PANDEMIC AND AUTHORITY IN ORHAN PAMUK'S *NIGHTS OF PLAGUE*

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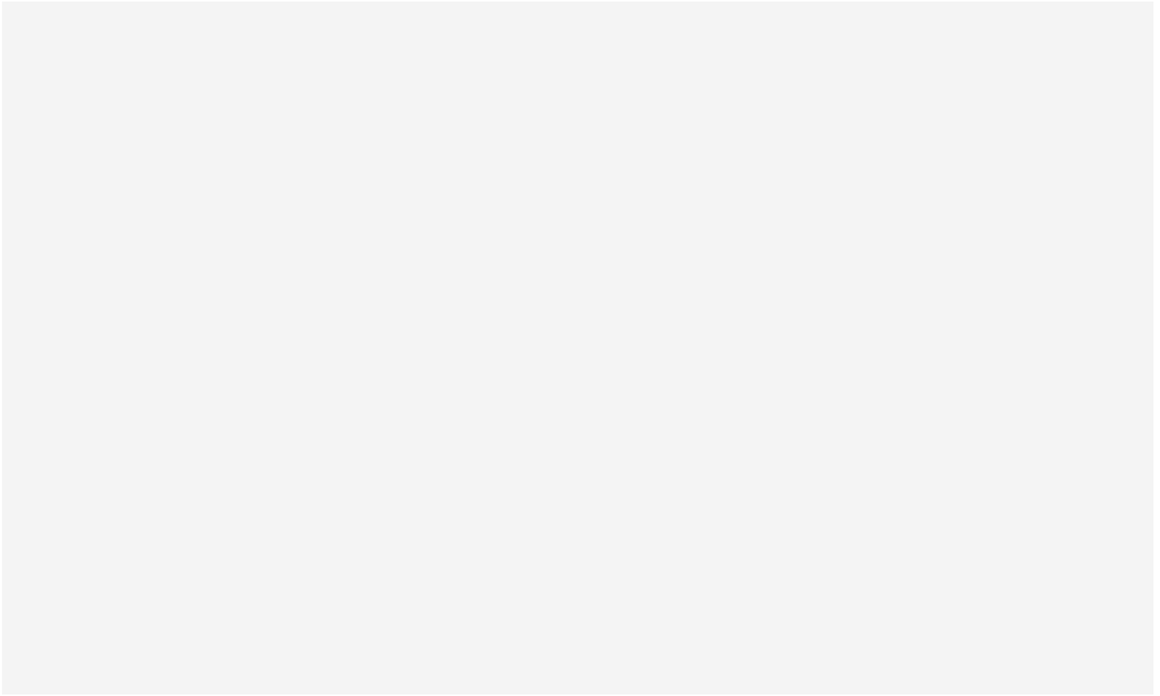

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: Orhan Pamuk, Nights of Plague, plague, pandemic, authority

This thesis examines how the plague pandemic in Orhan Pamuk's eleventh novel, Nights of Plague, engages with questions pertaining to political, epistemological, and literary authority. As a central structural element, plot device, and thematic, the plague makes its mark on the novel in various ways, initiating different kinds of transformations for the characters and the novel itself. Socially, the pandemic facilitates a shift to nationhood, parallels the spread of social movements and the communication of authority, and becomes a way for the author to express his politics. In terms of the authority of knowledge, it proves the futility of a search for purity in thinking, foils dreams of the mind's total domination over nature, and indicates the need for necessarily "impure" artistic knowledge. Aesthetically, the plague molds the text in its own image, posing the author as an agent for disease and health, and allows for a safe expression of anxieties provoked by the changing cityscape. In all three intermingling spheres, the plague serves as both a leveler and a force for change. Ultimately, reflecting on the role of the pandemic in Nights of Plague serves as a fruitful entry into the novel and one of its main themes, authority.

ÖZET

ORHAN PAMUK'UN *VEBA GECELERİ*'NDE PANDEMİ VE OTORİTE

PINAR UMMAN

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2021

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. SİBEL IRZIK

Anahtar Kelimeler: Orhan Pamuk, Veba Geceleri, veba, pandemi, otorite

Bu tez, Orhan Pamuk'un on birinci romanı olan Veba Geceleri'nde veba salgınının siyasi, epistemolojik ve edebi otoriteye dair sorularla nasıl ilişkilendiğini incelemektedir. Eserin merkezi bir yapısal öğesi, kurgu aracı ve teması olan salgın, karakterler ve romanın kendisi için farklı türden dönüşümler başlatarak romana çeşitli şekillerde damgasını vurmaktadır. Romana toplumsal boyutta bakıldığında salgın, ulus olmaya geçişi kolaylaştırır, toplumsal hareketlerin yayılımı ve otoritenin iletimiyle paralellikler içerir ve yazarın kendi politik görüşünü ortaya koymasını sağlar. Bilginin otoritesi kapsamında bakıldığında, düşüncede saflığı aramanın nafile olduğunu kanıtlayan salgın, aklın doğa üzerinde tümden hakimiyet rüyasını boşa çıkarır ve doğası gereği katışıklı olan sanatsal bilgiye olan ihtiyaca işaret eder. Estetik açıdan da veba, metni kendi imgesine uydurarak şekillendirir, yazarı hem hastalık hem sağlık getiren bir figür olarak konumlandırır ve kent peyzajındaki değişimin tetiklediği kaygıların güvenli bir şekilde dışavurumunu sağlar. Bu iç içe geçen boyutların hepsinde veba, hem farklılıkları yok eden hem de değişime zorlayan bir kuvvet olarak işlev görür. Neticede söylenebilir ki, Veba Geceleri'nde salgının rolü üzerine düşünmek, romanın ve ana temalarından biri olan otoritenin irdelenmesi için verimli bir yol sunmaktadır.

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Pandemide kaybettiklerimizin
ve Akın'ın anısına

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the subject of contagious diseases has come to dominate the global discourse. This cultural moment is bound to have its reverberations in academia as well, and it has certainly motivated this study. At a time of disconnection and uniformity on the day-to-day, studying pandemics feels especially immediate and relevant, but contagious disease outbreaks have long constituted a robust area of study for many different disciplines. Such phenomena reveal the fragility of our bodies and our economic and political systems. They accentuate the contradictions between the competitive, individualistic, zero-sum ideological notions that characterize our societies and the unprecedented connectivity inherent to the globalized neoliberal capitalist system, which produces them. They throw a wrench into our systems, but perhaps they also make us realize that we have to care about each other's well-being, if only for the sake of our own.

It is safe to say that, amongst all contagious diseases, there is one that has held a particularly privileged spot in the collective imagination for centuries: the plague. A highly virulent and fatal ailment with rapid progression,[1] plague took upwards of 50 million lives in Europe during the short period referred to as the Black Death in the 14th century (World Health Organization N.d.) and posed a serious threat to human life until public health efforts were sufficiently developed and finally penicillin was discovered in 1941. Although evidence to the contrary is emerging as well (Dunham 2008), it has long been thought that plague, in its three forms—bubonic (the most common), septicemic, and pneumonic—was democratic in that its ravages were not concentrated to particular groups, which created the sense that the disease was by divine intervention (Snowden 2011). Outbreaks of the disease throughout history

[1] Historian Frank M. Snowden believes the case fatality rate to be as high as 50-70% in the afflicted and the disease's course to be approximately three days after symptoms onset (Snowden 2011).

have had serious, multifaceted, and long-lasting effects on societies, and perhaps this is why, though the disease itself has not returned in a widespread epidemic since, it has retained much of its cultural meaning—as a death sentence on individuals and societies as well as a testament to the power or wrath of nature and/or God.

Examples of plague literature attest to this cultural importance, and Turkey's Nobel laureate author Orhan Pamuk is one of the latest additions to authors writing extensively about it. His eleventh and latest title, *Veba Geceleri*, is a postmodern historical novel set in 1901 in the fictional island of Minger, a province of the declining Ottoman Empire, in the midst of a plague epidemic. There is no known treatment available for the afflicted, and the only scientific way known to stop the spread is to impose public health measures, such as quarantine. The authoritarian Sultan Abdülhamit sends his head chemist to stop the outbreak on the island, but the chemist is soon mysteriously murdered, upon which one of the Sultan's nieces, Pakize Sultan, and her husband, a doctor experienced in epidemiology, are sent to the island. The novel mainly chronicles a six-month period, peppered with flashbacks and flash forwards, that involves disease control efforts, political upheavals, a murder mystery, and a Sultan's daughter's story of self-actualization. Historical details are enmeshed with fictional history and parody. Pamuk has said that the novel, which, to his dismay,[2] went from hypothetical to topical with the COVID-19 pandemic in an instance of life imitating art, was thirty-five years in the imagining and five years in the making (Pamuk 2021*f*).

Considering that the disease was featured in some of his earlier novels too, most prominently in *Sessiz Ev* and *The White Castle*, Pamuk's interest in plague can be considered noteworthy. Taking off from this premise, the present thesis focuses on the ways in which the pandemic in *Veba Geceleri* affects, intersects with, and raises questions about one of its primary themes: authority. The study views the plague as all of a symbol, model, and structuring principle for the novel's goals, without denying its positive content as an awe-inspiring object of curiosity and terror that has its own literary canon. As such, it attends to questions of how and to what end the plague is used as any or all of these elements in the work. The consideration of authority comes in because the novel engages in an excessive meditation on this topic through the plague; therefore, it may be productive to delve deeper into the connection, into how the novel uses the pandemic to explore different facets of authority—namely, political/social, epistemological, and literary/aesthetic

[2] "Böyle şeyler kışkırtır insanı ama sonra biraz düşünürseniz, yok bunlarla ilgili hemen bir roman yazmak istemem, çünkü güncel olur, o güncellikte geçip gider üç gün sonra, bu sefer sizin romanınız havada kalır. Güncel şeyi fazla kovalamam." [These things seem appealing, but when you think about it further, no, I wouldn't want to immediately write a novel about these because that would be topical, which would only last for three days, and then your novel would be left hanging. I don't chase after the topical much.] (Pamuk 2021*g*)

authority, respectively.

My main questions going into this study, then, could be listed as follows: if we view the plague as a device, what work is it doing in *Veba Geceleri*? In particular, what sorts of questions and discussions does the plague element give rise to concerning the topics of political, epistemological, and literary authority, and how does the novel respond to them? How does the plague interact with and influence the genre, form, and thematics of *Veba Geceleri* to elaborate on conceptions of authority? Moreover, looking into how an author generally concerned with themes of identity, authenticity, the "East-West" divide, and authorship returns to this topic of the plague raises the question of how these speak to one another in his works. The present study draws upon existing academic discussions on Pamuk's oeuvre when necessary to tie its inquiries into a wider conversation.

1.1 Thesis Outline

To make a few remarks on the title, the word "pandemic" is technically accurate in the sense that the outbreak in the novel is part of the Third Plague Pandemic, which was a transnational, transcontinental event that started in the second half of the 19th century, although this could just as well have read "epidemic" instead, since the novel is concerned with an outbreak over a very small geographic area. At the time I submitted my title, the word "pandemic" was "in the air", and that, as well as the alliterative appeal, might have had an impact on this decision. As for the concept of "authority", I am guided by dictionary definitions that cast it as a justified or justifiable form of power or right. Sociologist Max Weber's definition, "Authority means the probability that a specific command will be obeyed." (1958) provides another fruitful way to think about the concept, especially since the "probability" aspect is very pronounced in the novel and paralleled in calculations of risk of contagion and mortality. On a final note about the title, at the time of the submission of this thesis, the novel has not yet been translated, but translations into forty languages are in the works (Pamuk 2021*g*). Pamuk has declared "Nights of Plague" as the title in an interview (Pamuk 2020*b*), so that is most probably going to be the title by which the novel is referred to in English language writings. Despite the fact, then, that a novel called "Nights of Plague" does not yet exist, the study's title assumes that it soon will and, for the purpose of increased accessibility, defers its meaning.

To give a brief overview of the body of the thesis, the first chapter delves into

the way the pandemic provides a lens through which to problematize political authority. The chapter begins by exploring how plague and responses to it lead to a re-drawing of the boundaries of community, whereby the Ottoman Sultan's authority in Minger is diminished and a sovereign nation is born. Thus, it examines how plague allows for a nation to be "imagined", making recourse to Benedict Anderson's seminal theorization of "imagined community". By looking at uses of foreshadowing, irony, and the word *millet*, the chapter argues that the potential for nationhood is unconsciously articulated in language and then "realized". The importance of symbolic representation to political authority is examined, with special emphasis on how authority is read and inferred, as is plague, and on how symbolic meaning is contagious. It is noted that plague reveals the fragility of political authority, and the novel's treatment of history as theater, as in *Snow*, is discussed. René Girard's "mimetic contagion" idea, through which the behavior of crowds is explained as a chain reaction set off by an instigator, or patient zero, whose act is modeled or mirrored by others, is shown to be helpful in thinking about the social movements in the novel. Finally, this chapter looks at *Veba Geceleri* as a political novel that advocates modernization (as well as secularization and "Westernization" if that is what modernization requires) and critiques absolutism and the quest for purity in politics.

The second chapter centers around how plague challenges different forms knowledge production and ideals of certainty, being an unpredictable phenomenon that foils fantasies of control. The reluctance of the main religious faction to open up to scientific knowledge so as not to disturb their epistemological purity is criticized by the novel, which makes a point of how metaphorical thinking (all thinking) is necessarily contaminated and contaminating. Maps and rounds/visits emerge as two different and complementary ways of acquiring epidemiological information that have wider ranging implications about our beneficial but not all-powerful ways of knowing. The novel's references to Sherlock Holmes and cholera are taken up as part of an impossible dream the novel dismisses. The development of inductive thinking through its deductive counterpart is examined, using Michel Foucault's "biopower", and the novel's view of knowledge as interpretation is explored, the discussion of which takes a brief detour through Hayden White's subjectivist view of historiography and his concept of "emplotment". In this chapter, I also examine how plague forces a confrontation with and is emblematic of the "impossible" Lacanian Real (Felluga 2011) (Lacan quoted in Felluga 2011), which Felluga terms "the rock against which all our fantasies and linguistic structures ultimately fail." (Felluga 2011) (2011) If we become alienated from the Real by acquiring language, the novel believes it is also by way of language that we come close to shielding ourselves from it and engaging

with it indirectly. In the novel, narrativization helps grasp the ungraspable, so there is an epistemological importance to storytelling that is brought out during such a moment of crisis and uncertainty. Accordingly, artistic knowledge emerges as the most important kind of knowledge, and "minor" or vulnerable positions are seen to be at an advantage. The novel is hence shown to investigate through the plague what power certain kinds of knowledge can hold.

The third and final chapter looks into how *Veba Geceleri* engages with literary authority through the treatment of plague. Conventions of and trends in the literature of pandemics, especially plague literature, are reviewed, and the extent to which *Veba Geceleri* conforms with tradition is investigated so as to argue that, in addition to a nod to the canon, similarities among works of plague literature derive from the effect of the subject matter on the form of the writing. What the novel's authoritative narrative voice makes especially evident is that language, like plague, is uncontrollable; its meaning cannot be fully fixed, dominated, or made present at a given moment. The novel is read as a celebration of fiction through its multiplication of worlds and infectious textuality. Later, reversing the binary and this time pairing the pandemic with medicine, it is argued that the novel proposes, for all their similarity to plague, literature and art as curative or prophylactic practices that hold the key to a certain kind of health. Jacques Derrida's use of the concept of the *pharmakon* comes up in drawing parallels between the fields of health and art as the artist/healthworker figure is viewed as a *pharmakon*, a "drug" that is both medicine and poison, as well as a scapegoat. The novel can be seen to be paying penance or atoning for murders of non-Muslims, that is, for the intolerance of impurity or heterogeneity. Moreover, it is proposed that the setting up of quarantine can be read as an allegory for writing a novel, befitting Pamuk's artistic philosophy of balancing control and "natural" flow, conscious and unconscious processes, of the novelist being both sentimental and naive. Lastly, given that plague narratives in particular can be viewed as outpourings of urban anxieties, *pharmakon* rituals of their own right, it is argued that the author, like the plague witness, emerges as an authority like a plague witness, as the record-keeper of the city.

1.2 Connections between Chapters

The difficulty I experienced trying to split and evaluate these three levels separately in one chapter each attests to the fact that they are far from discrete, but that they infect each other in various ways. What is called political authority is also epis-

temological as the state places itself in a position of quasi-omniscience, monitoring people's private communications allegedly for the purpose of social order. According to Michel Foucault, plague government constitutes a model that is then emulated by increasingly disciplinary societies, initiating a shift from "deduction" to "biopower" (Foucault 1978, 136). Shifting models of political authority go hand in hand with those of epistemological authority, and the novel explicitly pairs these two areas in the discussions of whether the Sherlock Holmes method of reasoning would work in the Empire. Moreover, central and local governments in the novel strive to placate Muslim religious factions and discredit their claims to immunity from plague because a view of religious figures as the ultimate knowledge authorities begs the question of why then religion is not the primary source of political authority as well. So long as political government is seen to require a certain kind of knowledge, which is thought to have bearing on social reality, epistemological authority will substantiate its political counterpart and vice versa. Secular governments in the novel need to derive epistemological authority from sources such as science and Western models to bolster their political claims, while representatives of these disciplines, such as doctors, have to ally themselves with political governments for continued legitimacy of their knowledge production.

Epistemological authority bleeds into the literary or aesthetic in that the novel paints knowledge itself as interpretation, as a narrativization of sensory input. In this sense, big discoveries that advance knowledge are not merely passive encounters with the truth but also occasions for authorial creation, and the ability to tell the best "story" determines the extent of epistemological authority. According to Anderson, literary forms, broadly speaking, such as the novel and the newspaper, can initiate different ways of perceiving the world, which then can lead to political shifts (Anderson 2016, chap. 1). The claim of literature, in its function as a "creative" mirror, to epistemological authority also comes through in the potential for artistic knowledge to provide perspective on "real world" problems in the novel, such as the plague and the murders. Literary authority requires a claim to knowledge in that both the plague witness penning a narrative and the author as archivist have to be knowledge authorities for their stories to foster credence. It appears to be the novel's argument that, even when the text in question is not as filled with encyclopedic information as *Veba Geceleri*, successful or authoritative fiction still requires a kind of artistic knowledge that has to be cultivated, a form of thinking that is learned.

The role of narrativization, novels, and the imagination in nation-building demonstrates a strong connection between literary and political authority, which the novel recognizes when it says, "Daha o zamandan eşya ile tarih ve yazı ile millet arasın-

daki derin ve esrarengiz ilişkileri çocuk kalbimle hissederdim belki."[3] (*VG*, 519) On one hand, Pamuk finds the novel at odds with politics; on the other, he echoes Anderson's argument about the novel's role in envisioning a different temporality that enables the nation, and he believes that the novel becomes political through its effort to understand the other: "bana göre siyaset, en sonunda bizim gibi olmayanları kararlılıkla anlamama, romancılık ise anlama işidir. Ama romanda siyasetin sınırı yoktur, çunku romancı hayal gucu kendine benzemeyenleri, başka cemaatlere, cinslere, kulturlere, sınıflara, milletlere ait olanları anlamaya çalıştıkça siyasi olur."[4] (Pamuk 2011, 109-110). Further, political authority requires that one authorize certain stories and silence others like a skilled writer/editor. Sultan Abdülhamit is the pinnacle of this figure in the novel, while Mazhar is a prodigious upstart. News "stories" commissioned by government authorities, such as the articles attacking Sultan Pakize for not knowing the local language, exemplify this entanglement. But political authority might also be seen as infiltrating literature, in the sense that an author needs to be able to exert a command over her reader by anticipating her reactions, to be able to selectively present her with specific situations and/or sensations that seem re-presentative of some "truths" worth knowing.

The Arabic root *#hkm* in certain import words in Turkish can perhaps be fruitful in thinking about these connections. There is the matter of political *hakimiyet* [domination, control], which can be attained through ensuring the *mahkumiyet* [captivity, lit. dominated-ness] of others—this is Sultan Abdülhamit's strategy—but the former can also rise out of the latter, as in the case of Minger, Sultan Pakize, and the author. *Hakimiyet* entails epistemological command or mastery of a subject as well, that is to say, *hikmet* [wisdom], with the word *hekim* [doctor] suggesting an understanding of something resembling biopower and an epistemological opening to the predominantly political concept. The figure of the *hekim* in *Veba Geceleri* partially symbolizes the author/artist and vice versa, since the latter heals social ills. *Hkm* is also the root for *hüküm* [judgment, verdict] and *muhakeme* [the faculty of judgment], the seat of the aesthetic according to Immanuel Kant's categorization. To have a *hüküm* over something or someone means to have a claim or say over them, while *hükümdar* [sovereign, ruler] connects back to the political aspect. Contrary to absolutist fantasies of power, though, the novelist is both *hakim* and *mahkum* in the process of literary production. If she is a *hekim* to the society in which she writes, she is a *hakem* between different aspects of her psyche during the process of literary

[3] "Perhaps I used to feel even then, in my child's heart, the profound and mysterious connections between things and history and between writing and nation."

[4] "for me, politics is ultimately the endeavor of resolutely failing to understand those who are not like us, while novel writing is that of understanding them. But there is no limit to politics in the novel because the novelistic imagination becomes political in trying to understand those who do not resemble it, those who belong to different factions, genders, cultures, classes, and nations."

creation; a mediator, like Doctor Nuri; an impartial party who extends compassion and understanding to all. In this lies her ability to have a command on her reader, to access and propagate a kind of wisdom.

Overall, the plague in *Veba Geceleri* puts certain forms or versions of authority under question while allowing for others to rise to the fore, facilitating a transformation in various interlocking levels of authority. It catalyzes but also hinders, laying bare allegiances, fault lines, priorities, and serves as a vehicle through which Pamuk articulates his politics, epistemology, and aesthetics. This study hopes to flesh out the novel's theses on these topics to shed light on its self-positioning. *Veba Geceleri*, written by one of the most prominent contemporary figures in Turkish literature, is a significant, ambitious, and layered work that merits critical attention if only for the strong stances it takes. Pamuk being a renowned and politicized figure and the novel being about a pandemic and coming out during another pandemic, *Veba Geceleri* is also, beyond its literary value, a cultural event that requires interpretation. What say Pamuk can have in political matters, what he is bound to know, what the nature of his authority as an author might be have all become topics of discussion again with the publication of *Veba Geceleri*, and in that sense, this study also attempts to engage with the novel's meta-analysis about the author and the here and now.

2. PLAGUE AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Veba Geceleri is openly and obsessively concerned with issues of political authority, such as the management of state power, the prerequisites for a nation, and the management of public perception. The imaginary island of Minger is already a place that has only three years ago undergone a divisive state-sponsored massacre over a quarantine incident. In the Pilgrim Ship Incident [Hacı Gemisi Vakası], returning pilgrims are forced to quarantine in a ship for two weeks in accordance with protocol, but the provincial government of Minger neglects to bring them supplies and doctors. Soon, cholera breaks out in the ship, and the pilgrims hijack the vessel, throw two soldiers into the sea (one dies), and attempt to disembark and run inland. Tasked with keeping the pilgrims on the ship, the army opens fire and kills a number of those rushing forth. The event is hushed up by the governor of Minger, Sami Pasha, who denies having told the soldiers to fire. He suppresses news reports, obscures the death count, and makes sure the lawsuit filed by the pilgrims' families is dismissed. It is in this environment that the plague breaks out on the island, and public health measures such as quarantine are called for. Because of the colossal failure of the Pilgrim Ship Incident, public health measures are already highly politicized, and tensions are running higher than usual.

This is why in the beginning of the outbreak and the novel, characters such as Sultan Abdülhamit and Sami Pasha either suspect or outright believe that there is no epidemic in Minger at all. Different characters keep remarking that they need to be discreet as the issue "could be political" [olay siyasi olabilirdi] (*VG*, 48), which is funny because of course an epidemic and the response to it are political too. Pamuk points out in his New York Times article on pandemic literature that authorities have historically responded to pandemic outbreaks with denial (Pamuk 2020*a*), and the initial reluctance of political authorities in the novel to take doctors' warnings seriously and act quickly is certainly a demonstration of this trend. It is also, however, linked with the fraught and radioactive nature of politics at a time when two other pandemics, which feed off of each other, are running rampant: nationalism and

paranoia. The Ottoman Empire of the period and Minger specifically are dealing with emerging nationalist movements that threaten to turn into independence struggles, and Abdülhamit II's reign is infected with his own characteristic, constant, but, according to the novel, not unwarranted suspicion. The warning about the reports of plague potentially being political serve as ironic foreshadowing of how political the epidemic is soon to become and an indication of how characters tragically fail to see this potential.

Pamuk responds to a question about why he is interested in disasters, saying, "Çünkü insan hayatını ve acılarını anlatmaya elverişli bir ortam oluşuyor. Siyaset yoğunlaşıyor, tarihi dönüşümler oluyor. Devletin bir şeyler yapması beklenen bir güç olarak ortaya çıkması. Ya da çıkmaması..."[1] (Pamuk 2021*g*) In this chapter, I aim to examine how the pandemic facilitates the novel's inquiries into the nature of political authority. Plague leads existing authority structures to be questioned. Politically, it leads to a re-drawing of boundaries, to revised designations of inside and outside. It creates political power vacuums that are filled by new agents, but it also constitutes an ordeal that the new political authorities have to overcome in order to stay in power. Moreover, the formation of the Mingerian nation, which stands for all but perhaps especially postcolonial nations, is not so different in terms of its mechanism from the transmission of plague.

2.1 Imagining the Nation

At first glance, contagious diseases and health might seem to be unrelated to the formation or strengthening of a sense of community because they create a crisis of the social. However, since the sense of community is the product of divisions and separations as opposed to that of a free dispersion, it makes sense upon further consideration that the imposition of boundaries brought on by contagious diseases not only breaks connection but also creates community in ways that can be heartwarming or deadly. Indeed, many scholars have demonstrated how contagious diseases and the development of public health in response to them have historically led to the consolidation of communities as well as to discriminatory attitudes and practices against designated outsiders. As pointed out by Fatih Altuğ in his essay on *Veba Geceleri*, the Latin words *communitas* and *immunitas* share a root (2021, 30), and their affinity has been widely recognized. Alison Bashford argues in her

[1] "Because there forms an environment that is conducive to relating human life and pain. Politics gets more intense, historical transformations occur. The state emerging as a power that is expected to do something. Or not..."

book *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health* that "The pursuit of 'health' has been central to modern identity formation. It has become a way of imagining and embodying integrity and, problematically, homogeneity or purity of the self, the community, and especially in the early to mid twentieth century, the nation." (2004, 4) As Bashford points out, political and health-related imaginaries can be and have been easily superposed on each other especially in modern times.

Not only do pandemics unify biologically through chains of contagion whereby boundaries between individual bodies do not hold, but modern societies have also, through labeling bodies as healthy, exposed to disease, or sick, constructed immunological boundaries between "us" and "them". Historian Nükhet Varlık, who specializes in plague in the Ottoman Empire, argues that 19th century representations of Ottoman lands in European discourse as diseased are characterized by "epidemiological orientalism" (2017, 58). Varlık explains that plague outbreaks in Europe had started to subside by the mid-18th century, while the disease continued to spread outside of Europe, noting that "This divergence marked a turning point in the European episteme about the locus of plague." (2017, 62) In European thinking, the plague came to be "anchored in" (2017, 58) "the Orient", and Ottoman lands in particular, and referred to as "Oriental plague" (2017, 61). Increased precautionary measures against those coming from these geographies "helped to construct the boundaries of the European healthscape—real or imagined." (Varlık 2017, 62) Europe or "the West" came to define itself as "civilized" in distinction to its "sickly" Other (2017, 59). In an essay on the construction of AIDS and syphilis, Sander L. Gilman rightly points out that by allocating disease to particular groups, people outside those groups are able to feel safe and out of its purview (1987, 88). And of course, an added dimension concerns the conflation of hygiene and morals. Psychoanalyst and philosopher Sergio Benvenuto accounts for the frenzied purchase of toilet paper in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic by referring to the perceived connection of contagious diseases "above all to uncleanliness, to *impurity* (to filth or sin)." (2021*b*, 129) This perceived life-and-death role of cleanliness and the concept's connection with notions of moral purity are bound to add to hostile attitudes towards groups thought to bring disease.

To inspect how the relationship between "public health and governance, hygiene and rule" (Bashford 2004, 1) is articulated in *Veba Geceleri*, we need to take a closer look at the events that unfold. In the novel, a community arises out of the afflicted, the infected, and as such, it is not fear of an infected "other" that creates a more solid sense of "us", except perhaps in the case of countries' reactions to Minger. We see a lot of the stigmatization of disease through reports given by the

narrator of European countries' responses to plague in the East. What is perhaps an interesting additional variable here is the way the Ottoman Empire symbolically disowns Minger to control the spread of the stigma. It is under the shadow of orientalist (and particularly epidemiologically orientalist) thinking that Istanbul is desperate to distance itself from disease because, as the novel repeatedly points out, it has been labeled *hasta adam* [the sick man (of Europe)].

As a separate province of the Ottoman Empire (not part of a cluster with other islands), Minger is already discrete from the beginning and, as an island, marked out by natural borders. There are Mingerian nationalists trying to revive the undeveloped autochthonous language too, although they are spied on by the provincial government, jailed, and thus prohibited from gaining a large following. They are in competition with other ideological factions as well, such as the Greek nationalists, who are persecuted even more harshly by the state, and Islamists, who receive cautious mixed treatment. The example of Crete is alluded to often as another island close by that, to the empire's great disappointment, declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire and a few years later joined Greece—what might be an even bigger disappointment. The governor of Minger, Sami Pasha, takes pride in Minger's not being like Crete, in its being more devoted to the Ottoman Sultan. The population of the island is roughly half Christian, half Muslim. The overall picture shows that there are many of the ingredients for a national consciousness to emerge as well as certain challenges, but that the plague acts as a catalyst for this transformation.

We can crudely break down the formation of the idea of the Minger nation into four steps that map on to Benedict Anderson's formulation of a nation. In his *Imagined Communities*, Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (2016, chap. 1) In order to explain presumably the most novel contribution of this formulation, the "imagined" part, Anderson continues: "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." (2016, chap. 1) In *Veba Geceleri*, the plague outbreak in Minger and the climate of fear and anxiety it causes lead to a harrowing experience shared by the islanders and known to be shared by them, which allows for a community to be imagined. Taking a brief detour, we can see that the pandemic's role in Pamuk's *The White Castle* is similar. In this earlier novel, the plague blurs the boundaries between the doubled figures of the Venetian and Hodja, and the narrator, the persona of the Venetian, feels melancholy about the plague's gradual disappearance: "aklım hâlâ bize o korkulu kardeşlik günlerimizi yaşatan vebadaydı. . . . nedenini pek de anlıyamadığım

[sic] bir dürtüyle, hastalığın şehri ve bizi bırakıp gitmemesini isterdim."[2] (Pamuk 2016, chap. 8) The common purpose provided by the epidemic, the immediacy of its terror, and the metaphorical resonance that inheres within biological chains of contagion have great power to make and unmake social groups and personal as well as collective identities.

In the specific case of *Veba Geceleri*, reports of plague in Minger come at around the same time as those in İzmir, but while the latter manages to quash the outbreak very early on, the administration in Minger is more reluctant to institute public health restrictions, and the epidemic gets out of control. The infiltration of the plague into all the neighborhoods including those outside the capital, Arkaz, is one of the crucial factors that create the sense of shared destiny for the islanders: "tıpkı bir gemideki gibi birlikteyiz" [lit. "we are together, just like on a ship"] (*VG*, 57). This expression draws attention and looks almost clumsy (the person uttering it is of Greek origin, so could it be a language issue?) because it's not in its idiomatic, metaphorical form, "hepimiz aynı gemideyiz," [we are all on the same boat] but uses a simile. If we're not using the idiomatic phrase, but making a deliberate comparison, it is kind of strange to pick a ship to stand for an island, because they're too similar to merit the use. After the reader is made to ponder this first instance, the boat/ship motif surfaces again throughout the novel and is associated with themes like mobility, connection, and confinement. It is also frequently used as a metaphor for the state, particularly in the form of "devlet gemisini yüzdürmek" [lit. keeping the boat that is the state afloat] (*VG*, 360, 400, 441) as a difficult job that requires expertise and involves striking a delicate balance. In a way, the story of the formation of Mingerian national consciousness is contained within the figure of the ship and its metaphorical resonance, with the islanders going from the understanding of their shared destiny to the establishment of their nation-state, which can both be expressed metaphorically through the phrase, "we are on the same boat." Just as the phrase itself does not change and the journey from A to B happens in signification, so too does the formation of national consciousness reflect a transformation that happens in the collective imaginary, a construal of new meaning. The first step in this transformation is the plague, which has to affect the entire island for the islanders to have a sense of shared destiny and interest.

After local authorities' inability to get the outbreak under control, Western powers ["Düvel-i Muazzama"] impose a maritime cordon sanitaire around the island, which the Ottoman Empire has to join to save face. This is experienced collectively as the

[2] "my mind still lingered on the plague that had made us experience those dreadful days of brotherhood. . . . [I was] hoping out of motives I could not understand, that the disease would not leave the city and us." (Pamuk 2009, 88)

island's abandonment to its own destiny by the West and Istanbul alike, which entails the severance of imagined communal ties to the states in question and constitutes the second step on the way to the creation of the Mingerian nation. Anderson writes, "The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations." (2016, chap. 1) If the outbreak located exclusively on the island heightens awareness of a shared plight, this second development cuts "the boat" off from any fleets and sets strict limits around the "we." Some manage to escape the cordon, but after a fleeing boat (a literal boat) is sunk and its passengers drown, islanders give up hope of escape and resign themselves to their solitary and shared fate.

The cordon sanitaire around the island as a whole has the effect of creating a mental unit or entity of the island, which is easier to do for an already circumscribed geographical area anyway. Writing about the case of Australia, Bashford notes that, "The maritime quarantine line was one important way of imagining Australia as a whole, as the island-nation it was." (Bashford 2004, 125) Australia's quarantine practices were aimed at protecting its inhabitants from diseases overseas, particularly in Asia, whereas in Minger's case, the maritime quarantine line is instituted by other states, but the underlying mechanism of quarantine lines becoming a kind of blueprint for the designation of separate nations still holds: "Quarantine, more than any other government technology is the drawing and policing of boundaries. Quarantine and nationalism imply each other because both are about the creation of spaces. They determine an internal and an external, often nominated as clean and dirty, through the administration of a boundary." (Bashford 2004, 123) The cordon sanitaire around the island makes those in Minger come to the conclusion that they are considered "external" to the empire. Global recognition of Minger as a sickly appendage, a health threat, constitutes a denial of unity and greater meaning for the island but perhaps also a subtle Lacanian mirror stage moment, in which islanders realize their wholeness.

Arguably, Minger's unwantedness is evident in its history as part of the empire, although this is just mentioned in passing. We are told that the Ottoman Empire used to exile entire tribes and cults to Minger if it perceived them as a threat to government, a practice which lasted two hundred years and only ended following pressure from the West with the empire declaring Minger a province (*VG*, 83-4). Therefore, Minger must have already been seen as somewhat external and filled with threatening and contagious agents even before the plague. A significant portion of the island population, however, including Governor Sami Pasha, continues to believe Minger has a special place for Sultan Abdülhamit and Istanbul in general, until the maritime

cordon is instituted, at which point this belief becomes untenable. According to the narrator, Governor Sami Pasha must have felt "heartbreak" [kalp kırıklığı], experiencing this as his abandonment by the symbolic father, Abdülhamit (*VG*, 235). Soon, the belief spreads that Abdülhamit is putting "the Ottoman Empire" before the island and its inhabitants (*VG*, 240), that he has given up on the island (*VG*, 273). So far, the breaking off of Minger has remained a passive process happening against Minger's will. Anderson writes that the rise of Enlightenment ideals and the damage to the conceived singularity of religion left a void that the nation rose to fill: "Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning." (2016, chap. 1) The plague epidemic in Minger intensifies this spiritual void because there is no method to the madness of plague and the disease is so unsightly and horrific that it challenges the possibility of meaning.

The third crucial step animates the sense of agency, putting Minger in an active position. This happens through Senior Captain (later "Commander") Kâmil and his troops' raid of the telegram office. Although telegram communication to and from the island could have continued and certain telegrams from Istanbul could have just been disregarded or disobeyed, Kâmil decides to forcibly cut communication, possibly because he recognizes the paralyzing effect of Istanbul's orders on Governor Sami Pasha. It is as though Kâmil wants to prevent the governor from looking down as he walks across a precipice. It turns out later, though, that telegrams from Istanbul are still being decoded and delivered to the governor, which means that the raid is simply and purely a stance, the assumption of the active subject position. It creates the realization that Minger can choose not to listen, that even if it doesn't have the power to stop the plague or break the cordon, it still has the power to designate others as being internal or external. This resembles a *cogito* moment for the emerging imagined community of Minger as it leads to the inference of an independent community. In Anderson's formulation, "[the nation] is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm." (2016, chap. 1) In 1901, when nationalist rhetoric was in wide circulation and nations under Ottoman rule were declaring their independence, the legitimacy of the Sultan's claim on lands he didn't even particularly know or care about must have been waning, and it must have been so in Kâmil's eyes too. Although their conceptions of the confines of legitimate authority differ, it seems as though knowledge and care are part of the basis of legitimate representational authority for Kâmil, other characters, and the novel itself. As someone from Minger who knows and cares about the island, Kâmil

assumes political authority and forcibly orchestrates Minger's self-separation, its first non-democratic but sovereign act. The raid shows that some sort of *hakimiyet* [command over, control] can grow out of Minger's *mahkumiyet* [captivity, subjectedness], as literary authority can emerge out of the author's self-quarantine.

The event that ultimately results in the declaration of independence and the claim of nationhood occurs, significantly, following an armed conflict between the local officials, including the recently sacked governor, and an ex-convict and his gang who ambush and attack them to expedite the inauguration of the new governor appointed by the palace. The declaration of Minger's independence follows immediately after the conflict is won by the incumbents. As per Anderson, "Finally, it [the nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." (2016, chap. 1) The provincial administrators of Minger become literal comrades-in-arms through this event, combatting both lawlessness and Istanbul's orders, which, by being on the same side, symbolically infect one another, despite a lack of actual ideological connection, thereby favoring the split from the empire. Furthermore, the novel suggests that the plague might be what animates the aggression between the two sides and, in that sense, implies that everyone is on the same side: "sanki kurşunlar vebaya sıkılıyordu"[3] (*VG*, 318). Besides marking bodies and experiences, then, the plague is indispensable for the affective development of a shared identity because of its status as the common enemy.

Indeed, the struggle to contain the outbreak is not so much unlike a war in terms of the affective responses produced: "While nothing quite mobilised nationalist sentiment like war, invasion by disease not uncommonly stood in for the threat of actual invasion." (Bashford 2004, 129) That plague lends itself to comparisons with a wartime enemy is evident in the daily fatalities and the use of armed forces to "combat" the plague, as well as in language such as "Ordu veba şeytanını kesecek"[4] (*VG*, 182) and "düşman ordusunu bekler gibi kapanmış"[5] (*VG*, 226). As Susan Sontag famously argues in *Illness as Metaphor*, military metaphors are excessively prevalent in medicine and vice versa—the "body" of the nation must be protected against invaders (2001). In fact, once Minger declares its independence, we see the rhetoric of hygiene put to the deadly use of political suppression. Concerning what is to be done with Ramiz, Mazhar reports to Sami Pasha, "Cumhurreisi de bu pis-

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[3] "it was as if the bullets were fired at the plague"

[4] lit. "the army will cut the devil that is the plague"

[5] "lying in wait as though for the enemy forces"

lik temizlenmeden huzur gelmez diyorlar..."[6] (*VG*, 360) The Mingerian language in particular is seen as pure and in need of protection from foreign influences: the Commander searches for "a true Mingerian name bearing no other influence" [başka hiçbir etki taşımayan hakiki bir Minger adı] (*VG*, 369) and dreams of staging military operations "to preserve the unspoiled language of the children" living in the mountains [çocukların bozulmamış dilini korumak için] (*VG*, 370). Starting as early on as the drafting of the constitution, the shared identity becomes the site of ideals of homogeneity intolerant of mixing.

The plague is seen as a threat to the continued existence of the people of Minger on the island—"Minger milletinin veba karşısında mevcudiyet mücadelesi"[7] (*VG*, 340)—but of course, it is also what makes them a people. Quarantine, on the other hand, is credited as the savior of the people the plague created, because it enables the formation of the sovereign state of Minger—"karantina ölümsüz Minger Devleti'nin varoluş nedeni olduğu için"[8] (*VG*, 469)—and because, in the world of the novel, as political savvy incarnate Mazhar remarks, "'Devleti olmayan millet olmaz'"[9] (*VG*, 459). However, it is only once the collective identity of the nation takes shape that quarantine can work—"'Karantina birlik beraberlik işidir."[10] says Bonkowski Pasha (*VG*, 59)—and only through the quarantine and the state that the nation can survive.

After the attack, Senior Captain Kâmil declares that Minger is free, which retroactively and discursively constructs a past in which the people of Minger had the will to be "free" but had been held captive—this must have been true when Ottomans first conquered it, but it looks as though that past and a corresponding sense of community, much like the Mingerian language, might have been buried under new layers of history, which include oppression but also obsolescence. As a result, this was probably not conceived as captivity anymore, until it is recast as having been just that all along. Writing about his Haitian friend George's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, anthropologist Rodrigo Charafeddine Bulamah notes,

> "More than any other metaphor, being locked represents both a temporal and existential state: not only the definitive loss of the ability to predict

[6] "The president says there can be no peace unless this dirty mess is cleaned up..."

[7] "the Mingerian nation's struggle to survive the plague"

[8] "since quarantine is the reason the immortal State of Minger exists"

[9] "'There is no nation without a state'"

[10] "Quarantine is a matter of unity and togetherness."

> the course of days, but also the end of autonomy to move and get things going. For George, as for other friends, this existential immobility bears close resemblances to *what is conceived of* as 'the colonial times'." (2020, 232) [emphasis mine].

Even if people have not personally lived through colonization, a conception of these times can exist within reach, in the form of Marianne Hirsch's postmemory perhaps, and rise to the surface in the event of a triggering circumstance like being locked in.

Kâmil thus activates a particular imaginary—well-known if not through past experience, then through news about emerging postcolonial nation-states—in which the true essence of Minger is preserved in the land, the autochthonous language, and the locals, while Ottoman rule is external to it. He thereby constructs a nationalistic teleology towards an unearthing of this pure, uncontaminated essence and subsequent self-determination. This imaginary can gain traction relatively easily at a time of self-censorship and unease under the paranoid and controlling Abdülhamit's rule, under which everyone, including the successful grand vizier Mithat Pasha, is expendable and no-one immune. In addition, as Fatih Altuğ points out, the plague in and confined to Minger has more or less leveled distinctions[11] among islanders of different religious, geographical, and cultural backgrounds while marking them in the eyes of others, and in turn, in their own eyes. It has been their struggle and theirs alone. After viewing themselves as an extension, a province, but nonetheless a valorized part of the Ottoman Empire, the island's inhabitants, surrounded by plague and plagued by quarantine, have increased access to the colonial imaginary, to their colonial roots, which chips at the legitimacy of imperial rule and favors the authority of a leader from Minger.

The expedited pace with which this occurs in the case of Pamuk's Minger (two months) highlights the constructed but not necessarily insincere nature of this identity. It also reminds us of how history can furnish us with such galvanizing imaginaries, while different imaginaries can help construct histories in support of themselves. The "objective truth" and accuracy of these historical accounts might be somewhat irrelevant because even if we try our best, we cannot fully know or master the past; we will make our image of it, which will be selective and narrativized in a particular way. We will have shaped it to see what we want, which in turn will have been informed by what we've seen. This is clear in the way the novel points out the extent to which Minger's history, particularly the life of the founding Commander Kâmil, has been mythologized to foster nationalism by succeeding governments and

[11] "bulaşıklığın getirdiği nispeten eşitlikçi kaosun" [the relatively egalitarian chaos brought on by contagion] (2021, 30)

the Commander himself, which, instilled in Mingerian historians, leads to interpretations and accounts of history particularly amenable to Mingerian nationalist imaginaries.

In fact, we don't know how representative the nationalist movement is when it begins. Although there are those with whom Kâmil's agenda resonates during the declaration of independence, the narrator also points out the general sense of confusion that prevents others from fully understanding what is going on, as well as the lower-than-expected turnout. When Kâmil is walking around town shortly after becoming president, we find out that "vebadan saklanan çoğu aile yeni bayrak ve yeni devletten haberdar bile değildi."[12] (*VG*, 351) The plague prevents a great many from participating in the nation-state or collective will whose foundation it itself has laid, so it's certainly not just a socially unifying or democratizing force for Minger. Another way to frame what happens in Minger is to say that the plague weakens state authority to the point that one individual's search for meaning, continuity, and respect can jump start a revolution and gain a following, emulating struggles and passions he has been reading about. From Mingerli's account, we can gather that the revolution was generally well-received at the time, that the transition to a nation-state was welcome, that it raised morale, but moments depicting punctures in the imagined community serve to underline the approximated, imperfect, and inherently impure reality of the nation.

The idea of the nation can be such a strong mobilizing force despite, or perhaps because of, its inner contradictions, ambiguities, and varying interpretations. In the next section, I go beyond the preconditions that allow for the making of the Mingerian nation and examine how it actually happens on the micro level, in and through discourse.

2.2 Achieving Signification

The novel seems to be arguing that "seeing" the possibility of a nation once the conditions for its possibility are met (once you are "looking" in the right direction) is somewhat like seeing the metaphorical meaning inherent in a phrase that you hadn't seen before or like realizing that an ambiguous image can be registered in more than one way. This is an unlocking or Gestalt process that is instantaneous and timing-wise somewhat unpredictable. Once someone sees the metaphor, though, they can

[12] "many families hiding from the plague were not even aware of the new flag and the new state."

put it into circulation in the form of explanations, use, etc. (they can explain the image or rotate the picture), which can make it easier for others to see it as well. As such, there is some contagion involved.

We see this sort of mechanism at work in Sami Pasha's assertion "Bakınız, pekâlâ bir bayrak olabilir bu!"[13] (*VG*, 59) regarding the piece of advertising cloth he confiscated from Nikiforo the pharmacist. All kinds of nationalism are forbidden in the empire and hence on the island of Minger, so the banner is seen as a potentially subversive symbol people might rally under. Sami Pasha is a devoted Ottoman official in the beginning of the novel, and the last thing he wants (at least consciously) is a nationalist rebellion on the island. But unwittingly, he keeps saying things that push this agenda forward while trying (consciously) to prevent it. It is this banner that eventually becomes the state flag, when Kâmil brings it out of the cabinet and starts waving it. The articulation of the threatening ambiguity of the cloth plays a part in the "realization" of the feared outcome it expresses. It is as though the statement has been re-read with different intonation activating a different meaning that was always there but was not realized consciously until the point when it is. The possibility of the reading of the nation, as well as other readings, is always already in language. If we consider how often the narrator points out that often in history people do what they do without knowing why or expecting different outcomes, but they end up furthering history in an unintended direction, we can identify a similarity in that regard between language and history, in the sense of the unpredictability of meaning making due to the surplus meaning we don't necessarily take into account.

This surplus that gets in is like the unconscious of signifiers that they always carry with them and of the people who unconsciously use them to reveal their desires. For instance, Sami Pasha is constantly complaining about his difficult job as the governor, and a repeated complaint is that Istanbul is stopping him at every step through telegrammed orders and he can't get the outbreak under control. He doesn't say it consciously trying to provoke someone to do something about it, but his words plant a seed in Kâmil's mind that comes to fruition some time later. Derrida expounds on the seed-like quality of writing in *Dissemination*: as an externalized and self-sufficient unity, writing can circulate independently of its author and give rise to different interpretations and ideas long after its composition (1981, "Plato's Pharmacy"). This aspect of uncontrollable proliferation likens writing to the plague, and freed from "the metaphysics of presence", speech repeated or remembered is not different—the difference lies between the speaker's intentionality and control over the utterance as opposed to a random, accidental, contingent spreading, in which

[13] "Look, this could very well be a flag!"

one never knows what is going to take root and when.[14] As the product of a "sterile trace" (Derrida 1981, 149), Kâmil's seemingly spontaneous raid of the telegram office is akin to an unexpected pregnancy or a bastard child. It doesn't come out of nowhere, yet it is so surprising to the local government because it is not within their conceptual horizon. They and perhaps the reader are taken by surprise because it is the realization of something that they never saw as an option. It is easier for Kâmil to see it perhaps because he reads nationalist political writings. Mingerli also describes revolution as something that was never thought to be possible being realized. In this sense, the political journey represented in the novel of a province of the empire coming, through its isolation and its strife, to see itself as a sovereign unit is a journey towards signification—specifically, towards the creation of the signifier of the nation.

While the societal preconditions for nationhood are fulfilled by the plague and the events that follow, the accompanying discourse around the topic reflects the changes in the social imaginary and facilitates the tip over to the other side. The novel dangles the question of what a nation is at several points, and the first intimations of Mingerian nationhood suggest that nationhood is discursively constructed or construed, as though indicated into existence with signifiers. The question of Mingerian nationhood appears almost as an accident in conversations, often leading to questions that remain unanswered or receive unsatisfactory answers. The first such instance is when Doctor Nikos and Doctor Nuri are discussing the murder of Bonkowski Pasha, and Doctor Nikos remarks: "Katil kimdir, adını bilemem... Ama o kişi Minger milletinin kırılıp yok olup unutulmasına aldırmayan, kalpsiz biridir."[15] upon which Doctor Nuri asks, "Mingerliler sizce gerçekten bir millet midir?"[16] (*VG*, 95) The Greek doctor responds that it is dangerous to be asking that question as Mingerian nationalism is prohibited, and implies that the underdeveloped Mingerian language ("o eski dil") is a natural impediment to nationhood (*VG*, 95).

In situations like this, characters are led to do a double take, to question and entertain the possibility of Mingerian nationhood. A similar "slip" that is not pursued by the characters in conversation happens when Sami Pasha is talking to Nikiforo the pharmacist about the latter's banner decorated with the rose of Minger and

[14] Concerning Plato's *Phaedrus*, Derrida explains: "It is later confirmed that the conclusion of the *Phaedrus* is less a condemnation of writing in the name of present speech than a preference for one sort of writing over another, for the fertile trace over the sterile trace, for a seed that engenders because it is planted inside over a seed scattered wastefully outside: at the risk of *dissemination*." (1981, 149)

[15] "I don't know the murderer's name... But that person is someone heartless, who does not care whether the nation of Minger is devastated, annihilated, and forgotten."

[16] "Do you think the Mingerians are truly a nation?"

says: “Evet bu sizin bezinizdir elbette... Ama Minger gülü bütün bir milletindir.”[17] (*VG*, 127) Mingerli promptly remarks that it has been heavily discussed by historians whether Sami Pasha used *millet* to refer to the inhabitants of Minger or of the whole empire (*VG*, 127). The possibility of the nation of Minger then exists in a semi-conscious manner in language and comes out in slips of the tongue, when the main point the speaker is trying to make is something different and so she doesn’t attend much to her word choice.

The word *millet* is particularly treacherous because of its mutating meaning in Ottoman history. Originally, *millet* was used to refer to religious communities viewed as constituent sub-populations, but with the emergence of nationalistic ideals around the world, it also acquired the meaning of “nation”. As such, a Derridean trace was operating in the word, which seemed to evoke uniformity of religious belief in nations and imply nationhood status for different religious groups, such as the Christian *millet*s in the empire. The word was contaminated with its other meaning, which it conveyed regardless of speakers’ intentions. To complicate matters further, one could also think of *millet* as meaning “people” in a general and politically relatively neutral sense. It is therefore difficult to figure out if the characters converge on the same meaning at every utterance of the word, and this bundle of possible meanings circulates in every utterance to be potentially picked up.

Sultan Pakize is seen to be skeptical of any such unified community or administrative structure in the Ottoman Empire. In an argument with Sultan Pakize, Doctor Nuri speaks of the Ottoman *devlet* and *millet*, to which his wife responds: “Abdülhamit’ten başka bir de Babıali, devlet ve millet olduğunu sanmanıza cidden şaşıyorum... . . . Hem ‘millet’ dediğiniz kimdir?”[18] (*VG*, 228) Doctor Nuri points towards the *millet* in response: “Saray penceresinden . . . seyrettikleri, Kabataş’tan Beşiktaş’a yürüyen kalabalık, işte o millettir.”[19] (*VG*, 228) The doctor does not ponder identity—for him, every*body* living within Ottoman borders whom he can and must treat forms part of the *millet*. For the Sultan’s daughter, however, who is a reader and writer as well, issues of belonging, identity, and representation are far more important. The nation is a mental or imagined community that involves reference or a kind of vision but cannot just be pointed to with one’s finger. The couple experiences a similar disagreement when talking about the late grand vizier Mithat Pasha, with Doctor Nuri saying “the people” [halk] liked him, and Sultan Pakize

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[17] “Yes, this is your cloth of course... But the Minger rose belongs to an entire nation.”

[18] “I’m baffled that you think there is a Babıali [government], state, and nation aside from Abdülhamit. . . . Who do you mean by ‘nation’ anyway?”

[19] “The crowd walking from Kabataş to Beşiktaş, which they watch from the palace window, that is a/the nation.”

countering that he was not so well-liked by “the individuals you call the people” [halk dediğiniz kişiler] (*VG*, 430). Sultan Pakize seems to criticize the ease with which her husband assumes the existence of imagined communities encompassing the subjects of the Empire, or rather the way he overlooks the crucial imagined dimension. The Empire, she believes, lacks the necessary pluralism and unity for its aggregated subjects to be more than a crowd.

The conversations around Mingerian nationhood, by contrast, are not shut down as authoritatively but are met with contemplation. The *millet* argument between the Sultan and her husband has its parallel in two other conversations between different characters but concerning the islanders. In the first one, Sheikh Hamdullah and Senior Captain Kâmil get into a somewhat irresolubly framed argument about priorities during a time of plague:

> "[SCK:] 'Ama milletin itikadı ve tarihi, milletin hayatı ve istikbalinden daha mı mühimdir?'
>
> [SH:] 'Dini, itikadı, tarihi olmayan milletin ne hayatı olur ne de istikbali. Zaten bu adada millet dediğimiz kimdir?'
>
> [SCK:] 'Bütün adalılar. Bu vilayetin kendi ahalisi."[20] (*VG*, 313)

In a way, it is to be expected for the Sheikh, a man of religion and tradition, to do a double take on the word *millet* that Kâmil drops into the conversation. The response to the request for clarification resembles that of Doctor Nuri in that Kâmil says he means everybody living on the island. Perhaps some meaning could be made from the use of "kendi" and its discursive construction of possession and belonging. But perhaps the reason Kâmil has the final word here and the use of *millet* is not shut down is that what Doctor Nuri's finger pointing outside the window cannot do, which would be to indicate everyone in the community or at least a representative sample, island-wide “contagion” [lit. together-touching] has done.

The second and final conversation of the kind takes place between Sami Pasha and Marika:

> "[M:] Camisine, kilisesine gidemezse millet size sırtını döner.'

[20] “[SCK:] ‘But are the nation's faith and history more important than the nation's life and future?’
[SH:] ‘The nation that does not have a religion, faith, and history has neither life nor future. And who is this nation we speak of on this island anyway?’
[SCK:] ‘All the islanders. This province's own people.’”

[S:] 'Millet dediğiniz kimdir? Burada ahalinin, *herkesin* canından sorumluyuz.'

[M:] 'Camisi, kilisesi, dini olmadan millet olmaz, Paşam.'

[S:] 'Bizi burada millet yapan cami, kilise değil, bu adada olmamızdır. Biz bu adanın milletiyiz.'"[21] (*VG*, 406)

This time, it is a Christian who insists on religion, as though to say that the emphasis Sheikh Hamdullah places on religion is not uniquely Muslim. (The same symmetry is observed when Captain Kâmil hears fatalistic religious attitudes towards plague from a Muslim and a Christian in different settings within the same day.) At the time of this final rendition of the conversation, Minger's independence has already been declared, so although the question about *millet* harks back to the prior skepticism associated with the use of the term, here *millet* is not rejected or left hanging but explicitly redefined to include people with a shared destiny or possibility of salvation, people whose existence is intertwined and interdependent as it hangs on everyone's obedience to the quarantine. As can be seen in Sami Pasha's words, "Bizi *burada* millet yapan," [What makes us a nation *here*] (*VG*, 406) [emphasis mine] the process of nationalization is conditional on locality; it depends on a changing perception of the place of habitation, which is imbued with meaning. There might be disagreement between the lovers about who the *millet* is or how it will react, but its existence is no longer questioned. The *millet* has arrived.

We can interpret these interactions and the incredulous inquiries into nationhood as reflecting the anxiety that surrounds the notion at the time when the novel is set, as well as the slipperiness of the concept and the lack of positive or rather determinate content in it. Perhaps a nation is marked out first and filled in later—a signifier floats around instigating debate and controversy, until something resembling an agreement is reached. The question provokes and gradually produces its answer. Senior Captain Kâmil's repeated use of the word *millet* to refer to the islanders after the armed conflict (*VG*, 321-3) can similarly be seen as a conjuring into existence through iteration given that the prerequisites are already there. This is of course inherently similar to the way Pamuk creates Minger and its people solely through referring to them with words.

[21] "[M:] If it can't go to its mosque or church, the nation will turn its back on you.'
[S:] 'Who do you mean by nation? We are responsible here for the life of the people, of *everybody.*'
[M:] 'There is no nation without its mosque, its church, its religion, Pasha.'
[S:] 'What makes us a nation here is not the mosque or the church, but our being on the island. We are the nation of this island.'"

2.3 Symbols and Symptoms

A discussion of the journey towards signification that takes place in the novel would be incomplete without special attention to symbolization. Characters rely heavily on symbols to communicate meaning, and political authority in particular is attained and expressed through symbolic associations. This indirect and literary character of political power play is historically accurate for the reign of Sultan Abdülhamit, during which, according to Selim Deringil, "an emotional state between anxiety and panic" [kaygı-panik arası bir ruh hali] seems to be widespread among government officials and for good reason (2014, 105):

> "Abdulhamid rejimi bir yandan Osmanlı toplumunun gundelik yaşamına surekli daha fazla *nufuz etmeye* çalışıyor –ustelik Osmanlı sistemi hukumdarların kişisel görünürluğunu daima vurgulamıştı–, öte yandan da sultanın guvenlik saplantısı, onun sarayın duvarları dışında çok ender olarak görunmesine yol açıyordu. Bu, onun "pasif bir halife" olduğuna dair yoğun eleştirilere uğramasına sebebiyet verdi. Bunun sonucunda, padişah efsanesi, onun gucunu ve her yerde hazır ve nazır oluşunu aralıksız biçimde hatırlatacak bir simgeler sistemi aracılığıyla 'yönetildi.'"[22] (Deringil 2014, 31) [emphasis mine]

The novel's prominent problematic of spread versus containment can be readily observed as a characteristic feature of the era in which it is set. The Empire, or power in general, strives to infiltrate subjects' personal lives, which leads to their self-censorship or being self-contained. Meanwhile, perhaps as a response to the oppressive regime, the Sultan has to self-isolate in his palaces to avoid the risks of mixing in with the people. This causes the proliferation of rumors, another epidemic of its own, calling for the use of symbols to initiate counter-epidemics that spread the message of political authority, legitimacy, and power. The oft referenced clocks in the novel were one of the primary symbols of Abdülhamit's authority and presence in the provinces (Deringil 2014, 43).

The increased dependence on symbols peculiar to a "crisis of legitimacy" (Deringil 2014, 22) is paralleled in the exigencies of living through a deadly epidemic. Individuals infected with plague are identified by the plague "tokens" on their bodies; these

[22] "The Abdülhamid regime was, on the one hand, trying continually to further *permeate* the daily life of Ottoman society—what is more, the Ottoman system had always emphasized the personal visibility of rulers—, and, on the other hand, the sultan's obsession with security was causing him to appear very seldom outside the palace walls. This led to his receiving staunch criticism about being 'a passive caliph.' As a result, the myth of the sultan was 'managed' by means of a system of symbols that would never cease to recall his power and ubiquitous presence."

signs are read, and the illness is inferred. In like fashion, the narrator frequently describes or points out the way characters, founding father Kâmil in particular, are overly preoccupied with their image, rituals, formalities, and the trappings of political authority. For instance, one of the first pieces of information we find out about Kâmil is that he is ashamed of having a rank that is low for his age. He is almost always in military uniform, which is repeatedly said to impress those who see him, and while the plague continues to take lives, he finds the time to commission stamps that have his picture on them. Unlike him, Doctor Nuri and Sultan Pakize are said not to be interested in impressive titles (*VG*, 456), and yet when they take over from the Sheikh Hamdullah government, the first topics they negotiate with Nimetullah Efendi involve symbols and rituals: Mingerli writes, "Bizce . . . açlık her şeyden acil ve korkutucuydu. Ama eski başnazır ile yenisi Şeyh Hamdullah'ın cenazesi, Halifiye tekkesi ve tarikatının geleceği ve kraliçenin simgelerini daha çok konuştular."[23] (*VG*, 448) Observations like these can be seen as a critique of people in power and of the tendency to get carried away with details rather than attending to the material concerns of the people, matters of life and death.

On the other hand, politics as represented in the novel often takes place over and through symbols. The rose of Minger is an important hallmark of the island that ends up being on the flag, along with others like the Castle and the White Mountain. Just as they are emblems of Minger for the reader trying to imagine the island and orient herself, so too do these evoke nationalistic sentiment for Minger among the characters and help them imagine the nation. Moreover, superficial connections that should not be important according to logical thinking can play a critical role in political processes. The revolution, for example, owes part of its success to a metonymic carryover between the Sultan's daughter and Senior Captain Kâmil, who is her bodyguard: "Pakize Sultan sayesinde halk genç Komutan'ı hayalinde İstanbul'la, Saray'la ve padişahlarla birleştirmiş, . . . onun peşinden gelmişlerdi."[24] (*VG*, 351) The authority of the Sultan is contagious. It is difficult to say, therefore, that the concern with stamps, banknotes, framed portraits, celebratory cannon fire, and so on does not matter; perhaps those are part of what ensures that Mingerian political authority takes hold and persists throughout the years. The people of Minger, who have to develop the habit of reading their family members' and their own bodies for plague symptoms, read their government officials for signs of authority.

Furthermore, each of the three quarantine era heads of state are more important than

[23] "In our view, . . . the famine was the most urgent and frightening of all. But the former prime minister and his successor talked more about Sheikh Hamdullah's funeral, the future of the Halifiye lodge and cult, and the Queen's emblems."

[24] "Thanks to Sultan Pakize, the people had merged the young Commander with Istanbul, the palace, and the sultans in its imagination, . . . and followed his lead."

their corresponding prime ministers although they have relatively symbolic roles. Besides providing reassurance of power, symbols also function as representational anchors for imagined attachments. Senior Captain Kâmil is chosen because people believe he would be the best person to represent a certain emotion (*VG*, 322). Sheikh Hamdullah realizes when he goes up to give his Friday sermon that what his listeners expect from him is not logic but emotion to help them cope with the weight of the plague (*VG*, 304-5). Sultan Pakize, as queen of the third republic, does not appear to *do* much in her short term, but she is key in ending the epidemic. She does house visits and empathizes with the people; she feels with them, mirrors their emotions, and makes them feel less alone. A typical reader and writer character and a model Istanbulite in a Pamuk novel, she welcomes interpersonal and cultural contagion. As they leave the island, the final words uttered to them expressing the gratitude of the Mingerian people are said to be directed more at Sultan Pakize than her husband, even though he does concrete, important work in ending the epidemic. Public health measures, tough administrative decisions, and medical aid are indispensable in that they ward off disease and prevent death, but in a time of meaningless devastation, perhaps just as important are such symbolic investments that help find the will to live.

The representations of symbolic figures, such as those of the heads of state, must be kept unsullied for the symbolic attachment to work. For instance, Commander Kâmil signs off on the execution of Ramiz and his gang but doesn't actually sign the document himself because he wants to protect his image; as a symbolic figure the islanders revere, he must preserve his purity to maintain his power, and Sami Pasha thinks this an apt political decision. Even historical facts are not immune to the need for purification. Kâmil tells archaeologist Selim Sahir, who has written a history of the Mingerian people dating their origin to Asia, instead of to the island of Minger, "Unfortunately, we have not been satisfied by what you have written about the history of the Mingerian nation."[25](*VG*, 371) Kâmil believes that if Mingerians are just one of the peoples who arrived at and lived on Minger, that ordinariness detracts from a teleological claim to the land instead of legitimizing their sovereignty. His words separate "Minger milletinin tarihi" [the history of the Mingerian nation] and "yazdıklarınız" [what you have written], refusing to let disconcerting historical facts touch the Mingerian national history that he deems necessary for Mingerian nationalism to take hold. Impurity is seen as undesirable complication.

Abdülhamit is also acutely aware of the need to preserve his image, so he grants clemency to those condemned to death by local courts and has his dirty work exe-

[25]"Minger milletinin tarihi hakkında yazdıklarınız bizi maatteessüf tatmin etmedi."

cuted by government officials in the provinces, preferably in the periphery, in ways that cannot be easily traced back to him (*VG*, 430). Sami Pasha understands this tactic even as he hates the hypocrisy of it (in itself hypocritical because he does the same himself): "O suçlu o emrin nereden geldiğini bilirse Osmanlı memleketini yönetemezdin!"[26] (*VG*, 193) It is through this careful management of how much to show or hide, how much information to release or withhold that particular representations of power and policies are created.

But perhaps the most striking example of representational thinking comes from Doctor Nuri in a conversation with Sultan Pakize, which is surprising because he is the voice of reason:

> "'Padişah'a olan sadakatinizin bana olan bağlılığınızdan çok daha kuvvetli olduğunu görmek beni üzüyor' dedi Pakize Sultan.
>
> 'Bunlar tamamen ayrı cinsten sadakattir. Biri kalpten bağlılık;' dedi Doktor Nuri, kendisinin de o an aşırı bulduğu bir saflıkla, 'diğeri kandan bağlılıktır.'
>
> 'Kalpten bağlandığınız ben oluyorum herhalde. Ama Abdülhamit'e olan bağlılığınız niye kandan oluyor? Padişah sizin değil, benim amcamdır.'
>
> 'Bağlılığım yalnız amcanız padişahımız Hünkâr Abdülhamit Han hazretlerine değildir. O yüce makamın temsil ettiği yüce şeye, devlete, Âl-i Osman'a, Babıali'ye, bütün millete ve Karantina İdaresi'ne de bağlıyım.'"[27] (*VG*, 227)

If Doctor Nuri is literally bound by blood to anyone, it is to his wife, and it is his devotion to the Ottoman Sultan that is, strictly speaking, purely ideational. Although he seems to register the cheesy "naiveté" [saflık] of his comment as he makes it, Doctor Nuri does not back down upon being challenged by Pakize Sultan about an ironic reversal in his statement. His answer recognizes the Sultan to be a representational figure, but he claims to be attached by blood to abstract concepts like the state. If the most ideational connection is conceived of as visceral and the most visceral as ideational, is it any wonder that ideas of biological contagion can

[26] "If that criminal knew where that order was coming from, you wouldn't be able to rule the Ottoman land!"

[27] "'It saddens me to see that your loyalty to the Sultan is so much stronger than your devotion to me' said Sultan Pakize.
'These are completely different kinds of loyalty. One is a bond of the heart;' said Doctor Nuri, with a naivité even he found excessive at the moment, 'the other is a bond of blood.'
'I suppose I am the one you are bound to from the heart. But how come your devotion to Abdülhamit is of blood? The Sultan is my uncle, not yours.'
'My devotion is not solely to your uncle, our Sultan, his Majesty, the Sovereign Ruler Abdülhamit. I am bound to the lofty thing that lofty position represents, the state, the Great Ottoman Empire, the Babıali government, the whole nation, and the Quarantine Administration too.'"

easily slip into the formation of imagined communities and the latter into conceptions of bodily connection?

The way that being a Mingerian becomes a matter of blood also has an origin that underscores its symbolic nature. Senior Captain Kâmil is injured in the conflict and loses a lot of blood (*VG*, 327-8), which becomes a symbol of his sacrifice and the foundation of the state. Fighting in a battle and sustaining an injury don't have much in common with having one's biological lineage date back to a certain group of people except for the loaded signifier of blood, but the moment is used to support the importance of lineage. Showing the representational connection behind racist, exceptionalist movements, the novel once again emphasizes how powerful our representations are, on which political authority is predicated, and also how strange. Throughout the novel, strong emotional attachments to places and imagined communities crop up in strange ways. Sami Pasha momentarily takes "vague nationalistic pride" in the island's particularly tenacious plague-carrying rats—"bizim fareler" (*VG*, 40)—while island reporters repeatedly write about the impressive ships deployed to impose the maritime quarantine, "with an unconcealable pride at being considered important" [saklanamayan bir önemsenme gururuyla] (*VG*, 257). Part of this pride must have to do with being in the periphery and not being used to such attention; in that sense, the plague puts the small, overlooked island of Minger on the map, even as it causes it to be excised from the empire.

Another part of this pride, though, concerns the irrational nature of people's attachment to places, an aspect that is brought out by the stark contrast between the positive emotion of pride and its deleterious object. Taking pride in what might kill you because it is connected to your city shows almost that the power of nationalism lies in the ability to render individuals disinterested in their personal well-being. Sultan Pakize, even though she personally despises her uncle Abdülhamit for condemning her immediate family to a life of confinement, and possibly for condemning his subjects' subjectivities to the same, displays "a strange Ottoman pride" when she says that her uncle is the first person to read new detective novels in Ottoman lands (*VG*, 435). Nationalistic attachment is in itself not so much like the plague but like coming out of quarantine; the individual going outside of herself might be more susceptible to the ideological climate, whether it calls for self-sacrifice for the community or for the extermination of others. When Sami Pasha is contemplating going to Aleppo with his lover Marika after being fired from his post, his gut reaction is that she couldn't possibly go there, "to that place with scorpions" [gidemezdi o akrepli yere] (*VG*, 291). Even if Minger has the actual plague, on some level, it is seen with rose-colored glasses because it is home.

While the narrator grants the strangeness of the forms nationalistic pride takes, she herself is prone to nationalistic sentiment too, which could be read to suggest that no-one, no matter how analytical, is immune to the allure of imagined community and its mythologized histories. Mingerli's attachment to her country is also colored by the melancholy memories of the city she grew up in, and as such she shares in something similar to Pamuk's relationship to Istanbul.

2.4 Staging Authority

The spread of plague and meaning through communication resemble each other in terms of their unpredictability. Just as characters struggle to get the plague under control, they strive to manage perception and convey the desired messages, but they are not fully in command of either of these processes. The result is a fragile and dependent state authority, exposed to be even more so through the plague. All the discussions about "how will the people react to the quarantine" in the context of authoritarian imperial rule are very interesting in that they show how deeply insecure political authority really is or at least can be at such a time. The state fluctuates between power and powerlessness and often these two manifest in the same way—it can be thought of as powerful because with its aggregated resources, it can and will easily crush individuals who stand against it. On the other hand, if it has to twist people's arms to ensure compliance, it is clearly not that powerful, especially if violence is the only disciplinary technology it knows how to use: "şehzadelere eğitim vermek çok zordu. Çünkü Osmanlılar dayak atmadan disiplin altına almayı yeni yeni keşfediyorlardı."[28] (*VG*, 199). The converse is also true: if a state is not powerful, it will be compelled to use force: "Sami Paşa'nın Hacı Gemisi İsyanı sırasında bile göstermediği acımasızlığı o günlerde gösterebilmesinin bir nedeni, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun –hasta adam da olsa– verdiği güvenin yeni küçük devlette olmayışıydı."[29] (*VG*, 358)

Throughout the novel we see a concern with projecting an image of strength and hiding weakness so as not to deter those lying in wait to usurp power. This is not unique to the island of Minger—"Padişah'ın ve Hariciye Nezareti'nin kendilerinden beklediği ilk ve en önemli şeyin kolera salgınını durdurmak değil, salgın söylen-

[28]"it was very difficult to train the sultans' sons. Because Ottomans were only slowly discovering how to administer discipline without beating people."

[29]"One reason that Sami Pasha was able to exhibit such cruelty that he had not even shown during the Pilgrim Ship Incident was that the small new state lacked the confidence that the Ottoman Empire—sick man or not—was able to inspire."

tisini durdurmak olduğunu"[30] (*VG*, 92)—or to the Ottoman Empire—"Çin'deki isyanın bastırılmasını kendi güçlerini dünyaya göstermek için iyi bir fırsat olarak gören Kayzer Wilhelm,"[31] (*VG*, 64). If stopping the rumor of an epidemic is more important than stopping the epidemic itself, clearly, image matters a great deal and has "real" consequences. We see this most clearly in the establishment of quarantine. The local government does not only have to issue regulations; it also has to make sure that the population *thinks* they have everything under control and that the regulations are going to be observed by others. They have to project an image that seems like it will have a command on the general population; otherwise, especially in more co-operative processes like quarantine, they risk not having a command on anyone. This "game theory" aspect alone prompts the public to imagine what their fellow islanders are thinking and doing, thus nudging into existence, as a by-product, an imagined community.

Characters often refer to "karantinanın tutması" or "karantinayı tutturmak" [getting the quarantine to stick/to take] versus "karantinanın sulandırılması" [the watering down of the quarantine] or "milletin karantinaya küsmesi" [people turning their back on the quarantine]. The "tutma" and "sulandırma" terms speak to a particular consistency (in the cooking sense) or delicate balance that has to be struck for the whole operation to work, as though quarantine is a soufflé or yogurt, while "küsmek" evokes children, plants, and even eyebrows, but not fully-formed adults. "The public" is viewed as being in need of guidance but set in their ways: Doctor Nuri asserts, "Karantina, halka rağmen halkı eğitip, onlara kendi kendini koruma hünerini öğretme işidir.'"[32] (*VG*, 119) Before any real measures are taken against the epidemic, there is doubt about quarantine preparedness: "Paşam bu ada halkı karantina tedbirlerine uymaya hazır mıdır?"[33] Bonkowski Pasha asks the governor (*VG*, 41), while Nikiforo on a separate occasion says: "salgını inkâr eden bütün bir adayı karantinaya hazırlamak çok zor olacaktır."[34] (*VG*, 100) But what does quarantine preparedness even mean? The characters seem to be overly concerned with the need for a change of mindset. This level of insecurity and constant consideration of appearances and public opinion is interesting in an authoritarian regime. The public's emotions and perceptions need to be carefully managed for the quarantine

[30] "that the first and most important thing the Sultan and the Ministry of the Exterior expected of them was not to stop the cholera outbreak but to stop the rumor thereof."

[31] "Kaiser Wilhelm, who saw the suppression of the rebellion in China as a good opportunity to show their power to the world,"

[32] "Quarantine is the business of training the people in spite of themselves, teaching them the ability to protect themselves.'"

[33] "Pasha, are the people of this island ready to abide by quarantine precautions?"

[34] "it will be very difficult to prepare a whole island that is in denial about the outbreak for quarantine"

effort to work.

The concern with image and presentation is especially salient in Governor Sami Pasha's politics, who believes in the power of the spectacle in sustaining or eroding power. He thinks, for instance, that having a large crowd at Bonkowski Pasha's funeral will send a message to the perpetrators of his murder and cause them to "cower" ("sindirmek") (*VG*, 80-1). He and his government also hide negative developments from the public—the plague outbreak (*VG*, 184), the assassination of Bonkowski Pasha (*VG*, 186), the reason for Doctor Ilias's death (*VG*, 196), Zeynep's death (*VG*, 393), etc. He often says things to the extent that the most effective way to signal power would be through executions: "anlayacaklar adada asıl kuvvetin kimde olduğunu.'"[35] (*VG*, 146) Meanwhile, failing to project an image of stability risks jeopardizing the quarantine: "[VSP:] Bu kötülüğü [Bonkowski Paşa cinayeti] planlayıp yapanları hemen cezalandırmazsak, bunun devleti âciz göstereceğine ve karantinayı tutturamayacağımıza inanıyorlar.'"[36] (*VG*, 82)

In the world of politics, everything is about representation, and the world is a stage. Sami Pasha views his trial as "theater" (*VG*, 416), and the English Consul George Cunningham seems to agree with the view that the project of "Muslim unity" is "quite a bit of a fantasy and a bit of performance"[37] (*VG*, 474). Pamuk had brought together theater and politics/history before in *Snow*, in which questions of representation were focused around the oppressed individual's inability to represent themselves and the burden placed on them to represent their entire group or community. In *Veba Geceleri*, the questions of representation center around the ability of an individual to represent a community's feelings or spirit and representations of history. The official teaching line recited by ten-year-old Mîna Mingerli is that "the Commander . . . elevated us to the *stage* and level of civilized nations"[38] (*VG*, 537) [emphasis mine]. The use of theater terms like "Kolağası'nın Minger Adası'nda filozof Hegel'in sözleriyle 'tarih sahnesi'ne çıkmasının"[39] (*VG*, 85), "tarihin kendisine vereceği büyük rolü"[40] (*VG*, 113), "Tarihte 'karakter' ne kadar önemlidir?"[41]

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[35]"they will understand who has the real power on the island'"

[36]"They believe that, unless we find those who plotted and executed this evil [the murder of Bonkowski Pasha], this will make the state appear helpless and that we will never get the quarantine to stick."

[37]"pek bir hayal ve biraz da tiyatro"

[38]Komutan . . . bizi medeni milletlerin *sahnesine* ve seviyesine çıkardı

[39]"the Senior Captain's getting up on the 'stage of history', in philosopher Hegel's words, on the island of Minger"

[40]"the big role history was to give him"

[41]"How important in history is 'character'?"

(*VG*, 205), and "tarih sahnesine çıkmakta olan kişilerin"[42] (*VG*, 337) promotes a view of history as spectacle. Kâmil even takes a moment to look himself up and down in the mirror before he goes on stage, so to speak, in the town meeting at the provincial hall. Moreover, characters, especially Senior Captain Kâmil, are said to be talking more loudly than necessary (*VG*, 286, 321, 329) or doing exaggerated gestures—"ayaklarını denk alsınlar diye abartılı davranıyordu."[43] (*VG*, 264)—in historic moments. In the spectacle of history, however, the actors don't know where their actions will lead them and what exactly their role will be until the events are acted out (*VG*, 329). It is as though what is done is done through them and not by them, as though "history" were an author and they its characters.

In the novel's environment of constant mimesis, chains of mimetic contagion cannot be traced to their source because an original act or point of origin is a paradox, and indeed, a lot of times, beginnings are obscure. If Senior Captain Kâmil is the fuse that ignites the nationalist "awakening", how does he get to that point? We are told that he has read and thought about the French revolution, so he is imitating and importing some of those ideas, but then the French revolution must have been inspired by another revolutionary movement, and so on; the origin has to be out of sight. The origin of the first cry against Abdülhamit in Minger is also obscure; according to Mingerli, it has so far been impossible to identify the person responsible for the first anti-Ottoman slogan that day, and in fact, no-one might have yelled at all (*VG*, 328-9). In Minger's historic skirmish, there is the opposite, which is to say, no-one fires the first shot because everyone fires at the same time (*VG*, 317), so either there is an amazing coincidence or the origin that necessitated gunfire at that instant is obscured again. There is something of the locked-room mystery to this national awakening. We know this is an isolated space, with no-one coming and going (the new governor arriving on a ship being the exception). And yet, within a very short period of time *after* the spreading of the plague, a puzzling change takes place: Mingerians take the interpretive step to identify themselves as a nation. They see something different where they didn't before, even though nothing new came into the room. All clues point to "no-one", to the sneaky signifier. Language has a special ability to start mimetic chains while concealing their origins.

In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, René Girard writes about what he calls "mimetic escalation", a mechanism that he believes can be used to explain the behavior of crowds, judging by literary examples. Girard examines two instances, one from ancient Greek mythology and the other from the Bible, in which a crowd is encouraged

[42] "people who are about to get on the stage of history"

[43] "he was behaving in an exaggerated manner so that they would not overstep the mark."

to stone someone. In the first, there is a social plague, and the chosen scapegoat is a beggar who has not done anything wrong. In Girard's view, "the first stone is decisive because it is the most difficult to throw. Why is it the most difficult to throw? Because it is the only one without a model." (2001, chap. 4) But once that threshold is crossed, the crowd unabashedly stones the beggar, and the social problem disappears afterwards. In the second, Jesus presents a woman who has committed adultery, which is viewed as a grievous crime, to a crowd and makes his famous exhortation for the blameless to throw the first stone. Jesus's words stop the crowd at its tracks: "In calling attention to it [the first stone], in mentioning it expressly, Jesus does all he can to reinforce this obstacle and magnify it." (Girard 2001, chap. 4) Mimetic escalation is the ease with which the "contagion of violence" or "of nonviolence" begins when there is "a model" (Girard 2001, chap. 4).

This dynamic applies to the mimetic contagions in Pamuk's novel, in which the greatest obstacle to social movements is getting started. Even when a riot breaks out in the Castle and the rioting prisoners unlock all the jail cells, it takes "inspiration" for the incarcerated to run away: "hapisten kaçmak için ilham verdi" [served as inspiration to escape from prison] (*VG*, 391). The children in gangs who start eating mallows similarly "inspire adults" [büyüklere ilham oluyor] (*VG*, 353). The vocabulary of collective action overlaps with that of aesthetic creation, once again showing the "serious business" of political and social movements to be intrinsically akin to "fanciful" pursuits like literature. Further, in this view, authenticity is not really that important because under amenable circumstances, a crowd could go either way. The particular path taken is contingent; it could depend on the behavior of one model. The authenticity of social movements is perhaps questionable, and in a way it doesn't really matter what the original provoking kernel of a movement or a passion is, because it is its representations or images that will be proliferated, passed down throughout history, and embraced as significant.

2.5 The Novel's Politics

Pamuk has often been viewed as an apolitical author (Göknar 2012, 304) probably for reasons such as focusing mostly on bourgeois subjects and their personal experiences, not conforming to the *köy romanı* [village novel] tradition which was popular around his debut, not directly commenting on particular political actors in his novels, not being at the forefront of social movements as a person, and having a kind of art for art's sake attitude. He himself has noted that politics and novel writing don't

mesh well together, because the novelist tries to understand all perspectives, while the politician deliberately ignores certain perspectives and champions others (Pamuk N.d.) like the member of a debate team. Out of his previous novels, *Snow* has been viewed (including by the author himself[44]) as the most political, but, according to scholars such as Sibel Irzık and Erdağ Göknar, Pamuk's novels are actually quite political in general. Irzık writes that *The New Life*, *Snow*, and *My Name Is Red* all comment on the politics around representation, while Göknar argues that Pamuk's writings are inherently political because his use of Sufi elements challenges Kemalist constructions of national identity that deny any religious component: "The politics of Pamuk's novels emerges not from ideological disputes but from his literary interrogation of the so-called secularization thesis of modernity, according to which social progress requires an ever increasing commitment to rationality and a corresponding reduction in the influence of religion." (Göknar 2012, 305)

Göknar's point applies to *Veba Geceleri* to the extent that the importance of religion is not denied—the quarantine takes so long to establish mainly because strict enough measures cannot be employed without angering and alienating the local and mostly Muslim religious cults. But in this battle between the positivist, modern, and Western-influenced approach and the Muslim, traditional one, the first one wins out. The religious factions are presented in a compassionate way, like other characters are, but the novel seems to challenge religious (or non-religious) justifications used to disregard scientific knowledge at the expense of human lives. Characteristically, Pamuk balances this position with his criticism of his first secular quarantine government, which is overzealous in its top-down impositions on society. Ultimately, he comes out on the side of modernity. On a podcast with Nükhet Varlık, Pamuk disagrees with Varlık's comment that historical literature on plague is too focused on quarantine as the one right method and that alternative responses should also be taken into account. He believes that quarantine is "essential", that "there is no east or west to it. It's medicine. There's one way to fight plague." (Dolbee N.d., Pamuk in) Regardless of where we stand on this issue, Pamuk's comment suggests that modernity comes with its perks, such as advances in medicine and the literary genre of the novel, and it is indefensible for leaders to refuse these on behalf of their people. Thus, contrary to thinkers like Giorgio Agamben—who has criticized the establishment of a "state of exception" upon the COVID-19 pandemic out of fear of a slippery slope into authoritarian government and been criticized by others like Sergio Benvenuto as a result (Benvenuto 2021*a*, 93-4)—Pamuk takes a firm stance

[44] "Ben *Kar* adlı romanı yazdım. O zamanlar bana kalırsa benim en siyasi romanımdı. Hala da öyle düşünüyorum. O zamanki Türkiye'nin siyasi bir tablosunu çizmek istedim." [I wrote the novel *Snow*. In those days, I think, it was my most political novel. I still think that. I wanted to paint a political tableau of Turkey at the time.](Pamuk 2021*g*)

towards strong government under pandemic conditions, like the final and successful quarantine government in *Veba Geceleri*:

> "Salgın hastalık, en sonunda devletin sertleşmesine yol açıyor. . . . . Devletin sertleşmesi, özgürlüklerin sınırlanması demek. Ama karantinada ben devletten, bilimden yanayım. Yani salgının durması için ne yazık ki eğer millet, halk, ahali ne diyeceksek dinlemiyorsa devlet sertleşmek zorunda kalıyor. 'Ey devlet niye sertleşiyorsun bırak herkes istediği hayatı yaşasın' demek yanlış. Devletin bilimin ışığında önlem almasının yerinde olduğunu, halkın da dinlemesi gerektiğini düşünüyorum.[45] (Pamuk 2021*g*)

Although he advocates for opening oneself to influence (Parla 2011, 268), saying about *The White Castle* that "Doğu Doğu olmasın, Batı da Batı olmasın isteği var bu kitapta."[46] (Pamuk 2013, 134), in medicine, in science, matters of life and death, we should be a bit more skeptical of the dangers of cultural relativism and follow whatever method, eastern or western, that works.

Whereas some have seen in the novel a potential allegory of different stages of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic (Arslan 2021; Özkul 2021), Pamuk noted in an interview that it is more of an allegory of nationalism in general[47] (Pamuk 2021*e*, 18), while not denying, in another interview, having referenced contemporary

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[45] "Epidemics ultimately lead states to take harsh measures . . . . .
Harsher measures by the states mean limitations of freedoms. But as regards quarantine, I'm on the side of the state, of science. That is, if the nation, the people, the public don't listen to what we have to say for the epidemic to end, the state is forced to take harsh measures.
It is wrong to say, 'Hey, State, why are you taking harsh measures, let everybody live the life they want.' I believe it is appropriate for the state to take precautions in light of science and that the public needs to listen."

[46] "In this book, there is the desire that East not be East and West not be West."

[47] "Evet, alegorik bir yanı var ama anlatılan bir tek Türkiye Cumhuriyeti devletinin hikâyesi değil. Oradaki ulusal devletin kuruluşu bize biraz benziyor, biraz da benzemiyor... . . . Unutmayalım, ulusal devletlerin kuruluşunda sömürge karşıtı bir kahraman çıkar ve birbirine benzer şeyler yaşanır. Bu birbirine benzer şeylerin ortalaması benim yazdığım." [Yes, there is an allegorical dimension, but this is not just the story of the Republic of Turkey. The founding of the nation-state there kind of resembles ours and kind of doesn't... . . . Let's not forget that in the foundation of nation-states, an anti-imperialist hero comes out and similar things occur. What I have written is an average of these similar things.] (Pamuk 2021*d*)

politics,[48] most directly through the topic of executions[49] (Pamuk 2021*b*). Furthermore, an allegorical dimension is already explicitly suggested by the novel through the parallel between the central and provincial governments trying to manage the outbreak and Sultan Abdülhamit's attempts to revive "the sick man" that is the Ottoman Empire.[50] Even were the metaphor not emphasized, "plague literature" taken generally, contains plenty of works that use epidemics to write about social evils like fascism, as in Camus's *The Plague*, or unfettered capitalism, as in zombie novels (Boluk and Lenz 2010), so the possibility of allegory would probably occur to readers familiar with such works.

Crucially, though, Pamuk has also been accused of mocking Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of the Republic of Turkey, by including a character like him in the novel, Senior Captain Kâmil, and of sending a message to "the West" by doing so, in order to increase his popularity (*Ahmet Hakan 'ihbar etti': Orhan Pamuk, Atatürk'le alay ediyor* 2021). The connection between the plague story and the foundation of a nation state struggling with modernization and ideological divides and the Kâmil character, whose name, occupation, rank, ideological leanings, patriotism, role in the founding of the nation-state, and even mustache recall Mustafa Kemal, do tempt an allegorical reading that sees the history of Minger's independence as representing that of Turkey's. Furthermore, in one of Pamuk's promotional videos for the book, one can see in his notes that he has written "Yeni devletde [sic] _ bir çeşit İNÖNÜ olacak" [He will be a sort of İNÖNÜ _ in the new state], next to Sami Pasha, which shows that he partially modeled the characters after known figures in Turkish history (*Orhan Pamuk "Veba Geceleri'ni anlatıyor: Üçüncü Veba Pandemisi* 2021). What can be seen as irreverent by extreme Kemalists might be the thinking behind that gesture, as it suggests Kemal Atatürk might not have been so exceptional that

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[48]"Tabi ki, başta Jale Parla ve bütün akıllı okurlar kitabın sonundaki "yaşasın hürriyet" sözlerinin bugüne yapılmış bir gönderme olduğunu düşündüler.

"Yani kolağası Kâmil "yaşasın hürriyet" derken padişaha, şaha, feodaliteye, eski rejime karşı çıkıyor. En büyük, en sihirli, en güçlü ideolojik kavram hürriyet. Kolağası "yaşasın hürriyet" diye meydandaki kalabalığa seslenirken anlıyoruz onu.

"Bugün Türkiye'deki hürriyetsizlik ortamına gönderme var. [Of course, Jale Parla and all other smart readers thought that the cry for freedom at the end of the book to be a reference to the present day.

Senior Captain Kâmil opposes the sultan, feudalism, the old regime when he calls out for liberty. Liberty is the grandest, most magical, most powerful ideological concept. We understand this much when the Senior Captain speaks out to the crowd in the square.

There is a reference to the environment of unfreedom in Turkey today.]" (Pamuk 2021*b*)

[49]"Bir tek konu var günümüze doğrudan gönderme yapan o da idam konusu, idamın insani olarak kabul edilemez bir şey olması. İdam her zaman eski düzenin otoriter düzenin simgesi olmuştur." [There is only one subject that directly references the present, and that is the topic of executions, the idea that executions are unacceptable from a humane standpoint. Executions have always been the symbol of the old regime, the authoritarian order.] (Pamuk 2021*b*) This can be seen as Pamuk's response to the newly re-ignited debate of the death penalty in Turkish politics in the past few years.

[50]Yet this is the novel allegorizing in a microcosm the conditions it is already portraying—the novel allegorizing itself. This fractal-like structure lends a dream-like quality to the novel, typical of Pamuk's works, referencing the trope he uses of both being inside and outside oneself in a dream. The cover in which Arkaz Castle is both the vantage point from which the painting is painted and in the field of vision is another example of this trope.

there has been or can be no one like him, even in a fictional world. Pamuk has argued that the emphasis on character is overblown[51] (Pamuk 2011, 51), and that we are usually products of our time and environment[52] (Pamuk 2011, 53). This view risks undermining the cult of personality around Atatürk and making him seem comparable to leaders of other nationalist struggles, even to other people.

However, while some details tease the possibility of such an allegory, the significant differences between Turkey and Minger bring another interpretation to mind, in which the similarity of situations to real historical ones speaks to the patterns common to nationalisms and the similarity of characters to historical figures suggests that the repertory of figures that can emerge in a given environment is bound to contain parallels. This interpretation, while not completely ruling out other options, leads the reader to question whether seeing a particular nation's history allegorized rather than an allegory of nation-making in general, which Pamuk has stated the book partially is[53] (Pamuk 2021*e*, 18), could be due to limits in our own knowledge about other national histories and whether it serves as an invitation to confront our own feeling of exceptionalist nationalism. This points to another contradiction the novel highlights about the formation of nation-states, which is that it is a global phenomenon with many overlaps between different manifestations, and yet this process marked by deep historical and affective similarities engenders such strong divisions among groups constituted in the same way. In addition, the depiction of a nation's formation as reactive and almost accidental might have contributed to the ire. The creation of the nation of Minger hinges on numerous coincidences that include the fact that Sheikh Hamdullah spent a little too long in the restroom because he was inspecting the renovations (*VG*, 314). The contingent histories and imagined, socially constructed aspects of nationhood highlighted in the novel can make national attachments seem perhaps not less real but less legitimate or legitimate in a different way. They may not be completely legitimate in terms of their inner consistency or logic, but they are real nonetheless. Pamuk's irony reads as irreverence for many, which it sort of is, but to read conspiracy into that instead of contemplating why

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[51]"Roman kahramanlarının karakterlerine, tuhaflıklarına, unutulmazlıklarına gösterilen aşırı ve dengesiz ilgi, Avrupa'dan butun dunyaya, tıpkı romanın kendisi gibi yayıldı." [The excessive and disproportionate interest paid to the characters, eccentricities, and unforgettability of novel heroes spread from Europe to the whole world, just like the novel itself.] (Pamuk 2011, 51)

[52]"Ama roman kişisinin karakteri değil, içinde yaşadığı manzaraya yerleşmesi, olaylar ve şeylerle çevrilmesidir daha belirleyici olan." [But what is more decisive is not the personality of the novel's characters but their embeddedness in the general landscape, the events and things that surround them.] (Pamuk 2011, 53)

[53]"Yani romanınızın alegorik bir yanı yok mu?"

"Var. Ama sanıldığı kadar önemli değil. Minger Adası Turkiye'yi gösteren bir alegorinin çıkış noktası değildir. Olsa olsa alegori sömurge sonrası dönemlerin ve Emperyalizm çağının milliyetçilik ve milli devletin kuruluşu alegorisidir." [So does your novel not have an allegorical dimension?

It does. But it is not as important as people think it is. The island of Minger is not the starting point of an allegory that points to Turkey. If anything, it is an allegory of nationalism and the founding of the nation-state in post-colonial times and of the age of Imperialism.] (Pamuk 2021*e*, 18)

we look for reverence smacks of Abdülhamit's paranoia.

Finally, by bringing out the imagined, contingent quality of nations, Pamuk highlights the affinity between literature and politics. In fact, as one reviewer pointed out, it can be said that he is engaged in a nation-making process of his own, the making of his imaginary imagined community: "Mingerya'nın kazandığı özgürlük . . . . okuyucunun zihin coğrafyasında her şeye rağmen var olma hürriyetidir aslında."[54] (Kantarcı 2021, 42-3) Thus, the final cry for freedom at the end of the novel can be taken in multiple ways: as the expression of an important ideal, which the characters want for Minger and which we all want for our communities[55] and as a celebration of literary world-making, of literature's freedom and freedom in literature. It is a timely call for imagined communities' imagined but very real rights and for the right to imagination at once, as well as a recognition of how these are intertwined (which the outraged reception of the novel by some circles only serves to confirm). Pamuk speaks out for literature's and the imagination's right to exist, knowing full well that this cannot be in a completely separate place safe from contaminating and being contaminated by history.

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[54] "The freedom Mingeria has won . . . is actually the freedom to exist in the geography of the reader's mind, in spite of everything."

[55] Pamuk has repeatedly stated the lack of freedom of expression in Turkey as his first criticism of his native country (*Nobel laureate writer Orhan Pamuk slams climate of 'fear' in Turkey* 2014; *Orhan Pamuk: Sevdiğim İstanbul'u yok ettiler; politik olarak artık orada yaşayamam* 2017; Pamuk 2021*c*).

3. PLAGUE AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL AUTHORITY

Pamuk explains his motivation in writing a plague novel on a history podcast on plague in Ottoman lands, saying that he has been thinking about this novel for about 40 years and that he "wanted to surround himself with images of plague" (Dolbee N.d., Pamuk in). His aim is not to concoct a cautionary tale but to take aesthetic enjoyment: he reports being fascinated with death, and the plague in particular, in which death is all around and inescapable (Dolbee N.d., Pamuk in). The experience "cannot be compared to anything else," Pamuk says and adds, "how does it feel in an Ottoman place when you have plague?" (Dolbee N.d., in). Philosophical inquiries are common in literature depicting epidemics, and Pamuk's fascination with the terror of death suggests a philosophical dimension to his interest as well. Plague has historically been the paragon of infectious diseases in the cultural imagination, and the etymology of the Turkish word *veba*, which involves the Arabic word for "epidemic" coming to signify specifically "the plague" within the Ottoman language, testifies to this importance. The disease entails a confrontation not just with mortality but with a superbly powerful force of nature outside of human control that has generated an immense corpus of representations. As such, it has historically been the quintessential other to humanity, and for a novelist as intrigued by identity and difference as Pamuk, this is bound to be fertile ground.

To the extent that the plague is radically other, it provokes a crisis of epistemological authority for a humanity that positions itself as the master of nature, seeing as this mastery depends predominantly on knowledge. At stake in such a crisis are the scope of claims to knowledge, the power and legitimacy of different methodologies of reasoning, and the relationship of these to conceptions of humanity's ontological supremacy. Moreover, the novel opens to a fraught, uncertain, and unreliable epistemological environment in which Sultan Pakize and Doctor Nuri don't know why they are being sent to China, Sami Pasha and other authorities don't know if reports of plague are accurate, and nobody knows if Minger is ready for the quarantine or why Bonkowski Pasha is murdered. The lack of meaning and the atmosphere of

uncertainty and anxiety lead to competing efforts at making meaning and providing solutions. Once the plague outbreak is confirmed, science and religion emerge as two fields that offer answers, and a battle of interpretations ensues. Therefore, just as the plague in *Veba Geceleri* is an ordeal for the governments trying to handle its political aspects, it can also be viewed as a trial in terms of how it forces characters to approach, interpret, and come to terms with it. In this chapter, I would like to focus on how the pandemic is used in the novel to investigate different ways of relating to and knowing the world and their efficacy by examining competing responses to the plague, efforts at meaning-making in an uncertain environment, and implications of the concept of contagion.

3.1 Loss of Control

Pandemics invite questioning as they are prone to be "read" for their implications on humans' place in nature. In his book *Human Extinction and the Pandemic Imaginary*, which examines the implications of humanity's extinction in the hypothetical scenario of a viral pandemic, Christos Lynteris suggests that such a scenario centered around the disease agent or vector "challenges mastery as the ontological foundation of being human." (2020, 1) He finds that a pandemic extinction event poses a challenge to both religious and secular anthropocentric worldviews and constitutes "a final, meaningless end" that puts humans on a par with other animals (Lynteris 2020, 3)): "The pandemic hits our humanity, our conception of ourselves, besides our actual bodies." (Lynteris 2020, 9) The loss of meaning that tends to accompany the devastation of pandemics constitutes a crisis of identity and self-knowledge, one that forces us to rethink our relation to nature. For Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker, contagion, while escaping control, also teases us with "this 'dream of hygienic containment'" that we realize to be both extremely appealing and unattainable (2002, 2). The authors add that contagion "implies absorption, invasion, vulnerability, the breaking of a boundary imagined as secure, in which the other becomes part of the self." (Bashford and Hooker 2002, 4) As these authors demonstrate, contagion does not remain contained in the realm of bodily health but touches on "metaphysical" concerns about identity, becoming, and anxiety of influence[1].

Margrit Shildrick expands on these ideas in her essay in which she argues that disability is often unconsciously perceived as a contagious condition—even if it is known not to be biologically contagious, it will infect modernist ontological self-

[1] We can also consider the etymological connection between "influence", "influenza", "fluid"/"flow" here.

conceptions of invulnerability. Shildrick asserts that “the stress throughout [history] has been on controlling or eliminating the conditions of vulnerability as though science could settle ontology.” (2002, 155) The illusions dispelled by contagion are those upheld by our practices of knowledge; anxieties around compromising one’s independence can be traced, in Shildrick’s view, to “the post-Enlightenment ideal of autonomous subjectivity and agency [which] relies on a spacing, an interval between self and other that covers over the putative threat of engulfment by the other.” (2002, 159-60) She further argues that instead of acknowledging vulnerability, the permeability of boundaries between the sick or disabled and the healthy, we are more inclined to harden these boundaries because, despite lingering Cartesian ideals that split mind and body and value the former over the latter, we continue to be “obsessed with our bodies . . . . Whenever the body is at risk, it is the stability of the self that is threatened. In short, corporeal and ontological anxiety are inseparable.” (Shildrick 2002, 159). The sovereign self is at stake in pandemics just as much as the perceived mastery of the human species.

Susan Sontag highlights a different, affective aspect of the loss of mastery when she writes that death has become “an offensively meaningless event”, so disease needs to be hidden from view (2001, 8). For anyone who is not religious (although perhaps for the religious as well), “death is the obscene mystery, the ultimate affront, the thing that cannot be controlled.” (Sontag 2001, 55), This “affront”, which is lived collectively on an international scale with pandemics, can probably be considered a narcissistic injury that adds on to existing ones of its kind. Sergio Benvenuto writes:

> "Freud spoke of three fundamental narcissistic wounds inflicted on man in recent centuries: Copernicanism, Darwinism and psychoanalysis. Copernicus displaced the Earth from the *central* position of the Ptolemaic universe. Darwin shattered the belief of an *essential difference* between human beings and other animals. Freud himself inflicted the third narcissistic blow by saying that the ego is not a *master* in its own home." (2021*a*, 95-6) [emphasis mine]

The confrontation with the peripherality, ordinariness, and lack of control (or a perennial amateurishness) of the human, respectively, characterizes these narcissistic injuries. Benvenuto thinks that because of the implication of contingency and vulnerability inherent to them, natural phenomena like pandemics further offend our narcissistic view of ourselves as a species.

In *Veba Geceleri*, the plague has such an unsettling effect especially on characters who feel certain of their position of mastery. It challenges the idea that humans

have emerged from the yoke of nature and that there is nothing the mind cannot master. Characters representative of different bodies of knowledge are thus tested in a simplified, fairy tale or parable-like fashion, which is self-consciously acknowledged in the text through recurring patterns and evocations of the genre of the fairy tale and by the author in interviews (Pamuk 2021*f*). In addition to these explicit acknowledgments, the way the narrator keeps cautioning us to note the contingency of events, the constructed nature of historiography, and the difficulty or impossibility of knowing what really happened must be taken as a disclaimer to such a facile rendering of history. Lastly, acknowledgments of the fairy tale aspect are not apologies for a shortcoming; rather, the way this aspect, itself a counterweight to the detailed historical background provided by the novel and perhaps the morbid subject matter at hand, has been worked into the details indicates the level of forethought involved. Having provided these disclaimers ourselves, we can examine this aspect to unpack what it says about different sources of epistemological authority and their import.

Predicated on a "Hegelian" thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure of historical progression, this characteristically juvenile aspect is invoked through elements such as a sultan's daughter who is *pakize* [lit. pure] at heart, a mysterious castle, an "evil" relative who imprisons family members (Abdülhamit), and the repetition of the number three. These are not far-fetched realities given the historical setting, but the last element in particular, which harks back to Hegelian philosophy, is conspicuous in extraneous details. For instance, the boy who tries to assassinate Commander Kâmil is "shoved into the middle one of three empty and small jail cells," [üç boş ve dar hücreden ortadakine tıkıldı.] (*VG*, 355); when the Quarantine Soldiers are searching the Halifiye lodge to take the Sheikh away, it is noted that they see and look behind three doors (*VG*, 381); and the prison revolt breaks out in the third section, "also called the Beginners' Section" [Acemi koğuşu da denen Üçüncü Koğuş'ta] (*VG*, 391)—there is some chance symmetry also in this being the Third Plague Pandemic, the slogan of the French revolution echoed by Commander Kâmil having three parts, and Sultan Pakize's father being the 33rd Ottoman Sultan. The most important trinity, though, that other uses of the number point to as well, is of course the three quarantine governments. These are the vehicles through which the "moral" of the story (the need for moderation and balance) is illustrated—a moral which the markers of the genre of the fairy tale, by triggering a particular form of reading, cue the reader to watch out for. This speaks to the issue of the ontological status of humanity, which confrontation with the plague brings to the fore.

The first government, with Commander Kâmil as president and former governor Sami Pasha as prime minister, observes quarantine practices; the two leaders themselves trust in and generally adhere to scientific knowledge unless it seems politically

unfeasible. In that sense, political necessity comes first, and this is partly appropriate for the precarious circumstances: both the Ottoman provincial government and the first quarantine government have to walk a tightrope trying to diminish the religious groups' authority in plague matters without offending them and losing their support. From the very first story of plague at Minger, that of Bayram Efendi's final days, we are made aware of the circulation of prayer papers that are supposed to ward off the disease. These become a serious obstacle to the public's adherence to the quarantine because of the sense of security they provide and their implication that religious authorities override secular ones, including medical professionals—not to mention the risks posed by interactions needed to get the papers and the papers as objects being contaminated. Issues like these are so difficult to navigate that Governor Sami Pasha is overjoyed when Sheikh Hamdullah just responds to his letter, "as though he won the definitive victory against the plague." [vebaya karşı nihai zaferi kazanmış gibi sevindi.] (*VG*, 281)

The focus on politics is partly a side effect of the prime minister and president's professional or vocational deformation. Sami Pasha's forte is government—he knows the *gemi* [ship, boat] that is the Ottoman State, the interests of different parties, and the way the Sultan's mind works. He is also able to anticipate and manage public perception and manipulate people through threats and rewards. The narrator tells us now and again that despite Sami Pasha coming off as too paranoid or not strict enough in a given instant, he probably was right to do as he did. However, it is also this political paradigm of thinking that hinders Sami Pasha from viewing dissidents as people and that leads to bouts in which he gets "iktidar sarhoşu" [drunk on power] (*VG*, 106, 269). Upon finding out that Sami Pasha, while still an Ottoman governor, has taken suspects into custody based on just motive and that he plans to "make them talk", Doctor Nuri tells him: "'Fakat Paşam siz kimlerin suçlu olduğuna şimdiden karar vermişsiniz!'"[2] (*VG*, 82) In another discussion of the same subject, Sami Pasha tells Doctor Nuri, "'Devlet böyle mühim bir meselede sorumlunun kim *olacağına* kendi karar vermelidir,'"[3] (*VG*, 156) [emphasis mine] as though the state is not finding the responsible party but designating it.

Ultimately, this attitude of fabricating "the truth" as needed, of just writing, instead of engaging in a dialogue of reading and writing, is hubristic and lacks humility. This is best embodied by Commander Kâmil, whose vision and charisma earn him the position of a leader of the people. Commander Kâmil embodies military capabilities, but he is also armed with knowledge of revolutionary history and philosophy;

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[2]"'But Pasha, you have already decided who is guilty!'"

[3]"In such important business, the state itself should decide who is *going to be* responsible."

his contribution to creating a national mythology for Minger during his short term attests to his grasp of the mechanisms at play. However, Commander Kâmil's immersion in nationalist, revolutionary, and military discourses accounts for his vices as well as his strengths. While Kâmil wants to elevate the Mingerian nation, he is a bit too keen to fashion nature to his own will: he seems to want Mingerian history to be re-written to conform to nationalistic ideals, which accords facts secondary importance, and he declares Mingerian the sole official language, idealizing it, even though people, including himself, cannot speak it beyond isolated words or phrases. He is intent on having a command on everything: as soon as his wife gets pregnant, he has "decided his child would be a boy" [çocuğunun erkek olacağına karar vermiş] (*VG*, 347). The Senior Captain-[Kolağası]-become-Commander, like his German pseudo-namesake, Heinrich von Kleist's Michael Kohlhaas, is an idealist who cannot let things go. He doesn't understand people's emotional reactions to the terror of the plague, and he is both frustrated by what he sees as lack of principles and afraid of being like others, of losing control and not doing what makes sense. He starts to believe, a short while into his presidency, that he must be a special, "chosen" person, that it must be his destiny to lead the people (*VG*, 357). He prefers to attend to matters of nation-building instead of the plague, since the latter is a part of nature, and history is what Kâmil finds lofty and feels he belongs to. Both Sami Pasha and Commander Kâmil lose their grounding in existing realities to the point that they believe that they, guided by the political necessities of the circumstances, can designate the truth—a trademark of authoritarianism.

Perhaps by virtue of their hubris, both Commander Kâmil and Sami Pasha make great tragic heroes, whose principal punishment consists not in their deeply ironic deaths but in the period of repentance preceding these. Kâmil first realizes that his wife has disobeyed him and put herself in danger in visiting her mother during the epidemic. As a man who prides himself on commanding a nation, Kâmil is understandably shaken upon realizing his inability to have his wife do as he says[4]—it seems that disease is more readily transmitted than one's will. He is then tested by her illness and death, and finds that he is just like the people he judged for being too emotional and thinking too much of their personal existence. His ordinariness is confirmed not just through his feelings and reactions to his wife's death but also through his contracting the plague himself: he dies too early without having accomplished much of what he wanted; he dies of natural causes, instead of in a heroic battle, for instance, which would confirm his historical importance; and, as

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[4]Kâmil's problem of "getting through to" others can be seen as Mingerli, doing what he himself is unable to do, gets through into his mind and narrates his thoughts: "Zor işti bu millete söz geçirmek." [It was difficult getting one's words through to this nation.] (*VG*, 351) Kâmil, like Abdülhamit and anyone else with dreams of total control over others, is in a position of envying and wanting to emulate the plague.

Elana Gomel points out, the plague is not even an "individualizing" illness like tuberculosis (2000, 414-5), as per Sontag, which chooses its victims (2001, 37-8). In his final hours, he also loses his ability to speak coherently, the power of the word that he was to instill in everyone.

Kâmil's death thus refutes the sense that he is "chosen", dealing a blow to his narcissism, and his worst fear of being left alone comes true as well—he dies alone. His tragedy grants him the humility and clarity to identify with others and to recognize a power greater than himself. As for Sami Pasha, after devoting his adult life to political intrigue, sending people to prison and to the gallows for "political (read: image-related) reasons", and taking enjoyment in visiting inmates on death row, he is imprisoned, made to face his greatest failure, and executed, also for "political reasons". As a soldier and a bureaucrat, both characters are used to being in control, so much so that Sami Pasha aspires to be able to "slow down and make it known that he is in command of the situation like a careful government official" while having sex with her[5] (*VG*, 123). His impending execution brings Sami Pasha back to a more innocent and much less ambitious version of himself. He lets go of worrying about what everyone would think—it's almost as though a spell has been lifted. In his final hours, Sami Pasha remembers his childhood and his mother, just as he does in a tender moment while having sex with Marika (*VG*, 295); in love and in death, he goes back to a time before he felt the need to always be in control.

These confrontations with vulnerability and lack of control are fruitful, if harsh and tragic, because they are moments of sincerity. The cathartic experience of seeing characters' downfalls and their subsequent existential questioning and regret brings the reader closer to the characters; even if they have done cruel things, their vulnerability somewhat endears them to us. Their wrongdoings don't get overridden or overlooked, but these ethical lapses exist side by side with an awareness of their "humanity". Any inflated sense of mastery predicated on skill, capability, or knowledge of nature is bound to fall prey to a crushingly powerful natural phenomenon like the plague, which brings people back to their humanity, to an awareness of their vulnerability and limitation.

[5]"bütün benliğiyle kendini sevişmeye vermesini aşırı bulur, dikkatli bir devlet adamı gibi bazen yavaşlamak, duruma hâkim olduğunu hissettirmek isterdi.

3.2 Contamination Anxiety

When this regime loses its power, the void is filled with Sheikh Hamdullah and his followers. This is likened to a dark age in the island's history because previous attempts to track and stop the pandemic are abandoned and the disease spreads more widely than ever before. The regime contains elements of despotism like the previous one, except this time it's based on bigotry, with vindictive persecution directed at Christians. But it is through the plague that the second government's attitude towards ontological questions is elaborated and refuted. Sheikh Hamdullah tells Doctor Nuri about the two approaches offered by Islam to epidemics—the same as those presented in *The White Castle*. One counsels refraining from trying to escape it, denies contagion, and advocates going into a spiritual quarantine instead: "Veba çıkınca en iyisi kendi içine çekilmek, kimseciklere görünmeden, ruhunu zehirlemeden beklemektir."[6] (*VG*, 286) The "poisoning of the soul" in this case presumably entails losing composure and stooping to petty, self-interested anxieties to preserve one's own immunity. While this approach opposes quarantine, which, by contrast, the first government fully believes in, its emphasis on composure and self-control mirrors Kâmil's values. In the Sheikh's view, Europeans don't understand that this attitude is more than just "fatalism" (*VG*, 286). His explanation suggests that it stems from a place of internal motivation and for the purpose of emotional and social regulation, to guard against social ills like selfishness or chaos.

The second approach explained by the Sheikh resembles an epidemiological one in that it says to try to avoid infection at all costs. Ultimately, however, both approaches come down to the same bottom line: "Ama veba içimizdeyse zaten kapıyı kilitlemek de, kaçmak da para etmez. O zaman Allah'a sığınmaktan başka çare yoktur.'"[7] (*VG*, 287) The generic Islamic teachings about epidemics as represented in the novel lean towards spiritual elements more than Western, scientific approaches do. Even if one takes the second, non-fatalistic line of thinking in the Islamic school, there is the recognition of a point at which one must deem the situation unsolvable ("the plague is inside us") and defer judgment to the divine Ruler. The point at which the second approach tips into the first is open to interpretation, which can make the two more similar than they first seem. Indeed, when the Sheikh and his followers come to power in Minger, they abolish the quarantine and decree a return to normal. The quarantine as an imported method has been tried to no avail, so

[6]When there is plague, the best thing to do is to retreat into oneself and to wait without being seen by anybody and poisoning one's soul.

[7]"But if the plague is inside us, then neither locking the door, nor running away will do any good. Then there is no other hope than taking refuge in Allah.'"

it is time to accept that plague is among us and take spiritual shelter in God. The regime's readiness to abandon quarantine shows an unwillingness to import the knowledge of Western medicine, to admit heterogeneity, which fact is evident in their attitudes towards non-Muslims as well.

The second government errs on the side of spirituality and tradition, in the hopes of maintaining Muslim community, but the regime falls apart when plague deaths increase dramatically. On the one hand, it can be said that they make themselves too vulnerable by accepting plague as fate and not taking scientifically recommended precautions. The Sheikh's government, in contrast to the first government, *under*estimates the importance of behavioral change, the role of human involvement. On the other hand, it can be said that the fatal flaw of the second government that results in increased bodily contamination is their fear and rejection of spiritual "contamination": they are both unwilling to put a temporary halt to religious rituals that require physical contact and reluctant to accept that they might have to open up to the influence of other bodies of knowledge besides Islam. They mirror the first government's penchant for excessive control, as it is precisely the lack of precautions that indicates a refusal to welcome what Bashford and Hooker point to as the potential of contagion—the vulnerability of opening up, which entails a "possibility of becoming" (2002, 9): "Quite literally, . . . contagion can put us in touch." (Bashford and Hooker 2002, 11) The Sheikh shares Kâmil's hubris as well, a feeling of being special and therefore immune to the plague (*VG*, 284), but the plague corrects this misconception when, in an exemplar of poetic justice, the Sheikh contracts it as a result of his own policies and dies of it.

Indeed, such delusions of impermeability and invulnerability seem to be an unshakable part of living with the anxiety of contagion because, as if the fear of a painful death weren't enough, plague also dehumanizes its victims, who exhibit incoherent speech or delirium. The sufferer's character changes, and she turns into someone else: "ölüm korkusu, insanları kendi kalıpları ve ruhları dışına çıkarıyor, onları başka biri haline sokuyordu. . . . herkes başka birine dönüşüyordu."[8] (*VG*, 238). The pandemic is a gateway to a lethal metamorphosis, which, while tragic, seems to fascinate the novel as it does the novelist. In this regard, it resembles art, which, for Pamuk, provides a way to become different from oneself. Jale Parla argues in *Türk Romanında Yazar ve Başkalaşım* that the story of Sultan Celaleddin is Pamuk's own story: "'Kendi' olmanın siyasi erk için de, yazarlık erki için de olmazsa olmaz bir koşul olduğu yanılgısına dair "kendi" hikâyesidir bu (387, 392). İster şehzade olsun ister yazar, kişinin başkasına dönüşme yani 'başkalaşma' kapasitesine sahip

[8]"the fear of death brought people out of their casts and their souls and made them into different people. . . . everyone was turning into someone else."

olmasının gerçek bir erki temsil ettiğini fark etmiştir artık."[9] (Parla 2011, 261) In her view, "Pamuk'ta arayışla yaratıcılık, yaratıcılıkla başkalaşım özdeştir."[10] (Parla 2011, 269) The Sheikh's grievous crime is his resistance to transformation and alienation; it is as though he always wants to feel home.

Peta Mitchell argues that "Contagion is a limit case for metaphorical language," which always entails more than its biological dimension because the concept itself is mixed or contaminated: "contagion's metaphoricity taints even its most literal definitions." (2012, Introduction) Explaining that the germ theory of disease was a later development compared to the concept of contagion and that the concept's biological and ideational meanings were historically never entirely distinct, Mitchell questions the metaphoricity of contagion—whether there can be two distinct notions of biological and ideological or literal and figurative contagion that do not infect one another[11] (2012, Introduction). So not only does contagion, due in part to its inherent metaphoricity and mixedness, lead to ontological anxiety about sovereignty over nature, the body, and the self, challenging frameworks of signification from which individuals derive authority, becoming unthinkable for even the seasoned doctors and pharmacists in the novel who have probably seen or read about such situations, but the concept alone generates "epistemological anxiety" (Mitchell 2012, Introduction) and confusion about how to understand it, as it gets at the heart of our inability to think without metaphors: Mitchell believes that the contagion metaphor allows us to problematize metaphor itself, revealing, for instance, a sense of contamination to it: "'Contamination', with its connotations of 'pollution' and 'infection', is an apt metaphor for metaphor." (2012, chap. 1) Drawing on "the complex relationship between metaphor and mimesis", Mitchell also touches on the desire to be able to think without metaphors, (2012, chap. 1) "directly," so to speak, which resembles the desire, often seen in Pamuk's characters, to be "purely" themselves. Pamuk's "wisdom", then, extends from the realization that there is no originality, that one is always (already) necessarily influenced by others, to hint at an impossibility of thinking without metaphors, detours, or mediation, which Mitchell states is characteristic of post-structuralist thinking on the subject: "What the Derridean and 'New Nietzschean' theories of metaphor and rhetoric offer is an awareness of the 'Dionysian' nature of language, of its fundamental, infectious and irreducible metaphoricity. Metaphor becomes the problem of language, of representation, of

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[9] "This is his 'own' story about the illusion of how being one's 'own' self is an indispensable condition for both political authority and for writerly authority (387, 392). He has discovered that, no matter whether one is a sultan's son or a writer, one's ability to turn into someone else, to 'metamorphose', represents a real form of authority."

[10] "In Pamuk, searching and creativity, as well as creativity and metamorphosis are equivalent."

[11] In Mitchell's words, "contagion proves impossible to quarantine in this way." (2012, Introduction)

mimesis and of influence." (2012, chap. 1)

Interestingly, despite his aversion to foreign influence and change, we may note that the Sheikh's line of thinking is just as prone to contagion as that of any other character, if not more. As a religious leader, poet, and avid reader, the Sheikh is someone who deals in metaphors, and his followers take after him. This is made clear by the ironic expression of their horror after the Quarantine Soldiers spray disinfectant on the lodge's sacred wool: "kutsal mabet lizolle kirletilmişti."[12] (*VG*, 141) The Sheikh reiterates the point to Doctor Nuri, adding a metaphorical sense of death: "Bunlar tarikatının gizli emanetleriydiler ve kara lizol ve karantina zehri onlara dokunursa ölürlerdi. Onlarla birlikte müritlerden dervişlere herkes ölürdü."[13] (*VG*, 286) The narrator's use of reported speech in both cases brings out the metaphoricity that seems to elude the speakers themselves. The fault in this faction's stance lies not in their extensive use of metaphor but in the way they insist on purity while themselves engaging in metaphoricity, which Derrida defines as "the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic." (1981, 149) Whether this faction's intransigence and fundamentalism stem from a literal interpretation of holy texts, which holds that to acknowledge the metaphoricity inherent in religion would be to devalue religious teachings, or from a postmodern attitude worldly enough to recognize that all knowledge is interpretation but then quick to dismiss scientific knowledge as "only" interpretation doesn't really matter in terms of practical results; this attitude costs lives and is disapproved by the novel. Hence, the antithesis phase is a step back from the progress in pandemic management achieved in the first phase, but it is a necessary mistake that ends up convincing the population of the importance of epidemiology.

3.3 The Enlightened Mind

The prime minister of the final government, Doctor Nuri, is already associated with the practice of moderation—that is what he repeatedly counsels. Having to play the role of moderator, he tries to soften the ambitions and ruthlessness of Sami Pasha and to invigorate the Sheikh into quarantine advocacy. He tries to keep an open-mind, concurring with Bonkowski Pasha that Muslims can be more difficult as regards quarantine, but acknowledging also how this has been exaggerated and

[12] "the sacred shrine had been soiled with lysol."

[13] "These were the cult's secret relics, and if black lysol and quarantine poison touched them, they would die. With them would die everyone, from the disciples to the dervishes."

weaponized against them. Nikiforo the pharmacist points out that, by dint of his profession, he is tasked with measuring everything and choosing wisely "even while talking" (*VG*, 201), and the same could be said for Doctor Nuri. With a name that follows in the line of other Pamuk characters like the Işıkçı family and Faruk Darvınoğlu, *Doctor* "Nuri" [lit. "light"] represents Enlightenment ideals as he is fascinated with scientific accomplishments and horrified by superstition. His main contribution throughout the novel, besides being the voice of reason, is to monitor the tracking of the plague's spread in various ways (on an epidemiology map, through body counts, by doing "rounds" of the city), advise on public health decisions (funereal ablutions must be kept to a minimum, etc.), and do check-ups. Although doctors in the novel can diagnose plague—in most cases, so can anyone else who sees a bubo on the patient—they cannot actually treat it; all they can do is burst the bubo, but as the novel repeatedly tells us, that does not help with recovery at all, and it is dubitable whether it even gives the patient any relief besides a placebo effect. In other words, while epidemiological experience does help, doctors are not really able to do much in the novel that others cannot do.

In the novel, maps are the epidemiologists' greatest tools because they represent the new data that comes in every day from the laboratory that is the city. One looks at the map for a non-experiential way of knowing oneself, one's city or country, and to acquire knowledge that is not sugarcoated by the lies one is inclined to tell oneself in adversity: "haritada bu dehşet verici gerçek açıkça görülüyordu."[14] (*VG*, 244) Significantly, during the second government's term, cases are no longer counted and marked on the epidemiology map; the leaders are not interested in knowing themselves if the attainment of this knowledge involves a method imported from the West—if it disturbs "purity". The subject of maps is also taken up through maps of the empire's territory. Abdülhamit has "optimistically" commissioned a map of the Empire after winning back lost territory, but these territories' time under Ottoman control turns out to be very short (*VG*, 32). The map of the Empire instigates a sort of false mirror stage moment and subsequent disappointment at each viewing: "bu haritayı defalarca görmüşlerdi ve her seferinde İmparatorluğun kapsadığı alanın büyüklüğüne hayret edip saygı duymuşlar, sonra da haritanın ne yazık ki sürekli ve daha da hızlanarak küçülmeye devam ettiğini hatırlatmışlardı kendilerine."[15] (*VG*, 32) Some government officials are said to be unable to look at a map of the Empire (*VG*, 87); perhaps, like Bonkowski Pasha and Doctor Nuri struggling to look at the city and at plague sufferers, it is because they are ashamed to know where the road

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[14]"this horrifying reality could be clearly seen on the map."

[15]"they had seen this map many times, and every time they had been shocked and awed into respect by the size of the area covered by the Empire, only to remind themselves that sadly the map kept shrinking continuously and increasingly rapidly."

leads and to be looking at something that is dying (*VG*, 45, 99).

Furthermore, because the Empire is losing its territories more rapidly than it is having maps made and distributed, existing maps cause confusion (*VG*, 111), which brings out how maps, for all their claim to truth, are always already dated and thus provide disinformation as well as information. At their best, maps demystify patterns of contagion, such as in the case of cholera (*VG*, 161), but at their worst, they misrepresent or provide an incomplete picture due to all that they don't represent, such as all the other ways the Empire fails to measure up to European countries (*VG*, 33). Despite ambitions to the contrary, this impersonal, "objective", general knowledge is inadequate on its own; Bonkowski Pasha's expert opinion is that "'Karantinacı her şeyi kendi gözüyle görmeli.'"[16] (*VG*, 60) Thus, the general overview provided by the map is supplemented by Quarantine Board members' carriage visits and walks around town, which are much more interesting to the novel and through which they aim to observe the particular and put a face on the struggle. The map is to official history what the landau visits are to popular history, which seems to fascinate Pamuk much more as a novelist who constructs his narratives from and through images. This fondness for popular history comes through in a reference to one of its most famous figures, Reşat Ekrem Koçu, refigured as "Minger popüler tarihçilerinin en eğlencelisi ve sevimlisi Reşit Ekrem Adıgüç"[17] (*VG*, 440). While maps and statistics are crucial for the authorities and for readers to gauge the state of the epidemic, in contrast to the colorful life to be seen on the streets of Minger (it has been pointed out that the letters in "Minger" can be rearranged to read "rengim" [lit. my color]), they present a heartlessly impersonal, black-and-white way of staying informed, in which everyone is reduced to a number. Such representations erase the struggle and the process, delivering only results. This may be why Abdülhamit is said to have "instantly hated" his son upon finding him coloring in black on a map the territories his father has lost (*VG*, 32), counting his failures.

Priscilla Wald notes that variously annotated maps that "evoke both fear and reassurance." symbolize the work of the epidemiologist and "help the epidemiologists solve the puzzle of the disease" (2008, 37). Indeed, two doctors in the novel, as well as one layman experimenting at home, attempt to "solve the puzzle". In an episode that Sultan Pakize writes about to her sister and titles "Nights of Plague", Doctor Nuri wanders around town with the sense that he could see something that would give him the key, looking for clues or inspiration and comparing the puzzle of the

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[16]"'The quarantine officer must see everything with their own eyes.'"

[17]"The most enjoyable and likeable out of Mingerian popular historians, Reşit Ekrem Adıgüç"

pandemic to murder mysteries:

> "Hastalık ve salgın hakkında en sıradan şeylere, kuyu çıkrıklarına, kapı tokmaklarına, kilitlere, gaz lambalarına, güneşe çıkarılmış bir kilime bakarak kimsenin fark etmediği ama aslında çok da ortada olan bir şeyi gözleyebilmek istiyordu Damat Doktor. Cinayet çözmek ile salgını durdurmak arasındaki bu derin benzerliği Vali Paşa'ya anlatabilmek isterdi."[18] (*VG*, 155)

What Doctor Nuri wants doesn't come true for the plague; however, as discussed in the previous chapter, this is not far from how the vision of Mingerian nationhood will soon be formed, and despite Doctor Nuri's self-assurance, it will be Sami Pasha who solves the murders of Bonkowski Pasha and Doctor Ilias. Doctor Nuri and Sami Pasha are engaged in a debate about the better method for solving a murder, with the former championing the modern "Western" method of using clues to work up to the perpetrator in the example of Sherlock Holmes (what the novel refers to as the inductive method, though in philosophy sources this may be referred to as abduction), and the latter defending the traditional Ottoman way of deduction. In a way, this is a false binary of the kind Pamuk is known to undo; it's not possible to do with just one of these ways of reasoning. Debates around false binaries themselves illustrate the tendency to think things distinct, uncomplicated, unmixed. On the other hand, the question of whether the Sherlock Holmes method could work in "the Orient" does not appear to be totally void because Sami Pasha does manage to solve the murder using a mixture of the two methods: Sultan Pakize says to Doctor Nuri, "[Sami Paşa] Sherlock Holmes usulünün ne Orient'da ne de Osmanlı Devleti'nde sökeceğini hem size hem de ne yazık ki geceleri okuttuğu cinayet romanlarının cazibesine kapılan amcama göstermek istiyordu."[19] (*VG*, 426) Although Pamuk may not believe in essential distinctions between East and West, he does distinguish between modern and pre-modern—Minger's transformation is in some ways also its entry into modernity—so there might be an actual difference in question, a precondition of modernity to Sherlock Holmes. But then, even Sherlock Holmes has to go out to gather data. If as Bruno Latour says, "we have never been modern"—and contagion certainly challenges the duality between nature and

[18] "By looking at the most mundane things about the illness and the epidemic—the reels of wells, the door knockers, the gas lamps, or a rug out in the sun—the Doctor Son-in-law wanted to observe something nobody noticed but that was actually very much out in the open. He would like to be able to tell the Governor Pasha about this profound similarity between solving the murder and stopping the outbreak."

[19] "[Sami Pasha] wanted to show, both to you and to my uncle, who unfortunately falls for the attraction of the murder novels he has read to him at night, that the Sherlock Holmes method would work neither in the Orient, nor in the Ottoman Empire."

culture—then we might want to recognize that even Sherlock Holmes can't only use the method referred to by his name.

The discussion of induction/abduction and deduction does not just concern itself but maps on (roughly) to other distinctions relevant to the novel. First, these different ways of thinking and knowing can be related to different modes of exercising power, as theorized by Michel Foucault, who famously argues that the sovereign's power used to lie in "deduction" (1978, 136), the taking away of life, and unless he exercised his power by killing his subjects, it could not be felt. In 18th century Western Europe, however, a new form of power, which he calls "biopower", is born. This is a way for the states to regulate the lives of the population, and while deductive power that functions by way of threat and punishment still exists, it is no longer the sole form of power in countries that have developed it. At the turn of the 20th century, it could be said that although the Ottoman Empire has taken some steps to modernize the Empire and to have power infiltrate daily life, it has not completely made this switch, as the threat of the sovereign's power to kill continues to be the most reliable and salient form of power. Therefore, the question of whether "the Sherlock Holmes method" would work in the Empire could be seen to hint at whether certain behaviors or practices can be induced in the population of the Empire, or whether a constant threat has to be present for the population to behave a certain way. The result obtained in the novel is mixed; neither the Ottoman Empire nor the "Great Powers" [Düvel-i Muazzama] is exclusively using only one of these forms of power.

Again resonant with Foucault's ideas is the way the plague epidemic might help facilitate the development of biopower. Foucault writes that power responds to plague by increased "discipline" or increased regulation, control, and order—monitoring and restricting movement, counting bodies, mapping contagion, and so on; the "political dream of the plague" is taken as a model even after the epidemic is gone because of the increased reach it allows power to have (Foucault 2012, part 3 chap. 3). Whereas Abdülhamit's power over the island is exercised from a distance, under Mazhar's central government, Minger's public can be more closely monitored, their lives penetrated by power and regulated to a more precise extent. Mazhar going from head of intelligence to president is also apt given that this is a cerebral way of exercising power: "Against the plague, which is a mixture, discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis." (Foucault 2012, part 3 chap. 3)

Second, the establishment of quarantine and the model of mimetic contagion comprise two models of collective action that bear resemblance to induction and deduction respectively. In the former, although it is not possible for an individual to know

that the whole community is staying home, bits and pieces of information such as witnessing authoritative acts of leadership or seeing some individuals quarantining lead one to imagine that this is what "everyone" is doing; quarantining is taken to be what is done. Therefore, it is less the horizontal influence of particular individuals that produces the decision to self-quarantine as though it were a cool new trend, than an inference about the whole community or the general public. Displays of power and competence, for instance, are speculated to be effective in the novel because they will lead every individual to conclude that not just certain individuals but a nameless crowd, people they do not even know, will find them intimidating and/or reassuring enough to submit (or rather, that they will find them intimidating and/or reassuring enough for everyone else to find them intimidating and/or reassuring enough to submit). Taken to the limit, no one is actually thinking directly about any "thing"; they are all thinking about thinking—in mimetic contagion, however, it is the example or model that is copied and reproduced, spreading horizontally, rather than referring to higher orders of thinking. Like the Sherlock Holmes method, the inductive model of collective action is associated with the West: "[Bonkowski Pasha:] "Karantinayı kabul etmek Garplılaşmayı kabul etmektir ve Doğu'ya gittikçe bu çetrefilleşir."[20] (*VG*, 23) Although this is only a technique or method, albeit a very important one, that the West has on its belt and the East does not, its acquisition is considered "Western*izing*", which suggests an epistemological component to cultural identity. Minger's not being "ready" for the quarantine in the beginning of the novel, but eventually becoming ready through growing to imagine the whole is thus the incorporation of induction as a model of thought into the collective imaginary of Minger and an epistemological transformation to its identity. Just as Sami Pasha uses deduction and induction together to solve the murder and just as mimetic contagion is necessary but not sufficient for nation-building, the deductive method plays a role in ushering in or coaxing into being the inductive method.

Characters in *Veba Geceleri* fail in their endeavors to disarm the plague with a stroke of genius—fittingly, the ultimate discovery of penicillin will come as a result of an oversight in the course of laboratory studies. It is noted that Doctor Nikos, who also tries to come up with a theory that will explain the spread, but ultimately fails to go beyond wishful thinking, mainly has experience with cholera. This disease, as Doctor Nuri excitedly tells Sultan Abdülhamit, actually *was* solved: not by examining patients but by marking the cases on a map, which revealed a conspicuous absence around a brewery that boiled its own drinking water (*VG*, 161). The Sultan is intrigued: "'Tıpkı Sherlock Holmes gibi!' dedi sarayından hiç çıkmayan Abdülhamit

[20] "[Bonkowski Pasha:] To accept the quarantine is to accept Westernization, and as one goes further East, this becomes more and more difficult."

bunun üzerine."[21] (*VG*, 162) In truth, cholera is probably the exception, but it fuels dreams of intellectual triumph. Sibel Irzık argues that *Snow* expresses the dream of an artwork "purged" ["arınmış"] of politics, which it deems impossible (2018, 46). The story of cholera provokes a similar dream: if we can just see the hidden pattern (and surely it must be there), we won't have to get our hands dirty outside, in the real world, doing police work. We can get by only doing detective work and be like a brain in a vat; the need for quarantine and politics—the need to deal with the body politic—will go away. The persistence of the plague, however, shows the mind up for what it is not—being omnipotent and autonomous; the sickness of the Empire will eventually strike the palace as well. The solution to the plague and other problems will continue to depend on politics and co-operation, and any cures found will likely depend on the many extensions of the human mind (technologies including writing) and to sustained processes of trial and error over time.

3.4 The Unthinkable Real

Looking more closely at how reason is pulled up short in trying to grasp the plague, at this particular failure at complete domination over nature, we may note commonalities between Pamuk's two novels that feature encounters with the plague. In *The White Castle*, characters are inclined to conceptualize the epidemic as a thinking agent, but their failure to anticipate its movements, in that the Venetian and Hodja both fail to accurately foretell the end of the plague (Bayrakceken and Randall 2005, 195), reveals its radical difference. Bayrakçeken and Randall argue that "Pamuk's plague—and here is the crucial point—is characterized most tellingly by randomness. Neither science nor story can account for its developments." (2005, 195) The plague raises the question not only of how much we want to understand that which isn't like us, but of how much we can understand it. Psychologist Daniel Kahneman argues that pandemics are unthinkable for human beings by their very nature due to their exponential spread (Konnikova N.d.). This unthinkable quality to epidemics is echoed in *Veba Geceleri* (*VG*, 55, 164, 169, 243) (as well as in *The White Castle*) and taken quite literally: at one point, this is compared to the impossibility of picturing God (*VG*, 243-4), something of a different order than human existence. Although the impending devastation is only separated temporally from the present and in fact known deep down—"algılıyor ama gözünün önünde

[21]"'Just like Sherlock Holmes!' exclaimed Abdülhamit, who never left his palace, in response.

canlandıramıyor”[22] (*VG*, 164)—it creates awareness of a break in temporality, like the turning of a page, as opposed to a continuous flow. In *Veba Geceleri*, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (*VG*, 87) and “the revolution” (*VG*, 322) are also deemed unthinkable, and the grouping of both these events through the property of unthinkability alone demonstrates the pandemic’s powerful double potential.

If the uncontrollable devastation of the plague resembles the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in that both events are unthinkable before they happen, then perhaps the loss of humans’ mastery over nature, which they have colonized to their own ends, poses a similar unimaginable scenario as it entails the fracture of the cultural framework through which we understand our ontological status. Jonathan Lear explores an experience of cultural devastation in his book *Radical Hope* through the case of the Native American Crow nation. Lear notes that warring Native American nations, although deadly to each other, also helped preserve each other’s ontological stability (2006, 50). All those involved in the gun battle at the provincial hall are “ontologically on the same side”; although Ramiz and Sami Pasha are at odds, through their conflict they recognize each other from within a framework that makes sense to both. Sami Pasha wants to uphold government authority against a renegade and to prevent a public display of disorder lest it undermine the quarantine effort. He wants to prove himself as a good and capable public servant, governor, bureaucrat, and, until the independence, a good servant to the Sultan. Despite his personal animus towards Sami Pasha, Ramiz stages an attack that involves the new governor, who technically should have taken office, and thus a claim to legitimacy. On some level, he views himself as a righteous subject of the empire opposing a corrupt ex-governor. From Abdülhamit’s point of view, however, neither of them really matters because Minger does not really matter so long as it is not exporting plague and humiliating the empire. The men of action on both sides want their fight, their actions, and their politics to be significant instead of surrendering the limelight to natural forces greater than them and feeling like pawns in something that exceeds them. In a world where everyone is striving for visibility and recognition as the world of politics in the novel seems to be, to be insignificant is much worse than losing.

There is a similar dichotomy between the epidemic and the mystery of Bonkowski Paşa’s murder, which, as the product of a perpetrator’s mind, must have some kind of logic to it that can be unveiled and understood. Amid the meaningless devastation of the plague, knowing it’s possible to discover the logic behind the murder almost serves as a consolation for reason. Sibel Irzık writes about the genre of detective

[22] “can sense it but can’t picture it”

novels as follows:

> "Bu romanların kahramanı kentin karanlığına nüfuz eden insan bilincinin aydınlığıdır. . . . . [Dedektif] Aynı zamanda görünüşteki bir kaosun içinde bir düzenliliği açığa çıkarır, rastlantıyla bir araya gelmiş gibi gözüken tek tek olayları, nesneleri birer ipucu olarak yeniden anlamlandırır. ... Bu yüzden postmodern romanların bir çoğunda detektif [sic] romanı bütün kurmacanın, mesleği gereği bir paranoyak olan detektif [sic] de yazarın, okurun ve giderek insan bilincinin paradigmatik figürleri olurken, metropolü bir kez daha fethetmenin, bir kez daha insana maletmenin yeni bir yolu denenir."[23] (Irzık quoted in Parla 2018, 16)

The two quests of ending the plague and solving the murder are placed in parallel (as in the case of Oedipus[24]) often enough to make them foils for each other, and together they demonstrate the powers and shortcomings of the mind. Unlike the detective story that represents art or fiction (in this case, one that is authored by Abdülhamit, solved by Sami Pasha, and read by Doctor Nuri and Sultan Pakize), that forms part of history and has a logic, the plague is a chaotic and random natural phenomenon that does not allow itself to be "claimed" or "conquered". The murder mystery has a center, whether it can be located or not, just as Pamuk argues in *The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist* that novels do, and the murderer and the detective speak from the same ontological position, affirming each other. By contrast, interpretation cannot uncover the epidemic to find sense, and there may not even be a cover to it. Doctor Nuri's sense that he could just see one thing that would unravel the whole epidemic or "penetrate" the "nights of plague" is shown to be disappointing and quixotic, while the reader's relief at having a detective story, as well as the characters' inclination to think of the plague as similar to one, highlights the way even mortal enemies scratch each others' backs, ontologically speaking.

Literary scholars have pointed out that, besides being unthinkable, pandemics, in their stark reality, don't feel real. Elana Gomel notes that "The 'material force of the Real' is revealed in the impersonal dynamics of contagion" (Haver 1996, 2; as cited in Gomel 2000, 416) while Elizabeth Outka describes the experience of living through the uncertainty of the current pandemic as "hav[ing] no idea where we are

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[23]"The hero of these novels is the brightness of the human consciousness that penetrates the darkness of the city. . . . [The detective] also reveals a kind of orderedness amidst the apparent chaos, reading as clues isolated incidents and objects that look like they happened to come together. ... This is why, in many postmodern novels, the detective novel is the paradigmatic figure of all fiction and the detective, who is a paranoid as required by his profession, that of human consciousness, and a new way of conquering the metropolis once more, of claiming it for humans once more is attempted."

[24]Thanks to Sibel Irzık for pointing this out.

in the story or even what story we are in" (2020*a*). She compares the Spanish Flu pandemic to WWI: "For the period itself, it [the pandemic] was spectral because the war was what seemed like *the real story.* People had been fighting the war for four and a half years. They knew the characters. They knew the plot. But the flu lurked as this spectral trauma that made everything worse but didn't solidify into its own *historical event* in the way that the war did." (Outka in Schwartz 2020) [emphasis mine] Experiences that get us closer to death, particularly epidemics, present instances when the Real finds a breach and seeps in, but these feel "spectral" because we feel more at home in stories we recognize. The indigestible, ineffable Real appears often in Pamuk's novels, whereby characters feel as though they are on the verge of understanding something but never manage to proceed further to master a metaphysical truth. In Jale Parla's view, these moments are when characters catch glimpses of the transcendent in the course of what she likens to pendulum swings between transcendence and immanence that mark Pamuk's novels (Parla 2018, 24, 41). The white castle, for example, standing in the horizon but forever unattainable, symbolizes this transcendence according to Parla, and hence cannot be conquered by the characters.

In *Veba Geceleri*, moments when the characters find themselves on the verge of something greater than themselves or something that penetrates deep into existence are usually observed when they feel the effects of the epidemic or of History, and these experiences are often described as "büyüleyici" or "metafizik" and/or accompanied by "a strange light". Doctor Nuri's walk through the city at night is described as a "metaphysical experience" [metafizik deneyim] (*VG*, 176), suggesting that he came close to transcendence or the Lacanian Real. Eye contact with fearful people quarantined in their homes (*VG*, 238), the light coming from the newly designated Mingerian flag (*VG*, 320), and the empty streets (*VG*, 465) are all "büyüleyici" [enchanting], as is the "Teta" [Theta] brand clock at the telegram office for Senior Captain Kâmil, a gift of Sultan Abdülhamit (*VG*, 112). These experiences are felt, but they cannot really be thought through or analyzed, which is to say that perhaps art rather than science provides a better avenue to understanding them.

Similarly, there is a foreignness to the plague in the novel, which makes itself felt as "a strange force": "[Bayram Efendi] Tuhaf bir gücün pençesinde olduğunu anlıyor, korkuyor, . . . o gücün kendisinden çok daha büyük olduğunu kederle anlıyordu."[25] (*VG*, 26) It is deemed "unstoppable" and "supernatural" to the extent that it does not fit with our construction of nature: "Vali Paşa bazan vebanın durdurulmaz

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[25]"He [Bayram Efendi] understood he was seized by a strange power and was afraid, . . . he understood with grief that that power was so much bigger than himself."

gücünü doğaötesi büyük bir dalga gibi hissediyor,"[26] (*VG*, 233). When Zeynep is seeing Kâmil off to the fateful meeting at the provincial hall, she is afraid of something immaterial: "Sanki kavgadan, dövüş ve silahtan değil, daha metafizik ve ruhsal bir şeyden korkuyordu."[27] (*VG*, 311) It is as though what cannot be put into a determinate form, that which we intuit but don't perceive in any way, is much more frightening than anything actually out there. During the skirmish, we are told that onlookers were afraid of the symptom of violence, more than the violence itself: "sanki vuruluyorlar diye değil gürültüden korkuyorlardı"[28] (*VG*, 318). Similarly, the Sheikh's shadow is "ten times more frightening than the Sheikh himself." (*VG*, 381) Like perceptible buboes that act as lightning rods for the fear of the unthinkable plague, the symptom carries an excess that touches on all kinds of formless fears, perhaps formed early on in psychic development before the acquisition of language, and represents the fearsome and arresting Real.

The folklore that emerges around the plague can be seen as an attempt to make it more perceptible or digestible by clothing it in language and narratives. The plague is often anthropomorphized and attributed agency in the way it is imagined as being spread by a jinn (*VG*, 27), "a lost child" (*VG*, 126), a person from Girit with a sack full of rats (*VG*, 129, 144), a priest (*VG*, 150-1), a cyclops (*VG*, 138, 151), and/or a devil (*VG*, 129, 144, 151, 182, 375). A particularly elaborate and imaginative sighting, in which the priest goes from having more than one eye to just one eye in the telling of the story, goes:

> "Vebayı her akşam Hıristiyan mahallesinden kimseye görünmeden gelen kara pelerinli, kara top sakallı ve gözleri kanlı bir papaz getiriyor, bohçasından çıkardığı ölü fareleri Müslüman mahallelerinde bahçelere, sokaklara dağıtırken, vebalı macunu çeşmelere, duvarlara, kapı kulplarına sürüyordu. Kadirler Mahallesi'ndeki çocuklardan biri bir gece onunla karşılaşmış ve papazın tepegöz olduğunu görmüş, korkudan iki gün kekelemişti."[29] (*VG*, 150-1)

Such creative lore that has a life of its own and evolves in the telling helps channel

[26] "The Governor would sometimes feel the plague's unstoppable power like an enormous supernatural wave,"

[27] "It was as if she were afraid not of a fight and guns but of something more metaphysical and spiritual."

[28] "it was as if they weren't afraid because they were being shot but because of the noise"

[29] "Every evening, a black cape wearing, black goateed priest with bloodshot eyes brought the plague from the Christian neighbordhood without being seen, distributed the dead rats he took out of his satchel to the gardens and streets in the Muslim neighborhoods, and rubbed the plague-ridden paste onto water fountains, walls, and door knobs. One of the children from Kadirler Neighborhood had encountered him one night, seen the priest to be a cyclops, and stuttered with fear for two days."

anxiety but can also incite intergroup hatred and unscientific attitudes—religious conceptions of plague authorize religious solutions: "Emine Hanım Şeyh Hamdullah Efendi'den okunmuş bir muska alır, tepegözlü veba şeytanına doğru tutarsan, bohçasındaki fareleri bırakamadan gerisingeriye kaçtığını da anlattı misafirlerine."[30] (*VG*, 151) Wald explains the tendency to believe in such figures instead of recognizing the natural mechanisms at play by "the reluctance to accept Nature's [or God's] indifference toward human beings" (2008, 42), but in this case, it might also partly be due to an enjoyment of stories and to the historical setting, which is already characterized by an atmosphere of uncertainty that sends characters grasping for meaning. Censorship and surveillance under Abdülhamit's oppressive regime have infected the body politic with fear and doubt and made alternative and indirect forms of communication, such as anonymous rumors (or "gossip", which Bashford and Hooker call "an epidemic form of communication"; 2009, 5) particularly vital. Once censorship has contaminated the communicative environment, meaning is likely to be expressed and sought between the lines, with coincidences and lack of news held to be just as deliberate and informative as actual news. In short, censorship and oversignification mutually intensify each other as excessive amounts of information, misinformation, and speculation circulate at any given time.

Therefore, it's fitting that Sheikh Hamdullah, for example, interprets the dark smoke coming from the government's deliberate burning of an empty infected house as a death threat from the governor directed at himself (*VG*, 284), even though this is coincidental and the governor is terrified of offending the Sheikh; it seems as though the paranoid, image-minded Sami Pasha is hardly paranoid enough. But one of the most widespread acts of reading the whole island engages in involves the Sultan. Living under a dictatorial regime leads government officials like Sami Pasha to read whatever Abdülhamit does or doesn't do as a message: "Padişah hazretlerinin . . . beni burada Vali olarak tutmaları manidar değil midir?"[31] (*VG*, 82) Usually, this is tinged with wishful thinking common to many: "[Sami Paşa] yerleri sürekli değiştirilen pek çok Osmanlı valisi gibi bunu eski görevindeki başarısızlığından çok, Abdülhamit'in kendisini unutmayışıyla açıklamıştı."[32] (*VG*, 121) Likewise, Captain Kâmil observes that "[tekke şeyhleri] Abdülhamit kendilerini hatırlıyor mu, önemsiyor mu diye sürekli endişelenirler, alakasız ipuçlarına takılıp alınganlık eder

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[30] "Emine Hanım also told her guests that if you got a blessed [lit. read] prayer sack from Sheikh Hamdullah Efendi and held it out towards the cyclops plague devil, that he ran right back without being able to distribute the rats in his satchel."

[31] "Doesn't it mean something that . . . his majesty the Sultan has kept me here as Governor?"

[32] "like many an Ottoman governor who was constantly moved around, [Sami Pasha] had understood this not so much to be a result of his failure at his former post, but to mean that Abdülhamit had not forgotten him."

ve adayı imar eden Padişah'a küserlerdi."“[lodge sheikhs] would constantly worry about whether Abdülhamit remembered them and about whether they mattered to him, getting hung up on and offended by irrelevant clues and getting upset at the Sultan who built the structures on the island.” (*VG*, 237) This intense ongoing activity of reading entails the effort to interpret signs to make meaning and find hope.

The environment of a pandemic intensifies this act of reading and the circulation of interpretations and rumors, bringing out the “viral” spread and effect of interpretation, which, according to philosopher Gianni Vattimo is like a *pharmakon*, both remedy and poison:

> ". . . one cannot talk with impunity of interpretation; interpretation is like a virus or even a *pharmakon* that affects everything it comes into contact with. On the one hand, it reduces all reality to message—erasing the distinction between *Natur* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, since even the so-called hard sciences verify and falsify their statements only within paradigms or preunderstandings. If “facts” thus appear to be nothing but interpretations, interpretation, on the other hand, presents itself as (the) fact: hermeneutics is not a philosophy but the enunciation of historical existence itself in the age of the end of metaphysics." (2005, 45)

Indeed, the novel seems to be saying that nothing intelligible is immune to interpretation; coincidence is read as deliberate communication, no message is read as a message, and meanings infect otherwise unrelated things metaphorically and metonymically. Reading signs is how we approach solving an epidemic or a murder using scientific or positivist methods, but it's also how superstitious beliefs are formed, which can offer solace or hamstring scientific efforts. At different points, the people of Minger believe that the light from the flag protects from the plague (*VG*, 336), that the Sheikh is immune (*VG*, 294), that Sultan Pakize, formerly suspected of bringing the plague, can make the plague go away with her house visits (*VG*, 469, 477, 482). In addition, “*everyone*” (*VG*, 239) desperately engages in the superstitious interpreting of “signs” so as to foresee the future of the plague. Doctor Nuri is the sole exception in his lack of belief in them, and Mingerli disapproves of the trend: “En ‘aydınlanmış’ kişilerin umutsuzluktan dikkat kesildiği bu işaretlere Doktor Nuri hiç inanmıyor ama karısı Pakize Sultan bizi bugün bile üzecek kadar inanıyordu.”[33] (*VG*, 239)

[33]“Doctor Nuri did not give any credence to these signs, which even the most ‘enlightened’ people had started paying attention to out of desperation, but his wife, Sultan Pakize, believed them to an extent

On the other hand, Doctor Nuri wants to read his surroundings in a similar way as he wanders the streets in search of clues: "salgının işaretlerini . . . görmek istiyordu." [he wanted to see . . . the signs of the epidemic] (*VG*, 155) and Mingerli aims, through the inclusion of the murder mystery in her book, to incite this sort of reading that keeps looking for signs: "Polisiye merakı . . . bütün kitabı bir işaretler denizine dönüştürecektir."[34] (*VG*, 13) Although Mingerli is against unscientific superstitious beliefs directed at the future, which characterize our reading of literary works, as a subjectivist historian, she is all for interpreting the past in this way. Mingerli's acknowledgment of historiography as narrative construction that tries to stay true to facts is evident in her decision to novelize the historical text she is writing, her shaping of the narrative to bring out particular motifs and literary genre conventions, and in her discussions of other historians' interpretations. She often interjects to correct popular misconceptions about historical facts and to mention different interpretations of events and position her perspective in relation to them. So while she recognizes incontrovertible facts and believes one might be right or wrong on those points, in contrast to the objectivist position in historiography that holds that interpretations might obscure the authoritative objective truth, she acknowledges the multiplicity of interpretations or meanings that can be constructed with these facts at hand. The casual name dropping of Cambridge University Press as the publisher to Mingerli's book (*VG*, 13) shows that her approach, which could be regarded as fanciful from an objectivist point of view, has been certified.[35]

Mingerli, then, conforms to Hayden White's view of historiography: "White argues that history is primarily a narrative, where events are organized in a sequence to form a 'story', to convey meaning better." (Murthy 2014, 20) Thus, she chooses to paint Minger as a land out of a fairy tale and to make recourse to various forms of what Hayden White calls "emplotment" after literary critic Northrop Frye's concept: "Emplotment is an act that, according to Hayden White, maps available data onto prototypical literary forms, and tells a tale through formal structures of representation." (Murthy 2014, 20) Mingerli uses all four of the modes of emplotment White proposes—"Romance", "Comedy", "Tragedy", and "Satire" (Murthy 2014, 21)—and in an easily discernible way, not trying to hide the constructedness of her narrative. For example, she imbues with tragedy Commander's Kâmil struggle with his wife's illness, using a literary device common to the form, the apostrophe: "hay-

that troubles us even to this day."

[34] "The interest in murder mysteries . . . will turn the whole book into a sea of signs."

[35] Although how did they print a novel?

atta en sonunda iki buçuk ay mutlu olmuştu. Çok kısaydı bu, Allahım!"[36] (*VG*, 386), "Mutlu hayat da neydi! Her şey bitmişti, her şey!"[37] (*VG*, 388) These moments diverge from the dominant style of the narration, which makes them all the more conspicuous.

Mingerli tells the story she wants to tell, aiming for accuracy in her facts but without entertaining pretensions to objective truth. Even if her narrative will not be true in this way, it can be more honest, and perhaps the use of fiction, the form of the historical novel, allows her to do just that. The narrator thus confronts us as a double figure who challenges her historian's claim to authoritative "truth" and who, in so doing, makes room for her and everyone else's authority to interpret historical facts and come up with their own stories. Her version is just one of all possible stories, and/but it is just as special as any other. If history is to be narrativized in order to be understood anyway, then why shouldn't Mingerli or anyone else do it? Given that subjective interpretation is always necessary whether we are narrativizing the past or making scientific predictions about the future, the ability to come up with interpretations (that are true *to* the facts and the paradigms we are operating within—rather than true "in themselves") must form the basis of epistemological authority.

3.5 Artistic Knowledge

Doctor Nuri is crucial to ending the epidemic, but perhaps not as much as Sultan/Queen Pakize[38], his counterpart, the female to his male, the spiritual to his bodily, the literary/artistic to his empirical. According to Jale Parla, Pamuk's novels express the conviction that art and philosophy are crucial for civilization and that knowledge derived from art is more important and "vital" [yaşamsal] than scientific knowledge (Parla 2018, 70). Although art is not one of the primary themes of *Veba Geceleri*, we can see that this novel supports Parla's claim through the figure of Sultan Pakize, who can be seen to represent artistic or literary knowledge. Ironically, the character who is the youngest, the least exposed to "the real world" (she has been shut up in a palace all her life), and the most immersed in fiction,

[36]"ultimately he had been happy for two and a half months in his life. My God, this was too short!"

[37]A happy life, ha! Everything was over, everything!"

[38]As Doctor Nuri and Sultan Pakize are about to leave and the clerk who sees them off thanks them both in the name of the Mingerian nation, it is noted by Mingerli that "Bunu Doktor Nuri'den çok Kraliçe'ye bakarak söylemişti." ["He had said this looking at the Queen more than at Doctor Nuri."] (*VG*, 495)

fantasy, and literary imagination who proves the most "realistic" (*VG*, 85) and "politically intuitive" [siyasi içgüdüleri derin] (*VG*, 465). Literary knowledge, then, has a superior claim to understanding the world. This is also evident in the way Sultan Pakize figures out the mystery behind Doctor Ilias's poisoning, the question of how the poison was procured, and she is able to figure this out, and Abdülhamit able to plan it in the first place, through reading *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Both Abdülhamit's schemes which allegedly only become apparent at the end (*VG*, 16) and Sultan Pakize's shrewdness and worldliness originate from the knowledge they gain from literature. Once again emphasizing an ambivalent or double potential, characters note that those who read novels are uniquely equipped to solve murders (*VG*, 201) and also to execute them (*VG*, 430). Sultan Pakize's newfound interest in reading the detective novels her uncle has read, after she solves the murder whose idea is planted by Abdülhamit, also indicates her appreciation for the value of artistic or literary knowledge and her subsequent newfound respect for her uncle. Their understanding of the value of artistic knowledge and shared reading history binds them in a kind of literary kinship that is more real or close than their blood relation.

Sultan Pakize's relative ease in dealing with challenges to ontological and epistemological authority draws attention to the gendered nature of these crises. Men occupy all the positions of power in the novel, with the partial exception of Sultan Pakize and the narrator, and their disappointment and disorientation at losing their power are more severe. Quarantine seems to be harder on men too because they are not used to being at home, where they risk being feminized, and easily get restless (*VG*, 226). Since men's epistemological authority derives in part from their traditionally being outside participating in the public sphere—the knowledge of which is prized over that of the private sphere, which women have been traditionally confined to—this would also be weakened during quarantine. Perhaps this is why men are seen in the novel idly looking out of windows: "Şehrin bütün erkekleri pencerelerde vakit öldürüyordu."[39] (*VG*, 352) Perhaps the novel suggests that the inability to go outside, to be stuck in a woman's place, insufficiently armed with the knowledge thereof, can be experienced as a form of castration, and that toxic masculinity is another pandemic confronted by public health efforts.

The joint administration of Doctor Nuri and Sultan Pakize finally makes it possible for the main challenge in the novel to be overcome. A "message" that can be found in the epidemic's resolution, then, is that one is neither supposed to just read into it like the Sheikh who reads his surroundings as though it is all deliberate communication,

[39]"All the men of the city were killing time by the windows."

nor supposed to underestimate it as a setback in between the acts of World History. Through the trials of the characters, the novel criticizes the grandiose self-positioning of individuals in leadership positions in the face of disease in particular but of history and nature more generally and illustrates the limits and exigencies of being in the world. The realm of “the human” lies somewhere between nature and culture, not wholly in one of them, and one must beware absolutist positions that don’t allow for mixing and impurity. Ultimately, the third government’s synthesis is not so much a sum of previous approaches as a sublimation of the antithesis that articulates the thesis in an improved way. The relationship between her and her husband being more lateral than hierarchical compared to the previous pairs also signals a difference. Under the government of Doctor Nuri and Sultan Pakize, quarantine is strictly observed but morale is also considered important. The felicitous end to the plague, like the uses of pathetic fallacy sprinkled throughout the novel (*VG*, 135, 258), serves as the novel’s way of approving the couple’s response to the people and the plague.

This dialectic is complicated, however, by the demonstrable lack of historical “progress” that is underlined through Mingerli’s cursory account of what follows. There is no poetic justice served for the deep state and government official Mazhar, who persists throughout all governments. If Mîna Mingerli by virtue of her name and initials is the character most identified with Minger (and as the one who tells its story, she might be considered to have authority on it), former "Murakabe Müdürü" [Chief of Supervision] Mazhar shares that position with her. He may not be from Minger originally, but somewhat like Mingerli—a writer who can don different hats, historian and novelist, during the same work—he is a shapeshifter, but one who can find a place for himself in different governments, who can conceal his birthplace and become an ultranationalist when expedient. Mazhar is *mazhar* [lit. privy] to all intelligence data collected by the government, to everyone’s secrets or Minger’s unconscious, so he is closest to an all-knowing figure besides the narrator researching the events a century later. Erkan Irmak argues that Mazhar’s continued centrality and rising importance is the novel’s way of saying that “knowledge is the greatest power there is” (2021, 39), and there is definitely truth to that; Mazhar’s knowledge pays off the most in today’s world in terms of material rewards. Furthermore, judging by the positions he attains, Minger does not change much, even during plague times. Oppression continues, except this time, it is not the Mingerian language and identity that are repressed but all other languages and identities. The new Minger has cordoned itself off from the influence of different identities, just like republican Turkey (Pamuk 2008, 223), a policy Pamuk has criticized many times for the cultural and moral impoverishment it brings. By contrast, Sultan Pakize and Doctor

Nuri are not as interested in power plays, intrigue, and their public image as other characters in influential positions. Perhaps this is why they succeed in eradicating the plague, but it is also why they are bound to be sidelined in the world of politics. Sultan Pakize and Doctor Nuri display the “vital” knowledge that rids Minger of the plague, but Mazhar knows what it takes to succeed in the world of Realpolitik. Which of these kinds of knowledge is the more powerful remains to be debated.

4. PLAGUE AND LITERARY AUTHORITY

In an article on pandemic literature, Ed Simon writes, "Illness reminds us that the world isn't ours; literature lets us know that it is—sometimes." (2020) Pandemics might be difficult to conceive of and digest intellectually as well as challenging to notions of control and mastery, but one of the ways in which meaning can still be made and the world reclaimed in *Veba Geceleri*, amid the complete loss of meaning caused by the pandemic, is through writing. The plague engenders writing in different ways, leading to an increase in discipline, as pointed out by Foucault; in written testimonials, evidenced by the production of plague narratives; in imaginative rumors that circulate uncontrollably in their own turn (Pamuk 2020*a*); in religious incantations and protective prayer scrolls; and so on—writing proliferates[1] as a counter-plague. Sultan Pakize is passionate about writing letters to her sister; it seems that this is her way of coping with everything that is happening. After the devastating loss of his wife and just before his own death, Kâmil is able to find some form of continuance for himself and his wife by starting to write a children's book about her. Sami Pasha proves his competence and regains part of his dignity by composing, together with Mazhar, a file that reads like a detective novel and that contains the solution to the mysterious murders. The Sheikh has a poetry book and writes sermons, while Sultan Abdülhamit is a writer in that he concocts plots and an "editor" (a censor) to detective novels. For a novel that is not as openly concerned with literature and writing as some of Pamuk's other work, *Veba Geceleri* certainly has a lot of characters engaging in reading and writing in ways that end up being crucial to their legacy and self-actualization.

Boluk and Lenz elaborate on the connection between plague and writing: "the important relationship between media and plague [that] emerges as the fact of infection generates not only a surrounding rhetoric of plague but a veritable plague of rhetorics. The communicability of texts becomes inseparable from the communi-

[1] Cooke also sees a connection between plague and writing, with the former driving the latter, necessitating the text (2009, 43).

cability of plague.” (2010, 127-8) They point out that scholars have been drawing attention to “the close kinship between plague and textuality, treating plague as a text to be read on the individual and political body and the structure of plague writing itself as a mirror of its subject, proliferating with a serial contagiousness.” (Boluk and Lenz 2010, 128) Besides the way plague necessitates writing, then, the way it inherently resembles writing opens up avenues of thinking about how disease, health, and contagion relate to literature and to the “meta” aspect of the novel. Moreover, besides the primacy of characters’ literary pursuits and of artistic knowledge, that Sultan Pakize and Mîna Mingerli also exhibit aspects of Pamuk’s novelistic philosophy invites a consideration of the novel as an expression of Pamuk’s aesthetics. In due form, this chapter aims to flesh out questions of literary or aesthetic authority amidst epidemic uncertainty. The novel’s views on literature, language, and writing, as become apparent through the vehicle of the plague, are examined in light of conventions of pandemic (mostly plague) literature and through different allegorical readings and their implications for literary authority.

4.1 The Plagued Text

While plague drives writing in the various ways mentioned, writing in turn evokes the plague. Jennifer Cooke claims that writers of plague display a continued preoccupation with it; the disease infects their entire oeuvre or “corpus” (2009, 25).[2] Pamuk can be included among these writers, for he has also written about the plague in *Sessiz Ev* and *The White Castle*, with the former featuring a historian character obsessed with finding the disease in the archives and tracking it like a detective, somewhat like Doctor Nuri. The jarring expression "vebayı aramak"—why look for something that would be so unpleasant to find—uttered repeatedly in *Sessiz Ev*, recalls the more idiomatic "belanı aramak" [lit. to go looking for (one’s) trouble, understood to be the trouble that one is due or “trouble with one’s name on it”]. The act of searching for plague can be compared to an Oedipal quest that, looked at pragmatically, would be better avoided and that leads to the revelation of a tragic truth. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is the truth of humanity’s contingency, the meaninglessness of existence, the plotlessness of life, which is obscured by attempts at meaning-making that surround us like an occasionally pierced, imperfect quarantine.

[2]“As though to emphasise the contagious element at play here, both Defoe and Camus have plague publications in – or on – their corpuses other than those under discussion so far: both were obsessed by plague, both returned to it repeatedly.” (Cooke 2009, 25)

Elizabeth Outka, in her book *Viral Modernisms*, in which she “goes looking for” the Spanish Flu pandemic in works of modernist literature, draws on how World War I and the pandemic posed “foils” for one another in the social imagination (2020*b*, 3). Not unlike the counterpoint of the detective story against the plague in *Veba Geceleri*, the war, Outka argues, felt understandable and digestible, despite being devastating, while the pandemic could not really be processed at the time, let alone represented in an intentional, straightforward way. In this sense, the pandemic is troubling on another level, and “reading for the pandemic” in modernist texts, as Outka calls it, requires paying attention to its “intangible presence” (Outka 2020*b*, 253-4) that subtly infects texts and to “the pervasive atmosphere of ongoing mourning in modernism,” (Outka 2020*b*, 32) which can partially be tied to the disease. But while the writers Outka examines are contemporary with the Spanish Flu pandemic, writers of plague have often been out of the danger zone of their subject. They have chosen to return to the scene of the crime, undeterred, even prodded on by its gruesome and unpredictable nature. Writers of plague are, hence, actively looking for trouble: Cooke says, “to write of plague . . . . is to parasitise and then to be a corpus for others to feed upon; it is to suffer, either obsession, as with Defoe’s paranoid and repetitive warnings of the plague-to-come, or from the vicissitudes Camus coped with through his writer’s block.” (2009, 43) In Pamuk’s case, it is to carry an idea with you for almost 40 years, and to go through a grueling writing process: "Bu roman hayatta en çok yeniden yazdığım, en çok kısaltıp uzattığım ve üzerinde durmadan çalıştığım roman."[3] (Pamuk 2021*a*) The preoccupation with plague is a pandemic of its own, transmitted through texts and across times and manifesting throughout a writer’s career.

Besides spreading among a writer’s works, pandemics also seem to infect each text from within. Writers whose literary practice is afflicted by pandemics resemble each other in the way contagion contaminates their texts. Outka argues that the presence of the Spanish Flu in modernist works is subtle like the pandemic itself—invisible but through its effects (2020*b*). Cooke, who notes that plague literature contains certain common qualities and poses common aesthetic difficulties to authors (2009, 12), sees a similarity in the way buboes “declare the disease of the sufferer to be written on the body, there for all to read.” (2009, 19) and the short episodes that characterize plague writing: the buboes “have their corollary on the body of the text, where as a matter of inevitability there are a variety of small, self-contained narrative outbreaks, describing victims whose appearance is necessarily brief and terminal.” (2009, 22) Thus, according to Cooke, plague literature contains “flash fictions”, for which she

[3] "This is the novel I have re-written the most, the one whose length I changed the most, and one I worked incessantly on."

coins the terms "bubonic narratives" or "episodemics" (2009, 43). Elana Gomel explains this same phenomenon by referring to Maurice Blanchot: "The violence of a catastrophe fractures the coherence of the text, producing a string of fragments, a linear accumulation of episodes. . . . A heap of fragments like a heap of bodies, a text with no external limit like the boundless spread of contagion: the textuality Blanchot describes is the textuality of pestilence." (2000, 410) In other words, just as the disease breaks up families and communities, it fractures the narrative (also Cooke 2009, 23) and makes it resemble itself.

Pamuk's text conforms to this trend in that it similarly resists containment, both in terms of the sheer number of little stories or "episodes" it holds and in terms of its generic hybridity. Many more characters are introduced than can be remembered; the text is packed with specifics from historical details, fictional or factual, to details about minor characters that are not integral to the plot and do not get mentioned again, to anonymous episodes and snapshots, especially those depicting the effects of the plague. Instead of an organizing principle that has the text concentrate on particular characters or arcs, there is a sustained inhibition of attachment, an imposition of distance to any one dominating influence, and a spilling over to the peripheral. This has led some critics to remark on the lack of balance or measure in the novel, arguing that the frequent interruptions to the story to provide historical background pose problems for the compositional unity (Dağıstan 2021; Emre 2021). All this makes for a narrative that does not permit extended detailed, individualized life stories of characters. According to Ian Munro, there are "two modes of signifying plague" (2000, 248), panoramic ("plague as theater") and particular ("plague as circulation or narrative")—the author needs to alternate between them so as to be able to represent the effect of plague on the city (2000, 249). *Veba Geceleri* can be said to engage in this kind of a pendulum swing as well. The back and forth between levels helps the effects of the disease to be legible (even if not intelligible) on both the individual and societal level.

Plague's influence is felt in the narrative voice as well. Scholars have remarked on the narrative voice proper to the plague:

> "Paradoxically, to narrate pestilence one must become as impersonal as pestilence itself. Contagion strikes with no regard for the individuality of the victim, . . . The detached chronicler, the impersonal narrator-witness, speaks *for* the community of the victims, but he also speaks *with* the voice of the pestilence that has brought this community into being in the first place." (Gomel 2000, 412)

It can be argued that the distance maintained by the narration in *Veba Geceleri* to the characters contributes to a relatively "impersonal", neutral, and *clinical* voice, which is rationalized through Mingerli's meticulous academic approach. The result is what Cooke calls "a diseased narrative, a suffering in words of what the body suffers in symptoms. A plague text might stutter, repeat itself or wander incoherently", constituting "a strange plenitude." (2009, 24) Whether intentional or not, *Veba Geceleri* does display such symptoms, such as strange dialogues in which characters' words don't follow from those of others, as though they are not responding to one another but giving summary representations of their perspectives as in a theatrical performance (*VG*, 49, 53, 202). The flow of the text is obstructed (*VG*, 171), chronologies are given in a mixed up manner (*VG*, 65), contradictions go unexplained (*VG*, 99), details are repeated (*VG*, 302, 453), and the governing logic behind connections is elusive (*VG*, 474, 536). Plague has a disruptive effect on the narration; it brings out "a strangeness in [one's] mind". In like manner, "the untimely interruption of life" (Cooke 2009, 23) is observed in *Veba Geceleri* in the meetings, speeches, and conversations that are cut short because someone starts to experience symptoms.[4]

The novel also spills over into many different genres. It can perhaps most definitively be called a postmodern historical novel, although it has also been read as a modern epic according to critic Franco Moretti's formulation (Parla 2021). Since conflicts in the novel are resolved in an improbably positive way and words like "magical" and "fairy tale-esque" are often used in descriptions, the hybridity of genre can be said to include the fairy tale, as well as the detective and romance novel genres, the *Bildungsroman*, and the plague or pandemic literature tradition. The ambitious multiplicity of exposition and genre markers—"a strange plenitude"—could imply a quest for totality, for a novel that encapsulates life and art by both creating a history and geography and representing them artistically. Now with the pandemic, the novel could be categorized both as "high culture" and as "popular culture"—the latter because it describes a currently relevant reality. While this conspicuous economy of excess can be read as a claim to literary authority, the novel's mixed messages, its amplification of its own artificiality, and indications of the constructedness of the historical accounts make light of and caricaturize such a notion. What results is a problematization of literary authority, which is partially due to the demands of the genre of the historical novel. According to Jerome De Groot, "If an historical novel is not self-aware, interested in undermining its own authority and legitimacy, then it might be failing in its duty to history, as it might open itself up to obfuscation and

[4]The same happens when mention is made of Sultan Abdülhamit, which suggests that there's more than one reason for interruption and fragmentation, that the plague could be symbolic for the political situation.

untruths." (2010, 108) The author agrees to getting her hands dirty, to meddling in a pre-existing *body* of knowledge, when she attempts a historical novel, so she must abide by the principle to first do no harm. Perhaps the subject matter of the plague is found to be particularly suited to a novel of such a genre because it can compel the author to meet it at its terms, to take a turn towards the clinical.

Finally, literature confronts pandemics not just by reflecting them in its form but possibly in its plot as well. George Kurman tentatively identifies a common progression to plague literature in pre-modern and modern periods (1982). While the plague goes from being interpreted as divine punishment to nature's wrath for humans' excess, what seems to remain constant is a three-step arc that goes from family separation to plague to unnatural birth (Kurman 1982). Kurman is wary of stretching interpretations to fit outliers, something which he criticizes in René Girard's thematization (1982, 49). Erring on the side of overinterpretation, however, it might be possible to argue that a similar thematic is at work in *Veba Geceleri*. Family separation characterizes the beginning of the novel, when Sultan Pakize has to leave her father and her city, and it is only exacerbated with the story's progression: Sultan Abdülhamit, the metaphorical father figure, and the Empire forsake Sami Pasha, Minger, and its people, casting them out and leaving them alone in dealing with the plague. The plague reaches its peak after the abandonment of Minger to its own devices, like the novel's recurring image of the solitary crying child. The plague is followed by (or rather its tail end coincides with) the birth of the Mingerian nation—not an unnatural child per se, unless we consider the Derridean concept of the "sterile trace", the residues of language not meant or expected to be implemented, that engenders it. Taken metaphorically then, the plot also conforms to those of some of *Veba Geceleri*'s predecessors. All of these overlaps with other works of plague literature, besides being nods to the canon by a well-read writer, suggest that the subject matter of plague calls forth certain forms, themes, and structures in narratives. The author finds herself at the mercy of a powerful force that dictates the writing, and it is partly because the subject resembles writing itself that plague literature takes the shapes that it does. In the following section, I shall further examine the similarity of the plague and writing and the idea that perhaps plague writing constitutes literature par excellence according to Deleuzian theory.

4.2 The Power of "Delicate Health"

Writing about plague as the chaotic natural challenge par excellence exemplifies the aesthetic project as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?*—as a practice that engages with "the chaotic" and marshalls the weapons of the latter in order to attack the sheltering "umbrella" of orthodox "opinion" (1994, Conclusion). The discomfort caused by the subject matter of the pandemic, therefore, can be seen as a more or less intentional by-product of a subversive gesture that fulfills art's promise to unsettle and cast in doubt and that poses it against pragmatism. The endeavor, however, comes at the price of a recognition of and confrontation with "the chaotic", which exceeds the power of artistic representation. Literary authority in this scenario is not all-powerful but humble, or "minor". I have mentioned that readers are made to feel alien to the content at times, and "minor literature", a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari and used to describe Kafka's style, involves rendering language somewhat alien (1986). Deleuze continues this train of thought in "Literature and Life" when he writes, "We can see more clearly the effect of literature on language: as Proust says, it opens up a kind of foreign language within language, which is neither another language nor a rediscovered patois but a becoming-other of language, a 'minorization' of this major language, a delirium that carries it off, a witch's line that escapes the dominant system." (1997, 229) In the context of Pamuk's writing, this may readily bring to mind Pamuk's difficult sentences and frequently criticized writing style.[5]

This concept of "minorization" is evoked by Metin Yetkin, who has noted that Pamuk might be aiming for this through his language in *Veba Geceleri.* According to Yetkin, Pamuk does this through three specific methods: overstating the subject of sentences, overuse of "ve", and abundance of passive voice (Yetkin 2021, 44).[6]

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[5] For example, a popular singer in Turkey came out to voice his opinion about Pamuk, one that has often been repeated throughout the years. He alleged that Pamuk writes in English and has his work translated into Turkish and that his Turkish isn't good (*Kıraç: Orhan Pamuk gibileri çıktı, İngilizce yazıp Türkçe'ye çeviriyorlar; utanç verici* 2019).

[6] He notes the effects as follows:

Dolayısıyla, dildeki kırılmalar majör dili değiştirme kuvvetine sahip olmasa da yazarın dili minörleşme gayreti olarak okunabilir. Yahut minör tekniğin majör edebiyatta kullanılmasıyla bir gerilim yaratılır çunku zaten ust kurmaca olan metin daha da edilgen kılınmıştır. Ayrıca bu kullanım yazarın roman turunu diğer turlerden ayırma istediğinden kaynaklanıyor olabilir çunku bahsettiğim özelliklerle birlikte yapı dili yapaylaştırır. Pamuk sanki tahkiye içinde tahkiyeyi imler, dili yer yer yapaylaştırarak kurgunun, matematiğin altını çizer, estetik yalanla bezeli yapay bir dunya yarattığını vurgular. Yahut okurun metne yer yer yabancılaşmasını istemiştir. [Therefore, although the fractures in language do not have the force to alter the major language, they can be read as the author's effort to minorize language. Alternatively, a tension is produced through the use of minor technique in major literature because the text, which is already metafictional, has been rendered even more passive. Furthermore, this use might stem from the author's wish to separate the novel from other genres because, with the features I have mentioned, the structure renders language artificial. It is as though Pamuk indicates narrative within narrative, underlines fictionality and mathematics by making language artificial in places, emphasizes that he is creating an artificial world using aesthetic lies. Or he wants the reader to be alienated from the text at

Choices like overstating the subject make it difficult to get into the novel because the reader cannot "stay" in a subject; she has to reposition herself with every sentence. The relatively challenging (re-)reading experience slows the reader down, making her focus on the abundant historical detail. The novel refuses to go down easily, and the way it dictates a certain kind of reading experience can be seen as an instance of control over the narrative, to prevent the reader's getting too caught up in the individual story arcs or treating the novel as "just" popular fiction. In addition, part of the "minorization" comes from the use of a woman narrator and a heroine, Sultan Pakize, while the men in the novel tend to have fatal flaws, with perhaps the least "manly" of them, Doctor Nuri[7], who is rid of many of their vices, remaining a passive figure. This comes in contrast to Mingerli and her great-grandmother, and the novel can be said to prize a feminine or minor stance, which can also be seen in little instances such as "(*Orhaniye* yine tamirdeydi)" [(*Orhaniye* was undergoing repairs again)] (*VG*, 256) or the third section of the prison, where the riot breaks out, being dubbed "the beginners' section" (*VG*, 391).

While it can certainly be argued that this "minor" mode or quality of the writing that recognizes limits to literary authority, rather than being "masculine" or dominant, is, once again, necessitated by the plague, according to Deleuze, this stance actually belongs not just to a subset of writing but to all of it:

> "Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or -vegetable, becomes-molecule, to the point of becoming-imperceptible. . . . Becoming does not move in the other direction, and one does not become Man, insofar as man presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose itself on all matter, whereas woman, animal, or molecule always has a component of flight that escapes its own formalization. The shame of being a man—is there any better reason to write?" (1997, 225)

This process of becoming that is already in writing involves "undifferentiation, a destruction of specificities", what Girard identifies as the defining trait of plague (1974, 833). There is a natural affinity, in terms of their effect, between plague and writing, and perhaps the minor attitude that plague narratives call for presents another instance of the disease shaping the narrative in its image. Deleuze also finds in literature a becoming "impersonal": "But literature . . . . exists only

places.] (Yetkin 2021, 46)

[7]Doctor Nuri is said to have "feet so small that [Sultan Pakize] would not be able to find them pleasing in any man"[8] (*VG*, 66). He is also the least like the other men in the novel in terms of power-hungriness.

when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal-which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point: a man, a woman, a beast, a stomach, a child...." (1997, 227) If plague strips the afflicted of their individuating traits, turning them into impersonal bodies, it is also enacting a visceral version of the transformation that allows for the existence of literature—the characters contracting the plague are not just getting the life sucked out of them, but they are themselves getting sucked out of life and into literature. The story of Minger can thus be seen as one of becoming literature, which it of course already is, in the sense that, by the time we finish the book, Minger has been inscribed into our literary history. Commander Kâmil's contracting the plague, narrated in detail from his initial dread and resistance to his gradual acceptance and joy at transcending time,[9] is especially evocative of an abstraction from his particular being. The state of delirium he goes through, like other plague sufferers in the novel, exemplifies the linguistic nature of the affliction and once again places the plague stricken in the territory of literature according to Deleuze.[10] Not only does literature mimic the effects of the disease and vice versa, but literature *is* disease.

In this sense, Kâmil's becoming involves his "literarification", which is simultaneously a decline and boost in health—in Deleuze's words, he loses one kind of health and gains another:

> "Literature then appears as an enterprise of health; not that the writer would necessarily be in good health . . . . but he possesses irresistible and delicate health that stems from what he has seen and heard of things too big for him, too strong for him, suffocating things whose passage exhausts him while nonetheless giving him the becomings that dominant and substantial health would render impossible." (1997, 228)

The "irresistible and delicate health" might also be one possessed by the novel's "lunatics", its most lucid characters. In two separate occasions, different "lunatics" point or look at the sky, but the sane characters cannot make out what they see there (*VG*, 218, 483). They could be hallucinating, or their upward glances could indicate a desire for transcendence, as the upward direction has been said to symbolize transcendence in Pamuk's novels (Parla 2018, 68). Their indication of the non-

[9] "Bir an Komutan'ın yüzünde hatıraları gelecekle, tarihi masalları şimdi olup bitenlerle karıştırmanın mutluluğu belirdi. Mazide bugünü görmenin aslında istikbali hayal etmek demek olduğunu anladı Komutan" [For a moment, the happiness of mixing memories with the future, historical fairy tales with current events appeared on the Commander's face. The Commander understood that to see today in the past actually meant to envision the future] (*VG*, 403)

[10] "Literature is delirium, ... Delirium is a disease, the disease par excellence," (Deleuze 1997, 229)

existent brings out their affinity to the figure of the author, who is admittedly more successful in bringing imaginary things into existence by referring to them with words. But the "lunatics" could also be pointing or looking up at the narrator, "Mîna" Mingerli, as the only ones to realize they are characters in a novel. One of these figures, Ekrem Efendi, starts to talk to Senior Captain Kâmil about the impending apocalypse and, before pointing to the sky: "İnsanın gözlerinin kamaştığı, ayın karanlığa battığı ve güneşle ayın bir araya geldiği zamandı kıyamet!"[11] (*VG*, 218) Again, he could be delusional and/or prophetic: the apocalypse he is talking about could be the end of the story of Minger, when Sultan Pakize and Doctor Nuri sail off to China, and the moon sinks into the darkness (*VG*, 495). Mingerli reveals that she wrote the novel looking at a 3D pop-up book of Minger as it was in 1901 and at photos, so the characters could be thought of as looking up at her.

With all her power, the novelist could also be figured as an all-powerful presence for the characters, because she can decide who lives and who dies. A description of the personified plague might make us think of this possibility: "Sanki veba sarı renkteydi, gökteydi ve her an Minger halkını seyrediyor, kimin canına okuyacağına fazla düşünmeden karar veriyordu."[12] (*VG*, 268) This is once again a bit of a strange description if only because there is already something yellow in the sky, but again, the language, which pairs the narrator with the sky, suggests as a possible additional meaning that characters felt as if the plague was coming from the author as a death sentence, set in motion in the writing but enacted in the reading (canına "okuyacağına"), without much forethought. Indeed, besides creating community, engendering a new type of modern thought, helping one find meaning, novels have often been portrayed in novels as dangerous for their power to tempt their reader to seek out similar experiences, in other words for their going beyond their purview to inspire desires in their readers, and *Veba Geceleri* pays heed to that tradition. Sultan Pakize remarks: "[Sami Paşa] Sherlock Holmes usulünün ne Orient'da ne de Osmanlı Devleti'nde sökeceğini hem size hem de ne yazık ki geceleri okuttuğu cinayet romanlarının cazibesine kapılan amcama göstermek istiyordu."[13] (*VG*, 426) The primary reader of novels in *Veba Geceleri* finds that novels can be like a siren call that derail you into illusions or delusions. Mingerli also gives novels credit for facilitating transformations, for better or for worse: "*Annem Gecenin Ormanında* adlı romantik

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[11] "The apocalypse was when one was dazzled, when the moon sank into the darkness and the sun and the moon came together!"

[12] "It was as if the plague was yellow, in the sky, and watching the Mingerian people at all times, deciding, without much forethought, whose life to take [lit. read]."

[13] "[Sami Pasha] wanted to show, both to you and to my uncle, who unfortunately falls for the attraction of the murder novels he has read to him at night, that the Sherlock Holmes method would work neither in the Orient, nor in the Ottoman Empire."

çocuk romanı bizi on yaşındayken fanatik bir Minger milliyetçisi yapmıştır."[14] (*VG*, 376) The novel, as the active subject, has "made" her into a nationalist fanatic, which is really a degree of power that is only matched by the plague and death in *Veba Geceleri*.

Nevertheless, the abundant destruction in the novel that is to some extent linked with the narrator, as though due to a guilty conscience, finds its counterbalance in the avid creativity of the novel, which mimics the anxiety-inducing, destructive proliferation of disease in a safer medium. In what might be Pamuk's most "creative" gesture, not only has a fictional island been placed in the Mediterranean, but it has been endowed with a whole history, which has been sewn onto Ottoman history. Then there is the mention of a whole body of knowledge, of representations of Minger, which creates many additional worlds. For instance, throughout the novel, Mingerli corrects misrenditions of history, referring to various fictional scholars, memoirs as well as to an official history of Minger that is taught at schools. Occasionally we can tell that she is responding to something we have never seen or been told about but which she acts like we know about. For example, recounting the meeting of Senior Captain Kâmil and Zeynep, Mingerli says the former went to get water and the latter directed him towards it, and then writes: "Ama küpün tahta kapağını kaldırıp maşrapayla suyu Kolağası'na Beşir verdi."[15] (*VG*, 151) We might just think that Mingerli is saying, Zeynep told him where the water was, but Beşir gave it to him, and think that this is not important. But the implication is that there is a world in which this is important. We understand that we are not the intended audience, so the work also leads us to infer this fictional intended audience, sometimes explicitly, by alluding to nationalist rewritings of Mingerian history, but sometimes subtly, which can be more interesting upon realization.

So just as Pamuk shares inside jokes and references with us over Mingerli's shoulder, Mingerli and her fictional audience also have shared understandings that we are not privy to. Every work Mingerli refers to as something actually being out there in the world, which her audience would be able to access, opens the door to a new fictional world. That the novel takes pleasure in creating new worlds is also evident in the layers of text that stand at a remove from an authentic origin. Just as in *The White Castle*, in which Darvınoğlu's text is a very loose "translation" of the novel at hand and in which the epigraph is from a mistranslation, in *Veba Geceleri*, Sultan Pakize rewrites her husband's experiences in her own words, which are then related to us through Mingerli's lens. Texts are multiplied in the process of

[14] "The romantic children's novel *Annem Gecenin Ormanında* [My Mother in the Forest of the Night] made us a fanatic Mingerian nationalist at the age of ten."

[15] "But it was Beşir who lifted the wooden lid of the jug and bailed out water for the Senior Captain."

translation or reporting, with each copy existing in relation to other texts but also in its own right. As such, the postmodern historical novel, ironically, as a type of novel that one might think would most tie the author to historical reality, provides Pamuk with a great opportunity to experiment with creating many different worlds at once as to make the reader feel a bit alien, again, even though part of the topic, Abdülhamit's regime, is very familiar. The vast fictional realm we get a glimpse of makes us realize our confinement in our own reality and our way out through literature. What's more, from the lens of historiography, we are to become like fictional characters; when we're buried deep in the past, it won't matter whether we actually existed historically or solely in literature or mythology. We will join a palimpsest that an archaeologist like Selim Sahir, who could stand for the novelist or the historian, can draw upon. Commander Kâmil's final realization seems sort of in line with this idea: "Bir an Komutan'ın yüzünde hatıraları gelecekle, tarihi masalları şimdi olup bitenlerle karıştırmanın mutluluğu belirdi. Mazide bugünü görmenin aslında istikbali hayal etmek demek olduğunu anladı Komutan"[16] (*VG*, 403) Kâmil seems to find comfort in zipping through time in his mind, in turning the pages as he pleases, in allowing for naivete or reading. He feels "the happiness of mixing" things, abandoning his purist position.

Intertextuality and metafictional elements such as the book's paratext are other ways in which the world of the novel is put in conversation and intricately intertwined with other worlds. These features, typical of Pamuk's novels, embody contagion because of the way history and fiction have been made to infiltrate each other so that one could not cleanly slice between the novel's world and ours. There is no warning or clear sign of demarcation between the factual and the fictional. When describing how the Sultan's potential male heirs lived, the narrator also tells us about fictional people too as though they really existed, including Sultan Celaleddin Efendi from *The Black Book* (*VG*, 199). Besides the mention of Ahmet Işıkçı on the copyright page and acknowledgments of the novel as the co-painter of the cover along with Orhan Pamuk, *Veba Geceleri* enters into conversation with Pamuk's other works, as a story that was already anticipated by them. Minger is mentioned by name in *My Name Is Red*, and the existence of an island that suffered the plague is alluded to in *Sessiz Ev*. The gradual development of Minger's story into a full-fledged novel inextricable from literary and historical corpuses, its metastatic rather than self-contained or amputable quality, embodies the pandemic it aspires to represent. The author likes to put some of the same images in circulation to form chains of literary contagion and to blur the boundary of the text and the world, letting the text infect

[16]"For a moment, the happiness of mixing memories with the future, historical fairy tales with current events appeared on the Commander's face. The Commander understood that to see today in the past actually meant to envision the future"

the world and vice versa.

4.3 Ambivalence and Polyvalence

Such infective metafictional interventions in Pamuk have been interpreted as partly due to an unwillingness to relinquish control on the text (Irzık 2018, 37-8). Indeed, "sentimental" writer Pamuk's novels demonstrate a great amount of control: "Orhan Pamuk'un bize hep gösterdiği şey şudur: Yazar, hükmedici, olacakları hesap eden kukla oynatıcısı olarak ipleri elinde tutmaktadır;"[17] (Kirchner 1999, 12). *Veba Geceleri* exemplifies this in the figure of the authoritative didactic narrator and the concern with balance and symmetry. Pamuk himself has remarked that "romancının varlığını unutarak okumak imkânsız ve zevksiz"[18] (2011, 40), and accordingly, narrator Mingerli occasionally surfaces to remind the reader of her presence in the often metafictional parentheses, explanations, citations, and reminders sprinkled in the text. These knowingly presented (re)tellings of history poke fun in what is otherwise an authoritative narration by inserting jokes or shared understandings between author and reader.

Besides a few concrete pieces of information revealed mostly at the end of the novel, Mingerli is a difficult persona to pin down. It's not clear how much she subscribes to nationalist ideology because her narrative contains contradictions. For instance, Mingerli denounces the romanticization of children's gangs that emerged in plague times, saying they were leading tragic lives (*VG*, 278), but later on she herself engages in romanticizing them (*VG*, 353-4). More importantly, Mingerli the narrator strikes an interesting balance between nationalistic attachment to her country and brutally honest, no holds barred observation. Sometimes she expresses deep admiration for certain nationalistic elements, especially the figure of Commander Kâmil, in a way that smacks a bit of ideological indoctrination, whereas other times she deconstructs ideological beliefs and seems like she sees through them. One is inclined to ask how some of these positions come together in the same person. Perhaps this can be taken to indicate that writing allows for the emergence of what is consciously thought as well as what is in the unconscious. If the added layer of Mingerli the narrator voicing the characters' and the public's thoughts amplifies the ambiguity of "who is speaking thus" (Barthes 1977, 142), the question of whether the

[17] "What Orhan Pamuk keeps showing us is this: the author, the commander, holds the strings, as the puppetmaster calculating what is going to happen;"

[18] "it is impossible and joyless to read forgetting the existence of the novelist"

speech reflects her conscious thoughts or her unconscious, of whether it is sincere or ironic, fires extra shots at the already dead author. Just as Pamuk "doesn't know" who wrote the manuscript in *The White Castle*, we may never know exactly where Mingerli stands.

Furthermore, Mingerli seems a bit undecided about her project. Her conspicuous "emplotment" in Hayden White's terms of historical information discussed in the previous chapter is somewhat ambiguous—is the narrator demonstrating her comfort level at blatantly mixing storytelling and historiography, or is her decision to draw attention to emplotted historiography an indication of her lack of comfort, her desire to guard against contagion, to accentuate and preserve the difference between narrative and "pure" history: "Kolağası'yla Zeynep arasındaki aşkın tarihi kısımlarıyla 'romantik' kısımlarını ayırmaya çalışacağız. Tarihi hikâyeler ne kadar 'romantik' iseler, o kadar doğru değildirler ve ne kadar 'doğruysalar' –ne yazık ki– o kadar da romantik değildirler."[19] (*VG*, 148) The explicit warning, while making the point that history is not inherently romantic, that it is narrativized in that way, also lays the groundwork for the drama of contagion between historical truth and romantic fiction to be able to play out. Just as Pamuk has to posit an East and a West to obliterate the binary, Mingerli has to construct pure versions of romance and truth ("romantik" and "doğru") to argue that truth has fiction to it and vice versa. The quotation marks, which cordon off the words, both perpetuate the idea of such pure concepts and dismiss these as false. The contagion inherent to language contaminates whatever "the author's meaning" is. In using binaries like East and West to show that they are void, Pamuk still has to use them, which leads to his being labeled an orientalist every now and again. Once again, writing appears as a *pharmakon*, as both curative and misleading, with literary authority being alternately reinforced and undermined accordingly.

In gestures that seem to tease the reader, the novel, like Pamuk's other oeuvre, delights in giving mixed messages. For all its conscientious treatment of historicism, the novel culminates with Mingerli's admission that the fairy tale-like quality of her work might have been the result of the pop-up book she constantly looked at while writing, which might lead us to think of what else was determined by her immediate surroundings. Besides showing literary history to be just as contingent as political history, such details cast doubt on the sincerity of Mingerli's entire project, on whether she is writing a historical novel about her country or doing what Pamuk is doing, creating a country and its history. The trip to Geneva mentioned in the

[19] "We will try to separate the historical parts of the love between the Senior Captain and Zeynep from its 'romantic' parts. The more 'romantic' historical stories are, the less true they are, and the more 'true' they are—unfortunately—the less romantic they are."

coda with specific references Mont Blanc makes it look as though she borrowed Minger's magical seeming White Mountain from there, and the same can be said for the Maiden's Tower, Splendid Palas Hotel, the Zeynep-Kâmil pairing, etc. The pastiche that is Minger hints at its own haphazard fashioning. Just as equivocal is/are the novel's notion(s) of temporality. Mingerli highlights coincidences such as Senior Captain Kâmil standing at the exact spot where Bonkowski Pasha stood in the telegram office as though to draw out simultaneity across time and to hint at events being destined to happen. The irony here is indicative also of the irony inherent in the novel form, as one that enables a switch from conceiving the world as not like a literary work by representing it in a literary work in a particular way. The self-aware novel admits to the artificiality of the history it's trying to construct as though to assert its novelness, to say, "if you look underneath the layer of history, you will see that I'm a novel." We could also call this a moment of transparency as is often seen in postmodern novels—which, according to Parla, has become the form's claim to honor (1999, 274).[20] Thus, *Veba Geceleri* undercuts characters' message towards sober, non-fatalistic, and "grounded" approaches by emphasizing, through self-conscious gestures, such as fairy tale-like elements, its own constructedness.

To aspire to strengthen these messages of science, caution, and modernity through un-self-conscious verisimilitude would be to drastically increase and decrease the novel's authority at the same time; perhaps it could more confidently pose itself as the truth, but it would then deny itself the freedom of different kinds of representation. While realist and perhaps modernist novels used to aim for better imitations or approximations of "the truth", in postmodern works, the idea of a single truth has been shaken to reveal multiple possible stories. These latter works decrease the authoritativeness of their claims and forgo the possibility of getting at the Truth, but they authorize different interpretations and representations instead of sticking to a model. As a literary form, the romanticist or realist novel can help imagine a nation by portraying "empty, homogeneous time" and nudging a switch from viewing the world as the work of an author to viewing it as historical progression (Anderson 2016, chap. 2), but it does not dwell on the contradiction that it does this within the work of an author. It will be successful in doing that to the extent that it can make the reader forget about its novelistic quality, at its own expense, discrediting a type of reading and a type of world. Pamuk's postmodern novel is not content with such a trade-off that erases its novelness in the process of its becoming. Instead, it serves to deliver a different truth. In a particularly ambitious amendment to literary history, Pamuk inserts Minger into the *Iliad* as "pembe taştan yeşil elmas"

[20]"anlatıcı, yazma sürecini açıklayıcı yöntemleri elbette gizlemez (bunları gizlememek artık romanın namusu haline geldi)" [the narrator of course does not conceal methods explaining the writing process (not concealing these has become the claim to honor of the novel)]

[green diamond out of pink stone] (*VG*, 15). As Ian Munro points out, the word "carbuncle" refers both a red jewel and a boil, and it used to mean "plague token" in early modern times: "'Carbuncle' at once symbolizes pure and jewel-like invulnerability and rottenness and infection." (2000, 259) The comparison of Minger to a jewel prefigures the plague in its alternative meaning, a green, pus-filled carbuncle on pink skin, and highlights the double potential of the island as pure and rotten at once. The reference, once again, makes the epidemic seem like something that was fated to happen, reinforcing the sense of simultaneity across time. It is as though, just as with Mingerian nationhood, language always already "knew".

If the work displays a kind of ambivalence in the ideas it puts forth (e.g. are Muslims more difficult to get to co-operate with quarantine?), it also displays an instability or polyvalence regarding the figure of the artist. In the previous chapter, I brought up Peta Mitchell's arguments about the metaphoricity of contagion and vice versa. Her emphasis on the "viral" quality of metaphor (2012, Coda), circulating within a linguistic community, recalls "dead metaphors", which no longer strike us as being metaphors; we have become inoculated to them. They are no longer invigorating (or "defamiliarizing" if we think of Shklovsky), which is why authors introduce new metaphors or viruses into the linguistic community, which then are tired out, and this cycle goes on and on. The author is a hacker of language, or in the novel's more folkloric terms, the sneaky cyclops devil leaving rats all over the place, which is to say that *Veba Geceleri* can be read as a novel metaphorizing metaphor.

That said, in the novel's view, the author also resembles the figure of the epidemiologist or health worker in general. Again returning to Deleuze, "the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man." (1997, 228) Although Pamuk has said that he expected to identify with the character of Doctor Nuri but then didn't (Pamuk 2021*a*), certain similarities can be noted between the figure of the health practitioner in general in the novel, within the confines of its historical setting, and that of the contemporary author. It may come as a surprise to the contemporary reader that the figure of the doctor in the novel is one of mediocre social standing. Sultan Pakize is married off to Doctor Nuri *in spite of* his profession, as though he were an artist: "Pakize Sultan'a da 'doktor da olsa' son anda bir koca bulunmuş"[21] (*VG*, 66). When Doctor Nuri is summoned to Yıldız Palace, he thinks "that he will possibly be arrested at any moment like many young doctors had been" (*VG*, 159), which, again, in Pamuk's homeland, is something that would more likely happen to subversive authors or journalists. As mentioned before, Nikiforo the

[21] "a husband had been found for Sultan Pakize, 'a doctor but still'"

pharmacist's comment that "you see, as pharmacists, we carefully weigh everything even when we're talking" (*VG*, 201),[22] followed by his opinions on how only readers of French novels would recognize arsenic poisoning, pairs the fields of health and literature (as they are also in Camus's *The Plague*, through the character writing the narrative, Doctor Bernard Rieux[23]). The figures of the pharmacist/doctor and the artist/author also come together in the Armenian pharmacist and painter Osgan Kalemciyan, the quintessential *pharmakos* figure in the novel.

Writing about the COVID-19 pandemic, Sergio Benvenuto argues that narcissistic injuries, as mentioned in the previous chapter, are difficult to accept without designating a scapegoat, whose sacrifice provides a way to deal with uncertainty by redrawing the boundaries of the group. Benvenuto invokes the concept of *pharmakon*, which Jacques Derrida elaborates in his analysis of Plato's *Phaedrus*, drawing out the many meanings of the word in ancient Greek that got lost in translation, such as "'remedy,' 'recipe,' 'poison,' 'drug,' 'philter,' etc." (1981, 71) He analyzes a story mentioned in Plato's text to examine the figure of the Egyptian god Thoth: "The god of writing is thus also a god of medicine. Of 'medicine': both a science and an occult drug. Of the remedy and the poison. The god of writing is the god of the *pharmakon*." (Derrida 1981, 94) Next, he identifies writing as a *pharmakon*, for it helps us remember and communicate over an extended time and space, but, unlike speech, it is detachable from its origin and susceptible to distortion and misreading, and it weakens memory—we stop trying to remember things we know we have written down. Added on to the concept is its cognate, *pharmakos*, meaning "wizard, magician, poisoner", who he notes "has been compared to a scapegoat." (Derrida 1981, 130) In the way it is expelled or externalized to free up mental space, writing is also like a scapegoat, which, in itself, is considered both poison and remedy for the newly restricted and purified group or entity.[24]

Perhaps because of the drawing and redrawing of boundaries involved in *Veba Geceleri*, the concept of *pharmakon* is readily applicable to it. It may be observed that Minger is a *pharmakon* for the Ottoman Empire—it is humiliating for the empire on the international scene and dangerous for the rest of its population, but in achieving a distance from Minger by joining the cordon, the Empire is able to save face and define itself in distinction from it. Minger bears the brunt of the Ottoman Empire's declining reputation and insufficient sanitary measures, so it resembles the

[22] Doctor Nuri is also nothing if not a practitioner of careful balance and moderation.

[23] Thanks to Sibel Irzık for pointing this out.

[24] As far as I have seen, the scapegoat meaning has been carried over to the concept of *pharmakon* in some of the literature, so I will also take liberty to use the concept *pharmakon* in a way that encompasses the meaning of *pharmakos* too.

rejected scapegoat. For Minger, on the other hand, the plague is a *pharmakon*, because it is both blessing and curse, and the element that must be expelled for a happy, healthy union. The plague is an ethically felicitous *pharmakon* considering that it is often groups of people, entire ethnicities or races, that are "purged" in accordance with this mechanism; it makes the basis of Mingerian national pride relatively less ethically problematic. Then again, Minger has its own island for exile and quarantine purposes where officials loyal to the Empire are taken and then tragically abandoned; the Maiden's Tower island is to Minger what the latter is to the Empire.

But we might also want to recognize the *pharmakon* of the Empire that started it all—Bonkowski Pasha, the non-Muslim pharmacist/epidemiologist. Marika voices a rumor that, as though in a recognition of guilt by the collective unconscious, links the plague with his murder, comparing the act to the orphaning of a child, but that, as though to escape the censorship of the ego, still puts the blame on him: "Sözümona vebayı Bonkowski Paşa getirmiş. Şimdi o öldürüldüğü için veba şehirde sahipsiz kalmış kayıp çocuk gibi geziniyormuş. Başkaları da ölecekmiş."[25] (*VG*, 126) Bonkowski Pasha as a health worker is both a reminder of the plague that prevents self-soothing denial and an expert who can end the epidemic. As a non-Muslim, he is a symbol to Muslim Ottomans of the grandeur of empire but also of an intimidating and potentially threatening difference. At the intersection of these identities, as the honored, educated Other, he is both a trigger for Muslim Ottomans' insecurities about their inferiority in relation to the Christian West and a means for them to benefit from this epidemiological expertise. His murder, loosely orchestrated by the Sultan, contains an element of betrayal, of deceit and abandonment or of not being on the same page, considering he has devoted himself to the service of the Empire.

The plague's getting out of hand could be read as not just the consequence of the loss of the greatest resource in solving it, but also as divine or poetic retribution for this murder. The figure of Osgan the Armenian pharmacist and painter is linked with Bonkowski Pasha by contiguity (he is brought up in a conversation between him and Nikiforo), similarity (both non-Muslim pharmacists), and association (the two are friends) (*VG*, 58). Later on, Osgan is said to have been killed in April 1915 "along with two thousand or so Armenian intellectuals" (*VG*, 518). Mingerli notes that the painter, Doctor Ilias, and Nikiforo the pharmacist, all non-Muslims, will be killed "for political reasons" (*VG*, 101) by the end of the novel, thereby explicitly grouping non-Muslims as scapegoats, all of whom happen to be in the fields of

[25] "It's said that it was Bonkowski Pasha who brought the plague to the island. Now that he's been killed, the plague is supposed to be wandering the city like a child lost and alone. It's said that others will die too"

health and/or art. The fact that Bonkowski Pasha gave the idea for the banner that later becomes the Mingerian flag and that Osgan painted it brings out a tragic and satirical irony and underscores their status as *pharmakon*s who, through their lives and their deaths, laid the bedrock for the formation of nation-states.

Despite the central importance of Bonkowski Pasha's murder, according to Mingerli, the details of the event are not something historians of Minger want to discuss[26] (*VG*, 61). In that case, if we go by Parla's argument that Pamuk is thoroughly concerned with crime, punishment, and textual atonement or redemption (Parla 2018, chap. 1), Mingerli's novel can be regarded as atoning for this murder and for all the others that it can be seen to represent—that is to say, for the sins of Minger. Betrayal in an imagined unity cannot be undone—like a violated quarantine rendered ineffective, the community is instantly destroyed. Just as the disease is inferred from the visible and always belated symptom and to see it is to catch up to the reality of infection, an action that breaks the social contract between the Empire and its loyal subjects such as Bonkowski Pasha[27] indicates that for one of the parties, it's already been destroyed in the imagination. The gradual creation of community in Minger, then, is set off by a betrayal motivated by paranoia, an outpouring of fictions in the mind that only tolerate a community of one. It falls on another fiction to try to pick up the pieces, to salvage some by integrating them into a new whole.

4.4 The Reader in Quarantine

The overlaps between literature or art and health can be further extended into an allegorical reading, especially since epidemics are often used to symbolize social ills. As discussed in previous chapters, the quarantine in *Veba Geceleri* is treated as requiring cooperation by the public and being a delicate business, even though technically the government could do from the beginning what they do at the end: enforce the rules by force. Instead, most of the novel is gripped with the anxiety of not being able to coax the public into quarantine, which takes the form of anxiety over how to represent and how these representations will be interpreted, and the strangeness of this is not fully explained. It's almost as though a sort of confidence in the public is lacking, and whether this is unnecessary anxiety on the provincial

[26] "gönülsüzce de olsa hâlâ zaman zaman tartışılır." [it is still discussed from time to time, albeit unenthusiastically.] (*VG*, 61)

[27] He had no greater crime than his success: "Stanislaw Bonkowski'nin asıl suçu ise kurduğu modern eczacılık cemiyetinin beklenmedik başarısıydı." [Stanislaw Bonkowski's real crime was the unexpected success of the modern pharmaceutical association he founded.] (*VG*, 52)

government's part or whether they are completely right to worry given the historical setting—for the quarantine really couldn't work in the absence of unity in mind—this voluntary aspect in *Veba Geceleri* that depends on the public's reception, on an indispensable accounting of what others think we think they think, etc., makes the novel resemble a *Künstlerroman* when looked at from an allegorical perspective.

According to Pamuk, the novel form originated in and was soon mastered by the West; it was imported by the East, and it can be learned and requires discipline and a shift in mindset (once again echoing the shift to induction). In addition, the reading and writing of novels are characterized by what Pamuk likens to a chess game between the author and the reader involving the mutual anticipation of expectations (2011, 97, 108, 130)—a type of accounting using game theory. Both parties constantly evaluate and re-evaluate what the other must think or expect and what they must think they themselves think in turn, and so on like a hall of mirrors—a popular Pamuk trope:

> "Romanda neresi yaşanmış, neresi hayal ikilemi de, okur ile yazar arasında benzeri bir aynalar arasına duşme durumu yaratır. Her ayrıntıda, yazar okurun, o ayrıntının yaşanmış olduğunu duşuneceğini duşunur. Okur da yazarın o ayrıntıyı yaşanmış sanacağını duşunerek yazdığını duşunur. Yazar da okurun bunu da duşuneceğini duşunerek o ayrıntıyı yazdığını duşunur. Aynı aynalar oyunu, okurla yazar arasında, yazarın hayal gucu uzerinden de surekli oynanır."[28] (2011, 44)

Further, it takes a while for readers to find their bearings in a novel, to be able to envision the whole, which makes reading novels a stressful process: "Romandaki anların her birinin genel manzaradaki yerini, romanın merkezini nasıl gösterdiğini merak etmek, roman okumayı çoğu zaman gerilimli bir iş haline getirir." (2011, 76) Reading novels is "a participatory and individual activity" (2011, 77), which demands some "labor" from the reader as well (2011, 105). A novel's success depends in part on its reader: "En sonunda romanın 'gerçekleşmesi', 'başarılı olması' için romancının bizim gibi hayal gucu çalışkan, anlayışlı, iyi bir okura ihtiyacı vardır." (2011, 96) The reader does have a role, but the author is the one who constructs the puzzle, which has to be at an adequate level of difficulty to work. The reader has to play along, in other words, but it is up to the author to make the game compelling,

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[28] "The dilemma of which part in the novel has been lived, which part is fantasy creates a similar situation between the reader and the writer of falling in between mirrors. In every detail, the writer thinks that the reader will think that that detail was experienced in real life. Meanwhile the reader thinks that the writer wrote that detail thinking she would think it lived experience. The writer in turn thinks that she is writing that detail thinking the reader will think that. The same game of mirrors is constantly played over the writer's imagination, between the reader and the writer."

to captivate the reader. Crucially, as underscored in *Veba Geceleri*, for quarantine to work, one has to be able to establish authority, to create the image of a strong presence by showing and concealing in a strategic manner.

All in all, given Pamuk's perspective on reading and writing novels, it is possible to argue that, in *Veba Geceleri*, imposing a successful quarantine is kind of like writing a successful novel: as a result of both practices done well, masses of people can be induced to cut themselves off from others to be by themselves, to partake in a shared experience while each being alone, and to anticipate the first, second, third-order thoughts of another. Unlike in the "voluntary quarantine" the author goes into to write (Parla 2021, 17), in the "voluntary quarantine" the author sets up for the reader, the former has to be able to provide for the reader a comfortable, reliable, and firm hold solely through the text, so that the reader wants to stay of her own volition. The comparison feels somewhat counter-intuitive, considering that the isolation of quarantine often feels claustrophobic, whereas we usually think of alternative realities established by authors as an escape, a window out of our current reality to another in which we can live vicariously—in other words, as the opposite of restriction and confinement.

But perhaps some degree of authority is needed in order to give shape to a world that can capture and retain its readers, providing a carefully calibrated balance not unlike the one at work in producing dreams that prolong sleep according to Freud's psychoanalytic dream theory. Like the delicate balance of the quarantine in the novel, which cannot be too harsh because that could turn people away, nor too lenient, which would then not have any effect, dreams strike a balance between being dominated too much by the release of the tensions of the id, which would be difficult to tolerate and hence wake the dreamer, and being devoted to wish fulfillment, which would not provide psychic release. If we take Pamuk's analogy of trying to find one's way in a forest, an analogy he uses both for city living and for reading novels in *The Naive and Sentimental Novelist*, the well-balanced novel will be neither impossible to navigate nor a walk in the park; it will command attention and interest by both propitiating and making demands of its reader, taking pains not to destroy its authority by losing the reader or becoming too popular and not literary. Even for Deleuze, who is renowned for his championing of the rhizomatic and lateral, of escape and disorder over the hierarchical and vertical, containment and order, literature involves "institut[ing] a zone of proximity", to be able to "liberate life wherever it is imprisoned by and within man," (1997, 228). In Deleuze's terms, the sweet spot that needs to be struck requires one eschew an "infantile conception of literature", which seeks as its end goal a father: "It is the same thing to sin through an excess of reality as through an excess of the imagination. In both cases it is

the eternal daddy-mommy, an Oedipal structure that is projected onto the real or introjected into the imaginary." (Deleuze 1997, 227)

A brief detour may allow for another demonstration of this reading. According to Benedict Anderson, the novel form helped envision the temporality of the nation, which was that of "empty, homogeneous time" as opposed to the "simultaneity cross-time" idea that persisted before (2016, chap. 2). Under the latter paradigm, Anderson argues, people used to view the world as though every happening were part of the holistic work of one divine author. Events taking place in the present could be thought of as simultaneous with those that would take place in the future; they would be considered the same event manifesting in slightly different forms at different times. With the rise of Enlightenment ideas and the de-sacralization of the languages of holy texts, Anderson writes, people started to think of time as unfolding, and what resembles our modern conception of history emerged as a contender to the view of life as a story authored by God. Part of this change involved an opening up to conceptions of "horizontal" simultaneity, whereby people at different places were thought of as acting at the same time (Anderson 2016, chap. 2). Along with the newspaper, the novel had a crucial role in orchestrating the switch in how time was conceived (Anderson 2016, chap. 2). The novel embodies the "meanwhile", believes Anderson, because in contrast to the epic, the former does not just shine a light on one place at one time but explains how different actors are experiencing different events at the same objective time, as measured by clocks (2016, chap. 2). That way, the novel helps imagine a nation as a group of people that though they don't all know about each other and about what they are doing in any given time, are still connected "horizontally", by their contemporariness rather than vertically, by their connection to the divine hand.

Pamuk knows about this role of the novel in allowing a nation to be imagined (2011, 64). In *Veba Geceleri*, one way we see different understandings of temporality emerge is in the discussions of fatalism. Characters, especially those that are religious, keep repeating that they trust in God and that God will determine whether they get the plague or not. Since this shifts the focus from prevention to resignation, the characters trying to impose the quarantine try to discourage this kind of thinking. Senior Captain Kâmil is shocked to hear the resigned expression "Yazıldıysa olur" [lit. "It will happen anyway if it has been written (in our destiny)"] (*VG*, 237) coming from his wife, Zeynep. This is precisely the logic of "simultaneity cross-time", the pre-nation conception of temporality that sees the world as a creation of a divine will. At the same time, though, Zeynep's words are of course literally true as we the reader know and acknowledge: if Orhan Pamuk has written it, it will happen; what is Zeynep to do about it? What seems like a statement reflecting

pre-modern sensibilities also gestures at the postmodern metafictional element in which the character is aware of being a character. Just as characters' language hints at the possibility of Mingerian nationhood before they become wise to it themselves, here language speaks through Zeynep to tell us what she doesn't consciously know.

Further, Kâmil's frustration with this attitude can be seen not only in the context of plague prevention strategy but also in terms of his aspiration to be a *writer* of history, while Zeynep's statement implies that she is not contemporaneous with the author, who has already written the outcome at the moment she says this, but with the reader. The ontological self-positioning confirmed by the disappearance of the plague under the third quarantine government thereby translates to a literary one as well, which advocates a writing or quarantine imposition process in which one is both writer and reader to one's own work. The author is neither meant to try to consciously control the entire writing process, nor to let the unconscious completely take over in an exercise like automatic writing or in the way Pamuk envisions poetry as arriving almost in epiphanies or "visitations"—Sheikh Hamdullah, like Ka in *Snow*,[29] is a poet but not a "writer" in this sense. We might also think of how this binary corresponds to Pamuk's artistic philosophy, with the first government being too "sentimental" and the second too "naive"; the correct stance incorporates both: "Romancılık, aynı anda hem saf hem de duşunceli olma işidir."[30](2011, 15) This correspondence does make sense in light of the characters of Senior Captain Kâmil and Sheikh Hamdullah in particular. The former could be described as sentimental, which Pamuk, summarizing Schiller, defines as "doğanın basitliği ve gucunden uzak duşmuş ve kendi duygu ve duşuncelerine fazla kapılmış"[31] (2011, 16), while the latter is self-assured, and writing just happens to naive poets like him: "Şiir onlar için –modern insanın ve şairlerin aksine– hiç ayrılmadıkları doğanın uzerlerinde kendiliğinden bıraktığı bir etki gibidir."[32] (2011, 16) The Sheikh just waits for the plague to pass, like someone who never sits down to write but keeps waiting for inspiration. It is clear from the novel that Pamuk feels more of an allegiance to the modern, sentimental end of the pole, to the characters in the first government and what they represent, a disciplined work ethic over inspiration, and it is also clear that he seems to think this position more aligned with the novel form. In *The White Castle*, a similar binary operates in the final chapter between the narrator, who admires novels, soul searching, and self-exploration, and Evliya Çelebi, who

[29]Thanks to Sibel Irzık for pointing this out.

[30]"Writing novels is the work of being both naive and sentimental at once."

[31]"distanced from the simplicity and power of nature and too caught up in her own feelings and thoughts"

[32]"Poetry for them—unlike for modern humans and poets—is like an imprint that nature, from which they are never separated, leaves on them, on its own."

believes one should try to look for answers out in the world. The acquisition of the novel form can also be said to correspond with the epistemological shift towards induction and modernity—Deleuze writes, “Health as literature, as writing, consists in inventing a people that is missing. It is the task of the fabulating function to invent a people.” (1997, 228) Just like quarantine in the novel, which depends on the ability to inductively envision a people, health that comes through literature also requires the mental operation of induction, of inducing a people, along with a novelistic universe.

4.5 Recording the City

Besides an allegorical reading that sees in plague containment efforts an elaboration of Pamuk’s aesthetic philosophy, the pandemic can also be read as an expression of anxieties about overdevelopment and overpopulation. Boluk and Lenz point out that “Since the early modern period, textual articulations of anxiety regarding biological infection have simultaneously operated as expressions of otherwise largely unspoken anxieties arising in response to the interconnected changes wrought by the onset of modernity generally and the spread of capitalism specifically.” (2010, 128) They make a convincing case that the spread of disease voices concerns about the free market and the global flow of capital, noting the overlaps in vocabularies of epidemics and capitalism, such as the plague “token” (Boluk and Lenz 2010, 132). The particular anxieties expressed change with the times as well, they argue—during the shift to capitalism, for instance, anxiety about the changing class structure and unpredictable social mobilities finds expression through plays about plague, while at present, worries about neo-liberalism surface through zombie narratives (Boluk and Lenz 2010).

On a slightly different note, Ian Munro sees in the plague an anxiety about urban life in particular, which provides one explanation for why the plague might have been attractive to Pamuk, who is known to be very attached to Istanbul: “As the quintessential urban malady, plague is a spatial disease; it refigures the lived and symbolic space of the city, altering and transforming the urban aspect. At the same time its resonances are temporal, recalling and recycling a long historical and literary tradition of urban dissolution.” (2000, 242-3) In other words, plague acts on the body or the face of the city, possibly to the point of rendering it difficult to recognize, and brings to mind the death of this body. Munro argues that the plague presents a “crisis of urban meaning” (2000, 244), whereby inhabitants lament the “legibility”

of the city, of its “symbolic meaning” (2000, 244). What brings about this crisis of meaning in the case of London is, according to Munro, the city’s exponentially growing population, which comes with its contradictions: “But if the crowd is the symbol of the healthy city, the vibrant city, London as it should be, it is also the harbinger of the plague and thus of London’s destruction. The plague was closely linked to London’s overcrowding.” (2000, 250) The ambivalent figure of the crowd is both what makes a healthy city as well as what ails it.

Evidently, the increasingly rapid transformation of Istanbul in the past half century or so can be said to provoke a similar crisis of meaning particularly for its long-term inhabitants like Pamuk, who has treated the topic of these changes recently in his 2014 novel, *A Strangeness in My Mind.* The estrangement of Istanbul must thus be salient in the mind of the author, for it has often come up in his interviews. In an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, Pamuk reportedly said:

> "Hatıralarımın yok edildiği İstanbul’un bu yeni halini sevmiyorum. . . . Orası bugün daha zengin ama daha az özgür bir şehir. Mimari, ekonomi değişti, çok sevdiğim ahşap evler yerle bir edildi. Ben yıllardır İstanbul’un eski fotoğraflarını biriktiriyorum. Bunu neden yaptığımı bilmiyorum. Belki de o zamana dair kalan tek şeyler oldukları içindir."[33] (*Orhan Pamuk: Sevdiğim İstanbul’u yok ettiler; politik olarak artık orada yaşayamam* 2017)

Not only is this very similar to the situation of the nostalgic Mîna Mingerli, who constructs her book by looking at old black-and-white photos, but it also suggests that part of the animating force behind the novel for Pamuk might be the desire to mourn the loss of *his* city. Istanbul is changing, growing uncontrollably, as though ridden with an unstoppable plague, but rather than meeting this change with anger towards a designated *pharmakon* du jour and believing in relief through their expulsion, perhaps one can turn inward and seek catharsis through art and literature.

Another newspaper clipping reads, "“İstanbul’daki hızlı değişime dikkat çeken ünlü yazar, bu kadar hızlı ve dikey bir şekilde gerçekleşen değişikliklerin acaba, nasıl ve ne kadar farkına varıldığına ilişkin neredeyse metafizik bir kaygıya sahip olduğunu söyledi.”[34] (*Orhan Pamuk: Eskiden 3 korumam vardı şimdi bir tane, Türkiye iler-*

[33] "I do not like this new version of Istanbul where my memories have been destroyed. . . . The city is richer now but less free. The architecture and the economy have changed a lot; the wooden houses I loved have been demolished. I’ve been collecting Istanbul’s old photographs for years. I don’t know why I do that. Maybe it’s because they are the only things that are still around from that time."

[34] “Directing attention to the rapid change in Istanbul, the famous author said he feels an almost metaphysical anxiety regarding whether, how, and how much people are aware of the changes taking place in such a fast

liyor 2015) The loss of legibility of the city is "metaphysical" in the sense that it harks back to existential or ontological anxieties. It raises the question of whether our city is still ours if we can barely recognize it, of whether a phenomenon is anything other or more for us than its perceptible effects. It is the loss of signification, the obscuring or alienization of a face, which, in turn, sows uncertainty in the subject herself, constituted through confrontation.

For the author, Istanbul as home is both like a part of the self and like a mother. In a conversation of the author with Salman Rushdie and Deborah Treisman, Pamuk keeps associating "home" with "mother" (Pamuk and Rushdie 2014), probably influenced by signifiers such as *anayurt*, *anavatan*, *anadil* [motherland, mother language], as well as the common feminization of countries as objects that require masculine protection. But Pamuk's frequent assertions are noteworthy enough for Rushdie to humorously remark, "Orhan's mother has been haunting the conversation." (in Pamuk and Rushdie 2014) Once we recognize the strong association of home and mother in Pamuk's thinking, our reading of the novel can be informed by this as well. We might note that while Sultan Pakize has a strong attachment to her city and her father, and while her siblings are enumerated as well as other relatives, her mother is never mentioned, as though she doesn't have one, as though Istanbul is her mother. The Sultan's daughter leaves Istanbul at the age of twenty-one, and despite her strong desire to go back, she never can. The character who has already lost her motherland is the experienced figure who can guide a whole people through a symbolically equivalent experience. The loss of the city in the plague, however, can take a different form—not the death of the mother, but her unnatural transformation, a strange orphaning. This situation is referenced in the novel as the worst thing that can happen to a child and described as follows: "annelerinin eski, tatlı, şefkatli anneleri olmadığını, ölmekte olan çaresiz, zavallı ve bencil bir hayvana dönüştüğünü gördüklerinde deliriyorlardı çocuklar! O zaman bazıları bu dünyadan umudu kesiyor, sanki içlerine cin girmiş gibi uzaklara kaçıyorlardı."[35] (278) As it is noted multiple times by characters observing the streets of Arkaz (*VG*, 150, 212, 277, 312, 465), the image of the crying child is emblematic of the plague in Minger, its most persistent and powerful reflection. The epidemic as unmothering can also be said to be finally overcome through the appearance of a substitute mother to the nation in the form of Queen Pakize. In becoming queen, "The Sultan's daughter" is called on to leave her defining role as daughter to "nurse" the fledgling nation back to health. This authority is conferred upon and eventually stripped from Sultan

and vertical manner."

[35] "when children saw that their mother wasn't their old, sweet, affectionate mother, that she had become a dying, helpless, pathetic, and selfish animal, they lost their minds! At that point, some of them lost hope in this world and ran far away as though possessed by a jinn."

Pakize by popular opinion.[36]

It can be said that the artist takes on the role of mother for an orphaned people, since, as argued in the previous chapter, Sultan Pakize comes close to being an artist figure in that she spends her time reading novels and writing letters, describing second-hand experiences in great detail, as though she lived them herself. According to Mingerli (and Pamuk says almost the same thing in his university lectures [37]), "Roman sanatı kendi yaşadığımız hikâyeleri başkalarının hikâyesi gibi, başkalarının yaşadığı hikâyeleri de kendimiz yaşamışız gibi yazabilme hünerine dayanır."[38] (*VG*, 12) So despite not technically being a novelist, Sultan Pakize is a reader of novels and has the sensibility of a novelist, writing in a similar way. She is depicted as sensitive (*VG*, 454), proud (*VG*, 228), romantic (*VG*, 334), and dedicated (*VG*, 464). She is proud but not terrified of not getting through to others, displaying a healthier ego than Kâmil does: "Sözüm dinlenmeyecekse ben bu mevkide bir gün daha durmam." (*VG*, 492) According to Pamuk, she might be the only character in *Veba Geceleri* who is not hypocritical (Pamuk 2021*a*). As her name indicates, she is clean, pure, unadulterated, unblemished by sin. And yet, being a reader and writer, Sultan Pakize is the most compassionate character who "feels with" others and puts herself in their shoes—she doesn't police the boundaries of her being, fearing others' influence. In the aesthetic philosophy of the novel, which reflects that of its author, compassion is a sort of mixing or contamination required for the artist to connect with the people. Sultan Pakize deals with the tragedy around her by writing about it to her sister, and just as the Mingerian nation arises almost out of nothing, in something resembling a locked room mystery, the Sultan's daughter finds her voice literally in rooms where she is locked in: "Ben kendim 'evet' demek istiyorum!" [I want to say 'yes' myself!] (*VG*, 439)[39], "onlar hakkında ablasına kendi kelimeleriyle yazacağını anladı." [she understood that she would write to her sister about them in her own words.] (*VG*, 450)[40] Her self-actualization coincides with Minger's purification from the plague, as she finds her own voice. Like a novelist per Mingerli and Pamuk, she also manages to become other: "Bunları yaparken hem

[36] although how much the latter follows from popular opinion is unclear.

[37] "Roman sanatı kendimizden bir başkası gibi ve başkalarından kendimiz gibi söz açabilme huneridir." [The art of the novel is the ability to talk about ourselves as though we are someone else and about others as though they are us.] (2011, 56)

[38] "The art of the novel depends on the ability to write stories we lived through ourselves as though they are the stories of others and the stories lived through by others as though we lived through them ourselves."

[39] This quote begs the question of what changes when one says the same exact thing but says it oneself, recalling Borges's Pierre Ménard who wrote his own *Don Quixote*.

[40] Once again, this incites a double take; in a sense, this is impossible because no words are anyone's own. Perhaps this can be chalked up to Sultan Pakize's "saflık" [naiveté]. Then again, perhaps the suggestion is that this is a limiting way of thinking about what "one's own" means. We are led to think of the "discursive construction of belonging" from Chapter 1.

babası gibi olduğunu hem de kendisi olmaya devam edebildiğini hissetmişti"[41] (*VG*, 477). The way Sultan Pakize finds her voice is through reading and writing—not through the suppression of influence but perhaps through confluence—while the cursory mention of Sultan Celaleddin, a recurring imaginary historical figure from *The Black Book*, loses his mind trying to be purely himself (*VG*, 199).

During her reign, the Queen is beloved and soon mythicized as an influence that can dispel the plague. She helps create a synthesis between the first two governments through her common sense realism and democratic sensibilities combined with her empathy, understanding, and the room she allows for emotion and the influence of others. She is the first woman to officially and openly wield political power in Minger (and Ottoman lands), and as someone who has had the unprivileged experience of being discounted (as a woman) and confined by the Ottoman Sultan all her life, as well as the privileges of having a cultured upbringing, she is in an exceptionally suited position to relate to the Mingerians. Her success suggests that, especially in times of social fragmentation, what is needed besides concrete solutions might be someone to mirror ourselves back to us, creating community in feeling. During the heyday of the plague, the city of Arkaz is described as follows: "Ezan ve çan sesleri duyulmadığı için şehrin üzerindeki bulutlar ağırlaşmış, göğün mavisi ve insanların iradesi solmuştu sanki."[42] (*VG*, 345) When the sounds of human will are not reflected back to the people themselves, the collective will seems to fade away. Art is in a privileged position in helping cultivate the ability to relate to, reflect, and feel with others, all of which have curative effects.

For another interpretation, we might turn to Pamuk's self-identification with Istanbul as emphasized in his (and his city's) memoir, in which part of Istanbul's history and his family history are superimposed and bleed into each other so that each is filtered through the other[43] (Erol 2011). The boundary between the author and his city is already permeable. A similar relationship between city/country and self is suggested in the novel through the name of the narrator, Mingerli. The narrator is identified through her belonging to Minger even though the way this naming technically came to be is unexplained. Is Mingerian society matrilineal that Mina

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[41] She had felt that, when she was doing these, she was both like her father and continued to be herself"

[42] It was as though in the absence of calls to prayer and church bells, the clouds over the city had gotten heavier and sky's blue and the people's will had faded.

[43] "This personalization from a child's perspective, however, allows the readers to understand and experience the historical loss through their identification with and sympathy for the child's suffering. By setting this concrete example of the pain of a child longing for family togetherness and harmony as an emotional parallel for what Istanbullus felt after the loss of the empire, Pamuk turns Ottoman history into a story of the dissolution of another family like his, albeit more illustrious and powerful." (Erol 2011, 661); "In contrast, we can certainly say that by his own account, Pamuk was sad and even depressed during this period of his life in Istanbul and that the reason was the dissolution of the empire he was part of, that is, his family, whom he metaphorically links with the Ottoman dynasty throughout." (Erol 2011, 668)

Mingerli inherits such a last name, perhaps from Sultan Pakize? Surely this would be mentioned in so comprehensive a historical account. Moreover, if Sultan Pakize was never fully honored for her contribution to Minger, how was that last name given to her? The origin of Mingerli's name not being connected to any kind of inheritance, another person conferring the name to her, while hinting at fairy tales too, makes it properly hers and refuses to reveal the contingency of the connection between writer and home. Thus, the changing face of the city presents an estrangement from the self, an incongruous and uncanny mirror image. Indeed, Pamuk has likened Istanbul to his body (2017), which lends further credence to the plague as an apt metaphor—what plagues the city does the same to the individual body, and vice versa, and no hard lines can be drawn between the two "bodies."

The novel responds to this change as a kind of balm: as Pamuk explains in *The Naive and Sentimental Novelist*, he views the novel as an archive of daily language but also of the city (2011, 98). Not only does the novel provide a working through of the trauma on a symbolic level of the loss of the city through the confrontation with the plague, but it also preserves chosen elements from the city through its use of pastiche. Minger brings together some of his favorite structures and places, such as the Maiden's Tower and Splendid Palas Hotel. The artist designates herself as the record-keeper of the mutating city, allowing places to live on by textualizing them. This is part profession, part vocation or passion. Once again, we see that knowledge and care form the basis of this time aesthetic authority, which is one that preserves history. Similarly, it can be said that, in *Veba Geceleri*, women such as Sultan Pakize and Mingerli (as indicated by her name, in particular) or "woman[ly] writers" rather than "İktidar sahibi erkekler" [men in power] (*VG*, 12) seem to hold an aesthetic authority, a claim to the soul of Minger. This claim to aesthetic authority can be said to apply to Pamuk as well, since parallels between the author and the narrator pose the latter as an ersatz novelist. Like Mîna Mingerli, Pamuk avails himself of historical information and research for the novel; like her, he is an author and intellectual who is based partly abroad and partly in his home country and who has been somewhat reviled for opposing official narratives and state policies—perhaps he too feels somewhat cheated out of his legacy in his country for this reason. Perhaps most importantly, for all her contained tone, Mingerli is a first time novelist, an amateur, an ironic contrast to a Nobel laureate, but not so at the same time, for Pamuk too is an amateur when it comes to writing from a woman's perspective.[44] The irony that divorces Mingerli from Pamuk, their difference in gender, experience, and profession, holds the keys to their connection as well: they have similarly difficult novelistic projects involving putting themselves in others'

[44]Pamuk has said that he aspires to write a novel fully from a woman's perspective (Pamuk 2021*c*)

shoes and communicating the incommensurate. Both are experts and beginners at the same time. Pamuk pokes fun at his own authority from the very first page when he has Mingerli ask whether Sultan Pakize writes so well because she is a woman, pointing to a potential lack or excess in himself and to the flattering ambitiousness and humbling impossibility of his project.

But while the author can claim the literary authority to represent the city and preserve its life in the face of drastic change, this change, represented in the novel through the pandemic, also strips her of her authority. Sibel Erol writes about *Istanbul* that "Pamuk gains the authority to define what Istanbul is when he reconquers it in the spirit of Mehmet the Conqueror" "Pamuk achieves this conquest by understanding the meaning of the city . . . . The young artist conquers the city by allowing himself to be conquered by it." (2011, 664) If Pamuk's literary authority derives from his artistic "conquest" of the city through an understanding of its meaning, the changing meaning of the city must undermine this authority. In order to reconquer it, the author must allow the city to re-conquer her. She must try to penetrate the ever changing meaning of the city time and time again, to derive literary authority again and again in the face of shifting sands. The seasoned writer remains a perennial beginner, engaged in a Sisyphean task.

5. CONCLUSION

It is evident from the recurrence and depiction of the plague in Pamuk's works that the disease provides fertile ground for thought-provoking sociological/philosophical questions and rousing imagery for the author (Pamuk 2021*g*). Seeing as *Veba Geceleri*, his most extensive foray into the topic of the plague, actively grapples with the notion of authority, this study has tried to zero in on the potential of the pandemic in the novel to unearth lines of inquiry relating to different facets of this confrontation. In many cases, the treatment of the plague in the study took a metaphorical turn interested in pursuing not the subject of the disease as a plot device but the structure of the phenomenon of plague as an underlying pattern or mechanism within the novel. One of the premises of this thesis was that the "logic" and vocabulary of contagion do not just concern either biology or ideas, that the term and the concept is neither purely bodily, nor purely pertaining to the soul. The concept's excess meaning and implications are precisely what render it interesting for critical inquiry. In fidelity to this multifaceted quality, I have seen fit to consider the permeability of different meanings, their allowance for each other, and tendency to tip over into one another. Other metaphors, such as digestion (in boundary negotiation and expulsion of the *pharmakos*) and archaeology, were hinted at through language as potential avenues for thought.

To give a brief summary of the thesis, the first chapter explored the pandemic's intersection with the theme of political authority, its role in nation-formation and in the loosening of ties with the Empire. In this analysis, I was guided by Anderson's theorization of "imagined community," and the whole chapter revolved around matters of imagination, sight, fiction, narrativization, and representation. I attempted to examine how a notion is born and meaning is created and spread through often accidental, unconscious prodding, through the push of an ill-fitted signifier that nonetheless gets at or resonates with something (or someone). Provided that certain conditions are in place—in the novel's case, a feeling of shared destiny, abandonment, and agency, albeit limited—I have examined how the "model" (a la Girard)

or visionary, just like a patient zero, can lead to what René Girard calls "mimetic contagion", considering the potential implications of this mechanism for social movements. I went into the way authority is expressed and perceived visually in the novel through symbols and spectacles, which is not that different from the way illness is inferred from symptoms and performances (not to be taken to mean the latter are inauthentic). Finally, I have dwelled on the novel's reception, commenting on what political and social messages are conveyed by the work. It can be remarked that the work falls into a sort of qualified postmodernism, in the way that it embodies pluralism but rejects unlimited relativity.

The second chapter examined the authority that different forms of knowing, represented by certain characters, hold in the novel and how these fare and change when put to the test by the plague. It tried to show how a tripartite fairy tale-like structure is employed to dismiss or confirm different approaches and ontological stances and to point out their strengths and weaknesses. One of the main messages was shown to be that trying to shut out the influence of different bodies or disciplines of knowledge is catastrophically wrong, while another was that unlimited faith in the human mind's ability to overcome any challenge is but a dream. Artistic knowledge, which the novel prizes above any other kind, came in at this point, precisely because of rationality's inability to resolve problems on its own. The plague in the novel, therefore, given the way it exceeds human reason, brought out the authority of and need for artistic knowledge, with its potential to facilitate understanding, communication, empathy, self-fashioning, and mutability. The chapter also discussed deduction and induction, modes of thinking that map onto different kinds of political authority and community formation. I also visited different kinds of history and the kinds of knowledge they were shown in *Veba Geceleri* to be authorized to provide. The fine line the novel walks, viewing knowledge as interpretation but posing constraints on the legitimacy of different interpretations was taken up in the context of subjectivist historiography and rumors around plague.

Finally, in the third chapter I looked at how the plague helps the novel comment on literary authority, examining conventions of plague and pandemic literature that are reproduced in *Veba Geceleri*. I entertained the idea that these commonalities could be the result of plague texts being "parasitized" by others that follow them (Cooke 2009, 18), but also and more importantly because of the exigencies of the subject matter on the writer. The novel was shown to conform to other examples of plague literature in its stylistics, thematics, and narration, which involve a plague-like quality that casts doubt on the power of authorial control. The humble position that plague requires the writer to take was called, in Deleuze's words, a "minor" stance, one that got her closer to what the French philosopher views as the calling

of literature. Deleuze's view of literature as health and the author as physician was drawn upon and shown to carry resonance in *Veba Geceleri*, in which the figures of the health worker and the artist converge in to differing extents in scapegoated non-Muslim Ottoman subjects and in Doctor Nuri and Sultan Pakize. The concept of the *pharmakon* popularized after Plato by Derrida and then Girard was shown to be helpful in thinking about approaches in and/or by the novel towards many ambivalent entities and phenomena. The attempts at setting up quarantine were said to elaborate on Pamuk's literary philosophy, which calls for a balance of authority over the writing process. In the novel's philosophy, the figure author emerged both as someone who protects from disease and as one who spreads it. Perhaps it could be said then that, in Deleuze's terms, the author is a figure who tries to take his readers from one kind of health to another, from "dominant and substantial health" to a "minor" or "an irresistible and delicate" one (1997, 228), that we may better experience life. Lastly, the knowledgeable and caring author was said to emerge as an authority to memorialize the city and mother its inhabitants in response to the alienation brought on by the changing city and overpopulation, which the plague can be said to represent.

In all three of the chapters, I took up the way the pandemic constitutes a jolt out of established orders, be that oppressive imperial rule, the sovereignty of reason, or the writer's authority over the text. Moreover, I have tried to argue that the "logic", anxiety, and theme of the plague in *Veba Geceleri* cannot really be contained and that its mixed, heterogeneous, and impure connotations apply to the ways in which we act, think, and create. As a threat to the status quo, plague can be seen necessarily to constitute a turning point in the novel, hence carrying an uncontrollably generative and fiercely destructive potential. It is a driving force for change, even metamorphosis, for both those who avoid or survive it and those who die from it. Given Pamuk's interest in transformations instigated through art, perhaps his interest in or view of the plague as agent of transformation is not surprising. I do believe, however, that the biological/medical aspect that *Veba Geceleri* brings to the table that is Pamuk's oeuvre might add dimension to our consideration of the author's work and philosophy in general, and I hope that this study will contribute to that in some small way. That said, I may take a moment to acknowledge some limitations to this study. I may have discussed to an unnecessary extent certain facets of the novel; I believe I was tempted to do this, to comment on tangentially related things, because of the dearth of existing literature on the novel, it being so recent. I may have also overly diluted the boundaries between concepts in hopes of drawing metaphorical connections between them, to the point that there emerged plenty of connections, but the concepts were not distinct enough for these

to matter anymore; striking a balance in this regard was difficult.

In future, a more comparative study evaluating the logic of contagion in all of Pamuk's oeuvre could be worthwhile, as well as a study that does puts different levels of authority (here discussed in separate chapters) or the different planes of the novel more in conversation with each other, paying attention to how the novel sheds light on this interpenetration. relation, in keeping with the spirit of the subject. Such connections could also be analyzed with regard to freedom and oppression, another important thematic axis in the novel. Girardian mimetic contagion could be examined in the rest of Pamuk's works, as it seems that his novels are particularly suited to the lens of Lacan's mirror stage and deliberately constructed the-chicken-or-the-egg type of conundrums that ponder the production of something out of nothing.

On a final note, Pamuk's placement of the plague in an Ottoman context provides him with a great opportunity to explore different themes related to modernization, government, and knowledge, among others. His treatment of the plague generally follows the conventions of plague literature, for better or worse—"the diseased text" is not always well-received. The novel's advocating for authority can be said to be somewhat counterculture at the moment, considering postmodern Foucauldian and Deleuzian ideas that are more about power as oppression countered by resistance, flight/escape, or horizontality as freedom and equality. Pamuk in this sense does something original and even polemical, but perhaps in the era of COVID-19, we understand more than usual how he could have a point. His novel seems to say that contagion, impurity, and metamorphosis are inevitable, but that, when possible, we could choose to experience these within the safe confines of literature and come out of them, again and again, different and/but enriched. The novel's final words could be read as calling for the freedom to make this choice.

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