"Under Western Eyes"

Rereading the Landscape of Ruins in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City*

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the subject position of the narrator in Orhan Pamuk's celebrated Istanbul: Memories and the City who is shaped by his preoccupation with the Western gaze, and its role in shaping the landscape of Istanbul through the language of ruins, poverty, and decay. On this note, the main problem that this paper seeks to address is: How does Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul* respond to, or react against, the way Istanbul has been perceived and described under Western eyes? To guide my analysis of Pamuk's memoir, I will be borrowing the definition of "ruins" from Wu Hung's essay, "Ruins, Fragmentation, and the Chinese Modern/Postmodern", where ruins are defined as "memory sites". Through his memoir, Pamuk extends the discourse of ruins as memory sites to the problem of how these sites become a contested space for reconstructing a subject's relationship with his past.

Keywords

ruins, memoir, Orhan Pamuk, subject formation, memory

Introduction

Orhan Pamuk is possibly the most famous Turkish novelist today. In 2006, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first for any writer from Turkey. He was honored by the Nobel Committee for Literature as a writer who "in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures" ("The Nobel Prize in Literature 2006"). But even before winning the Nobel Prize, Pamuk already had a strong following both in his native country and in the international scene. His novels are bestsellers in Turkey, and his readers range from housewives to members of the academe. Moreover, his works have been translated into more than forty languages and have been critically acclaimed. Because of his popularity, his opinion on Turkey and its modern day problems has been sought after by local and international publications like *The New Yorker* and *The Paris Review*.

In his works, the discourse about Turkish identity is no longer centered on the "clash of civilizations" as most of his predecessors have done. Instead, what we find in the works of Pamuk is the attention given to the central role of fiction in shaping the way we perceive the world and our place in it. In a world destabilized by the loss of tradition, he writes stories where characters find a sense of center in the narratives that they read.

Pamuk's novels meditate on how artists use their work to respond to the way the adoption of Western practices and ideals crucially shift the way they see the world. In his novel *My Name is Red* (2001), Ottoman miniature artists suffer through a crisis when they realized that the commissioned artwork that they are working on forces them to commit blasphemy. To respond to this crisis, one of the artists supplants the center piece of the commissioned work, the image of the Sultan, with his own image to assert a sense of autonomy. Meanwhile in the novel *Snow* (2005), an exiled Westernized novelist named Ka returns to Turkey and visits a remote city called Kars to find inspiration that may help him write once again. As a Westernized artist tagged as "godless" by the locals, Ka attempts to bridge the distance between him and the people of Kars by writing his novel *Snow*.

On this note, Pamuk as a writer seems to be quite preoccupied with the issue of perspective, which may explain his interest in artists as outsiders. In Pamuk's body of work, one of his dominant themes is Westernization and how it shifts the way Turkish artists see the world—a source of conflict that drives the story of his protagonists. We can further understand the roots of Pamuk's preoccupation with perspective and the Turkish artist's distinct way of seeing the world in his memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2005). For this paper, I aim to analyze the subject position of the narrator in Pamuk's celebrated *Istanbul* who is shaped by his preoccupation with the Western gaze, and its role in shaping the landscape of Istanbul through the language of ruins, poverty, and decay. The main problem that this paper seeks to address is: How does Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul* respond to or react against the way Istanbul has been perceived and described through Western eyes? I aim to answer this question by focusing on two selected chapters from *Istanbul,* "Gautier's Melancholic Strolls through the City's Poor Neighborhoods" and "Under Western Eyes." These two chapters are representative of Pamuk's struggle to understand his perspective on Istanbul as a writer vis-à-vis the writings of his literary predecessors, be they Turkish or European.

To guide my analysis of Pamuk's memoir, I will be borrowing the definition of "ruins" from Wu Hung's essay, "Ruins, Fragmentation, and the Chinese Modern/Postmodern", where ruins are defined as "memory sites" (60). This definition is a key point for this paper because the work of Pamuk meditates on the concept of Istanbul as a city of ruins both as imagined and as constructed by the Western gaze. Through his memoir, Pamuk extends the discourse of ruins as memory sites to the problem of how these sites become a contested space for reconstructing a subject's relationship with his past.

This paper will be divided into three sections. I will start with a brief discussion of Turkey's modernization program and how it has shaped current concerns regarding modern Turkish identity. I will then proceed with profiling Orhan Pamuk as one of Turkey's writers whose works effectively captures Turkey's modern dilemmas. Finally, I will focus on Pamuk's *Istanbul* to analyze his reflections on Istanbul as a city of melancholy.

I.

Modern Turkey and the European Dream

Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938), a military officer who became the founding father of the Republic of Turkey, initiated drastic changes to modernize his country. One of the changes he instituted was the deliberate and systematic separation of church and the state, as guided by the principles of secularism. The systematic changes introduced by Kemal Ataturk have been called "Kemalism" by some critics. Kemalism is largely influenced by laicism in France, which Kim Shively defines as policies intended to "bring religion under the control of the state" (684). Accordingly, the citizens of Turkey had to note the changes in the boundaries between private and public spaces as it would affect their religious practices. Nuri Eren thinks that Ataturk wanted "to direct the genius of his people into the stream of Western civilization, from which they had been excluded primarily because of their narrow, persistent refusal to allow a new interpretation of orthodox Muslim dogma in the light of man's growing knowledge of the universe" (91). Consequently, to modernize in line with the vision of Ataturk is seen by some critics as taking a path to "progress" that is not dependent on nor inhibited by religious beliefs. Aside from confining religious convictions and practices to the private space, an individual's outlook on time, relationships, and lifestyle choices were changed by Kemalism as well. The Western calendar was adopted, civil marriage and divorce were introduced, and even European manners of fashion choices were considered models in order to project a modern Turkish identity (Barzilai-Lumbroso 56).

The changes in the social system in Turkey also correspond to the way Turkey wanted to be seen in the international scene. There have been repeated attempts by the country to be recognized as a member of the European Union (EU). Nilufer Gole states that the "Turkish candidacy to join the European Union seemed, in the eyes of many Turkish citizens, to be an almost natural culmination of processes of Europeanization since the Ottoman empire" ("Decentering Europe" 665-666). In other words, there is a prevalent assumption that the "natural culmination" of Turkey's future

leads to the Europeanization of the country. The seeming inevitability of this direction indicates an apparent civilizational shift for Turkey, although its numerous applications to be a member of EU led to strong opposition from "European publics on the basis of civilizational differences" ("Decentering Europe" 666).

Ahmet Kuru explains in *Secularism and State Policies Towards Religion* that one of the difficulties faced by Turkey in its application to the EU is the assertion that membership should be based on the applicant's realization of a common European vision: political liberalism. Turkey is perceived to have fallen short of that standard because of its treatment of minorities such as the Kurds. Moreover, Turkey's refusal to address accusations about the Armenian Genocide during the early 1900s ("The Armenian Genocide") is still a point of controversy to this day. The secularist policies of the state have also initiated the marginalization of groups and communities who refuse to abandon their right to practice their religious beliefs in public and private spaces. For instance, some Turkish Muslims consider state policies as repressive of and controlling over their private lifestyle choices. In the 2000s, one issue that brought further attention to the politics in Turkey is the issue of the headscarf girls. The protests and refusal of young Islamic girls to adhere to the secularist policies have resulted in the politicization of the headscarf which escalated into an issue about "the collision between Kemalism and Islam" ("Turkey: The Battle of the Headscarf"). The response of the state over the issue of the headscarf girls is an example of what Merve Kavakci observes as "a means of state hegemony and control over religion and freedom of expression" (Kavakci 164). The regulations and impositions of the state are considered by Turkish Muslims as private lifestyle issues that should not be dictated upon by the state. Moreover, Shively also explains that "decisions about clothing, education, and forms of social interaction" (687) are deemed as constraints to one's freedom.

Interestingly, Gole also points out that the arguments against the membership of Turkey are not mainly focused on the issues that the public had anticipated such as, "human rights violations, the recognition of Kurdish claims, the Armenian past, the diminution of the role of the army in the polit-

ical life, the crafting of a constitution, and so on" ("Decentering Europe" 676). The question, rather, is centered on defining what Europe is. Some of the debates regarding Turkey's application were grounded on "geographical and civilizational differences with respect to Turkey" (676). Kosebalaban shares that "there are two opposing perspectives in Europe about Turkey: Turkey as an integral part of Europe, and Turkey as the essential historical other of Europe" (101). The application of Turkey to the EU then surfaces the questions about the nature of European cultural heritage and values. Kosebalaban also writes that the debates about Turkey's membership to the EU shows that "European cultural heritage" reads as "Christian heritage." He then points out that if one follows this widely held view, "Turkey is not a member of Europe's cultural heritage based on Christianity and Enlightenment values and thus is doomed to remain outside its boundaries" (101).

Despite the opposition of some members of the European Union and the divisive conflict produced by the modernization of Turkey, Gole explains that majority of Turkish citizens' "desire to belong to Europe extends back to the cultural transformations of the late Ottoman Empire and the creation of a secular republican state in 1923" ("Decentering Europe" 676). Then again, the arguments against Turkey's membership were related to resisting imposition made by "European political fathers" while others "feared that Turkey is a 'Trojan horse' [that] would bring Muslims to invade Europe" (676). Gole also emphasizes that what the whole process of application made clear is that the desire to possess a European identity "meant 'othering' Turkey" ("Decentering Europe" 676).

Nonetheless, in 2004, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's Prime Minister, stated that,

> [to have] a country like Turkey, where the cultures of Islam and democracy have merged together, taking part in such an institution as the EU, will bring harmony of civilizations. That is why we think it is the project of the century. We are there as a guarantee of an entente between the civilizations. The countries that want to exclude us from Europe are not playing their roles in history. (Kosebalaban 95)

This statement emphasizes that even a leader of Turkey's ostensibly secular government insists that Islam is not a hindrance to Turkey's chances of becoming a part of the EU. Erdogan is not alone in having such sentiments about Turkey's future.[1] Among the many supporters who firmly believe in Turkey's dream of becoming identified with Europe is Orhan Pamuk. Though Erdogan and Pamuk's views on politics may be different, they share the same view in terms of insisting that the influence of Islam in their country is not just what Turkey is all about. According to Pamuk,

> [t]rue, most of my countrymen are Muslims. But if you truly wish to understand my country, you have to look at its history and our consistent orientation toward Europe. The Turks have a love-hate relationship with European culture, Turkey is a part of Europe. ("Spiegel")

It is not unusual for people like Pamuk and Erdogan to have an ongoing reflection on their relations with Europeans. They live in a country that exists between the boundaries of Europe and Asia. The geographical location of Turkey allows it to access multicultural entry points from both Asia and Europe. Because the Turks were socialized in the ways of Europe through Kemalist modernization, one understands why many of them may identify with European ways.

II.

Orhan Pamuk, the Novelist from Istanbul

One of Turkey's writers who addresses the conflict produced by Turkey's desire to be viewed as Western and yet remain undeniably indebted to the influences of its Islamic past and imperial history is Orhan Pamuk. Born in 1952, Pamuk has lived a privileged life in Istanbul. He recalls the rich lifestyle of his family in his memoir, *Istanbul*. In this work, he details how his family can be described as part of the "secular bourgeoisie"—"a wealthy family with a taste for Western culture and a lack of commitment to the religious practices followed by traditional Muslims" (*Istanbul* 160). His father had often travelled to Europe and brought home with him books that filled the family's library. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he describes how his father's library introduced him to French writers, Turkish encyclopedists, and the classics from Persia to the West. Aside from his upper-class secular upbringing, he had also been educated in Robert College, a secular American school in Istanbul. Because of his social position, he had better access to the various literary works—local and international—that influenced him to "[discover] new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures" ("The Nobel Prize in Literature 2006").

When Pamuk talks about his literary influences to the international press, he always mentions Western writers who have shaped his writing style. He has been very vocal about his admiration for Faulkner, Woolf, and Proust—writers celebrated for their modernism (GurrÃa-Quintana 2015). Pamuk tries to distance himself from Turkish writers whom he considers as social realists because this kind of "literature produced in the sixties and seventies was becoming outmoded" (GurrÃa-Quintana 2015)═Pamuk had feared that he had been influenced too much by Leo Tolstoy or Thomas Mann, but he realized that no matter how much he was influenced by the stylistic techniques of his favorite Western writers, he lived

> [in the] part of the world, so far away from Europe or at least it seemed so at the time—and trying to attract such a different audience in such a different cultural and historical climate, [such that using those techniques] would

> grant [him] originality, even if it was cheaply earned. But it is also a tough job, since such techniques do not translate or travel so easily. (GurrÃa-Quintana 2015)

But some critics think that he is able to capture interest and attract intrigue because of his style of making two very different worlds meet in his works. As Guneli Gun writes, Pamuk's work "translates into English like a dream" ("The Turks are Coming"). What he means is that Pamuk's style of writing has a consciousness of how it will "fall into place abroad" ("The Turks are Coming").

Orhan Pamuk has written extensively on the ironies produced in living both in the shadow of the Ottoman Empire and under the powerful influence of European ideas. Considering this point, Erdag Goknar emphasizes that writing about history is a key characteristic of the novels of Pamuk. He shares that the Turkish novelist usually focuses on four major areas: "Ottoman history in a European context, the transition from Ottoman Empire to modern Middle East, the early-twentieth-century Kemalist cultural revolution, and the legacy of all three on present-day Turkey" (Goknar 34).

Pamuk's first novel, *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* (1982), revolves around the story of three generations of a wealthy family living in Nisantasi. The novel uses the family saga to discuss the Westernization of Turkey from the perspective of three different generations. His second novel, *The Silent House* (1983), also received acclaim, garnering the 1991 *Prix de la découverte européene* [Prize for European Discovery]. But the novel that is considered to have propelled Pamuk to international fame is *The White Castle* (1985). It tells the story of a Venetian slave and an Ottoman scholar who find their doppelgänger in each other. After the novel's publication, Pamuk went to New York as a visiting scholar at Columbia University. During his stay in America from 1985 to 1988, he wrote and finished the elaborate detective or mystery novel, *The Black Book* (1990). The novel tells the story of a lawyer's attempt to investigate the disappearance of his missing wife. In the process of his search, he discovers a haunting labyrinth of mysteries found in the city of Istanbul. Thereafter, Pamuk's fame continued with the publication of

The New Life (1997), which is one of the most widely read books in Turkey ("Biography"). Afterwards, *My Name is Red* (1998) led to the recognition of Pamuk as one of the most relevant and talented writers in the world. Because of his stature, Pamuk has been constantly asked about his views on human rights and freedom of speech despite his claims to take little interest in politics. It is only with the novel, *Snow* (2002), that he purposefully expressed his desire to address the politics of his country. After *Snow*, Pamuk wrote a sentimental love story, *The Museum of Innocence* (2009), which later on inspired him to put up an exhibit called "The Innocence of Objects." The museum exhibit has received acclaim for its profound meditation on love and loss.

The novels of Orhan Pamuk have been translated into forty-six languages, including English, French, Czech, Catalan, and Italian (orhanpamuk.net). Aside from receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006, he was awarded The Peace Prize in 2005, a prestigious award in the field of culture from Germany. *TIME* magazine also chose him as one of the 100 Most Influential Persons of the world for 2006. But in contrast to his willing reception of international prizes, he declined to receive the award of "state artist" from his own country because of his refusal to be used in politics ("The Armenian Genocide").

But being the most-widely read novelist in Turkey comes with certain problems. As his popularity increased, so did the pressure of becoming the face of Turkish literature in the international scene. His reputation was propelled further when during one of his interviews with the Swiss newspaper, *Der Tages-Anzeiger*, he was quoted as saying something about a very controversial issue in his country: "thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares to talk about it" (GurrÃa-Quintana 2005). Thereafter, Pamuk calls this period as the end of his "honeymoon phase" with the press. Eventually, as a result of the interview, "he was charged under the Article 301/1 of the Turkish Penal Code with 'public denigration' of Turkish identity—a crime punishable by up to three years in prison" (GurrÃa-Quintana 2005). This controversy was widely covered in the international press as well as attracted protests from members of the European Parliament.

In the aforementioned case, the primary issue faced by Pamuk was accusations about insulting Turkishness, which is an offense punishable by imprisonment. Aside from Pamuk, there are also other Turkish writers who have been accused of being "projects" that are "[developed] by western powers to criticize the Turkish government"—accusations that have caused some to state that Pamuk and other "projects" were "not human" ("Turkish novelists"). One of "Western stooges" tagged by pro-government Turkish press is the internationally-acclaimed Turkish novelist, Elif Shafak. Writers like Pamuk and Shafak are claimed to be "controlled by an 'international literature lobby'" that monitors the Turkish government ("Turkish novelists"). Meanwhile, other critics are dismissive of Pamuk's works because of his privileged position. He is viewed as "someone who hasn't 'sweated enough'" (Shatz, "Wanting to Be Something Else") thus is unable to know the story of Turkey's people.

Pamuk stated in his memoir *Istanbul* that the possible criticism of and indifference to his works were already communicated by his mother to him when she passionately protested against his decision to become a writer:

> There are a lot of people in Europe who become artists because they're proud and honourable . . . . But do you really think you can be an artist in a country like this and still keep your pride? To be accepted by people here, who understand nothing of art, to get these people to buy your art, you'll have to toady to the state, to the rich, and worst of all, to semi-literate journalists. Do you think you're up to this? (Istanbul 328)

But it appears that Pamuk has been able to meet his mother's challenge because he has continued to write everyday since his decision to become a writer ("Spiegel Interview"). In various interviews, Pamuk relates how he continues his routine of writing in his room in the Pamuk Apartments that overlooks the Bosporus Sea. He has often claimed that he will continue to write in Turkish because he thinks doing so is as an expression of pride about his national identity: "I stay in the same city, on the same street, in the same house, gazing at the same view. Istanbul's fate is my fate: I am attached to this city because it has made me who I am" (*Istanbul* 6).

III.

Hüzün and the Haunting of Modern Turkey's Past

Pamuk's *Istanbul* is widely read and celebrated because the work converses with local and foreign writers in shaping its perspective about the city's history. The memoir is described as "an amalgam of memoir, literary reminiscences, and anecdotes of Istanbul history" (Mucignat 1271). Through *Istanbul,* Pamuk weaves together the story of his life with the history of his city.

Pamuk asserts that it is only during the beginning of the twentieth century that writers from Istanbul began to write about the city as a living creature that is "rich [in] variety" (279). Pamuk shares that he often finds European writers from the middle of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century to be discussing with passion and interest the following subjects:

> the harem; the slave market (in *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain fantasized that the financial pages of big American papers might report the price and vital statistics of the latest crop of Circassian and Georgian girls); the beggars in the streets; the unimaginably huge burdens carried by hamals (during my childhood we were all uneasy when European tourists photographed the fearsome hamals I'd see crossing the Galata Bridge with tin piled high on their backs, but when an Istanbul photographer like Hilmi Şahenk chose the same subject, no one minded in the least); "dervish lodges (one pasha told his friend and guest Nerval that the Rufai dervishes who ran around piercing themselves with skewers were "crazy" and advised him it was a waste of time to visit their lodges); and the seclusion of women." (212)

As a result, when Pamuk looked for "an image of the city and a literature in which Istanbullus could see themselves", he is confronted with the aforementioned images.

Majority of critical works on Pamuk's *Istanbul* focus on how the memoir writes about the Western gaze and how it shapes the narrator's perspective and the reader's expectations on Pamuk and his city. In Rosa Mucignat's "Perspective and Historical Knowledge: Magris, Sebald, and Pamuk", she

emphasizes that although "a big part of *Istanbul* is about seeing the city, and in particular about the gaze of Western travelers" (1271), he does not "reject the gaze of this overbearing 'Other.'" (1271). In his reflections about Istanbul, Pamuk describes in detail how the works of European and Turkish writers shaped his understanding of melancholy and the city. Mucignat reads this a way of engagement with "Western representation and embraces the possibility they give of complementing or reversing the autochthonous point of view" (1271).

On this note, Pamuk then asks, why does he, and the four melancholic writers that he looks up to, care so much "about what Gautier and other Westerners have to say about Istanbul?" (272). In Pamuk's memoir, we see that the predilection of the narrator to take on the Western gaze to make sense of his position as an outsider in his own city seems to be an inevitable choice for him to take. This is because the dominant voices that shaped what Istanbul is came from European artists. As John Berger emphasizes in *Ways of Seeing,* "[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (8). Without the writings of European artists, Pamuk believes that chronicling the life and history of Istanbul as a city would not exist as its local residents did not know "what to read into what they see" (213). How then does Pamuk begin to articulate his own perspective about his own city if the ways of seeing his own world has been learned from foreigners or outsiders?

Pamuk believes that the longing to establish an "authentic" Turkish identity is a result of the haunting presence of the "glorious Ottoman past" that challenges Ataturk's vision of a secular Europeanized Turkey. From architectural sites to road pavements, the feeling of being haunted by the past is what Pamuk identifies as "*hüzün.*"

Hüzün is a "feeling of deep spiritual loss", a word with an Arabic root which appears in the Koran (*Istanbul* 81). But the term has developed into a philosophical concept in the tradition of Sufism where it refers to "a spiritual anguish we feel because we cannot be close enough to Allah, because we cannot do enough for Allah in this world" (*Istanbul* 81). The presence of *hüzün* in a person's life brings anguish, but at the same time it is a presence

that is desired; the absence of *hüzün* would mean an emptiness that renders life futile and meaningless.

The concept holds a significant place in Islamic culture because it is a "cultural concept conveying worldly failure, listlessness and spiritual suffering" (*Istanbul* 82). As Pamuk aptly notes, "'*hüzün*' is the smoky window between him and the world. The screen he projects over life is painful because life itself is painful" (*Istanbul* 93). Moreover, *hüzün* explains why there are artists who give "their resignation an air of dignity, but . . . also explains why it is their choice to embrace failure, indecision, defeat and poverty so philosophically and with such pride" (*Istanbul* 93). *Hüzün*, according to Pamuk, "is not the outcome of life's worries and great losses, but their principal cause; '*hüzün*' gives them poetic license to be paralyzed" (93).

In her essay "The Chronotope of Istanbul in Orhan Pamuk's Memoir *Istanbul,*" Sibel Erol questions treating Pamuk's memoir as a "reference text in discussing both melancholy in general and Turkish *hüzün* in particular" (656). Erol takes issue with the manner of how "Pamuk transforms his personal experience of sadness into a collective and typical one by creating a prehistory for it in Istanbul through a chain of influences and developments that explain it and derive it from that past" (656-657). She explains that because of the "personal nature" (656) of *Istanbul,* the "argumentative evidence that might be treated skeptically in a discursive presentation is absorbed into the subjective logic of the autobiographical narrative, all the while according it factual support" (656). Furthermore, Erol reads Pamuk's "attribution of the prevalence of *hüzün* in Istanbul to a collective sense of loss experienced by the city over the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire seems only to reinforce the connection between Istanbul, sadness, and Pamuk by offering a historical explanation" (655). This explains why Erol is alarmed by the "unquestioning and even eager acceptance of the … sweeping connections by all kinds of readers" (655) of how Pamuk interrelates melancholy, *hüzün,* and his life story. On this note, we are reminded that the memoir is written from the perspective of a narrator who professes to his audience his unreliability as a narrator—both of his personal story and even of his city's history.

Perhaps it is better to understand Pamuk's style of writing by describing it as a "pseudo-memoir" and a "Kuntsler-roman":

> [the memoir] contains black and white photographs of the city scattered throughout the volume along with other visual components (sketches, engravings, and paintings) which provide an in-depth look at what for many Westerners is an unfamiliar urban landscape. The placement of the pictures appears to have little connection with the narrative, which is based on the author's account of his childhood as well as his meditations on the city's past. The parallel narratives blend together to unveil Pamuk's subjectivity both as a typical Istanbullu and as an artist: 'Istanbul's fate is my fate. I am attached to this city because it has made me who I am'. (Santesso 153)

The unreliability of Pamuk's memoir then may be read in relation to the formation of the narrator's subjectivity. He tries to form his own critical gaze from the things that he knows about his native city—a body of knowledge shaped by the writings of European and Turkish writers. It is interesting then to note that Pamuk believes that all Turkish writers, were or will always be "at one point in their lives, dazzled by the brilliance of Western (and particularly French) art and literature" (*Istanbul* 99). Being taken in, and influenced by, Western ideals seems to be, as Pamuk suggests, a fact of life. How does this claim by Pamuk then influence how the Turkish modernists he discusses in his memoir look at Istanbul under Western eyes?

In two chapters of the memoir, "Gautier's Melancholic Strolls through the City's Poor Neighborhoods" and "Under Western Eyes", Pamuk attempts to use *hüzün* as a framework to explain why four of the Turkish writers he admires, the memoirist Abdulhak Sinasi Hisar (1887-1963), the poet Yahya Kemal (1884-1958), the novelist Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar (1901-1962), and the journalist-historian Resat Ekrem Kocu (1905-1975), have become masters of capturing the essence of the city's melancholic ruins through the influence of European artists. He explains that as these writers wanted to write like Frenchmen, they were also divided by the thirst for a sense of originality. They faced the very same problems confronted by Dostoevsky's heroes— "to be Western, and yet at the same time to be authentic" (*Istanbul* 100)—but with a longing that is religious in character, which further compounds their

sense of anguish. On this note, Sibel Erol argues that the Turkish modernists that Pamuk mentions “converted the individualistic artistic melancholy they admired in their predecessors into a shared social sensibility caused by the loss of a 600-year-old empire” (668).

Without a doubt, ruins are one of the most tangible reminders of the loss of the 600-year old Ottoman empire and the historical changes in Istanbul. In reading Pamuk’s *Istanbul*, there seems to be a gap in analyzing the presence of ruins and how the ways of seeing these ruins “under Western eyes” (as Pamuk calls it) influence the subject position of the memoir’s narrator. Pamuk respond to, or react against, the way Istanbul has been perceived and described through Western eyes by reading ruins as a memory site that become a contested space for reconstructing the narrator’s relationship with his past.

Michel Baridon’s essay “Ruins as a mental construct” articulates that the “creative imagination of the eighteenth century seems to have attributed a great power of stimulation to ruins” (84). The European travelers who write about the ruins of Istanbul may have imbibed this disposition. From a Western perspective, Baridon claims that “[r]uins were indeed an essential element of the landscape of sensibility; they gave it an element of nostalgia which was part of its essence” (84). Citing Baridon’s work, Wu Hun’s “Ruins and Fragmentation and the Chinese Modern/Postmodern” argues that “ruin culture”—the West’s fascination with ruins so much so they were “thought so indispensable that substitutes (sometimes even cardboard) were erected in the parks which provided destitute of authentic ‘relics of the past’ (Baridon 84)—influenced how ruins are conceived in modern Chinese art and photography. Hun explains how the “aestheticization of ruins [in China] took place mainly in poetry; visual images of ruins virtually did not exist” (59-60). In premodern China, preserving and portraying ruins was taboo: “although abandoned cities or fallen palaces were lamented in words, their images, if painted, would imply auspiciousness and danger” (60). Hence, “[w]hen this Chinese tradition encountered European ‘ruin’ culture, two things happened: on the one hand, this encounter led to the creation of ruin images in Chinese

art and architecture; on the other, these images, as modern memory sites, evoked the calamities that had befallen the Chinese nation" (60).

In the case of Pamuk's *Istanbul*, the Turkish modernists' perspective on seeing ruins in their city "under Western eyes" have also created an impact on they produce their art. In the chapter "The *Hüzün* of the Ruins: Tanpinar and Yahya Kemal in the City's Poor Neighborhoods", Pamuk highlights Tanpinar's affinity towards writing about Istanbul's ruins:

> On every page, Tanpınar repeats the phrase 'as we've all known since childhood'; he describes a neighborhood…The melancholy Tanpınar first discovered in Nerval's and Gautier's arresting observations about the poor neighborhoods, the ruins, dingy residential districts, and city walls, he transforms into an indigenous *hüzün* through which to apprehend a local landscape and, most particularly, the everyday life of a modern working woman. (222-223)

For Pamuk, Tanpinar and Kemal's interest in ruins were motivated by a political agenda: "[t]hey were picking their way through the ruins looking for signs of a new Turkish state, a new Turkish nationalism" (225).

In his body of work, we can see how Pamuk's *Istanbul* sheds light on how ruins, or what he calls as "the melancholy of the ruins", are among the ways he navigated the consequences of the abrupt westernization of his country. The conflict experienced by his memoir's narrator translates a sense of dislocation as he grapples with the power brought by the words of European writers in looking at his city—thus, the narrator seems always to perceive his life and his city "under Western eyes". Through his memoir *Istanbul*, Pamuk memorializes the images described in the writings of Western writers and legitimizes their contribution by crediting their influence on how one imagines the following elements associated with Istanbul:

> The Janissaries, those elite troops of great interest to western travelers until the nineteenth century, were the first to be dissolved. The slave market, another focus of western curiosity, vanished soon after they began writing about it. The Rufai dervishes with their waving skewers and the Mevlevi dervish lodges closed with the founding of the Republic. The Ottoman clothing that so many western artists painted was abolished soon after

> André Gide complained about it. The harem, another favorite, also gone. Seventy-five years after Flaubert told his beloved friend that he was going to the market to have his name written in calligraphy, all of Turkey moved from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, and this exotic joy ended too. Of all these losses, I think the hardest for İstanbullus has been the removal of graves and cemeteries from the gardens and squares of our everyday lives to terrifying high-walled lots, bereft of cypress or view. The hamals and their burdens, noted by so many travelers of the republican period—like the old American cars that Brodsky noted—were no sooner described by foreigners than they vanished. (218)

The act of reading an outsider's perspective of his own city forces the narrator of *Istanbul* to discover "the same destitute and not yet westernized quarters (which, sadly, fire and concrete would soon obliterate)" to no longer be as "exhausting" (206) as he would have seen it before. Moreover, Pamuk insists that for a writer like him, he can find helpful answers in Western accounts concerning his city because:

> The living, breathing city—its streets, its atmosphere, its smells, the rich variety of everyday life—is something that only literature can convey and for centuries the only literature our city inspired was penned by Westerners. We must look at du Camp's photographs and the engravings of Western artists to see how the streets of Istanbul looked in the 1850s and what sorts of clothes people wore; if I wish to know what was going in the streets, avenues, and squares where I have spent my whole life, a hundred, two hundred square was then just an empty field, and which of today's empty fields were once colonnaded squares; if I want to have some sense of how the people made their lives—unless I am prepared to spend years in the labyrinthine Ottoman archives, I can find my answers, however refracted, only in Western accounts. (216)

At the same time, the narrator grapples with how his heroes, the Turkish modernist writers like Tanpinar and Kemal, were able to shape their own critical gaze and look at their city anew despite being preceded by European writers who have dominated the discourses about Istanbul as a city of melancholy. The writings of his Turkish predecessors and how they attempted to see the politics behind the ruins not only serve as a site to express melan-

cholic woes but also as a site that shows the persistence of memory. Looking at ruins as memory sites is indeed a political act in Ataturk's Turkey because they not only show the former glories of their Ottoman past, but they also undermine, through their presence, the "cultural" or "ethnic cleansing" involved in Turkey's modernization:

> After the founding of the Republic and the violent rise of Turkification, after the state imposed sanctions on minorities—measures that some might describe as the final stage of the city's 'conquest' and others as ethnic cleansing—most of these [minority's] languages disappeared. I witnessed this cultural cleansing as a child, for whenever anyone spoke Greek or Armenian too loudly in the street (you seldom heard Kurds advertising themselves in public during this period), someone would cry out, 'Citizens, please speak Turkish!'—echoing what signs everywhere were saying. (*Istanbul* 215-216)

As Kader Konuk emphasizes in his reading of *Istanbul*, Pamuk is "not concerned with disclosing a 'true Istanbul' through a sort of archaeological search. Rather, the dialectic ordering of the title expresses the connectedness between Pamuk's own memories and the many faces of the city preserved in the literature and art by travelers and citizens alike" (252). As the Westerner's gaze becomes "indistinguishable from the narrator," (254) the narration turns into a form of internalization that may be "the result of reforms that were based on the conviction that the only way to modernize was to Westernize" (254) To read Istanbul's ruins as memory sites then becomes a political act in the context of Istanbul's history because it highlights how the ruins create a sense of continuity between the past and the present, ties that Ataturk's modernization program sought to limit, if not end.

For the narrator of *Istanbul*, to juxtapose his life story with Istanbul's history as a city riddled with melancholic ruins positions him into an understanding that ruins are not only found in the landscape of Istanbul, but also in the landscape of the mind. Ruins as memory sites create what Baridon calls as "mental constructs" that feed, for the memoir's narrator, from Eastern and Western accounts of a lost totality. The landscape of ruins then become crucial in the formation of the narrator's subject position because these sites

evoke memories that continue to contest any narrative that speak of modern Turkish identity as homogenous, uncompromisingly secular, blindly devoted to Western values.

Before this paper ends, I would like to share Walter G. Andrews perspective why he celebrates Pamuk's novels:

> In Orhan's novels, I am brought face to face with the fact that memory is important. It becomes far more than harmless nostalgia. It is not just the museum we once visited on a class trip or during a sojourn abroad. It is not just the Topkapi Palce or the Ottoman treasury. It is not the buried or sunken detritus of lost civilizations or junk at the bottom of an apartment air shaft. It is the *stories* we are going to tell ourselves about all this stuff. Those stories are what enable us to know ourselves, our place in the world, to approach the mystery of why we are here …And I am also reminded, over and over again, that memory—all memory—is a matter of creation and imagination, not of truth…He empowers us to constitute our own memories, to listen to the objects of memory as they tell their own stories and take confidence in our own abilities to remember actively. (29)

On this note, we should perhaps read the accounts of the *Istanbul*'s narrator as an investigation of memories. These memories after all are pivotal in shaping how the narrator has connected his story with that of his city. Again, in the words of Pamuk: "Istanbul's fate is my fate: I am attached to this city because it has made me who I am" (*Istanbul* 6).

Note

1. As of January 2021, Turkey's relations with the EU has become more problematic due to disputed territories and other issues. See–www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/12/turkeys-erdogan-eyes-eu-reset-wants-ties-back-on-track.

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