyll. If the pomegranate represents the death of Christ on the one hand, on the other it also anticipates his resurrection; similarly, the Armenian family and community are also re-united and re-born in a new environment, the United States. The pomegranate brooch traces the destiny of a family as it unfolds through abundance, death, and rebirth under a new multiethnic society, as well as the history of the Armenian community shortly before, during, and after the 1915 genocide, delineating how their imperial existence came to an end and a new, diasporic one started under a new multicultural empire.

Another interesting aspect of pomegranate symbolism in *The Bastard* emerges in the comparison between the collapsed Ottoman Empire and a broken pomegranate. The implications of this parallel are manifold, ranging from the realization that Ottoman multiculturalism (as understood by Shafak) was hopelessly compromised, to the prophecy of blood-shedding embedded in the image of a broken pomegranate, and the scattering of seeds that stands for the diasporic existence into which the imperial minorities would be forced. Curiously enough, on a symbolic level the pomegranate brooch confutes the broken pomegranate. The ‘seeds’ scattered by the fragmentation of the Ottoman empire can indeed be re-united in the United States, a nation that, in Shafak’s fiction, presents all the features of multiculturalism, religious tolerance, and linguistic variety that characterized the Ottoman Empire.

Birds of Migration: Ornithological Symbolism in *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*

Birds of migration were the most peculiar of all fowl. Initially, they detached from their own flocks to migrate to faraway lands, and once there, they flocked into detachments.
Elif Shafak, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*

Like trees and plants, birds are important components of natural symbolism in Shafak's novels. Bird symbolism in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (again in the Armenian subplot) and *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* does not only cover the history of an ethnic group, but symbolizes two different types of migrants, contributing to shape a dualism that is central in Shafak's fiction. These two different migratory experiences are personified by two couples of opposites: Armanoush and Asya in *The Bastard*, Gail and Omer in *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*: Armanoush and Omer are migrants living in a foreign country (an Armenian and a Turk in the United States), whereas Asya and Gail live like foreigners in their own country. It is on this last condition – being foreigners in one's own homeland – that Shafak elaborates most compellingly, as the author herself points out in an interview:

most people lead their lives in their homelands. Some people live the lives of foreigners in foreign lands. And then there are some others, a few others – like Native and African Americans – who lead the life of a foreigner in their own homeland. It is their position that is more difficult to understand. They are the true exiles and expatriates: their bodies seemingly at home, their souls in exile. (Shafak, "Migrations" n.p.)

It is in order to portray this peculiar condition that Shafak makes extensive use of bird symbolism, which takes up a prominent position in both *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*.

Amnesiac and Memory-Bound Societies: *The Bastard of Istanbul*

The first bird symbol appears very early in *The Bastard*: in the Armenian flashback Hovhannes Stamboulian, the Armenian poet, is working on a children's book entitled *The Little Lost Pigeon and the Blissful Country*. A collection of Armenian folktales, the book addresses Armenian families, encouraging them to read the tales to their children in order to keep the Armenian cultural tradition alive. The book remains incomplete, as Turkish soldiers arrest Stamboulian before he can finish the last chapter. Stamboulian's anthology acquires great metaphorical significance in the text, connecting to the Armenian question as well as to wider considerations regarding the nature of migration. First, the book

underscores the importance of handing down collective memory, especially in the case of diasporic communities; second, it reflects on how different peoples – Turks and Armenians in this case – display opposite attitudes towards their cultural memory and their past.

In *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, Jan Assmann proposes that a country's identity-building process is closely dependent on the notion of a shared past. Assmann explains that the continuative identity that societies hand down to future generations is built on a culture of remembering: it is the remembering of the past that supports the construction of a communal knowledge and self-image, as well as of the idea of a "We" (Assmann 16–17). Shafak's Turkish and Armenian American communities represent opposite and equally dysfunctional variations on Assmann's theme. On the one hand, Turkey is presented as an amnesiac society, driven by the urge to forget its own pre-republican past. In Shafak's reading, a nation that relies on forgetting for self-definition is dysfunctional in so far as a denial of history is conducive to a denial of the individual, as Asya's pronounced *cupio dissolvi* shows. The overemphasis on remembering that informs Armenian American identitarian narratives is, to Shafak, equally dysfunctional, as rage and trauma emerge as the strongest factors that determine the Armenian American self-perception. The Turkish and the Armenian (American) communities have coexisted on the same territory and thus inevitably share a past, but the two communities have spun divergent and conflictual historical narratives. Even their conceptualizations of the past are antipodal: a foreign and distant country for the Turkish characters in the novel, a resilient space of belonging for the Armenian American. In *The Bastard*, bird symbolism is used to shed light on the function of remembering in the Armenian and Armenian American communities.

The protagonist of the frame narrative introducing the different stories in Stambouljian's anthology is a bird:

a pigeon lost up there in the blue skies while flying with his family and friends over a blissful country. The pigeon would stop at numerous villages, towns and cities, searching for his loved ones, and at each stop he would listen to a new story. (226)

The motif of a wandering bird gathering Armenian folktales, "most of which had been transmitted from generation to generation, others long forgotten" (226), emphasizes the importance of cultural memory and foreshadows the idea of the Armenian population as a geographically dispersed community whose stories need to be gathered and preserved by a single agent (the bird, i.e. the writer).

The following developments in the story of the pigeon – who loses his way and then lands on a pomegranate tree – are equally important in terms of the relation they establish with the rest of Shafak's text:

“Don’t cry little pigeon,” said the pomegranate tree. “Let me tell you a story, the story of a little lost pigeon.”

“But that’s me you’re talking about. I am that pigeon!” chirped the Little Pigeon in surprise.

“Oh really” asked the pomegranate tree, but didn’t sound the least surprised. “Then listen to your story... don’t you want to learn about your future?”

“Only if it’s a happy one,” said the Little Lost Pigeon. “I don’t want to learn about it if it’s sad.” (228)

The pigeon’s reluctance to hear about his future, fearing that it might be a sad one, alludes to Shafak’s understanding of how Turks and Armenians relate to their cultural history, memory, and past. The main assumption put forward by *The Bastard of Istanbul*, supported by other non-fictional texts by Shafak, is that if Armenians are trapped in the memory of their past, Turks, on the contrary, have managed to erase it and have succumbed to a government-induced collective amnesia. The pigeon episode, stressing the importance of documenting the past with loving devotion as well as the fearful rejection of the future, encapsulates the totalizing relationship between Armenians (in Turkey and abroad) and their memory as it appears in Shafak’s novel. The following excerpts, all revolving around the Armenian American co-protagonist Armanoush, explain the prominence of the past in the Armenian American collective memory:

They talked a little, [Matt] about the career he wanted to build, [Armanoush] about the childhood she would like to destroy; he about his future plans, she about the traces of her past; he about his expectations in life, she about family recollections. (108)

Not that [Asya] was hearing the story of the deportation of the Armenians for the first time. But it was quite a different experience to hear an account from an actual person [i.e. Armanoush]. Never before had Asya met someone so young with a memory so old. (165)

“You’re fascinated with history.”

“And you aren’t?” drawled Armanoush, her voice conveying both disbelief and scorn. (179)

The pigeon on the pomegranate tree epitomizes the prominent role memory plays for Armenians and Armenian Americans. It struggles to find his family and friends while gathering Armenians stories, fragments that will reconstruct his cultural memory and tradition, but it reacts uncomfortably when its future is mentioned. For Armenian Americans in *The Bastard*, the past is the only possible space of identity.

Turkish characters have the opposite approach to history. This is evident in the figure of Asya, the nineteen-year-old Turkish protagonist. Asya seems

to have no interest either in her individual past or in the history of her country. Her desire to forget is illustrated by her envy for her grandmother's Alzheimer's disease. Creating an enormous distance between the individual and their memory, Alzheimer's holds the promise of an "autonomous realm of amnesia" (128):

"Alzheimer's is not as terrible as it sounds. The past is nothing but a shackle we need to get rid of. Such an excruciating burden. If only I could have no past – you know, if only I could be a nobody, start from point zero and just remain there. Light as a feather. No family, no memories and all that shit." (148)

The following passages – describing a very different viewpoint from that of Armanoush – show how the detachment between the individual and the past not only affects Asya and her personal story (which, with Asya being the 'bastard' in the title, is characterized by a missing father), but the entire community of Turkish citizens. They describe the reaction of Asya's family to Armanoush's account of the Armenian genocide and introduce the idea of the past as a foreign country to the Turks. The first quote refers to Cevriye, one of Asya's aunts and a history teacher, while the second excerpts involves the entire family:

Twenty years in her career as a Turkish national history teacher, and [Cevriye] was so accustomed to drawing an impermeable boundary between the past and the present, distinguishing the Ottoman Empire from the modern Turkish Republic, that she had actually heard the whole story as a grim from a *distant country*. (164, emphasis added)

The women in the house listened to [Armanoush's] family's story with sincere interest and sorrow but that is as far as they could get. The past is *another country* for the Turks. (183, emphasis added)

Forced into a diasporic existence, Armenians in *The Bastard of Istanbul* concentrate on keeping their cultural memory alive in order to foster national unity. By contrast, Turks had to detach themselves from the history of the Ottoman Empire with its calamitous events.

According to Shafak's novel, the reason why the new-born republic had to insist on the separation from the imperial past is, paradoxically, the same reason why Armenians cling to their past: namely, fostering national(ist) unity. This forces Armenians and Turks into two conflictive situations:

[Armanoush], an Armenian, embodied the spirits of her people generations and generations earlier, whereas the average Turk had no such notion of continuity with his or her ancestors. The Armenians and the Turks lived in different time frames. For the Armenians, time was a cycle in which the past incarnated the present and the present birthed the future. For the Turks, time was a multihyphenated line, where the past ended

at some definite point and the present started anew from scratch, and there was nothing but rupture in between. (165)

This passage echoes Shafak's article "Memory-less Turkey/Amnesiac Turkey" (2006), in which she explains the difference between "amnesiac" societies and "memory-bound" ones. Shafak claims that this difference in perceiving a nation's collective past applies to non-Jewish and Jewish Germans in Germany as well as to Turks:

Societies are distinguished from one another not only by their governmental styles and their economic structures, but also by their relations with the past. Every nation-state rewrites its own history, and does so subjectively. But while some can be called 'amnesiac societies,' still others can be called 'memory-bound societies.' ("Memory-less Turkey/Amnesiac Turkey" n.p.)

For some nation-states, the collective-memory of their society is an all-important thing. Some societies take the task of remembering the past as just that: a mission that is incumbent upon them to carry out. For them, it is a citizen's duty to remember the past. But what about in Turkey? The situation here is the exact opposite. With us, the tendency towards forgetting history tends to dominate. Turkey is a society of collective amnesiacs. (ibid.)

Two ideas of migration correspond to these different ways of relating to the past. While Armenian Americans are a diasporic population proper, both Armenians and Turks in Turkey live the life of foreigners in their homeland. Armenians have been deprived of their right to citizenship and suffer discrimination, whereas Turks have fallen prey to a "collective amnesia" that alienates them from their own cultural history. As a result of their denial, it is impossible for them to fully relate to the modern reality of the Turkish republic, deprived of its past and projected towards a Westernized future. The representatives of these two types of migration, in *The Bastard of Istanbul*, are Asya and Armanoush, respectively representing Turks and Armenian Americans. A similar division appears also in another novel by Elif Shafak, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004), where migration and its subdivisions are once again portrayed with the help of bird symbolism.

Appearing but briefly in *The Bastard* in the figure of the pigeon, bird symbolism is more articulated and diversified in *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*, and helps a further contextualization of the "Little Lost Pigeon" in *The Bastard*. Bird symbolism in Elif Shafak's *The Saint* is mostly related to the issue of migration: the book returns to the theme of 'inland' migration so dear to the author and questions contemporary Othering strategies targeting migrants. "Who is the real stranger," inquires the narrator as the novels nears its end,

“the one who lives in a foreign land and knows he belongs elsewhere or the one who lives the life of a foreigner in [one’s] native land and has no place else to belong?” (*The Saint* 351). In *The Saint*, however, the inland migrant is not a Turk in her native Istanbul – like Asya in *The Bastard* – but an American citizen in the United States.

Birds first appear in the epigraph of *The Saint*: a poem by Rumi entitled “The Cause of a Bird’s Flying and Feeding with a Bird That Is Not of Its Own Kind.”⁹² In this short anecdote, the speaker spots a crow and a stork flying together. Wondering what may have led the two birds to choose each other as flying companions, he soon realizes they are both lame. The poem includes images of birds isolated by their own flock and anticipates the content and message of the novel. Even chapter titles – “The Crow,” “The Stork,” “Birds of Feather,” “Destroying your own Plumage” – comment on the opening poem and show the significance of bird imagery in the novel.

In the course of the novel, birds appear in numerous situations. They feature as ancestral spirits (“The crow is the venerated elder of the venerated fowl family. And if you find a crow old enough, the chances are that it might have once looked in the eyes of your great-grandmother;” 7); they symbolize a fresh start (“they have stoically agreed to move to a completely empty house, and, once there, make a complete fresh start *as light as a feather*,”⁹³ 19, italics in the text); they are mentioned in relation to feminism (“We are feminist magpies stealing old patriarchy’s words so that they won’t be used against women anymore,” 48). Finally, birds in *The Saint* are celebrated for their putative capacity to ‘change names’ and, along with names, identities. Multiple names correspond to multiple selves, and to a fluid identity that is not fixed and determined by such markers of identity as ethnicity, social class, and provenance. The novel’s protagonist, whose name, at this point, is still Zarpandit, claims to envy birds their multiple identities. To her, leaving one’s own flock corresponds to transcending differences and overcoming discrimination:

92 “I saw a crow running about with a stork/ I marveled long and investigated their case,/ In order that I might find the clue/ As to what it was that they had in common.../ When amazed and bewildered, I approached them,/ Then indeed I saw that both of them were lame.” The poem – of which Shafak provides the first six lines – is part of Rumi’s *Mathnawi*, Book II. The English translator is not mentioned.

93 The expression “light as a feather” appears in *The Bastard* in a very similar context, namely. When Asya talks of her necessity of having no past, she says: “If only I could have no past – you know, if only I could be a nobody, start from point zero and just remain there. Light as a feather” (*The Bastard* 148).

“I envy birds because of their names. We’ve only one name, or maybe two. But birds have hundreds of them. Even a single species of fowl has so many different names” (57)

“Change your name and your identity, have no name and no identity. Only if we stop identifying ourselves so much with the identity given to us, only if and when we really accomplish this, can we eliminate all sorts of racism, sexism, nationalism, and fundamentalism, and whatever it is that sets barricades among humanity, dividing us into different flocks and subflocks.” (145)

The most eloquent examples for the correspondence between names and identities are the two protagonists. The first is an American woman who changes her name spontaneously from Zarpandit to Gatheride, to Ilena, and finally to Gail, and wears a metaphorical spoon in her hair to remind her that “whatever name she found herself attached to, could be erased and replaced with the letters of another name” by mixing letters as easily as one stirs a soup (70). Her partner is a Turkish student who moved to the United States and Americanized his name by dropping the dieresis, going from Ömer to Omer. By doing so, Omer increases his detachment from his Turkish roots and reveals his desire to reinvent himself. Rather than embracing Omer’s desire for assimilation, however, the narrator condemns the practice of Americanizing one’s name, common among migrants in the United States, as “getting away from your innermost seed” in order to “becom[e] more visible in the eyes of others” (5). Increased visibility in the host country corresponds, in Shafak’s text, to making the country of origins invisible, as the omission of the dieresis proves.

In *The Saint*, the two protagonists, Omer and Gail, correspond to the Crow and the Stork in Rumi’s epigraph: two birds left behind by their own flock and paired by their shared disability, as both, although in different ways, are outsiders existing beyond the borders of the American majority, locating their identity in a state of inbetweenness rather than in their Americanness or Turkishness. If Omer conceals his Turkishness but, although assimilated, will never be fully American, Gail, who was born in the U.S., feels uncomfortable about her nationality. She will eventually grasp the nature of her identity on a journey to Istanbul – a city between two continents – when “it occur[s] to her, and the next second she knew with certainty that this inbetweenness was the right place, and this very moment was the right time to die” (347). By committing suicide on the Bosphorus Bridge, Gail fixes her identity in a suspended space in between continents and exposes the obsolescence of national belonging.

The Saint mostly focuses on stories of migrants in the United States (including international students), who, according to the narrator, tend to identify fellow citizens from their country of origins and re-aggregate in small national

clusters. The narrator explains this behavior through an ornithological metaphor: “birds of migration were the most peculiar of all fowl. Initially, they detached from their own flocks to migrate to faraway lands, and once there, they flocked into detachments” (81). Parallels between migratory birds and migrant communities recur frequently in *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* and *The Bastard of Istanbul*. The two texts bring forward one image in particular, that of birds left behind by their own flock, which dominates the discussion of identity, belonging and migration.

The little pigeon in *The Bastard of Istanbul*, collecting Armenian tales in Hovhannes Stamboulian’s children’s book, can be read as a member of a community in a process of diaspora and its story stresses the importance of preserving cultural memory. In addition to that, it embodies the difference between the Armenian and the Turkish attitudes towards the past. The eagerness of the pigeon to collect stories from the Armenian past, and his reluctance to hear about his future from the pomegranate tree, alludes to the position of the Armenians towards their cultural past, as depicted in this text.

In *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* the two protagonists, Omer and Gail, display fluctuating identities that position them outside the boundaries of the American majority. The novel is built around the bond between naming and identity: identifying with one given name means embracing the limits of the identity one was born with, while switching between multiple names corresponds to inhabiting the interstitial spaces between the traditional categories of belonging such as nation, gender, or sexual orientation. In the text, birds figure as metaphors of this fluid condition. The crow and the stork, being lame, have been abandoned by their flocks: their story is the story of Gail and Omer, who, in spite of their different nationalities, have been brought together by their flexible, unstable identities. In *The Bastard*, the pigeon losing track of its flock is Shushan, who is separated from her family during the genocide and remains in Turkey, while many Armenians, including her brother, emigrate to the United States. In one way or another, all these ‘birds of migration’ – Shushan, Armanoush, Omer, and Gail – seek to participate in or escape from Americanness. Shushan and Armanoush, as Armenian Americans, will be re-joined with their dispersed national community in the United States, while Omer and Gail struggle to partake in the American mainstream.

The End of the Ottoman Garden: Alev Lytle Croutier's *Seven Houses*

Some plants disconnected easily but others resisted,
leaving them no choice but to twist and pull, mangling the break.
It was violent. Each time they could hear the flowers cry,
they could sense the breaking of their own heart.
Alev Lytle Croutier, *Seven Houses*

Space and Narrative in *Seven Houses*

Identity is shaped by space, and changes in landscape correspond to changes in a community's self-perception. This process has been extensively addressed in the field of Turkish studies, given the change that affected the Turkish urban landscape from the end of the 19th century onwards, due to the Westernization policies implemented by the imperial administration in the *Tanzimat* period and continued later by the republican one. Various studies focus on Istanbul as a living literary scenario or a character proper (e.g. Mallory Katherine Koci's 2009 book *Istanbul: Redefining Topoi and Establishing the City as a Character in Contemporary Turkish Novels*); others look at how Istanbul's evolving architecture reflected the mutating psychology and concerns of its inhabitants (see Amy Mills' work on landscape and cultural identity/memory in Istanbul); others parallel the Ottoman house structure to the set of values characterizing the Ottoman imperial ideology (Maurice Cerasi's "The formation of Ottoman House Types: A Comparative Study in Interaction with Neighboring Cultures"). These studies highlight the bond between the Turkish population on the one hand and the domestic as well as urban spaces they inhabit on the other. In addition, they hypothesize a deeper bond between the rapidly evolving Turkish cityscapes and the problematic shaping of Turkey's modern, national identity.

Croutier's family saga *Seven Houses* (2002), spanning Turkey and America, provides a fictional exploration of these identitarian spaces. Each of the book's seven chapters is narrated by one of the seven houses the İpekçi family lived in. Every chapter is preceded by a photograph of the 'narrating house,' and by dates indicating the period of time in which the family has resided there. If, to put it with Maurice Cerasi, Ottoman houses can be considered an "epiphany of the Ottoman civilization" (Cerasi 132), similarly representative values can be attached to the apartment buildings that spread due to the rapid urbanization that swept Turkey (Istanbul in particular) from the beginning of the 20th century onward. By then, Western architecture had stopped being merely one component of the

Ottoman plethora of architectural influences, but became its most prominent feature. In “Democracy, Development and the Americanization of Turkish Architectural Culture in the 1950s” (2008), Sibel Bozdoğan addresses the “internationalization” of Turkish architectural culture in the 1950s, equating it with Americanization (Bozdoğan 117). According to Bozdoğan, Turkish architects in the Fifties “abandoned the search for a ‘Turkish national style’ and [...], with a new sense of belonging to an international community of modern nations, they embraced a new supranational aesthetics of bureaucratic efficiency (as best symbolized by the recently completed U.N. building in New York)” (Bozdoğan 119).

Croutier’s effort is precisely that of using architecture to comment on the mutation of Turkish culture in the passage between the empire and the republic and in the decades to follow. Gardens are essential in the shaping – and, remarkably, in the losing – of Turkish identity in the crossfire of Americanization and Ottoman nostalgia, Islamic tradition and secularism, continuity and historical amnesia. In *Seven Houses*, gardens function as filters, metaphors, and victims of the massive, turn-of-the-century metamorphosis of Turkish society.

In the novel one family matriarch (Maria) and one patriarch (Iskender) are trapped in the passage from a slow, timeless Ottoman universe to the republic’s fast materialism: neither they nor the gardens they live in will survive this change. In fact, in the secular republic of Turkey, little room is left for these ancient figures and for their gardens, mysterious remnants of Ottoman magic and folklore that the new Turkish society observes with a mixture of compassion and indifference. The two gardens – almost symbolic representations of their owners’ souls – are portrayed as *loci* of Ottoman nostalgia, as mystic paradises, and as utopian strongholds where the Turkish folkloric tradition flourishes and prospers. Remarkably, one is destroyed in a fire and the other is torn down to make room for a road enlargement.

The demise of these two oases of tradition and their elderly keepers parallels the erasure of Turkey’s Ottoman legacy, and to the ensuing replacement of the old imperial mindset with new Westernized values. The significance of gardens must therefore be examined in the light of massive urbanization and Westernization, whose voiceless symbolic victim they represent. This scenario is complicated, firstly, by the use of Orientalist clichés in the description of the two gardens, and secondly, by the attitude of acceptance displayed by the family members and the matriarch herself vis-à-vis the devastation of their cultural landscape. My intention is not only to show how gardens in *Seven Houses* embody the relationship between republican Turkey and its imperial, Islamic past. I also claim that through the use of Orientalism and the resigned acceptance with which the

characters witness the destruction of their Ottoman gardens, *Seven Houses* expresses an ambivalent attitude towards the early republican Westernization project, one that is perched between accusation and the awareness of its necessity. *Seven Houses*, therefore, does not oppose Kemalism as vehemently as Shafak's novels, which unambiguously condemn Kemalist reforms.

The Patriarch's Garden

Alas, Iskender Bey's fortune melted like a candle. Too much of an old silkworm to make the adjustments to a chameleon world that had left him behind in an oasis of loneliness he, in turn, had abandoned the world that could not remember its past nor recognize its own reflection in the mirror. No one ever mentioned the fire that had killed Iskender Bey and devastated the plantation. (*Seven Houses* 119)

Referring to the destruction of Iskender Bey's silk plantation after its bankruptcy, this citation is a significant one for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates that the disappearance of the patriarch's "fortune" was due to the transformation of Turkish society in the first years of the republic until the Fifties, the time period in which the story of Iskender's plantation takes place. The decades from 1930 to 1959 can indeed be identified as the period when the country's dominant ideology, insisting on rapid Westernization and modernization, was put into practice. The quote highlights the contrast between a country rapidly evolving towards standards of Western modernity on the one hand and the patriarch's old-fashioned silk plantation on the other. The incapability of the elderly man – the "old silkworm" – to "adjust" to Turkey's modernity is offered as the reason of his demise.

Secondly, the idea that Turkey "could not remember its past or recognize its own reflection in the mirror" is reminiscent of Shafak's image of the past as a foreign country in *The Bastard*. Such similarity between Shafak's and Croutier's representations of the past indicate the presence of a recurring narrative in Turkish American literature imagining modern Turkey as alienated from its history and incapable of self-representation ("could not [...] recognize its own reflection in the mirror"), due to the rupture with the Ottoman imperial legacy and the consequent mutation in the nation's self-perception.

I argue that the fate of the patriarch's plantation is intertwined with the social and architectural changes that connoted the first decades of the Turkish republic: it exemplifies the painful passage from an imperial universe to a national one and emerges as the arena in which Ottoman nostalgia and acceptance of a Westernized future are negotiated. To the eyes of a Turkish child called Amber, Iskender Bey's niece, the plantation is a paradise, an enchanted world populated by supernatural beings, an extended family garden where Islamic folklore resiliently

resists the widespread modernization. The plantation becomes the theater of the exclusive friendship between the family patriarch and the child, which develops in the depths of the plantation. The child sees it as an extended playground, a safe place presided by the godlike figure of the patriarch – “an old wizard, see all, know all, as fierce as the God who had ordered Abraham to sacrifice his son” (105). But for Amber the plantation is much more than a garden, it is a universe of storytelling and communion with nature:

Iskender told the story of every tree and stone, reinventing everything on the spur of the moment, spinning stories until they became completely ludicrous but still credible [...]. He told her stories of the Silk Road, of places where people were yellow, where they ate monkeys. Of giant ants guarded by griffins digging up the earth for gold, of pearl divers who found treasures buried beneath the sea in dark sinister caves, of skinny naked men sitting on beds of nails, of people who lived hundreds of years because they drank from a special spring, of giants and unicorns, lions and tigers, jewels scattered everywhere like dust, the cobras that guarded them, and of perfumes and silk that grew on trees. (100)

The imaginary universe Iskender discloses to the child and that becomes associated with the plantation contains an array of Orientalist tropes. Islamic folklore is coalesced with the Western Orientalist tradition, as Herodotus’ giant ants prove.⁹⁴

Once Amber re-emerges from the plantation, she is, however, confronted with her mother Camilla’s skepticism:

“I saw a chameleon that changed into the color of purple hyacinths, I even saw a camel being born [...]. Uncle Iskender said I can have it.”

“He’s lost his marbles,” Camilla said, exasperated. “Senile old creature. He knows it’s ridiculous. He knows camels are not allowed in modern cities!”

[...]

“Can’t you see the fire in [Iskender’s] eyes when he looks at Amber? We have to separate them [...]. It’s unsavory.” (103)

Besides criticizing the unusual intimacy between Amber and Iskender, fearing that his interest for the child may go beyond filial affection, Camilla is dismissive of the kind of knowledge that the old man is handing down to Amber. The prospect of her child being initiated to Ottoman folklore makes Camilla uncomfortable, and, by dismissing Iskender’s stories as irrational, she mimics the Kemalist posture towards the Ottoman heritage. Iskender’s “senile” fantasies have little to do with the trajectory of Westernization that the young Turkish generations will have to follow. By stressing the fact that camels are not allowed in “modern cities,” Amber’s

94 The reference to gold-digging ants can be found in Book II of Herodotus’ *Histories*, where the Greek historian describes the culture of India.

mother re-enacts the rupture between Turkey's 'Eastern' tradition (condensed in the Orientalist cliché of the camel) and modernity, between the enchanted plantation and Istanbul's metropolitan ambitions. Amber eventually identifies Iskender's silk plantation with an "oasis" (119) where a folkloric Ottoman past is safeguarded from outside events, a semi-divine paradise untouched by raging Westernization, heavily romanticized through childlike imagination and sublimated by the luxurious Orientalist descriptions that contribute to the place's enchantment.

More gardens are lost along with the devastation of Iskender's plantation, sold by the family's new patriarch, a man named Cadri, in order to pay for the family's debts: "The summer yali in Moda, the fig orchards along the Aegean, the hunting lodge in the Belgrad forest, the villa in Pamukkale Hot Springs, the vineyards" (120). Caught at the crossroads between the imperial past, represented by the İpekçi's aristocratic gardens, and the republican future, the new patriarch embraces the country's new mindset and moves the family to Ankara, described by the narrator as a city that sprang out of Atatürk's imagination:

Ankara, a dusty city in the arid Anatolian plains, the ancient Angora. [...], a nomadic inland rumbling with blood memories of human sacrifices for rain, a modern city reborn out of a need to find fulcrum for the revolution, a city of new beginnings that Atatürk had elevated overnight to the status of the new Turkish Republic's capital. (120)⁹⁵

The İpekçi's plan to become part of the new Turkish nationalist dream and relinquish their aristocratic past is completed when the family moves to one of the concrete apartment houses that function as metonymy for frenzied urbanization. The narrator describes them as standing "in a grand row, all more or less identical, cement colored, six stores each – mutant progenies of urban functionalism, ghostless and hollow inside" (121). A product of modernization, Ankara finalizes the rupture between the İpekçi and the territory they had inhabited thus far. The new "ghostless" apartment house contrasts the enchanted wilderness of Iskender's silk plantation, populated by all kinds of Ottoman ghosts.

The disappearance of gardens from the family's life, due to the sudden change in the country's architectural and housing standards at the beginning of the 20th

95 This movement from leafy mansions to urban Ankara, as well as the systematic loss of Ottoman nature, are reminiscent of the American frontier. The narrative has been applied before to early republican Turkey by Ernest Wolf-Gazo, who, in his study on John Dewey's "Report and Recommendation upon Turkish Education," claims that Dewey "saw an analogy between the [...] [American] Old West and Anatolia" and saw Turks as the "frontiersmen and women of a newly established land, possessing a vision clearly focused on the future, not on the past. In Ankara he felt the pulse of a pioneer spirit" (Wolf-Gazo in Raw 87).

century, is indicated by another small detail. If on the one hand the house on the plantation had a hamam decorated entirely with “tiles of birds, of flowers, and an enormous tree of life” (85), the bathroom in the new apartment has “linoleum tiles. No tulips. No tree of life” (124). This architectural change has direct consequences on Turkish culture, as the loss of Ottoman botanic symbolism entails a loss of Ottoman cultural practices. In the new apartments, for example, “communal bathing” and its “respiratory bliss” are irretrievably lost (124), marking profound changes that affect all aspects of life, from bathing down to breathing.

The understandable pain accompanying the family’s translocation to another city coexists side by side with a hopeful curiosity for the new, modern existence the family will adapt to. America plays a crucial role in determining such attitude:

America insinuated further into their lives, seducing the women with Frigidaire and Hoover. It also brought along the virus of Time and virus of time, the imaginary. The first item on time: a Miele washing machine for Camilla, with a pot belly and a revolving wringer to feed through. [...] All the women spent months neglecting other tasks to use Camilla’s Miele, mesmerized by its rhapsodic churning, exhilarated by the joys of automatism. (123)

Thus, the exoticist, romantic mode that dominated Iskender’s plantation and the sentimental farewell to the universe of values it represented are soon replaced by renewed excitement, and by a consumerist frenzy directly connected with the country’s Americanization. Benton Jay Komins sees the openness to American commodities as another sign of the rupture with the Ottoman mindset. “Global commodities – especially their promises of a comfortable and modern life – have supplanted understandings of what it used to mean to be cosmopolitan. [...] These commodities, from plastic card tables to internet-ready pocket phones, present an empty form of cosmopolitanism that is disconnected from the pluralism and multicultural possibilities of [Istanbul’s] past” (Komins 364). Komins draws a line between the idea of globalization, which he uses almost interchangeably with Americanization, and the idea of Ottoman multiculturalism. He critically hints at the fact that the former has practically supplanted the latter.

The Matriarch’s Garden

Amber opened the wooden gate into a garden entrance with an energetic riot of plants. The creepers strangled the sunlight; the bell-shaped blossoms of trumpet vines, morning glory, and hibiscus dangled from their limp stems [...]. Amber touched her nose, locking the scent in her nostrils so the intoxication would linger. She reveled in her gratitude to the deities for creating such whiteness, the nobility of the soul who placed beauty at the entrance of this humble sanctuary. (268)

The story of Maria's garden, in the way it develops and in its significance, is comparable to that of Iskender Bey's plantation. Maria is Amber's Greek grandmother, she lives alone in a cottage with a luxurious garden in Izmir; at the center of the garden there is an old well where the spirit of Maria's deceased husband resides. Yet, the cottage and the garden will soon be razed by the city's administration in order to make room for a road enlargement. The destruction of a garden is therefore once again at the center of a discussion on the clash between Turkey's imperial memory and its enchanted spaces (the garden) and modernized future (the road being enlarged).

In the chapter that narrates the last days of the cottage before its destruction, Amber and her daughter, Nellie, take it upon themselves to inform Maria about the eviction and the fate awaiting her home. Like Iskender, Maria is a mystical figure that can be completely understood and envisioned only in relation to her garden: "Even in her long dress and scarf, Maria blended into the landscape, imitating its colors like a chameleon" (270), later on she is said to resemble "some small animal, a squirrel or a rabbit" (272). Like Iskender, the matriarch is god-like, as the mythical space she has inhabited so far mutated her humanity into something more complex: Maria's decrepit appearance encompasses an entire universe of mythological creatures: "Her features began to quiver, subtle changes of skin-deep colors flashed a thousand faces at Amber. Ape women, witches, demented old hags, voluptuous sirens, female Buddhas, antediluvian crones, queens, baby girls, virgins, strange animals, prehistoric female deities, and all else in between" (271). In addition, the garden, in harmony with the supernatural figure of its keeper, is a space where inexplicable events take place: things materialize on tables and the phantom of Maria's late husband appears at night. Similar to Iskender's plantation, Maria's garden is heavily exoticized and eroticized, as the next passage exemplifies:

A flock of hummingbirds, hundreds maybe, were ravaging the flowers in a flutter of erotic madness as if in an esoteric mating dance – now chasing each other, now competing for the orifice of a flower, now swooping so low they almost got tangled in the women's hair. (272)

Both gardens function as oases where Ottoman culture is preserved and sheltered and bear an important link to the empire's history. If the plantation encloses the history of an Ottoman aristocratic family, the cottage is associated with the history of the Greek minority in the Ottoman Empire. In a lengthy account about her childhood, Camilla connects the cottage to the collective memory of the Ottoman Greek minority, highlighting some key elements of their history:

“I was merely a baby when my father disappeared into the Liberation War, leaving nothing to his wife except a gold watch. My mother, Maria, who’d change her name to Malika and converted from Greek Orthodoxy to Islam to please her husband, sought refuge at her mother’s in Bornova, the lovely tree-lined suburb of Smyrna, an oasis for the European aristocracy.” (258)

Not only does Camilla connect the cottage to the necessity for Maria to change her name and convert to Islam, but she also points out the importance of the city of Izmir/Smyrna in the family’s and the country’s history, due to the great fire that destroyed the Armenian and the Greek neighborhoods in 1922. The word “oasis” appears in reference to both Iskender’s plantation and the neighborhood where Maria’s cottage was located, and it is essential to understand the way gardens function in the novel. These spaces are clearly indicated as an anomaly, an exception in Kemalist Turkey (especially considering the republic’s new capital, raised in a symbolically dusty, nomadic inland). Both the plantation and the garden are connoted as safe havens where the Ottoman universe, with its Islamic folkloric narratives, lives on untouched by outer events, immune to the changes occurring in Turkish society and history and yet very short-lived, as both gardens are captured by the novel on the verge of their inevitable destruction.

Maria develops a quasi-mystical relationship with her cottage. In the first family house she shared with her husband, Hamid Bey, Maria retrieves a connection with her ‘forgotten,’ cosmopolitan, multilingual past:

rising as a somnambulist in the middle of the night, [Maria/Malika] would descend down to the basement where earlier Hamid Bey and his Sufi friends had gathered to sing and dance until their feet left the ground and floated like angels in their long white robes and conical hats. Malika sat in candlelight communing with the unseen that the men had agitated, watching otherwise invisible visions from her forgotten past. Sometimes she recited things aloud or hummed in Italian or Greek. (166)

In the solitude of the basement, Maria reconnects with the Greek identity she was forced to erase after marrying into a Muslim family.⁹⁶ There is no trace in the novel of the “distaste for underground structures” that Maurice Cerasi defines as typical of Turkish culture (Cerasi 132). *Seven Houses* contrasts this assumption by creating densely spiritual underground structures. Another example for this are domestic wells, which are a fundamental architectural feature of numerous

96 Interestingly enough, the “unseen” these men agitate is compatible with Maria’s Orthodox Christian spirituality. The intertwining of religious traditions – the Sufi and the Greek Orthodox – underscores the Ottoman tradition of peaceful coexistence and, once again, positions Sufism at the center of a discourse about interreligious dialogue.

Turkish gardens. The well in Maria's family house appears as a dangerous place children should be kept away from, the reason for this is to be found somewhere between the real danger of falling and drowning and the universe of Islamic children's tales and legends depicting wells as the residence of spirits. Camilla tries to keep Amber from playing near the well:

"Cats have fallen in. Snakes squirm at the bottom. *Odjus* live inside and when they see children staring at them, they open their mouths real wide and suck them in like marrow," [Camilla] told [Amber], making a sucking and slurping sound. (165)

Unconcerned by the reputation of wells, Maria shows a peculiar attraction to them, as she habitually leans over them, stares inside, and whispers. In the case of the first family well, this behavior is left unexplained. One can assume that, considering Maria's use of underground structures as spaces where she reconnects with her past, like in the case of the basement, the well might give Maria the illusion that she could retrieve her forgotten past: by no means vanished but stored underground.

The cottage well in Smyrna is where the ghost of her husband, killed in the war, came back to reside. Not only does the ghost inhabit the well, but he also takes the bowl of food Maria leaves for him in the garden and leaves a coin in return. This, as Maria explains in the text, not only happens to her, but to other women whose husbands died in the war, as if the deceased men were continuing a traditional family life by accepting the food cooked for them and by financially providing for their wives in return. Therefore, wells appear as places where an irretrievable past is stored, where the matriarch can continue to relate to her repressed Greek ethnicity and with the memory of her family life, as both are not utterly lost, but merely stored away, kept safe, and sheltered. The demolition of Maria's garden and well by the city's administration in order to enlarge a road coincides with the demise of one more imperial family narrative and of an entire world of Ottoman tradition and folklore. At first, the matriarch rejects the idea of leaving a place that is physically populated by her memories, but eventually she agrees to move in with her daughter and abandons the cottage to its unavoidable fate. Once again gardens are left behind with a feeling of acceptance and resignation: in Maria's case, her attitude of acceptance is dramatized by the decision to destroy the garden herself before the bulldozers get to it and arrange to cut down flowers as a sacrificial offering.

Maria's conscious decision not only affects the plants, but the birds as well. After the destruction of the Ottoman garden, the hummingbirds, which had infused the garden with erotic madness, are now depicted while desperately searching the devastated bushes for the nourishment that had "fed generations

of their species” (285), but they eventually lose hope and die from exhaustion. The hummingbirds’ last visit to the garden is rendered by the narrator with a very fatalistic attitude:

they were sensing that the plant would no longer bear flowers, and nothing else of sweetness was left in the garden. They were sensing that they had lost their fountain of life and could never return. Their livelihood was gone. (285)

The departure of the hummingbirds marks the end of an entire bird community. The strong exoticism characterizing the first apparition of the birds – coming “in a flutter of erotic madness as if in an esoteric mating dance” (272) – is therefore also bound to disappear and make room for the republic’s rationalism.

In *Seven Houses*, the disappearance of a garden is once again paralleled to the disappearance of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and its ghosts, supernatural beings, aristocracy, cultural diversity, and orthodox and heterodox spiritualities incarnated by the Sufi Hamid Bey and his wife Maria/Malika, the matriarch. Similar to Iskender Bey’s garden, the matriarch’s garden also presents exoticized elements, sublimated in the image of the hummingbirds, as it was by the camel in the plantation: both remnants of a surpassed Ottomanness with no hope of survival in “modern cities.” The departure of the hummingbirds manifests the surpassing of the concept of Turkey as Orient, erased by the Turkish republic’s new Western and secular outlook.

The demolition of Maria’s house corresponds to the erasure not only of the physical traces of the empire, but also of its values – above all, Ottoman cosmopolitanism. As a Muslim convert of Greek origins and a lonesome old widow, Maria lacks the power to lay a claim to the land she inhabits and the house she owns. Cengiz Çandar claims that the Kemalist elites, intentioned to create a Turkish national consciousness, “denied the existence of the many non-Turkish ethnic identities within Turkey” (89). Land expropriation ensued as one of the expressions of this denial. To put it with Ariella Azoulay (who explores the significance of house demolition in the colonial context of the Palestinian territories in “When a Demolished House Becomes a Public Square”), due to her ethnicity Maria has entered a condition of “unprotected exposure to power” (205). The presence in one political territory of dispossessed, refugees, and, especially in the case of Turkey, minorities, “does not serve as a condition for their entry into public space, nor does it entitle them to a place within the body politic” (ibid.). On a discursive level, former imperial minorities are not invited to partake in the act of imagining Turkey’s post-imperial future, as they do not fit the ethnicist principles on which Kemalist Turkey has built its identity; in the same way their homes “[do] not pose a physical or symbolic obstacle in the way of

rampantly violent governmental force. [They are] perceived as a spatial disruption of the movement of the governmental force” (Azoulay 205) and therefore lose their “sanctity as a human dwelling and [are] designated for demolition” (210). The expropriation of Maria’s cottage indicates that the shrinking of the political space of minorities in Turkey after 1923 was accompanied by a much more tangible shrinking of the physical spaces allotted to them on the republic’s territory. The erosion of Ottoman cosmopolitanism as a central component of the imperial society is the obvious consequence of these joint phenomena. To put it with Azoulay, “against the backdrop of the forms of life that existed here, the destruction [...] became in fact an end in itself – destruction of the mixed society that had developed here, and the removal of anything that might enable its resurrection” (214, italics in the original).

The gap between the universe of the matriarch in her garden and the modern world is stressed by scenes of incompatibility between Maria’s old traditional ways and Amber’s, but especially Nellie’s, Americanized attitudes. Amber and her daughter Nellie are first- and second-generation Turkish Americans respectively, and are the youngest members of the family, the last generations of the saga.

“Hello *Anne-Anne-Anne*,” Nellie flirted. *Anne* is mother. Two *Annes* grandmother, three grand-grandmother. That she knew from her ‘Turkish for Travelers’ guide. She took a Polaroid of the birds, gave it to Maria. Maria looked at the picture, trying to make sense of a strange sortilege.

“Take one of the two of us,” Amber said while putting her arm around Maria, and her cheek against hers. [...]

Maria cringed when she heard the shutter click, afraid of having her soul stolen. And it was. (273)

Americanization appears in this chapter as a fundamental element of modernity caught in a painful, clumsy coexistence with the old, Ottoman world order. The passage comments on the apparent incompatibility between Ottomanness and Americanness, suggesting serious communication problems between three generations of Turks. The flirtatious behavior Nellie displays with her great-grandmother betrays an incomplete understanding of the matriarch’s grief, stature, and dignity, being Maria an heir to the Ottoman culture and the embodiment of its dignified decadence. Nellie’s physical warmth and language experiments, stimulating her own amusement rather than attempting to engage Maria in a real conversation, suggest that Nellie, occasionally travelling to Turkey with her mother, aims to be nothing more than a traveler in the land of her ancestors. Her Turkish American great-granddaughter’s unrequested attention proves physically overwhelming for Maria, who, on her part, fails to comprehend her relatives’ expansiveness.

The moment the photograph is taken is particularly problematic. Maria tries to relate Nellie's Polaroid to her own cultural universe, identifying it as "a strange sortilege," but "cringes" as a picture of hers is taken. By confirming Maria's fear of "having her soul stolen," the narrator suggests that tradition and modernity, in Maria's garden as well as in the new Turkish republic, are mutually exclusive. The novel points at a fundamental incompatibility between the photograph – "the fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction" (Anderson 204) – and the decrepitude of the garden, between the sacredness of ruins and the lack of understanding thereof by the agents of modernity, between irreparable loss and the logics of "infinite reproducibility" and "print-capitalism" (Anderson 182). The fascination with American symbols and consumerism – the household appliances first, now the Polaroid camera – contributes to the erasure of Turkey's traditional past. In fact, the photograph objectifies the matriarch and her garden, reducing them to a portable souvenir of a vanishing world. Benedict Anderson equates photographic reproducibility to profanation and connects these dichotomies to the colonial condition. To Anderson, the photographic gesture repositions monuments and ruins as "regalia" for a (neo)colonial state that does not comprehend the sacredness of the colony's past (182). "Infinite reproducibility," Anderson argues, "[was] made technically possible by print and photography, but politicoculturally by the disbelief of the rulers themselves in the real sacredness of local sites" (ibid.). In *Seven Houses*, the Kemalist erasure of enchanted Ottoman ruins is coalesced with the specter of Americanization and its imported logics, condensed in the Polaroid camera and the photographic urgency. Both Kemalism and Americanization share important features with colonization processes as described by Anderson: both prove oblivious of the garden's sacredness, the former simply hoping to erase it, the latter eager to commodify it.

Maria's fear of "having her soul stolen" provides a powerful link to the American cultural context, as this belief is widespread among Native American populations as well. Reports by Native American interviewees in Lucy Lippard's essay "Independent Identities" show that Native tribes felt a comparable fear of photographs:

"Some native people believed that with each photograph their soul would weaken [...] the loss they sensed was very real and generations later is still felt by Native Americans today." [...] "Before the picture," says Oren Lyons (Onondaga) "the subject was free and unencumbered. After the picture, the photographer had indeed captured the identity of the person – his or her face." (Lippard 142)

Lippard also signals that photography can be understood as a marker of an epochal shift, the sign of a new world taking over the old. To Lippard, the cultural opponent to photography is storytelling. “North American society is becoming increasingly dependent on photography and its cinematic, videographic, and electronic offspring. Yet the ancient stories are being replaced by pictures; family albums replaced oral histories” (ibid.). By enabling a connection between Turkish and Native American folklore, the image of the soul-stealing Polaroid resonates strongly in an American context. One can also argue that the Ottoman legacy in Turkey and Native American beliefs in the United States underwent similar Othering processes. This allows American readers to position the relationship between ‘modernity’ and Ottoman folklore in Turkey with respect to their own history of Othering, disavowal, and repression.

Re-Orientalism, Hyper-Orientalism, and Acceptance: Problematizing Gardens in *Seven Houses*

The muezzin’s voice rose in the air.
The nightingale sang a song of acceptance. A bus went by.

The old woman was vacant. A grayness emanating
out of her body, the color of resignation.
Alev Lytle Croutier, *Seven Houses*

The ostensibly Orientalist portrayal of gardens and the attitude of acceptance displayed by the Turkish characters while witnessing the dissolution of their estates can be analyzed in the light of the search for Turkey’s modern national identity. In the novel, Orientalist tropes are employed to describe spaces that are secluded from the outer world where Ottoman tradition and folklore have been preserved throughout the first decades of the Turkish republic, unaffected by the Westernizing and modernizing effort that swept the republic in those same years. Orientalism and the idea of seclusion facilitate a reading of gardens in *Seven Houses* as sources of untainted Ottomanism. The garden is thus romanticized and turned into a space of Ottoman authenticity: an un-Westernized, un-urbanized landscape featured by the yet uncompromised union of man, nature, and God. The garden associates Ottoman identity with Edenic characteristics, and, according to the Edenic narrative, foreshadows an impending crisis. The use of Orientalist elements in the description of this Eden of Ottomanism is essential to characterize gardens as abstractions, surreal spaces perched between reality and legend, and points at the impossibility of their survival in the quickly evolving Turkish present. The end of these Ottoman gardens, inhabited by ancient patriarchs and

matriarchs, is presented in the novel as an unfortunate development, and yet an acceptable one, part of the natural order of things.

The İpekçis settle rather cheerfully in their new apartment, ready to start anew:

“Luckily a handful of remaining liras will make it possible to build an apartment complex for all of us to share, right here where your feet are touching the ground, to start a new life here in Ankara where opportunities are greater, where better schools exist for children, and better jobs for men, everything is new and modern in this city. Everything sanitary. Every sign of progress exists.” (121)

The matriarch Maria, instead, switches from a loving determination to stay at her house, driven by the attachment to her garden and to the spirit of her dead husband residing in the well, to a pragmatic, matter-of-factly resolution to move to her daughter’s house:

“Look at that jasmine bush, look at the bougainvillea [...]. Tell me the truth, do you see them like this anywhere else? No, child. I’m not going to leave my home and go live with my daughter.” (282)

“It’s all dirt in the end anyway. What does it matter? No. I don’t want to be left behind. Tell her, tell Camilla, I’ll come live with her. He [the ghost of Maria’s late husband] can find me there if he wants to. If he’s a spirit, he can go anywhere. My life is spent waiting for him.” (284)

The prospect of a new future makes the loss of the Ottoman past bearable. Patriarchs and matriarchs step aside, vanishing or docilely following their world-wise grandchildren into an Americanized existence.

The attitude of resignation that permeates the novel resonates with a statement by the author herself: “In the 20th century’s process of modernization,” Croutier told *Publishers Weekly*, “we turned away from the cultural patrimony of the empire. It was necessary because if we glorified the empire, it would have prevented progress” (Croutier in Rosen 63). Similar to Croutier’s approval of modernization, the narrative that emerges from the novel is apparently supportive of the Kemalist mindset: the legacy of the empire, if not ejected from the national self, would have prevented the country’s modernization. To put it with Welat Zeidanlioğlu, the Kemalist discourse constructed Ottoman society as “lacking,” as a “source of instability and a barrier to progress,” or, more drastically, as an element that would “cause defeat” (Zeidanlioğlu 159). The novel’s Orientalist outlook on Ottoman society is therefore rooted in the Kemalist doctrine. Zeidanlioğlu, via James Carrier, explains that Orientalism not only serves to draw a line between Western and Eastern cultures, but also “a line within” (Carrier in Zeidanlioğlu 156). In a Turkish context, this amounts to disconnecting the republican from the pre-republican past. The Ottoman Empire and its legacy thus became the victims

of what Louisa Schein calls “domestic othering”⁹⁷ (Schein 73), as the Kemalists sought to rid the nation of its “Orientalness” (Zeidanlioglu 159).

This phenomenon can be addressed in the light of Lisa Lau’s notion of re-Orientalism.⁹⁸ Lau defines re-Orientalism as a “process of Orientalism by Orientals,”⁹⁹ implying that Orientalism is no longer an exclusively Western practice, but one that has been taken up by cultural producers who “derive both ancestry and identity from the Orient” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 572). In other words, re-Orientalism theory focuses on ‘Orientals’ employing Orientalist modes of descriptions in their self-representation, not being Othered by Western observers, but by a “process of self-Othering” (Lau, “Introducing Re-Orientalism: A New Manifestation” 4). As much as the power of representation is now in the hands of these non-Western cultural producers, and no longer in those of Western interpreters of Eastern cultures, the resulting representation remains “filtered through Western lenses [...] with Western frames of discourse, and via Western knowledge systems” (Lau, “Introducing Re-Orientalism: Theory and Discourse” 5). This is particularly true if re-Orientalist texts are designed for Anglophone readers and markets, as they thereby attest the centrality of the West and show their intrinsic ambivalence, circulating “discourse which speaks as much to the West as for the East” (4). According to Lau, however, what differentiates re-Orientalism from Orientalism is not only the origin of the cultural producers, but also the fact that re-Orientalism “is not pitting the ‘West’ against the ‘East,’ but strives for a much more complex and nuanced understanding of postcolonial cultural production,” as it is “attentive to the implications of the heterogeneity embedded in

97 With this term, Schein describes Othering processes that “take place interethnically” (Schein 73). That is to say when one class, ethnic group, or social component of a non-Western society (Schein mentions China as an example) Orientalizes another, becoming the agent of Orientalist representation. Schein refers to the same process also as “internal Orientalism” (Schein 73).

98 This section refers to three works by Lisa Lau: “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals” (2009); “Introducing Re-Orientalism: A New Manifestation of Orientalism” (2011); and “Introducing Re-Orientalism Theory and Discourse in Indian Writing in English” (2014). As Lau herself points out in “Re-Orientalism,” similar processes of self-Orientalization have been addressed earlier although denominated differently. Lau mentions ethno-orientalism (Carrier, 1992), self-orientalism (Dirlik, 1996), internal orientalism (Schein, 1997), and reverse Orientalism (Mitchell, 2004) (Lau 4).

99 I disagree with Lau’s use of the term “Oriental” with reference to the authors she addresses in her study. I believe, however, that by her re-introduction of the term Lau sought to emphasize the paradox intrinsic to the concept of re-Orientalism.

categories such as the West and the East” (Lau, “Introducing Re-Orientalism: A New Manifestation” 2).

While Lau conducts her studies on re-Orientalism mostly within the framework of South Asian (specifically Indian) writing in English,¹⁰⁰ the concept is particularly helpful if applied to the Turkish context, where processes of re-Orientalism can be located in texts that are set in the socio-historical context of Kemalism itself. Indeed, re-orientalism is an illuminating category if applied to *Seven Houses* and Croutier’s work, as important similarities between Croutier and Lau’s re-Orientalizing authors become evident.¹⁰¹ In *Seven Houses* the plot unfolds in the crucial moment when Kemalist Turkey intensifies late-Ottoman, re-Orientalist discourses to inscribe Turkey into a Western-centered narrative of progress. It addresses the Kemalists’ re-Orientalist mindset and the necessity to draw a line within the nation’s present and its imperial past through the stories of two destroyed gardens.

As a diasporic author of Turkish origins, Croutier re-Orientalizes her home culture in her novel. In fact, Croutier seems eager to affiliate with the Western Orientalist tradition, as, among the genres and authors who inspired *Seven Houses* and *The Palace of Tears*, she mentions “19th century travel fiction, especially French travelers who went to the Near East” and other authors such as “[Rudyard] Kipling, [Samuel T.] Coleridge, [Percy B.] Shelley, George Eliot, William Blake, and Gustave Flaubert” (Croutier in Rosen 63). By openly tracing the genealogy of her work back to Western authors, Croutier positions her work in the Western Orientalist tradition, making Western conceptions of the Orient prominent in her own writing.

Yet, Croutier takes the discussion of re-Orientalism further, as re-Orientalism in *Seven Houses* has a specific function: it exposes the process through which Turkey’s Ottoman legacy and culture needed to be Othered in order to sever the country’s imperial past from its Westernized present. Through the image of

100 In her categorization of Indian writing in English, Lau distinguishes between “home authors,” “sojourner authors,” and “diasporic authors” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 573, 575). In brief, home authors permanently reside in South Asia, diasporic authors permanently reside abroad, and sojourner authors “travel frequently from within South Asia to other countries, living and working and dividing their life and time between two or more countries” (575).

101 Other similarities that bring together Lau’s re-Orientalist writers and Croutier are the blurred border between life writing and fiction and these author’s self-positioning in a difficult interstitial space. See Lau’s “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals,” especially 585–586.

Ottoman gardens and their demise, Croutier shows how, within the Turkish national context, past and present could coexist and respectively play the role of object and subject of the Orientalist representation. In this perspective, the novel exploits the Ottoman past as a repertoire of Orientalist tropes and images for which, as Lau's works point out, the demand of global literary markets is still high¹⁰² (Lau, "Introducing Re-Orientalism: Theory and Discourse" 11). The same Ottoman past is later dismissed as an abstraction, an Oriental fable for which little room is left in Turkey's modern, secular present. On the one hand, the novel seems to subscribe to the dictates of Kemalism, especially to the expulsion of the Ottoman past from official historical narratives. The characters' acceptance of the radical reinvention of Istanbul's urban landscape, their gleeful exultation at the flow of American commodities, and Maria's desire to not be left behind by her family point towards her willingness to also draw a line between the country's modernity and its past. On the other hand, the abundance of Ottoman themes and Ottoman nostalgia, the use of fairy-tale elements, and the celebration of Turkish folkloric cultural practices ultimately distance the novel from the Kemalist mindset. These factors complicate Croutier's response towards Kemalism, defining it as much more ambivalent than Shafak's.

Building on Lau's theory, not only does Croutier emerge as a re-Orientalizing author, she also takes the notion of re-Orientalism into the terrain of what I here term 'hyper-Orientalism.' Besides strongly exoticising Turkish culture and its 'indigenous' elements (Sufism, the Karagöz theatre, Ottoman folklore), Croutier integrates elements from cultures further East than Turkey, which contribute to making Turkey stranger, more exotic, more unfamiliar; in a word, more 'Oriental.' This tendency is particularly evident in the figure of the patriarch Iskender and his plantation. When Iskender's granddaughter, Amber, visits her grandfather's office at night, she is welcomed by

a jungle of velvet drapes, Buddha heads, carnivorous plants, golden braziers, ancient tombstones, assorted smoking-pipes, maps, musical instruments, peculiar ephemera, [...] clumps of brown photographs pinned on the walls. One showed two men in Bedouin clothes smoking *nargilehs* in front of a coffee shop somewhere on the Silk Road, a backgammon board between them. Another showed Iskender on camelback dressed like a Sheik. (94)

102 On the popularity of postcolonial exoticism on the Anglophone literary market see Lau's "Introducing Re-Orientalism: Theory and Discourse in Indian Writing in English," Graham Huggan's "The Postcolonial Exotic" (2001), and *Commodifying (Post)Colonialism: Othering, Reification, Commodification and the New Literatures and Cultures in English*, edited by Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner (2010).

This passage presents Iskender's collection of mementos of his travels to the East. Among curiosities of striking vagueness, the reader stumbles on the Buddha heads, which suggest that this is not merely the office of a Turkish plantation owner, but a space welcoming different Orients, a synthesis of "the great Asiatic mystery" (Said, *Orientalism* 44). The photographs on the wall add indeterminacy to the Orientalized space of the office: the reader is unsure whether the photographs of the Bedouin-clothed men, the water pipes, and the coffee shop were taken in Turkey or further East – "somewhere on the Silk Road." The walls of a Turkish gentleman's private office plunge the reader in a mysterious and undefined Orient, whose boundaries are stretched beyond recognition. The Buddha heads and the Bedouin and Sheik clothes contribute to the hyper-Orientalization of a Turkish space, as if Turkey itself were not 'Eastern' enough for the purposes of the novel. In addition, the diversified mementoes stored in Iskender's office not only enhance Turkey's potential for exoticization, but also offer a commentary on the vastness of the Ottoman Empire and the cultural diversity it subsumed, adding a layer of imperial nostalgia.

Iskender's office is not the only space that reveals the author's tendency towards hyper-Orientalization: the garden itself – or silk plantation – is another significant one. The silkworm used by the İpekçis are, in fact, Chinese: "the most coveted silk moth, a secret that the Chinese had guarded viciously for many centuries" (64). The adventurous journey that leads to their discovery provides the occasion for another enumeration of suggestive Oriental treasures brought back by Iskender, including "musk, fabrics, diamonds, rubies, perfume, rhubarb, and other assorted objects of desire" (64). Similar to Iskender's office, the wardrobe of his daughter Aida contains a variety of exotic robes that have populated Western ethno-chic fantasies for centuries, among which "Mandarin gowns, saris and sarongs, charshafs and chadors, caftans, kimonos, and kebayas, pallium, peplum, peplos" (64).

In Croutier's novel, Turkey's exoticism is a result of the conglomeration of different exoticisms. Rather than investigating the cultural specificity of the country, Croutier constructs an imaginary Turkey reminiscent of Said's Orient: a field of "considerable geographic ambitions" and a "confusing amalgam of [...] vagueness and precise detail" (*Orientalism* 50). The participation of other 'Orients' in the portrayal of this fictional Turkey helps the novel to amplify the country's exotic potential – otherwise 'confined' to its Ottoman dimension.

In his collectionist fervor and exotic masquerading, the Turkish patriarch and adventurer Iskender brings to mind the figure of the Western Orientalist venturing into unfamiliar spaces. This sheds an ambivalent light on the issue of

Orientalism in Croutier's novel, as the re- and hyper-Orientalization of the Turkish space conceal an attempt to relocate Turkey as predominantly Western, and push the boundaries of the Orient further East. Significantly, members of the İpekçi family oscillate between Ottomanesque manners – or even hyper-Orientalist exoticism – and their wish to participate in the rampant Westernization of the country.

It has become clear that, in *Seven Houses*, Ottoman tradition can no longer be the main source for the construction of contemporary Turkish identity. *Seven Houses* and its gardens also indicate that Turkey has become hybrid and Americanized. In the first years of the republic, the İpekçis adopt a strongly Americanized domesticity: after losing all their garden-like properties, they conform to a modern, anonymous, and bourgeois existence. Their everyday life is now replete with American products such as washing machines, refrigerators, Kleenex tissues, toilet paper and wall-to-wall carpeting. In addition to consuming American products, they also adopt “certain types of politics” (Raw 84) and imported American philosophies, such as of pragmatism, functionalism, consumerism and the “virus of time” (*Seven Houses* 123).

Laurence Raw's assessment of how the dissemination of American products has impacted Turkish identities is helpful to define Americanization in *Seven Houses*. In response to Edibe Sözen, who considers the spread of American commodities a threat to Turkey's indigenous culture, Raw argues that “the process vulgarly called ‘Americanization’” should rather be addressed as “*vertrossing*, an untranslatable Dutch word conveying the idea of mediation and creolization” (Raw 86). Croutier's openness towards Western models, and towards America less as an actual geographical space than an idea, is an invitation not to uncritically imitate and reproduce Americanness, but to creatively adapt it. Through the contact with American cultural and material products, Croutier's characters appear as actors involved in Raw's *vertrossing*, who “produce hybrid products” and thus “become producers themselves, utilizing these cultural products [...] both for their own ends, and for the benefit of the nation” (Raw 85). In the cottage garden, Amber and Nellie witness Ottoman magic and, although they fail to understand it completely, they inherit part of it and are entrusted with the task of forwarding it into a modern, Americanized Turkey, or into the U.S. itself.

Orientalism and the characters' posture of acceptance reveal a compliance with the American influence on Turkey. The novel supports the Westernization efforts of Kemalist Turkey by referring to American cultural influence as one of the most prominent component of Turkish national identity, not to mention the economy and foreign policy. Consequently, not only does *Seven Houses* approve

of the country's Westernization by showing how Turkish characters adapt to modernity without opposing resistance, but it also perpetrates the same re-Orientalist rhetoric adopted by the Kemalists by constructing the Ottoman past through Orientalist tropes. The novel's atmospheres, however, betray a great fascination for and nostalgia of Turkey's imperial culture, which is portrayed as a source of beauty and magic. The prominence of Ottoman themes grates against the pro-Westernization message that seems to permeate the novel, making *Seven Houses* a multilayered and ambivalent text.

This argument can be consolidated further by comparing *Seven Houses* to Pamuk's *The Black Book*, another novel that addresses the issues of urbanization and Americanization in Turkey and makes a symbolic use of gardens. In its cautious critique of urbanization, *Seven Houses* settles on a more moderate position than *The Black Book*, as it describes urbanization as an agent that changed Turkey only superficially: under the concrete buildings, an authentic Turkishness continues to exist, in the form of the buried ruins of ancient Anatolian civilizations. The superficiality and inoffensiveness of urbanization in *Seven Houses* is captured by the narrating voice of "The Spinster's Apartment," the İpekçi's new home in Ankara:

little did anyone know that underneath, less than twenty meters, a whole ancient city lay not yet uncovered. So, after all I was an old soul deep down. Despite the mask. (122)

While Pamuk repeatedly denounces the loss of a Turkish 'soul' (although *The Black Book* points at essentialist notions of culture as deceptive), Croutier insists that the soul of the Turks is intact behind the façade of Americanization/Westernization. "Deep in their hearts," the narrator announces, "Turks were still nomads" (209). Unlike the supposedly permanent nomadic nature of Turkishness, concrete buildings are made to "last no more than ten or fifteen years, then self-destruct" (ibid.). In spite of Turkey's urbanization, "nomads resist the threat of permanence" (121). In *The Black Book*, instead, a character depicts the urbanization of Istanbul as a much more alarming phenomenon:

In the autumn of 1957, you wrote an angry, mournful but carefully worded column about the mosques going up in the new suburbs of our fast-expanding city; [...] because your point was that these new suburbs lay siege to the city proper and surrounding us on all sides, and to see those concrete minarets pressed against the sky was to gaze upon a forest of hostile lances. (*The Black Book* 352)

The author's militaristic language portrays a city under siege, threatened, "surrounded," and "pressed" by a hoard of "hostile lances." Even though the proliferation of religious edifices such as mosques and minarets seems to pose a

conspicuous threat to the city, the ever-growing suburbs, with their concrete architecture, are just as sinister. The same is true for the novel's position on Americanization – of which *The Black Book* is much more critical than *Seven Houses*, or any other Turkish American text analyzed in this volume. In the chapter “Bedii Usta's Children,” for instance, characters are less inclined to consider Americanization as functional to the making of Turkish identity, and rather react against it with melancholic obstinacy.

If in *The Black Book* Ottoman cultural memory is lost and impossible to retrieve, in *Seven Houses* it was never lost completely. *The Black Book* resists Americanization, while *Seven Houses* settles for an attitude of hopeful acceptance. Similarly, while *Seven Houses* describes the rupture with the Ottoman heritage as necessary, *The Black Book* nostalgically clings to the past. On the one hand, *Seven Houses* does hold Americanization responsible for the destruction of the Ottoman Eden. On the other hand, the text internalizes Western conceptualizations of the East, replicating Orientalist canons in portraying the Ottoman Empire as a pre-colonial paradise, and labeling it as a folkloric impossibility in the context of the modern Turkish republic.

Wells and National Amnesia: Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*

What happened to the secret inside the pit that later became the gap?
When it turned into the gap, what happened to the pit and everything in it?
Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*

Once again, the choice to include a novel written in Turkish offers a valuable starting point for a comparative analysis of nature and garden imagery in Turkish American literature and literature in Turkish that clearly traverses national boundaries, but does not develop along bicultural lines. One of the main aspects that differentiates the garden in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book* from other examples explored so far is that it is more deeply grounded in the experience of collectivities rather than individuals or families. The ‘garden of memory’ in this novel emerges from the beginning as a collective metaphor articulated on a cultural level, without the mediation of a family story. First of all, Pamuk's garden is a backyard shared by the many families that inhabit an apartment house in Istanbul (not unlike the modern apartment building in Ankara the İpekçis move to in *Seven Houses*); secondly, the story of this shared courtyard – and its well – appears in a fictional column of the national newspaper *Milliyet*, which targets a national readership and presents the garden as a central metaphorical space in Turkish culture.

The Black Book's charismatic co-protagonist, Celâl, works as a columnist for *Milliyet*. In one of his columns, he reminisces about the apartment house where he was born, now in decay, and his memory goes directly to a pit – also called “the dark airshaft” or “the well” – in the building’s backyard. This well, by then devoid of any practical function, was still considered the dwelling space of evil spirits by the tenant families. Pamuk modifies this traditional narrative, rooted in centuries of Islamic folklore, by concentrating less on its magic aspects like Croutier did in *Seven Houses*, and turning it into a metaphor for the disruption of the Ottoman heritage in modern Turkey.

In many ways, the basement structure called the pit, the gap, the well, or the dark airshaft¹⁰³ in *The Black Book* is comparable to Maria’s well in *Seven Houses*, which hosts the phantoms of a mystic and multicultural past. *The Black Book* provides another representation of wells as mysterious structures infested with supernatural creatures, both real and imagined, and it echoes Turkey’s traditional “distaste” for underground structures (Cerasi 132). In addition, the novel inscribes its well in a lineage of Turkish literary wells:

it was of mythic proportions, [...] It was, I was sure, the same pit Sheikh Galip described in *Love and Beauty* and Rumi in *Mathnawi*. Lower a pail into it, and something cut the rope; they told us there was an ogre lurking in its darkest depths, a black ogre as big as our building. (206)

Croutier’s wells, very much like Shafak’s nature, appear as metonymies of private family stories and only later does their vaster cultural value become clear. By contrast, Pamuk’s well immediately latches onto a collective or even national dimension: first, because it is connected to a multiplicity of family stories, as it is located in a shared courtyard and not in a family garden. Second, because its origins are rooted in canonic texts of the Turkish Sufi tradition.¹⁰⁴

103 An in-depth analysis of the Turkish terms for pit, gap, well, and airshaft, as well as a critical assessment of Freely’s translation choices, would be extremely valuable but are not within the scope of this work.

104 Sheik Galip was an eighteenth century Turkish Sufi poet. His romance in verses *Beauty and Love* (Hüsn ü Aşk) is his most notable work; see Dilek Direnç, “Şeyh Galip: Beauty and Love” (2007). It is important to note that the first names of the two protagonists of *The Black Book*, Galip and Celâl, are meant to remind Turkish readers of Sheik *Galip* and *Jâlal* âd-Din Rumi. This detail, like many others, would go unnoticed by the majority of non-Turkish readers and points at the predominantly ‘national’ quality of Pamuk’s fiction.

Besides being the dwelling of supernatural beings, one of the most fascinating aspects of the well in the shared courtyard is its ‘anti-museumizing’ or ‘counter-archival’ (Göknaar 122)¹⁰⁵ function.

There was all variety of ordure in these basement passageways, things so disgusting they cried out for their own words: [...] unlucky forks and knives shaken into the petroleum void from the folds of flowered tablecloths, orphaned socks shaken from the folds of sleepy bed-sheets, dustcloths, cigarette ends, shards of glass from broken windows, crashed lightbulbs, shattered mirrors, rusty bedsprings, the armless torsos of pink baby dolls whose long-lashed eyes continued to open and close with hopeless obstinacy, deflated balls, soiled children underwear, the carefully shredded remains of suspect magazines, dubious newspapers, and photographs too fearsome to contemplate. (207)

Traditionally, the function of a museum is to salvage and exhibit selected objects that appear to its curators as representative of an epoch, culture, or cultural phenomenon. Museums, and the “museumizing” imagination, Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities*, are thus highly politicized (Anderson 107). The Kemalists had carefully selected the elements that would configure Turkey’s cultural memory and re-imagined national identity along primarily Western lines, hoping to confine unwanted cultural legacies to oblivion. In *The Black Book*, Pamuk suggests that a similar selective effort was being made at a smaller scale by Turkish families. Anderson confirms that museumizing efforts happen on the national as well as the domestic level. In *Imagined Communities*, he speaks of “photographs, birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical reports, and the like” as elements that “record a certain apparent continuity” (Anderson 204). As a consequence, their disruption betrays the hope for a rupture in historical and familial narratives. Jan Assmann’s concept of “Gedächtnis der Dinge,” the memory of things, helps us to outline the implications of the choice to rid oneself of objects. Assmann affirms that human beings have always been surrounded by things that embody their ideal of practicality, comfort, and beauty. Thus, things return the very image of their owner; they remind one of oneself, one’s past, one’s background (*Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* 20).¹⁰⁶ It is therefore logical that the

105 Göknaar claims that a “dissident archival mode” permeates Pamuk’s work (Göknaar, Orhan Pamuk 127). Pamuk’s “subversive counter-archives” in *The Silent House*, *The White Castle*, and *My Name is Red*, according to Göknaar, subvert the “official Republican discourses” and express the urgency to revise “secular modernity through a rejection of the authority of Republican historiography” (122). *The Black Book* is certainly to be listed as an example of this “dissident archival mode.”

106 “Der Mensch [ist] seit alters von Dingen umgeben, in die er seine Vorstellungen von Zweckmäßigkeit, Bequemlichkeit und Schönheit, und damit in gewisse Weise sich

tenants of Pamuk's apartment house – a metonymy for the Turkish nation in its entirety – decide to discard objects from their past that do not return an acceptable self-image, or return one they have learnt to dissociate themselves from.

Everyday life objects – such as cutlery, food rests, or toys – that are thrown or fall from the higher floors' domestic universe are gathered in the pit and form a disturbing collection that mocks and subverts the museumizing practice, gathering artifacts that should be forgotten rather than remembered, thrown away rather than preserved. Among other things lying on the bottom of the well, the image of “photographs too fearsome to contemplate” significantly expresses this subversion, as the well swallows photographs which would otherwise not be collected in family albums and would not serve the function of preserving memory. Those elements that were expunged from Turkey's collective memory, however, did not simply cease to exist but gathered underground, forming an alternative historical narrative.

Two passages confirm the initial assumptions that, first, wells connect to a collective or national dimension rather than an individual or familial one; second, they address the issue of collective memory and the repression of a shared past. In the chapter “O Brother Mine,” Galip, receives an anonymous phone call by one of Celâl's readers, who lists all the wells that ever appeared in Celâl's columns and demonstrates the literary and metaphorical significance of wells in Turkish culture.

“So let me pass quickly over the wells of divan poetry, and the well into which Rumi threw the body of the beloved Shams, or the wells of The Thousand and One Nights, [...] or the wells said to be inhabited by witches and giants, or the wells lurking in the gaps between apartment houses, or the dark and bottomless pits in which you claim *we* lost *our* souls.” (352, emphasis added)

The pronouns “we” and “our” imply that the wells, pits, and gaps of Turkey witnessed a national-scale loss. Gökner points out another passage in *The Black Book* where Pamuk uses the pronoun “we” in reference to the Turkish national community: a column by Celâl mysteriously written twenty-five years after his death. There, “Pamuk/Salik¹⁰⁷ uses the pronoun *we*, evoking the imagined community

selbst investiert. Daher spiegeln die Dinge ihm ein Bild seiner selbst wieder, erinnern ihn an sich, seine Vergangenheit, seine Vorfahren usw.”

107 In the passage Gökner reports, Celâl openly addresses his community of readers. The reference to a national collectivity is therefore more obvious. “But if I were alive today,” Celâl writes, “this is what I'd want to tell my readers: We ourselves are to blame as well” (Pamuk quoted in Gökner, “Secular Blasphemies” 323). In the analysis of this column by Celâl, Gökner equates the narrator with the writer, claiming that,

of Turks” (Göknar, “Secular Blasphemies” 323). In the quoted passage, “we” can hardly refer to the inhabitants of the apartment building described in Celâl’s column, since the reader does not know whether the man making the phone call used to live there or not. It probably indicates the vast readership of the national newspaper for which Celâl writes. As such, “we” stands for the Turkish national community as a whole, and the “souls” which have been lost inside these wells are those of the Turkish nation.

In the same dialogue between the anonymous phone caller and Galip, whom he mistakes for Celâl, the man uses the pronoun “we” in connection to the well metaphor: “Rather than raise our eyes to the sky to look at concrete minarets – we should look instead into the dark, dry, snake- and soul-infested wells of our submerged and forgotten past”¹⁰⁸ (352). Therefore, not only does *The Black Book* make the function of the well as the residence of Turkey’s forgotten memories explicit, but it also extends this function to the underground. Along with wells, also cellars and underground corridors function as an anti-museum that subverts Turkey’s official national memory.

The unpleasantness connected to the discarded objects on the bottom of the well sheds light on the feelings the Turkish population may have towards its own repressed cultural memory. The “petroleum void” (207) into which objects are thrown is reminiscent of the shiny black bottom of a well, concealing not ogres and jinnis like the family wells in *Seven Houses*, but the much bloodier threat of broken glasses and rusty metal. The inventory of discarded objects provided by the narrator opens a scenario of scabrous intimacies and family secrets, disorderly bodily functions (the soiled underwear), and clandestine sensual pleasures (the suspect magazines, the dubious newspapers). Particularly striking are the references to a somewhat monstrous humanity producing mutilated dolls and “photographs too fearful to contemplate” (ibid.). The embarrassment Turkish families feel towards their past is conducive to one of the most prominent themes of *The Black Book*, namely, the desire to forsake one’s own identity and be someone else – which is center stage in *The Bastard* and *The Saint* as well, especially in the figures of Asya, her father Mustafa, Omer, and Gail. *The Black Book* describes this attitude as epidemic in republican Turkey, where everyone, from single citizens down to the country itself, finds his or her own identity repulsive

through Celâl, Pamuk himself is commenting on “his transformation as an author (once national, now global)” (324).

108 It is my impression that the anonymous phone caller uses the terms “well” and “pit” interchangeably. In other areas of the text, however, the two terms convey different ideas. A more detailed analysis of the different terms and their uses will follow shortly.

and desires the lives of others. Turkish American novels maintain the focus on this narrative and simultaneously complicate it by engaging with the American, Armenian American, and Turkish American experiences.

This phenomenon of collective denial, implying an imposed lack of identification with the nation's imperial past and tradition is addressed frequently in Turkish American literature. It recurs in Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* and in her articles "Memory-less Turkey/Amnesiac Turkey" and "When a Nation is Afraid of Having a Memory." There, she denounces the way Turkey "turned her back to [her] Ottoman past, and pretend[ed] to have started history from scratch the day the modern nation-state was established" and felt "uncomfortable, if not embarrassed, about [its] 'Eastern' ways and pretend[ed] to be Western and nothing but Western" (Shafak n.p.). The image of the wells swallowing Turkey's repressed past and preserving it in a horrific anti-museum adds one more precious element to this discourse.

There is a moment in the history of the apartment house when the well, or the pit, becomes the "gap"; this moment corresponds to the 1950s and the second half of the 20th century, when Istanbul experienced rapid urbanization. Tall concrete blocks of flats were raised next to Ottoman houses and buildings in order to respond to the rapid increase of the urban population due to inland migration, as well as to evoke the outlook of modern Western cities (see Kucukmehmetoğlu and Geymen, 2009). The apartment house described in Celâl's column is part of the older urban texture, since "in no ways did the building resemble the ugly concrete affairs that would soon line the avenue like a filthy wall" (206). In addition, the building is initially embedded in a typically Turkish neighborhood. This situation, however, does not last:

When the apartment house was first built, there were empty lots on either sides [...] and you could see the mosque, the streetcar line, the girls' lycée, and Alâaddin's shop. [...] But the empty lot next door was sold to a builder, and soon there was a huge apartment house standing between us and the world, leaving nothing to contemplate but a row of new windows three yards away. This was how the gap into the well was formed. (206–207)

The translator's decision to use different words in reference to the periods before and after Istanbul's urbanization is very indicative. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a "pit" as "a hole in the ground, and related senses" or "a natural or man-made hole in the ground, usually a large or deep one." While a pit seems to unequivocally be "a hole in the ground," the definition of "gap" lays emphasis on the figurative use of the term. The first definition provided by the OED does not define a gap as a physical phenomenon, but as an abstract notion: "any opening or breach in an otherwise continuous object; a chasm or hiatus." The physical quality of such "breach"

is only covered by the second definition: “a breach in a wall or hedge, as the result of violence or natural decay.” Freely’s choice of terms is therefore particularly pertinent to the function of Pamuk’s gap, which indeed marks a “hiatus” in the otherwise continuous history of Turkey. The moment that turns the well from a communal source of water and the abode of mythological monsters into a gap where Turkish collective memory is lost can easily be associated with the reforms and measures implemented during the republican period, which opened the doors to an urbanization process that aimed to conform Turkish cities to Western architectural canons.¹⁰⁹

When some of these objects are occasionally brought back to the surface and shown to the tenant families in the hope of finding the owner, they vehemently repudiate the objects found in the disturbing depths of the pit/gap:

from time to time, the janitor would retrieve some of these objects and wander from floor to floor, holding the piece of filth in front of him, like a policeman who’s just clared a criminal, but no residents ever owned up to the dubious objects he dragged from the muddy underworld: “It’s not ours,” they would say. “It fell all the way down *there*, did it?” They uttered the word there as if it were a fear that they were desperate to escape and forget forevermore. (208)

There is a fundamental difference between the social function of a well – providing water for the community – and the pit, into which tenants carelessly drop their waste. If in the first case the well is a symbol of communal responsibility, in the second case the pit signifies its exact opposite: the lack of responsibility

109 In *East West Mimesis* (2010), Kader Konuk reflects on the symbolic power of fire in the context of early 20th century urbanization in Istanbul. Konuk quotes a passage from Pamuk’s *Istanbul: Memories of a City* in which the narrator expresses his mixed feelings about the destruction of Ottoman Istanbul due to frequent fires that ravaged the wooden structures of imperial architecture: “Ours was the guilt, loss, and jealousy felt at the sudden destruction of the last traces of a great culture and a great civilization that we were unfit or unprepared to inherit, in our frenzy to turn Istanbul into a pale, poor, second-class imitation of a western city” (Pamuk in Konuk 135). In the narrator’s imagination, Istanbulites welcome fire with “an uncomfortable mix of pleasure and despair” (Konuk 135) – not unlike the relief they feel when letting embarrassing mementos slip to the bottom of a well, and thus doing away with cultural memory. Konuk notes that this dual attitude towards the destruction of Istanbul’s Ottoman past is not limited to Pamuk, but appears in other examples of literature about late-empire and early-republic modernization, and she mentions Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’s non-fiction as an example for that. Konuk adds that, for Tanpınar and Pamuk, “fire invokes memories of the past, melancholy, transformation, and even modernization” (Konuk 134). Indicatively, the patriarch’s garden in *Seven Houses* is also destroyed by a fire.

towards collective spaces and the disregard for personal properties, which can be disposed of when no longer functioning. If the well seems to be at the center of practices of community-building in Turkey, its successive embodiments (the pit and the gap) stand for their erasure.

The opposition between a domestic “here” and a “down *there*,” emphasized by the narrator’s use of italics, evokes the imbalance between a central “Here” and a peripheral “There,” a Self and an Other. Within the apartment house, the domestic “here” points at the realm of the socially acceptable, whereas the “there” inside the well/pit/gap indicates a set of objects from which the building’s inhabitants are eager to separate. The parallel between the community of the apartment house and the Turkish national community suggests a similar imbalance within Turkey itself as a nation that is split between an inner “Here” (an official, admirable, and Westernized way of being Turkish), and an outer “There” – a shameful legacy that it seeks to “forget forevermore.”

In contrast to the other novels examined in this chapter, *The Black Book* openly denounces the influence of ‘American cultural imperialism’ during the republican period, and how seriously it impacted Turkish identity, cultural memory, even self-perception. In the chapter called “We Lost our Memories at the Movies,” the novel critiques Hollywood’s penetration of Turkish culture with alien habits and models that compromised Turkey’s self-perception and brought about the loss of national memory. Movies are described as a weapon used by “secret and invisible masters” (63) or “new masters” (128) in order to dilute national identity and turn Turkey into a docile ally. In the following citation from “We Lost our Memories at the Movies,” “new” imperialist strategies and “old” ones are compared:

Instead of bringing new settlers to populate this new state, as their predecessors had done a thousand years ago, [our new masters] would turn the old inhabitants into ‘new people,’ tailored to serve their purpose [...] The new plan was to erode our collective memory with movie music. Church organs, pounding out chords of a fearful symmetry, women as beautiful as icons, the hymnlike repetition of images, and those arresting scenes sparkling with drinks, weapons, airplanes, designer clothes – put all this together and it was clear that the movie method proved far more radical and effective than anything missionaries had attempted in Africa and Latin America. (126–127)

The juxtaposition of religious elements (the organ, the hymn, Madonnas painted on icons) and secular ones evoking the tenets of Hollywood cinema (beautiful women, “scenes sparkling with drinks, weapons, airplanes, designer clothes”) heralds a new type of cultural imperialism that sweeps Turkey. A conversion to Western aesthetic canons, imagery, and cultural products replaces the violent expropriation of the land carried out by the Western empires of the past. While no

new “settlers” came to reside in what is effectively called a “new state” (Turkey was, in fact, a new state, as before 1923 there was no such thing as a Turkish nation), the local population was converted to alien ideas of secularism and progress. If the reference to “fearful symmetries,” via Blake’s poem “The Tyger,” draws an immediate connection to British and European imperialism, in the second part of the passage the aesthetics of Hollywood cinema seem to predominate.

The missing ring that connects American cultural imperialism and the well metaphor is the visual nature of memory. In *The Black Book*, lost memory is mostly visual memory, as demonstrated by the images of the family archive, the photographs, the fading of the Turkish features from the faces of Galip and Celâl’s fellow citizens, and the critique of Hollywood. Further evidence of the visual nature of lost memory is provided by an episode in which a boy threatens to blow up a movie theater in Istanbul and demands that “they give him his eyes back – the eyes that could see the *old* images” (127, emphasis in the text). The parallel that finally and definitively connects the loss of visual memory and American cultural imperialism can be found in the passage where the anonymous phone caller cites from one of Celâl columns. In the fictive text, Turkey’s forgotten past is compared to

an eye that would go on haunt you for years, reminding you, wherever you went, of the sins of your past; it was not by accident but by design that you chose to describe this visual organ as looking “like a dark well in the middle of the forehead.” (352)

The most salient difference between wells in *The Black Book* and their Turkish American manifestation lies in *The Black Book*’s specific focus on a national perspective rather than on a transnational or bicultural one. *The Black Book* shows little interest in the hybridization of Turkish identity, and is rather invested in discussing, problematizing, and eventually deconstructing the dynamics through which memory and identity could be retrieved from under the mask of Westernization, and cleansed from alien – most notably American – influences.

Two elements have the power to bring back the memories that have been thrown into the well: children and flowers. In *The Black Book*, children are the only ones who show interest in the repulsive world of the pit/gap:

but, God be thanked, there is always someone willing to rummage through the forbidden pages of the past in search of treasures, and so it was in the long hallways (kept dark to save on electricity), when children (ah, children!) squirmed between the tightly drawn curtains and pressed their little foreheads against the windows to stare into the air shaft. (208)

Besides stressing the role children have in recovering Turkey’s cultural memory, the quote illustrates once more the parallel between the objects deposited inside

the airshaft and the forgotten pages of the nation's history, as searching the airshaft means to "rummage through the forbidden pages of the past." A mention to the salvific power of children can be found in *Seven Houses* as well: after the destruction of Iskender Bey's plantation and the moving to Ankara, Amber is the only character who continues dreaming of the plantation: "Amber drew houses, enchanted places with doors and windows and gables leading to other dimensions hidden behind ivy and vine, towers and cupolas and secret gardens" (*Seven Houses* 124).

Pamuk wraps up his well symbolism by mentioning individual gardens of memory that can be either "dry" or "heavenly" (*The Black Book* 134–135) – a distinction that suggests the absence and the presence of flowers and other garden amenities – and depicts the moment in which one retrieves one's (cultural) memory as the opening of flowers in a garden. This happens to Galip, when the questions posed by the anonymous phone caller who mistakes him for Celâl cause him to remember episodes from his life and Celâl's. Listening to the man's voice, Galip remains "amazed by the flowers that opened in the garden of his memory with each answer, intrigued by the seeming endlessness of the garden from which his opponent plucked his questions" (353).

A comparison between *The Black Book* and *Seven Houses* helps to shed light on the differences between Turkish and Turkish American literature and is functional on two levels. First, both novels present images of gardens and wells that acquire great prominence in the plot and become the vehicle of significant cultural symbolism. Second, *The Black Book* covers the years between 1960 and the 1980 military coup (Göknaç, *Orhan Pamuk* 225), a period which *Seven Houses* also addresses towards the end. This is a crucial period in Turkish history as it displays the effects of Americanization on the country. *The Black Book* approaches the logic and consequences of American cultural penetration from the perspective of what Ferenbach and Poigner call "imperialist narrative" (Ferenbach and Poigner xix), concentrating on the loss of identity that ensues from the widespread adoption of American habits and aesthetics. In *The Black Book*, the narrator meets characters who lament the impact of Hollywood aesthetics on Turkish identity and self-perception. The novel occasionally comments on the impact of Americanization on the Turkish economy: Bedii Usta's mannequin atelier, for example, is doomed to irrelevance by the new Westernized aesthetics films have contributed to spread. By contrast, Croutier does not appear as critical of Americanization and indicates that Turkish history and identity are inevitably progressing towards hybridity. Westernization and Americanization infiltrate the lives of the characters at a very profound level. Camilla names her daughter

after an English novel set in 17th-century England (*Forever Amber*, by Kathleen Winsor), turned into a movie by 20th Century Fox. Camilla herself is repeatedly described through her uncanny resemblance to a Hollywood star of Mexican origins, Dolores del Rio. It seems almost inevitable that the family saga rooted in the glorious days of the Ottoman Empire would continue in the United States, where Amber and Nellie – the Turkish American generation who conclude the novel – return after having visited their native Turkey.

‘Becoming someone else’ is undoubtedly a very prominent theme in both novels and offers a powerful commentary on Americanization in Turkey. According to modernization theory, argues Bozdoğan, “the ability to imagine oneself as someone else or as being somewhere else, especially in America, was a major criterion distinguishing the ‘moderns’ from the ‘traditionals’” (Bozdoğan 118). If the İpekçis are forced to re-invent themselves in republican Turkey as a bourgeois family, leaving behind their aristocratic past as the whole nation left behind its Ottoman heritage, *The Black Book* gravitates around the obsessive desire to be someone else and the contradictory necessity who remain who we are. While the İpekçis face the change with a cheerful spirit and succeed in reintegrating in the republican world, the characters in *The Black Book* struggle to find a way back to who they were, to the naïve delusion of a “non-American purity” (Fluck, “The Americanization of German Culture?” 30); some of them die in the process (Celâl), others remain trapped in an endless melancholia (Galip, Bedii Ustaa and his son). Paradoxically, the search for cultural authenticity in *The Black Book* is conducive to the realization that there was never such thing as an authentic Turkishness. *Seven Houses*, instead, regards Turkishness as a combination of influences and possibilities that never attack a supposed cultural core that one of the narrating houses identifies as the nomadic experience. The Turkish American chapter of the family saga can therefore be read as yet another manifestation of this attachment to nomadic practices.