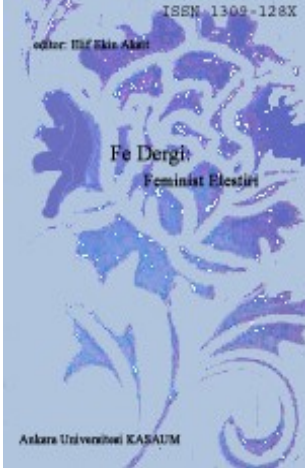


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### **Shekure's room for her own: A Feminist reading of Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red***

*Niloofar Arjomandi and Sohila Faghfori*<sup>1</sup>

*This paper presents a feminist reading of Orhan Pamuk's prize winner novel, My Name is Red. Feminism is a common approach applied to the study of literary works. It always reveals new things to be discovered about women's essence and their place in the world. The study of women's history indicates their ceaseless suffering and oppression caused by male gender throughout the centuries. Since old times, women have always struggled for their rights. Moreover, many great figures have endeavored to bring changes to the position of women in the male-dominated world. The contemporary Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk, can be considered to be one of these figures. As a postmodern writer he has tried to deconstruct the binary opposition of male/female in his historical novel My Name is Red. It is the story of a woman called Shekure who struggles to define her identity in a patriarchal society and attempts to shape her fate among powerful men. Indeed, through this character, Pamuk is able to depict all the sufferings and oppressions brought to women by the Ottoman society of 16<sup>th</sup> century and even the present-day Turkey. Although the novel includes 59 chapters mostly related by male characters, Pamuk lets his female characters speak as well. This paper attempts to show the feminist ideas of Pamuk by analyzing the chapters related by the main female characters of the novel, Shekure and Esther. The stories related by these characters are of great interest to the readers. This study further reveals some information about the lives of women in 16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Society of Turkey and how this condition has improved as the result of women's struggle for self-discovery and female identity exploration. Shekure is the representative of such strong and brave women who have gone a long way through the journey of self-discovery. She revolts against the traditional image of women as submissive and inferior to men and defines her place in her society. In other words, Shekure is an intelligent woman who demands to have a place in her patriarchal society, to tell her story to the readers and to have a room of her own.*

*Keywords: Feminism, postmodernism, Ottoman Empire, My Name is Red, Orhan Pamuk*

#### **Şeküre'nin kendine ait odası: Orhan Pamuk'un *Benim Adım Kırmızı* romanının feminist bir okuması**

*Bu makale Orhan Pamuk'un ödüllü romanı Benim Adım Kırmızı'nın feminist bir okumasını sunuyor. Feminizm edebi eserleri çalışırken sıklıkla kullanılan bir yaklaşımdır. Her zaman kadınların özüne ve dünyadaki yerlerine dair keşfedilecek yeni şeyler ortaya çıkarır. Kadınların tarihi bize, kadınların erkek cinsi yüzünden yüzyıllar boyunca yaşadığı ızdırıp ve baskıyı göstermektedir. Eski zamanlardan beri kadınlar hakları için mücadele etmiştir. Dahası birçok önemli kişi kadınların erkek egemen dünyadaki konumlarını değiştirmek için çabalamıştır. Günümüz Türkiye yazarlarından Orhan Pamuk bu kişiler arasında sayılabilir. Postmodern bir yazar olarak, tarihsel romanı Benim Adım Kırmızı'da erkek/kadın ikili karşıtlığını yapıçözüme uğratmaya çalışmıştır. Roman ataerkil toplumunda kendi kimliğini tanımlamaya çalışan ve güçlü erkekler arasında kaderini çizmeye çalışan Şeküre isimli bir kadının hikayesini anlatır. Bu karakter yoluyla Pamuk, on altıncı yüzyıl Osmanlı toplumunda olduğu kadar günümüz Türkiye'sinde de kadınların yaşadığı ızdırıp ve baskıları anlatmaktadır. Her ne kadar roman daha çok erkeklere ilişkin 59 bölümden oluşsa da, Pamuk kadın karakterlerinin konuşmasına da izin verir. Bu makale, asıl kadın karakterler olan Şeküre ve Ester'e ilişkin bölümleri inceleyerek Pamuk'un feminist fikirlerini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu karakterlerin hikayeleri okurun ilgisini çekecektir. Çalışma, on altıncı yüzyıl Osmanlı toplumunda kadınların yaşamları ile ilgili çeşitli bilgileri ortaya koyacak ve bu koşulların kadınların kendilerini ve kadın kimliğini keşfetme mücadeleleri yoluyla nasıl iyileştirdiğini gösterecektir. Şeküre kendini keşif yolculuğunda uzun bir yol kat etmiş olan güçlü ve cesur*

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*bir kadındır. Kadının boyun eğen ve erkeklerden aşağı konumdaki geleneksel imgesine başkaldırmakta ve toplumdaki konumunu tanımlamaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle Şeküre ataerkil toplumda bir konum talep eden ve kendisine ait bir odaya sahip olmak için hikayesini okurlara anlatan zeki bir kadındır.*

*Anahtar sözcüker: Feminizm, postmodernizm, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Benim Adım Kırmızı, Orhan Pamuk*

### Introduction

One of the most prominent approaches to the study of literary works is Feminist Criticism. Although it started in 1960s, the story of women's struggle for freedom and equal rights has roots in previous centuries. In other words, women have always desired to be seen, heard and understood by their societies. Feminism questions the male-centered societies. It highlights the existence of women in the world and their equality to men in social, cultural and political rights. A look back into the history makes it clear that the development of women's lives and conditions all over the world owes a lot to some historical figures who laid the foundation of feminism by their great efforts. A prominent precursor to bring forward the feminist notions is considered to be Mary Wollstonecraft. In her book *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she rejected the inferiority of women and advocated the women's rights and their equality to men. Later in 19<sup>th</sup> century several other figures including John Stuart Mill and Margaret Fuller defended the women's rights (Abrams 1999, 88). Feminist literary criticism developed significantly in 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, issues related to women began to be discussed mostly in the second half of the century. Many great figures from different countries freely expressed their ideas about women. Moreover, during this time women found their way into society and gained the opportunity to be active in social, cultural, political and literary fields; however the patriarchal society still existed and men were considered superior to women (Bressler 2007, 167). The present day's feminist criticism has its origins in the ideas of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) who was a great British scholar and writer of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her seminal work called *A Room of One's Own* (1929) includes her negative attitudes towards the patriarchal society and mainly discusses the rights of women and their equality to men. She believes that women should not be considered inferior and it is necessary for them to define their own identities apart from men; moreover, Woolf believed that women should reject the female image constructed by their society and culture.

When talking about feminist criticism, an outstanding name triggers in mind. It is Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), a French writer who after World War II brought a great impetus to feminism. In 1949, she published her book entitled *Le Deuxieme Sex* or *The Second Sex*, "a seminal work which questioned the whole position and role of women in society and was a critique of women's cultural identification" (Cuddon 1999, 316-17). *The Second Sex* is regarded as the most influential book in feminist criticism. Beauvoir's concern was the place and role of women characters in literary works. She rejected men's treatment of women as the "Other" and tried to change the socially constructed image of women as subordinated to men. Mary Ellmann(1921-1989) and Kate Millett(1934-) were two feminists who developed de Beauvoir's approach in 1960s and 1970s (Quinn 2006, 162). Other significant feminists who contributed to the present day feminist criticism include Betty Friedan (1921-2006), Sandra Gilbert (1936-), Susan Gubar (1944-), Elaine Showalter(1941-), Julia Kristeva (1941-), Helen Cixous (1937-) and etc.

Feminism or the struggle of women for freedom and equality in Eastern or Islamic countries is even more prominent than West. Although many of the great feminist figures appeared in Western countries and gave rise to the movement, in Islamic Countries women have always revealed their protest against the rigid rules laid by their patriarchal states. Turkey is one of the Islamic countries in which women's role and place have always been inferior to men's. Although the condition of women in the present day turkey is improving and they are trying to define themselves, the history of Turkey reveals that women have suffered a lot and have experienced hard times since the previous eras. A significant historical period which needs to be investigated in this respect is the Ottoman era. The Ottomans ruled Turkey for 6 centuries, from 1281 to1924. Actually the Ottoman Empire was one of the richest and most prominent Islamic dynasties. The Empire was totally patriarchal. Men were deemed more important and "women's putative physical and moral weaknesses rendered them subject to men. As a general rule women were economically dependent on men and derived their social positions from their husbands and fathers". (Zilfi 2010, 16)

To better understand the women's conditions in the Ottoman era, it can be compared with the Victorian Society of England. There are similarities in some sense. Both were:

Traditional societies in which the rules had been previously determined by males in accordance with the religion and tradition related norms; thus, the oppression of patriarchy could be felt in every field. As social practice, the complete submission of the woman to the man was supposed and even forced. Furthermore, the woman was regarded as the repository of the nation's virtue - defined as essentially domestic and private, bound to family, ideals of affection, loyalty, and obligation to domestic production or housekeeping. (Nazlıpınar 2012).

The situation of women in Ottoman era was even worse. The Ottoman Society of Turkey was completely "silent on the subject of woman. It was even improper to talk about her" (Safarian 2007, 141). According to Madeline C. Zilfi, "The Islamic Middle East field has come late and slowly to the study of women". (Zilfi 1997, 1) It was during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II that there were some reforms. Indeed the first organizations for women were established in 1867. Even these organizations would ignore the social status of women and had only cultural and educational nature. The struggle for the liberation of women in the Ottoman Empire gained impetus after the Young Turk Revolution (1908). This movement was projected into the literary works of 19<sup>th</sup> century writers. Many women started to write poetry and prose. In addition, they wrote for journals dedicated to women and protested against the Ottoman's attitude toward women (Safarian 2007, 142-144).

The traditional structure remained much longer in the Ottoman society than in the West. Actually the move from the traditional to Modernity and Westernization of society started late in Turkey. Little by little women gained their independence and were able to express themselves in different areas (Nazlıpınar 2012). 1920s and 1930s was a significant period for establishment of women's rights in Turkey. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey brought a great change to the condition of women. He defended women's rights by placing them at the core of the society. Moreover, he declared women's equality to men in both social and political issues. Therefore, by Modernization of society and developing women's place and role, Atatürk can be considered a feminist who seriously initiated the movement in Turkey (Ulker Erkan 2011, 1018-1020).

Feminist literary criticism focuses on female characters and highlights their role and place in literary works. Almost all the works of fiction from all over the world attribute some special characteristics to their female characters which need to be studied under the light of feminist theories. From 20th century onward, several men and women writers have tried to negate the inferiority of women by deconstructing their traditional roles. Thanks to Jacques Derrida and the other postmodern scholars, the binary opposition of male/female is fading. As stated earlier, the equality of men and women is not wholly achieved. In Islamic or Eastern countries, this binary opposition still remains and women are suffering from living in male-centered societies. Many critics and writers in these countries have tried and are still trying to change women's condition. One of the most significant writers who struggle to change the social structures of their countries is Orhan Pamuk (1952- ). He is a well-known Turkish writer who won the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. Pamuk is a postmodern literary figure whose books are the best seller in Turkey. He himself asserts that he is "a happy postmodernist (Saracoglu 2006, 2). As a postmodern writer Pamuk tries to bring changes to the traditional ways of storytelling and he wants to deconstruct the old notions with regard to social, political, religious and cultural structures and notions of his country.

Pamuk has written seven outstanding novels including *Cevdet Bey and Sons*(1982), *The Silent House*( 1983), *The White Castle*( 1985),*The Black Book* (1990), *My Name is Red*(1998), *snow*( 2002), and *The Museum of innocence*(2008). Trauma, war, fragmented identity and the search for self are the major themes of the postmodern Pamuk (Grace 2007, 104).<sup>13</sup> Each of the novels reveals unstable identities in a Turkish historical context especially Ottoman Empire. Pamuk moves from realism of *cevdet bey and sons* to modernism in *The Silent House* and at last to postmodernism. He reveals the clash of East and West in some of his novels including *The Black Book* and *My Name is Red*. Furthermore, he chooses history as the setting of his novels by focusing on four major areas: "Ottoman history in a European context, the transition from Ottoman Empire to Modern Middle East, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Kemalist cultural revolution and the legacy of all three on present-day Turkey" (Goknar 2012, 34).

Among Pamuk's novels, *My Name is Red* (MNR) is a literary masterpiece that won three literary awards including 2002 Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger (France), 2002 Premio Grinzane Cavour (Italy), and 2003 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (Ireland). The story is set in 16<sup>th</sup> century Turkey under the Ottoman reign of Sultan Murat III. It revolves around a mysterious murder of a miniaturist that happens as a result of the conflicts between the Islamic Miniature painting and the Venetian art of portraiture. There is a real tension between the Eastern values and the Western values which leads to the murder of a painter. The Ottoman

Sultan wants the Miniature artists to work on a secret illustrated book according to the Western (Venetian) style of art and painting. The novel also includes a bitter- sweet love story between Shekure and Black. Shekure is the widow daughter of Enishte Effendi, the producer of the secret book and Black is Shekure's cousin who left Istanbul 12 years ago for the sake of his unfulfilled love for Shekure. He has never forgotten Shekure and he wants to win her love. Now he is back and Enishte needs his help for the secret book and to find the murderer.

Pamuk's use of multiple narrators is one of the features that make the story more appealing. *My Name is Red* is told by several narrators and each one narrates his/her own story. Although most of the actions in the novel are recounted by male narrators, Pamuk introduces two female characters who speak for the readers during the course of the novel. In other words, the readers are given the chance to hear the story from both male and female points of view. The chapters related by female characters bring a new atmosphere to the novel which makes it extraordinary. Shekure as one of the main characters is given the right to speak about her feelings, opinions and her life as a widow. The story is full of binary oppositions and tensions but the binary opposition of male/female is apparent in most parts of the novel. So far several studies have been done on *My Name is Red*, mostly in the field of cultural studies. Hence, this paper is an attempt to study *My Name is Red* under the light of feminism and with regard to feminist claims and quotations from feminist thinkers. Pamuk's concern for women's rights is mostly revealed by Shekure who dares to express her womanhood during the course of the novel. Besides, Pamuk aims to introduce Shekure as a representative of Turkish women who rebel against the binary opposition of male/female and reveal their endless efforts to change the social status of their country.

### Discussion

*My Name is Red* reveals the social and cultural norms and structures laid by of the Ottoman Empire. As stated earlier, the Ottoman society of the novel is based on "phallocentrism". The story not only reveals the cultural and religious condition of 16th century Turkey, but it also provides a clear image of the social condition of the country and the role and place of men and women within the society. The novel includes 59 chapters of which 38 are related by men, 13 by women and 8 by non-human narrators including dog, tree, money, death, red color, horse and Satan. Unlike traditional works of fiction which were usually narrated by male voice and male characters were the focus of the story, Pamuk lets the readers investigate the minds of his female characters by listening to their stories. Shekure is the main female character who appears to talk in 8 chapters. She is a brave and strong woman who gives value to herself as a female. Pamuk depicts her as a woman who revolts against the traditions to define herself and find her place in the male-centered society. "Elusive, changeable, enigmatic and immensely beguiling, she is the finest portrait in the book. Not a portrait, in fact a Persian miniature." (Eder 2001, 2). Shekure is a character full of mysteries. Like a miniature painting she is full of colors and details that must be seen and understood.

David Damrosch, the professor of comparative literature at Harvard University, believes that "Shekure is one of the most interesting characters in the novel. It's a very sympathetic portrait of a complicated woman who is trying to negotiate her position within the traditional confines of a patriarchal society of her time" (Learner). In her first chance to speak, Shekure relates the love story between herself and Black. The immature love between a 12 years old girl and 24 years old boy. She does not give credit and wisdom to Black as a lover "Though he was twelve years my elder, when I was twelve, I was more mature than he." (Pamuk 2006, 44).

It is clear that Shekure blames not herself but Black for the unfulfilled love between them. By reading her life story, the readers of the novel will get to know Shekure as an intelligent and independent woman. She is strong enough to choose and make decisions for her own life. Her father Enishte Effendi has always tried to keep her near himself. Shekure herself considers her father a man who has always tried to decide for her life:

If it were left to my father, my husband would not only be the greatest of scholars, he'd also have an appreciation for painting and art, be possessed of power and authority, and be as rich as Karun, the wealthiest of men in the Koran. The inkling of such a man couldn't even be found in the pages of my father's books, and so I would've been forced to pine away at home forever (Pamuk 2006, 48).

Though her true love is Black, Shekure has married a soldier and has two sons, Sevket and Orhan. Her husband is an army soldier who has not returned from war. All the people including herself believe that he is dead and that he will never return; therefore, she is considered a widow. Although Enishte is completely the

image of a man who wants to keep women's fate in his hands, Shekure proves that she herself can choose her future husband. She tells the reason she fell in love with her husband. Unlike other men found in her society, she describes her husband as "innocent and quiet like a sleepy child...gentle and quiet as a lady" (Pamuk 2006, 49). She loves her husband simply because he is a different man, he did not try control her or perhaps he did not treat her like a slave. In other words, Shekure's husband is not a representative of the rigid patriarchy of her time.

Not only does Shekure struggle to define herself as a woman in her society, but she also attempts to free herself from all the restrictions that the society and culture impose upon her. She rejects the socially constructed image of women. Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* asserts that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society. It is civilization as whole that produces this creature." (De Beauvoir 1953, 273) In *My Name is Red*, it is clear that the female characters are suffering from these restrictions to the point that they feel weak and lonely. Shekure reveals her contradictory feelings with regard to her womanhood. In a letter she writes to Black after he returns to Istanbul, She rejects his love and wants him to forget her forever. Indeed she expresses her loneliness while she denies it:

I might feel lonely, hopeless and weak living with my two children and an elderly father. I miss the strength and protection of a man, but let no one assume he might take advantage of my situation; therefore it would please me if you ceased Calling on us. You did embarrass me once before, and afterward, I had to endure much suffering to regain my honor in my father's eyes (Pamuk 2006, 41).

Shekure's society constructs women in a way that they never feel stable in their manners. Shekure suffers from a sort of psychological disorder and her feelings keep on changing. She extremely loves Black but is afraid that he may hurt her feelings like when he left her 12 years ago. Furthermore, she is a widow and this adds to her fears. Though she is madly in love with Black, she places her self-esteem above her love. Shekure wants to be recognized as a person who has rights to be free and independent. She doesn't let Black or any other man look upon her as an object of pleasure. She is even willing to sacrifice her feelings in order to be understood. She believes that honor is a necessity for a woman. Perhaps by telling her story, she tries to make all women of her society aware of their situation. If like Shekure all the Turkish women try to define themselves as independent and worthwhile human beings, men will not allow themselves to insult them.

In the Ottoman Society of the *My Name is Red* there is no freedom of mind for women. They cannot have a place in social, cultural and economic fields. They are rarely seen and heard of and they terribly suffer from being neglected. Among these women, it is Shekure who dares to speak her words and make herself visible. She tells her readers that she has always searched to find women's place in Society and she has found them all alike. In her point of view a woman in the Ottoman Society is not given the right to breathe, to live her own life, to decide about her future or to have a room for her own. Now that Shekure is telling a story, she is in fact trying to deconstruct the women's place, not only in her own society but in the whole world.

Don't be surprised that I'm talking to you. For years I've combed through the pictures in my father's books looking for images of women and great beauties. They do exist, if few and far between, and always look shy, embarrassed, gazing only at one another, as if apologetically. Never do they raise their heads, stand straight and face the people of the world as soldiers and sultans would. Only in cheap, hastily illustrated books by careless artists are the eyes of some women trained not on the ground or on something in the illustration—oh, I don't know, let's say a lover or a goblet—but directly at the reader. I've long wondered about that reader (Pamuk 2006, 48).

Shekure believes that unlike sultans and soldiers, women's names are not written in history and they do not have the right to show themselves. Even in paintings they are rarely seen or they are depicted as weak and worthless. Shekure wonders why women are not allowed to speak or write about themselves. So, she speaks to break this patriarchal ideology. Shekure's ideas with regard to the social place of women and their rights to be active members of society are similar to the Virginia Woolf's. Like Woolf She is concerned with women's rights to express themselves by freely writing about their lives and experiences. Virginia Woolf in her feminist text, *A Room of One's Own* reveals her idea about women's freedom. She claimed that "a woman must have money and

a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” (Woolf 2001, 6). Shekure’s act of storytelling can be considered a starting point for all the women. Moreover, she is optimistic about the future of women; “perhaps one day someone from a distant land will listen to the story of mine. Isn’t this what lies behind the desire to be inscribed in the pages of a book?” (Pamuk 2006, 48) Shekure wants women to write their stories and their own history indeed. She believes that a woman must be pictured in a beautiful and attractive way and the value of women must be preserved in paintings and writings. She tells her readers, “I, too long to speak with you who are observing me from who knows which distant time and place. I’m an attractive an intelligent woman and it pleases me that I’m being watched.” (Pamuk 2006, 48) In Shekure’s point of view women have the right to be happy for their existence in the world and they don’t need to be ashamed of themselves.

As a woman, Shekure has to deal with different problems. Pamuk wants to reveal that the life of a woman in such a society means trouble and distress. Being a widow demonstrates one of the most problematic issues in Shekure’s society. Not only is she suffering from being a woman but she is also dealing with the problem of being called a widow. The fate of many women in this society is like Shekure, as she herself asserts: “when I realized how many lonely women like me with missing soldier-husbands there were in Istanbul, I resigned myself to my fate.” (Pamuk 2006, 49) Shekure tells the readers some of the most irritating things she had to handle as a widow woman, the problems she faced when she lived with her father in law and her brother in law, Hasan. When they sell their slave to get some money, it is Shekure who has to play the role of a slave for them. She relates her gloomy experience to the readers:

They wanted me to do the kitchen work, wash the clothes and even go out to the bazaars to do the shopping in her stead. I didn’t protest by saying “Am I the type of woman to take on such drudgery?” I swallowed my pride and went to work. But when that brother-in-law of mine Hasan, now without his slave girl to take into his room at night, began forcing my door, I didn’t know what to do (Pamuk 2006, 49-50).

Though Shekure is opposed to the patriarchal rules of her country, she has to go against the grain. As de Beauvoir says “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being . . . she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.” (Habib 2005, 683) Shekure’s father-in-law and brother-in-law attempt to define her as a slave, an inferior who is dependant to them. Furthermore, Hasan regards her as an object of pleasure. It seems that for him a woman signifies two things, housework and sexual pleasure; however, Shekure with her strong will withstands these problems and finds a way to escape this trauma. The intelligent Shekure rejects Hasan’s love on the basis of the fact that this relationship is a master/slave relationship rather than a true love “If I were to do this without careful thought, I might find myself, God forbid, his slave instead of his wife.” (Pamuk 2006, 50)

Shekure is the representative of all the women in her society who are victims of social constructionism, those patriarchal rules that the male-centered society forces upon them. While Shekure struggles to assert her female identity, she gets into trouble with the men surrounding her life. She wants divorce so that she can separate her life from Hasan and his father. On the other hand, she does not want to live with her own father till the end of her life. What Shekure needs is an independent life free from all the restrictions imposed upon her. Though her patriarchal society considers women as dependent, submissive and inferior, Shekure proves the opposite. She herself asserts how the men of her society including Hasan and her father, Enishte need her in their lives. It seems that without Shekure’s presence life is impossible for them. After she leaves her husband’s house, it is the lovelorn Hasan who sends letters to Shekure and tells her about his woeful state, “love letters in whose corners he drew forlorn birds, teary eyed lions, and sad gazelles.” (Pamuk, 2006, 51). Yet, in another letter he wrote “In my dreams I see myself chasing you over deserted hilltops. Every time you leave one of my letters—that I know you read—unanswered, a three-feathered arrow pierces my heart” (Pamuk 2006, 149). Also Shekure’s father needs her endlessly near himself. As Shekure herself says “My father doesn’t want me to be declared a widow by verdict of the judge either. If I am granted a divorce, he thinks I’ll find myself a new husband and abandon him.” (Pamuk 2006, 167) Thus, it is Enishte not Shekure, who finds himself weak and lonely in his daughter’s absence. Not only does Shekure’s story negates the binary opposition of male/ female, but it also indicates that men are indeed weaker and more dependent than women. This is in fact Pamuk’s art of

deconstructing. Through his brilliant female character, Shekure, he negates the social constructions of the Ottoman society.

Esther, the Jewish peddler is another female voice in the novel. Five chapters are related by this character. She is a matchmaker who carries letters between Hasan and Shekure and later between Black and Shekure. Though illiterate and harsh, Esther is depicted as a sociable and intelligent woman; When Black meets her for the first time he describes her in this way: "She was as large and wide as an armoire. Yet she was boisterous, lively and even coquettish." (Pamuk 2006, 37) She roams the streets and allures women to buy her stuff. Like Shekure, she is depicted as a strong and independent woman. She is aware of the fact that in this Islamic society, nothing is equal between men and women. Esther is a woman who appears in every social gathering and knows about the lives of women in this society "I was Esther, a woman who went in and out of thousands of homes and was acquainted with hundreds of widows; I knew that women who lost their husbands early were spellbound either by defeat and misery or anger and rebellion." (Pamuk 2006, 265) Although she is ready to do everything for the sake of money, during the course of the novel she is seen encouraging Shekure. When Shekure feels depressed and lonely it is Esther who calms her down and makes her aware of her dignity and value. Somehow, Esther can be considered the novel's heroine, someone who has a great influence upon the novel's chain of events. She helps Shekure to find her identity and personal life and she is the only person who defends Shekure's rights. At the end of the novel, it is Esther who dares to stand in front of Hasan and his father to free Shekure from their prison:

The entire neighborhood, and the judge who presides over these parts, that is everyone, knows that Shekure has long been divorced and properly remarried in keeping with the dictates of the Koran," I said. "Even if your son, who has long since passed away, came back to life and returned here to you from Heaven in the company of the Prophet Moses, it'd be of no use for he's divorced from Shekure. You've abducted a married woman and are holding her here against her will." (Pamuk 2006, 374)

As a brave woman Esther defends Shekure's rights. She shouts her womanhood. In other words, she has a very important role in Shekure's journey of self-discovery.

One of the most interesting chapters of *My Name is Red* is the 54<sup>th</sup> chapter entitled "I am a Woman". In this Chapter a male voice tells the readers about the experience of making himself a woman by changing his appearance. Indeed through this narrator, Pamuk discards the traditional image of women and tries to depict them from a different point of view. "Let me first state forthright that contrary to what we've often read in books and heard from preachers, when you are a woman, you don't feel like the Devil." (Pamuk 2006, 381) The narrator believes that the sense of being a woman is different from what men always deem:

When I pulled on my mother's rose-embroidered wool underclothes, a gentle sense of well-being spread over me and I felt as sensitive as she. The touch against my bare skin of my aunt's pistachio-green silk shirt, which she could never bring herself to wear, made me feel an irrepressible affection toward all children, including myself. I wanted to nurse everybody and cook for the whole world. (Pamuk 2006, 381)

The narrator's curiosity about the women's essence makes him understand how much they have been devalued and oppressed by the men. Perhaps, Pamuk wants to say that if men try to put themselves in place of women they will change their outlook toward them. Everything would be different if they understand the real sense of womanhood. The male voice of this chapter disguised as a female recognizes all the worries of being a woman, and all their tender feelings and emotions: "As soon as I saw how beautiful I was, I no longer wanted to wash clothes and dishes and parade about the streets like a slave." (Pamuk 2006, 382) Through this chapter Pamuk tries to highlight women's significant place in the world, He believes that a woman must have the right to be free, to enjoy her tenderness and beauty, Marriage should not enslave her to a man and make her the mistress of the house.

## Conclusion

All in all, it can be stated that Pamuk's masterpiece, *My Name is Red* is a novel with feminist colorings. Although the main focus of the novel is on a murder story and the clash of Eastern and Western values in art and



culture, at the heart of the novel there exists a bitter-sweet love story mostly related by Shekure, the female protagonist. The novel pictures a patriarchal society marked by prejudice and misogyny. In this male-centered society and among all the powerful men, Shekure stands to define herself as a woman. The paper highlights the feminist ideas of Orhan Pamuk and how he has tried to give voice to a female character to speak about her life, the miseries she has gone through and all the problems she would face as a widow. In this novel, Pamuk's feminist ideas are reflected through Shekure and Esther, the two major female characters.

Shekure wants to be heard and seen by her society, she wants to be understood as a woman who has the right to be free and independent. As one of the main narrators of the novel, and as the representative of all the women of the Ottoman society, Shekure tells her story to the readers. She revolts and finally rejects the traditional image of women as inferior, submissive and dependent. She wants to tell her story in her own voice and to express her womanhood to the readers. Besides, she wants to make a history for women and show their true value through her narration. The paper highlights the fact that Pamuk as a contemporary writer with a postmodern mind, tries to deconstruct the traditional structures of his society that have existed since previous centuries and still continue. Through this study, it is concluded that Pamuk tries to reject the binary opposition of male/female or deconstruct it by depicting women from a different point of view. Also, as a Turkish writer, Pamuk aims to speak to his Western readers about the social status of an Islamic country. Indeed by choosing the Ottoman setting and depicting Shekure, Pamuk wants to make his readers aware of the condition of women in the Ottoman Turkey. Moreover, he wants to show that this condition is not restricted to Ottoman period but it can be observed even in Contemporary Turkey and the Islamic or Eastern Countries in general. Finally, *My Name is Red* brings a message to the women that tells them to define themselves, struggle for their rights and find their place in society, a specific place which Woolf calls 'a room of one's own'. Shekure finds her true identity and her true voice in the patriarchal Ottoman society. She is able to build a room for herself and to announce herself independent and free.

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