



Politics Of Silence & Dissidence in Orhan Pamuk's Black Book: A Qualitative Scientific Analysis Subhadeep Ganguly

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Received: 12.09.2026; Accepted: 19.09.2026; Available online: 30.09.2026

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Abstract

The Black Book. It posits a new term, "dissent through apparent silence," to describe a form of political dissent that is not direct but is instead hidden in the emotions, collective memories, and subtle defiance against hegemonic post-totalitarian structures. The paper begins by establishing a pedagogical and neurological basis for dissent, discussing the role of the Anterior Insular cortex in emotional awareness and the five levels of emotional awareness defined by Lane and Schwartz. Building on this foundation, it contextualizes dissent by referencing Romilla Thapar's definition and historical examples, including the Soviet and Indian spheres. A significant portion of the analysis uses Václav Havel's essay, "The Power of the Powerless," and the example of the greengrocer, to establish the politics of conformity, 'the other,' and 'living within the truth' as the context for Pamuk's work. It argues that The Black Book, while not overtly political, mirrors life's enigmatic nature, where protagonist Galip's search for his wife Rüya and the columnist Celâl becomes a search for a fundamental truth – a non-conventional, spiritual essence of contradictory selves. This longing and seeking, the paper conclude, is the very basis of a silent, powerful dissent that breaks from conventional societal norms.

Keyword: Dissent, Silence, Romila Thapar, Post-totalitarian structures, The Black Book.

"Nothing can be as shocking as life. Except writing." Ibn Zerhani

As we talk about politicizing dissent in a literary as well as extra-literary sphere, it's important that we understand the pedagogy and the neurological basis of dissent. Our brain plays an intrinsic part in understanding dissent because, without understanding the basis on which the idea of it stands, it's very hard to scrutinize it. In our Brain, the Anterior Insular cortex is responsible for emotional awareness. Now, emotional awareness is a very varied term; it roughly equates to our subconscious social and personal well-being. Whereas the conscious experience of emotions, through which the basis of dissent and thinking is based, is controlled mostly by parts of the cerebral cortex whereas Insula serves a critical role in emotional awareness. Emotion, as a multi construal concept, is usually considered to consist of psychological and biological components as well as expressive social components. Lane and Schwartz, in their 1987 paper, defined 5 levels of emotional awareness. These are, respectively, awareness of bodily sensation, the body in action, individual feelings, blends of feelings, and blends of blends of feelings. All of these are constructed and correlated in the basis of our brain by a complicated mechanism of neuronal interaction. But their paper

further suggested that emotional perception, evaluation, and behavior can be processed with or without conscious awareness, i.e., emotional awareness is necessary but not a sufficient condition for successful emotion processing. The idea of this is clearly noticed in the example of the greengrocer in Havel's text. The idea of this paper is to establish the notion of politics in dissent and the silencing of dissent. Now, the idea of dissent in itself is far-reaching. It lurks in our day-to-day work. It eavesdrops into our being; it preys on our insecurities and self-scrutiny. Dissent is an ever-enlarging term. Dissent can be seen in regular day-to-day arguments between our parents, the clash of dreams between generations resulting in inner rebellion; it can also be seen in our regular complaints against the government. But the dissent we're more interested in today's discussion is political dissent, or dissent that has a political agenda that it serves willingly or unwillingly. But there's a catch: every dissent, however small, generally serves a purpose that has a political nature to it, and this politics is not the politics of color; this is the politics of breaking stereotypes and barriers, since nothing under the sun is apolitical in nature. It is in this regard, the idea of dissent through politics, but not streamlined in nature, comes into play. Therefore, I'd like to term it "dissent through apparent silence." But before we go to that, there are certain things that we should have a clear idea of before establishing a hierarchical hegemonized structure of dissent. To quote Romilla Thapar, "Dissent in its essence, the disagreement that a person may have with others, or, more publicly, with some of the institutions that govern their patterns of life." But the true genesis of this dissent lies in many forms and factors. It can be seen in the American Pre-Raphaelite architecture and paintings. It can be seen in the collective memory that writers like Orhan Pamuk, Annie Ernaux portray in their literary works. Orhan Pamuk, for instance, uses secularism and blasphemy as analytical tools to the politics of Turkish novels that talk about varied topics like the 'alleged' Armenian genocide in the 1990s and the massacre of Kurdish separatists that led the government in 2005; and it is in these contexts that he was sued under article 301 of the constitution for defaming the Turkish state. This is also an interesting feature of the 'dissidents', the idea of being sued and defamed in every respective socio-political governing entity is one of the constants that we notice in the politics of dissent. Now, dissent is not something that has sprung up in the last few decades. It has been as old as civilization, and the study of dissent is essential to understand how civilizations molded and evolved into their newer trajectories. As Romilla Thapar suggests, to truly understand dissent in the older civilizations, we've to recognize and understand the centrality of dissent, and the forms of dissent itself have changed hugely over time. Now dissent in the Indian sphere has existed from the Brahmanas who were the sons of Dasi to the modern movement of dissent in the context of the Nationalism of the Present. In an international, or rather Polish sphere of intellectualism, we see discussions of dissent in the works of Czeslaw Milosz, Adam Michnik, among others, regarding the Polish Solidarity movement. We also notice that in the case of Soviet dissidence, the history of dissidence was not so much written by the victors as by the observers of the victors, as argued by American historian Timothy Snyder. We also see the nature of Orwellian dissidence that says words are never innocent, and never wasted. Every word expresses a purpose, and you want to make sure that the purpose is yours and not someone else's. And this personal purpose goes beyond the limited personal space. As Václav Havel's brilliant essay "The Power of the Powerless" portrays through the famous example of the greengrocer who puts a sign up in the window saying, "Workers of the world unite." Now, in its essence, it clearly is a personal purpose, but there's more to it. Havel discusses in his essay that the greengrocer hasn't really

thought about workers of the world uniting and its radical implications. He probably doesn't have views one way or another. But the sign allows him to express his loyalty beyond a personal space into a political common consciousness to the regime without directly humiliating himself. Similar analogies can be done for the dissidents and the nature of dissidence. For instance, Havel wonders what'll happen if the greengrocer takes down the sign, or rather if all the subjects of the regime take down the sign, a clear idea of dissent. Havel is suggesting to live authentically, by not lying to oneself and even little lies, such as the sign on the window, is the first step towards individual freedom, not only to a miniature scale but towards a conscious mass freedom. Therefore, opening up a political window, a stream of consciousness to flourish, making the personal: political and universal. Having established the idea of politics in dissent, I'd like to go further into the nature of dissent and the dissent through apparent silence and try to establish a structure through the writings of Václav Havel and, more importantly, Orhan Pamuk's *Black Book* to respectively understand the nature and characteristics of dissent through apparent silence. To understand the nature of dissent and its evolution, we need to understand that dissidence has often been attributed to 'the other' of society. Now, if we consider the society to have a political 'self' that maintains its obedience to the regime, "Other" is a set of people who are recognized as different, as they question the views of the political "self". This otherization is often correlated with the power of the dissidents. Havel's essay delves into the politics of Power and its correlation with dissent and analyzes the self and other in a "post-totalitarian" system, in which the term "post-totalitarian" doesn't mean that the system is over; rather, it is totalitarian in a way that is fundamentally different from classical dictatorship. In the previously given example of the greengrocer, Havel argues that the slogans' real meaning is rooted firmly in the existence of the greengrocer. He further argues that the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, that is, his ideology. Therefore, the singular idea of not putting up the sign is like a butterfly effect, resulting in possible rebellion against the dominant status quo. We can argue that every regime is, in essence, closer towards a post-totalitarian system rather than a democracy for the people. Going by this assumption of power structure, Havel further argues that this post-totalitarian structure demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline, but every form of dissent is trying to break apart from this very conformity, towards fulfillment of its own freedom, be that silent dissidence or a clear political act of dissidence. Havel further argues that the greengrocer had to put up the sign, had he not already submitted to the post-totalitarian structure by various internal and semi-public ways? He argues he has to put up the sign to contribute, along with thousands of other ways, to the panorama of the larger political self that everyone is aware of. It reminds people what is expected of them. In this regard, every little deviance from this expected behavior of the masses is a form of dissent; it is in this way, dissent lives on in every nook and corner in our existence. The flickering light of dissent is very hard to extinguish through the very methodology that submits people to the regime. Havel proposes that individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something to alienate and connects this alienation to the very act of dissidence. He connects dissent with living within the truth. This otherness, this "principle of exclusion," lies in the center of all moral and political dissent. "Black Book" by Orhan Pamuk is one of the most enigmatic works of Pamuk, dwelling in the past and present, mystery and reality. His work, shrouded in metaphysical symbolisms, tries to unveil the hidden secrets of the universe in plain sight. It resembles a foam of memory with each

neuronal junction creating pretenses and double meanings. The narrative seeks significance in even the most anodyne words, uncovering the essence masked behind our common perceptions and compelling us to forge our own representation of events, be it political or totally personal in nature. The book finds allusions in simple pleasures, searching for hidden symmetry within the universe's enigmatic ways, ultimately reflecting on our fundamental evil as we contemplate the memories of inanimate objects and the world around us. In its intricate layers, *Black Book* mirrors life's mysterious innocuousness, inviting readers to delve into its multifaceted reality. Now, this particular book is not really, by its nature, a politically conscious book trying to defy the odds through dissent. The dissent here is not direct; it's hidden in between the lines, the emotions and collective memories of the city and its people. It is in this regard that "dissent through apparent silence" plays an important role. It merely suggests the presence of a dissidence that is not easy to find, that defies the hegemonial post-colonialist structures and revolts against the ideological state apparatus that controls our senses and impulses, but at the same time, once we see the pattern of defiance, it's very hard to ignore. "In every silence, a voice speaks, in every darkness, a light shines." Pamuk tries to, from a Lacanian perspective, emphasize the main roles of "others" and language in forming the unconscious and individual identity. As Mongan Abshavi reiterates in the paper "The reflection of Lacanian Mirror-Gaze and Thought in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*", Galip, in search of his wife Rüya, follows a set of signifiers to know himself. His search does not lead him to reach a complete ultimate meaning of his "self". The basic premise of the book is that Galip is in search of Rüya, his wife, who Galip believes has run away with Celâl, a prominent columnist. Celâl suffers from memory loss, and Galip believes Celâl wants to save his memory by telling his stories to Rüya. Memory is directly related to dissent; the regime tries its best to remove the collective memory of the atrocities that take place under its watch so that dissent cannot take place. This collective memory loss is directly connected to a deficit in memory, alexithymia, i.e., collective amnesia leading to collective alexithymia. Galip's self is not aware; he tries to merge himself with the self of Celâl by living in his room and treating himself, believing himself to be celâl, therefore giving rise to two contradictory selves in one. This very spiritual essence of contradictory selves has an underlying struggle for existence; the dissent and the silence represent two selves in the context of this paper. The clash of west and east, self and other, past and present, is represented through the Bosphorus, which is drying up. Celâl writes about Rumi as if he himself were Rumi. He talks about the relationship between Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, the very foundation is dissident in nature. Every gesture, every sentence has double meanings as Galip moves from one signifier to another, without a fixed point to search for the meaning of his "self". "Some things we don't remember," Celâl had written in one of his last columns. "Other things we don't even remember we don't remember-and these are the things we need to look for." Galip tried to look for those signs that might bring him to an ultimate truth, the very basis of this search for truth was dissent in nature. Even though dissent is not a direct result of these searching and longing, dissent can be seen from the cracks of these seeking. The memory and the collective search for truth were, in essence, breaking apart from all the conventional rules and norms of society that chain us down. The truth Havel speaks of for the dissidents to search for is the very truth Galip was searching for. "The world was linked in some way with the enigma of the weeping face." The ordinary meanings become extraordinary, the cruelty of silence leading to dissent, simple acts of defying the stereotypes are some of the things that define *The Black Book*, and it is through

this Black Book becomes an interesting study in understanding the fundamentals of silence in dissent.

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