The Location of Subject Formation and Potential Resistance: A Foucauldian Analysis of Orhan Pamuk's Selected Works

Michel Foucault’s entire oeuvre focuses on the subjectification of the self through strategically operating power relations, discursive formations, and the episteme of the day. Power relations, in Foucault’s view operate by manipulating, disciplining and normalizing the individual’s body and soul. On the one hand, power relations constitute the individual’s body as their nodal or relay point, while on the other, the subjectified self of the individual also becomes the origin for resistance. Since, according to Foucault, power cannot exist without resistance, therefore, resistance is both a condition and a threat to power, and the subject is both, a medium for the operation of power and resistance.

My thesis takes up the selected works of Turkish postmodernist writer Orhan Pamuk and strives to prove that the characters of Pamuk’s fiction are subjectified individuals, who are constantly resisting to liberate their subjectified selves through various strategies of resistance.

The thesis takes up the English translations of six prominent novels by Orhan Pamuk namely, Snow, My Name Is Red, The White Castle, The Black Book, The New Life and Silent House and examines and analyses the incidences, causes and repercussions of the characters turning into subjects. The objectives of the thesis are twofold. Firstly, to trace the history of the subjectification of the characters of Pamuk’s fiction and secondly, to locate the particular sites of resistance from where the subjectified characters strive to de-construct and de-normalize their subjectified selves. The subject formation of the characters as well as their resistance is both traced using Foucauldian tools, like disciplinary apparatuses, power, knowledge, and discursive formations.
**Conclusion**

A thesis which looks at Michel Foucault’s notions of subject formation and strategies of resistance in a post-modernist author like Orhan Pamuk is inevitably built upon conditions of provisionality and non-codification. The thesis traces the strategies opted by Pamuk’s characters in liberating their subjectified selves from the networks of power, knowledge and other disciplinary apparatuses. These strategies constitute the potential resistance of the characters which cannot achieve a closure with the end of a thesis. Foucault’s strategies of resistance defy being theorized or institutionalized, in either case of which they would end up becoming allied with the corollaries of power. Foucault’s ideas about resistance are as open-ended as they are ductile; as Butler states: “. . . Foucault formulates resistance as an effect of the very power that it is said to oppose” (*PLP* 98). Thus, the thesis itself resists an end or any finality. In fact, since the thesis traces the changing contours of the characters’ thoughts as they gain awareness about their subjectified positions and strive to resist it, it will be a fallacy to suggest a decisive ending to this transformation within the characters. The thesis rather outlines the mutating topography of the characters’ minds, which glimmers as a powerful potential of resistance to their subjectification.

The second reason why this thesis cannot be closed formally is because Foucauldian resistance by its very definition cannot exist in the absence of power relations. The moment at which resistance overthrows power relations completely and absolutely is a dangerous one, as it is then that resistance itself contains the deadly potential of becoming codified. The codification of resistance will bring forth another power apparatus into force. Resistance thus comes into being only when and where there is a flow of power, and the operation of power relations can never cease. Resistance throbs continuously within the operations of power and can only retain its
significance if it maintains its character. If resistance desires to substitute the
disciplinary apparatus it is opposing, then it loses its dissident character and becomes
a disciplinary apparatus itself. This balance is very tentative and delicate and is highly
susceptible to becoming disturbed. Therefore, within the Foucauldian schema, power
and resistance are unceasing entities which continuously balance and oppose each
other. It is the dynamism and tentativity of resistance, of standing on the frontiers of
power relations without yielding to them, which must be kept alive and throbbing.

Therefore, to suggest that the potential resistant attitude which flickers within
Pamuk’s characters is an end in itself would be erroneous. In fact, their potential
towards attaining their eventual de-subjectification is a beacon opening up a vast
uncharted field of newer tactics of resistance. Moreover, since power relations and
resistance must co-exist in the same space and in the same time, the thesis explores
the highly mercurial nature of certain forces of power. Certain agencies which
function as transmitters for power relations might at other times operate as tactics of
resistance, depending upon the manner of their use and the connections and relations
which they form with other agencies. The fields of power and resistance according to
Foucault are continuously shifting and so are the agencies within the fields, and also
the nature of their relations with other agencies. In the words of Caroline Williams,
“The activity whereby the subject reinforces its subjection to power and confirms its
own structure (through, for example, self-surveillance) is simultaneously one that
gives rise to something in the subject which resists power” (183). My thesis has been
an endeavor to argue in support of this idea through constructing an edifice of the
politics of recognition and self-awareness as being integral to one’s struggle for
resistance against the discursive apparatuses and disciplinary techniques.
Consequently, there are certain strategies which, depending upon their application and practice, can on the one hand be used in bringing about the subject formation of individuals, or on the other hand, can be used in liberating their selves:

Like power, resistance is also composed of functions - that is, discourses, practices, or effects of the latter which produce a designated or latent consequence in a given social context. Thus resistance and power are made of the same "contents" - namely, functions; the difference between them depends on the form in which these functions are organized. (Brenner 698)

Thus, I have made an attempt to disentangle the densities of Foucault’s theories of power and resistance and show that practices like writing, expression and representation are potentially explosive mediums which can be applied and practiced in any way so as to achieve any objective, whether it is one of mobilizing relations of power or discursive relations or of disrupting the free movement of those very relations. It only depends upon their tactical function within and without the discursive apparatuses. For instance in TWC, the writing which Hoja and the Venetian narrator practice day and night starts off as a willing exercise in self-expression and self-describability, but it gradually transmutates and evolves into a technique of resistance which eventually helps the two of them to re-invent their own selves and also helps them to construct alternative discourses.

Similarly the apparatus of “journalistic devices” explained as one of the mediums of subjectification in Pamuk’s works, can also be understood as existing in exteriority to its own existence, and therefore as being a dynamic entity itself. Going by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a book, if a journalistic device like a book or a
newspaper exists in a space outside its own being and by virtue of the agency with which it is aligned, its functions and nature will be ever-changing. It will cease to function like a medium of subject formation as its own nature is not governed by any fixed ideology. Thus if in TNL, the book or the written word becomes one of the dangerous devices by means of which the characters are controlled, it can also be understood as a medium which liberates its readers and characters because it itself exists in a space which lies outside all other relations of power. This resistant potential contained within the tactics of subject formation makes the task of working with Foucault’s techniques a slippery, yet exciting one.

A very interesting case of these slippery tools of resistance with which the characters deal is the medium of story-telling. While on the one hand, story-telling emerges as one of the powerful apparatuses of subjectification replacing intellectual representation in the modern world, on the other hand, it is with the aid of mediums of art like theatre, poetry, writing and story-telling that subjected bodies can stage and voice the struggles of their subjecthood and defiance. Snow is a fine model of how characters like Sunay Zaim and Ka are seen to be straddling the fragile threshold of revolt which bears the latent danger of becoming an organized rebellion, ultimately toppling over the establishment and transforming into a disciplinary apparatus.

The application of Michel Foucault’s theories has been a challenging task for me as Foucauldian theories are by no means uni-dimensional theories from which we can obtain a comprehensible standpoint. His concepts are notoriously complex and malleable enough in their applicability and can be made to be put to use in multifarious ways. He made clear his intentions of making his ideas a sort of “... tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use
however they wish in their own area… I write for users, not readers (523-524). It has also been rightly stated by Clare O’Farrell in *Michel Foucault* that:

One does not simply ‘apply’ Foucault’s method in the same way that one applies ethnomethodology and other sociological methods, semiotic analysis, literary theory, or even various forms of Marxist theory or historical method. Most actual ‘applications’ of Foucault’s method really amount to the transfer, via a process of analogy, of his concrete ideas about specific historical situations to other situations. (53)

Foucault’s work focuses upon the theorization and analysis of the “structures of domination in modern society” which lie “beyond the field of investigation opened by the traditional Marxist notion of the mode of production” (Poster 106). These structures of domination are insidious such that their presence in most cases lies undetected to the eye, yet their functioning is dangerous and of inexhaustible potential. It has been the main objective of my thesis to establish that the characters which Pamuk constructs in his fiction can be viewed as Foucauldian subjects, tottering towards the brink of breaking free of their subjectification. Pamuk’s characters are fluid and dynamic in their mental constitution and it is precisely this fluidity which becomes the cornerstone of their resistance to modes of subjectification. However, this movement in the characters comes at a later stage when they begin to aestheticize their selves and seek alternative discourses. This entire journey lived by Pamuk’s characters has been traced in the thesis using primarily Foucauldian tools and theories and other allied critical methodologies.

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1 This quote is from Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 2 (Paris, Gallimard, 1994).
The thesis is also an attempt to open up an understanding of the identities and selves of the characters created by a postmodern writer writing in an intensely conflictual political, cultural and social space. Orhan Pamuk, through the characters of his fiction, reminds us of the impossibility of achieving a unified identity in a space where almost every co-ordinate of an integrated self is shattered by conflicting discourses. However, he does not seem to lament this splitting up of the self. Pamuk rather underscores the inevitability of multiple subject positions which is brought out by him, not only in the manner his characters unknowingly become nodal points for the proliferation of multiple discourses, but also in his writing style. Thus, in Pamuk’s writings, “The void, characterizing the self, Istanbul, and, by extension, Turkish identity, no longer appears as an unfathomable emptiness, but as a space of multiple possibilities” (Almas 159). Pamuk’s writing style silently establishes his tacit understanding and affirmation of the socially constructed nature of the subject and also the multiple subject positions which his characters must embody. Each chapter thus examines the most crucial and significant factors which lead to the subjectification of the characters in Pamuk’s fiction and the strategies opted by them in resisting that subjectification.

Since Orhan Pamuk is a recent author, I particularly faced the challenge of a dearth of critical material available on him and whatever little material was available, it mostly centered on the preponderant theme of the dichotomy of the East-West relations and how those affected the individuality and identity of the characters. Since there was hardly any material available on the subjectification of characters in Pamuk’s fiction and the resistance put up by them in order to de-subjectify their selves, I was left to my own devices to explore, examine and analyze the insidious effects of various disciplinary apparatuses on the subjectification of the characters.
The thesis involved drawing a configuration (re-reading Pamuk’s works using Foucauldian tools) being done for the first time, and also posed the acid test of a serious lack of theoretical and critical material available on Pamuk. Though the work focuses primarily on the diverse techniques by which the literary characters in Pamuk’s fiction are turned into subjects and their eventual awareness and resistance of the same, yet the concerns of the thesis extend much beyond how characters of a postmodern author’s fiction in particular, or literature in general, behave.

The thesis strives to apply the existing corpus of theoretic-philosophical material available on the construction of the subject under disciplinary apparatuses and as a consequence of discursive regimes, onto a politically fragile and culturally pluralistic region like Turkey and its literature. Since Pamuk has been Turkey’s most successful and widely read and translated author till today, his fiction is hailed as the closest and most accurate reflection of the politically, culturally and socially conflicted space of Turkey’s existence: “The contemporary political arena of Turkey is conspicuous for fierce confrontations between the Islamists and the secularists. Pamuk’s texts engage, among other things, with secularism and Islam—both that of the Ottoman past and the present—in his country” (Pandikasala 5). The practical aims of the thesis become even more evident when one is studying a contemporary author whose fiction represents a space that offers an ideal and conducive environment for the construction of subjects. Azade Seyhan corroborates the aims of my thesis in his statement which has captured the essence of Pamuk’s fiction: “Pamuk understands how political forces and oppression control human lives but also believes that individuals have the capacity to understand their fate and to imagine in the midst of an abject present the possibility of a different future” (“Seeing Through the Snow”).

The endeavor however does not end here as the thesis also makes an effort to explore Foucauldian ideas on the various strategies of resistance and to examine and
corroborate their validity and soundness in the literature and hence in the life of the 21st century. The primary, secondary and tertiary sources which I have read, analyzed and used for the thesis are not confined to works by my primary theorist, Michel Foucault. The sources in fact constitute an eclectic mélange of various thinkers, theorists and philosophers whose ideas are aligned with the Foucauldian range of thought. In fact, an attempt at categorizing the thesis within a single, unified academic field would constitute a fallacy. The thesis stands at the intersection of epistemology, social discourse and studies of the self and identity. I have tried to bring out the dynamics of power relations inbuilt into the fabric of a modern Islamic society and what forms they assume in a region like Turkey where politics and religion are not only the most powerful determinants of discursive regulations, but also potent co-ordinates of knowledge production and eventual disciplining of citizens. I have tried to apply Foucault’s methods of resistance onto the real lived experience of a politically and religiously unstable and volatile region like Turkey. Since the epistemological conditioning of people is nowhere exemplified better than in Orhan Pamuk’s works, his fiction becomes a truly faithful reflection of the dangerous nexus between knowledge production, dissemination and relations of power.

The thesis has tried to raise germane questions on the functioning of modern-day power and knowledge structures and how they integrate with the self and produce personal and social identities. It also raises doubts on the legitimate foundations of knowledge and the various insidious by-lanes it makes use of in trying to masquerade its disciplinarian intentions and traces optimal tactics of resistance in a post-modern writer’s works. The thesis not only seeks to prove my propositions but also paves the way and opens the field for numerous other debates and researches on the writings of Orhan Pamuk as well as on the applicability and relevance of Michel Foucault’s ideas and theories within the post-modern sphere of life, writings, culture and politics.