Capitalizing Istanbul: reading Orhan Pamuk’s literary cityscape
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Chapter 3 - Homelessness, Self and the City in

*İstanbul: Memories and the City*

İstanbul is the means through which Orhan Pamuk defines himself: so he suggests in *İstanbul: Memories and the City* (2003, 2005), his memoir with visual and verbal representations of the city and of himself. The title merits a short note. For convenience I used Maureen Freely translation and the page numbers refer to the 2005 English edition of the text. Yet this translation mainly omits subtleties of meaning that are crucial for this argument. The foremost omission is the title: the English translation changes emphasis; it reads *İstanbul: Memories of a City*, and does not reflect the text’s predominantly autobiographical nature. This chapter is based on the Turkish title and focuses on the dialogue between the self and the city.

Pamuk identifies himself with the city and offers it as his autobiography. Istanbul in his memoir is more than an entity that the writer himself comes to terms with or sets himself against: it is an unparalleled companion, the only constant in a fleeting world, central to the self and to the human condition. The prioritization of the city when defining the self inspires the present chapter. The following pages trace the sense of space that Pamuk’s memoir conveys. I begin with the visible space of writing, the language. My focus then shifts to the space that the memoir describes, in order to examine the identity between the self and the city. I suggest in the final sections of this chapter that this identity is infused with the account of the other, and a feeling of homelessness. The space that Pamuk’s memoir invokes is not simply a topography, but a place of residence, a locus of both individual and cultural identity.

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35 Pamuk’s comments on the memoir in the *Paris Review Interview* are also to the same effect, emphasizing the book’s originality as the result of “put[ting] together two things that were not together before [...] Combined with [an] essay on the invention of Istanbul’s romantic landscape is an autobiography” (2005 377).
Autobiography and Alterity

Simply put, autobiography is the account of a person’s life written by that person. In his often-cited *The Autobiographical Pact* (1975), which forms the basis of my understanding of autobiography, Philippe Lejeune posits a contractual understanding of the genre as an agreement between reader and writer based on “the identity between the names of the author, narrator, and protagonist” (14). Even a straightforward definition exposes the problem that the genre entails, namely the notions of self and alterity. The act of writing inevitably leads to the fictionalization of the main character, the self that is written, and to a rift between the written self and the writing self, that of the writer. Autobiography, in other words, connotes rupture between the main character and the writer even though they both bear the same name. 

Similarly, Pamuk’s text is one that plays with the question of alterity that autobiographical writing—as a genre—poses by its problematization of the self. In this chapter, I use two terms when writing about Orhan Pamuk and his role as the writer, the main character, and an Istanbullu, an inhabitant of Istanbul: I refer to his self and to his identity. Here my conception of the words follows Paul John Eakin’s use of the 'self’ as an umbrella term that defines subjective experience, and identity as a self-reflexive experience of it (2008). I deploy the word self when writing about the writer-protagonist of the memoir. Yet, when discussing the position of the self in culture, I use the term identity to implicate the self as a social and culturally determined being.

My discussion of Pamuk’s writing does not aim to link it with this tradition of autobiographies; instead, it aims to show how he makes the ambiguity of narration a

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36 One example on this schism is Nathalie Sarraute’s *Enfance (Childhood)* (1983), an exploration of childhood memories through a dialogue between the two voices of a doubled narrator.

37 For Eakin narrating the self is an endeavor to “give permanence and narrative solidity […] to otherwise evanescent states of identity feeling” (77).
specifically Turkish issue that will have trouble traveling through translations. For example, verb tense become an immediate issue when writing the reported memory of a self that has been distanced by time and the unreliable processes of memory itself. Turkish is particularly well-equipped for an account of the self based on reported memory; it possesses a special past tense, -mişli zaman, which designates hearsay, dreams and fairytales, and hence distinguishes what one sees and experiences directly from what one is told by others. Pamuk also confesses a tendency to write his life story in this tense:


I’d have liked to write my entire story this way [using –miş’li zaman] as if my life were something that happened to someone else, as if it were a dream in which I felt my voice fading and my will succumbing to enchantment. (2005 8)

Dissociating the hearsay stories of the past from the I that speaks, Pamuk multiplies the I of his text: the I who has had an experience but does not remember; the I who later hears about the same experience from someone else; and finally the I who is the narrator of the text. As Linda Marcus claims in her survey on autobiographical writing: “Autobiography imports alterity into the self by the act of objectification which engenders it” (202-03). Pamuk’s account also introduces a form of alterity into the self through writing. He casts doubt on the possibility of constituting a continuous I, and explores the problems involved in situating the self when memory is uncertain and we do not know if a given set of memories is ours. More significantly, Pamuk’s memoir also shows us that the marking of alterity is embedded in Turkish grammar.

Using -mişli zaman entails longing for an existence without direct consciousness of the self, and without responsibility of one’s actions and choices. Pamuk comments on the implications of the use of -mişli zaman when talking about past experience. If autobiography
is considered as the human prerogative to define one’s life, then a narrative that does not convey responsibility, displaying instead a nostalgia for the Garden of Eden before the Fall, contradicts the very precepts of the genre, and the conception of a self shaping his or her life through writing:

I find the language of epic unconvincing, for I cannot accept that the myths we tell about our first lives prepare us for the brighter, more authentic second lives that are meant to begin when we awake. Because—for people like me, at least—that second life is none other than the book in your hand. [And that depends on your attention, o reader]. (2005 8)

The narrative, as such, starts with a prelapsarian nostalgia for a life that merely acts as a passage to an ‘other’ life. Writing one’s life is about choosing “moments of being,” as Virginia Woolf elaborated in her eponymous memoir (Moments), and ultimately about defining that life. Pamuk’s ‘being,’ on the other hand, claims existence through writing: I write therefore I am. Writing in the post-modern tradition, however, Pamuk is aware that to gain a sense of ‘existence’, the writing self needs a reader.

Through a repeated affirmation of his stance as a memoir writer, Pamuk creates a generic contract with the reader. Similarly, writing in a genre with claims from its very outset to truth, referentiality, and lifelikeness, Pamuk pledges honesty:

Ben sana dürüstlük göstereyim, sen de bana şefkat. (2003 16)

Let me be straight with you, and in return let me ask for your compassion. (2005 8)
Pamuk’s pledge is not entirely reliable, for *Istanbul* is a memoir that works to obscure meaning and complicate language. In return for his honesty, Pamuk expects the reader to show him *şefkat*, connoting a mixture of compassion, affection and tenderness. The *şefkat* he asks of the reader, however, is peculiar: what exactly does he mean?

The following chapter, entitled “I”, recounting the first consciousness of selfhood, has two instances where the author feels *şefkat*. In the first instance, the young Orhan experiences his first sexual arousal while simultaneously threatening and showing affection to his teddy bear (18). The second instance repeats the same sensation, but this time succeeding an act of cruelty:

Kedileri aşkla, dostlukla sevip, bir inançsızlık, umutsuzluk ve boşluk anında onlara bir tane çakıp güldüğüm, sonra utandığım, içimin kediye *şefkatle* dolduğunu da çok oldu. (2003 29)

I’d lavish affection on a cat, only to strike it cruelly in a moment of despair, from which I would emerge with a bout of laughter that made me so ashamed that I would [be overcome by *compassion* for it] [*şefkat: affection in Freely, my italics*]. (2005 20)

Here, compassion is more about repentance following the abuse of a creature weaker than himself, than it is about kindness for its own sake. The *şefkat* that Pamuk recounts in the above anecdotes connotes violence, power and regret. Yet, does it also relate to, or explain, the *şefkat* that Pamuk asks of the reader? As a memoir, Istanbul raises more questions than answers. The narrative raises specific questions about the writer and his text: what sort of a person would have a sense of *şefkat* that unites cruelty and guilt? Are we expected to show the writer the same sort of compassion he shows cats and shall we, in Pamuk’s words, both ‘love’ and ‘hit’ the text? These questions are left hanging, and language obscures as much as it discloses. Pamuk’s account of himself is not an act that brings transparency or authentic knowledge of the self. Rather, it expresses a desire for the recognition of the self, yet leaves it unfulfilled.
Autobiography and the City

Opacity seems to shroud Pamuk’s autobiography, which he then dispels by identifying the city with the self. The prioritization of space when defining the self invites a reading with similar concerns. This attention to space and identity was usefully examined by Michel Foucault in “What Is an Author?” Limiting the author’s role in the text to a function that helps determine its interpretation, Foucault suggests that it is not the authenticity or person of the writer that require out attention, but the writing itself, as a space where the subject disappears only to generate one that others can inhabit or adopt (102). Foucault focuses on the spaces of writing and the situated positions that the text invites its readers to occupy. Space is indeed a major concern in autobiography. In his conception of le pacte autobiographique (1975), Lejeune defines the term ‘espace autobiographique’ as the space derived from the totality of an author’s work (165-90). Applying Lejeune’s term to Orhan Pamuk’s work, Catherina Dufft defines Pamuk’s autobiographical space as one rooted in his childhood and made universal through his fiction (181). It is possible to extend Dufft’s remark, and to trace the positions that the text invites its readers to adopt.

In the first chapter of the book, we are told the writer’s identity is inscribed with the history and identity of his immediate family and of the city into which he was born. Pamuk declares that just as the family he was born into, the body and the gender he happened to possess at the time of his birth, so does Istanbul, the place where he was born, determines his fate. On one level, then, Istanbul represents a kind of immutable destiny. His own fate and sense of self are intricately woven with the fate of the city. Thus, by speaking of Istanbul, he speaks of himself and vice versa. The city, for Pamuk, is at the core not only of his text, but of every text written in and on the city. For example, coming across on television a scene from an old black-and-white film set in Istanbul makes him realize that the Bosphorus
“glittering in the distance” (77) constituted the subject. In Istanbul, Pamuk extends his autobiographical space over the city. Istanbul is not only the space he has lived in all his life; it is the space of imagination and representation.

We tend to imagine the old, monumental cities in images that are fixed and enduring. But in fact the city is in flux, as are Pamuk’s impressions and the ways in which he makes meaning of the city: Sunday drives with his father and solitary walks in the city. Existential questions, pondered with the father during Sunday drives are intertwined with the silhouette of the city:

[S]özlerini dikkatle dinler ve görüntülerle sözlerin kafamda birleştğini hissederdim. [...] çünkü zamanla hayatın tıpkı müzik, resim ya da hikayeler gibi iniş çıkışlarla biteceği, ama gözlerimizin önünden akan şehir görüntülerinin, yıllar sonra bile rüyalardan çıkma hatırlar gibi bizimle kalacağını hissetirirdi. (2003 295)

[A]s I drank in his words, they would blend with the things I was seeing. [...] and make me feel that with time life would rise and fall, and eventually end, just like music, art and stories, but even years later, [the views that flew before our eyes would stay with us,] like memories plucked from dreams.38 (2005 284)

The city here has a dual role. It serves as a backdrop to the drive. Yet, it also serves as a crucible where all stories are forged into one. What remains is not the individual pursuits but the image and the experience of the cityscape.

Pamuk strolls around in Istanbul’s derelict neighborhoods, experiencing past glory and present decrepitude, extending himself over the many stories, lives, pasts and presents of the city. In Istanbul, the narrator is a flâneur in the sense that Walter Benjamin makes Baudelaire and his flânerie the central symbolic figure of the modern city: an idle drifter and spectator of urbanscapes whose aimless walks result in revealing representations of the big city. Pamuk’s pedestrian experience of the city is equally Baudelairean in its association

38 Compare with Freely’s translation: “those lives are with us still in the city views.”
between walking and artistic creativity. It evokes the poet’s imagery in “Le Soleil,” where a stroll through poor neighborhoods in the outskirts of Paris is an act of literary creation: “Stumbling over words as though they were paving stones/ Sometimes knocking up against verses dreamt long ago.”

Poetry, like walking, is enhanced by the pedestrian’s chance encounters.

In Istanbul, however, urban experience is much more important in terms of literary creation, generating the figure of the writer as well as his work. Pamuk makes his pedestrian the raconteur of his multilayered and faceted city. It is during his nocturnal wanderings and strolls into the derelict parts of the city that he reaches a self-realization and decides on his life course: to pursue a career as a writer. Writing emerges as a means of extending, and capturing flânerie, reminiscent of pastime habits, in “the way [he] used to hide a precious seed or a favorite marble in [his] mouth for hours on end” (332). The analogy between writing and a childhood means of enjoying a favorite item shows a writer who is childlike, spontaneous, and above all playful about his work. On the same note, when arguing with his mother about dropping out of college for a possible career as an artist, he finds solace in dreaming about the streets he will roam shortly:

[A]z sonra kapıyı açıp beni teselli edecek sokaklara kaçacağımı ve uzun uzun yürüdükten sonra gece yarısı eve dönüş bu sokakların havasından ve kimyasından birşeyler çıkarkmak için masama oturacağımı biliyordum. (2003 345)

I knew now that […] in a few minutes I would open the door and escape into the city’s consoling streets; and having walked away half the night, I’d return home and sit down at my table and capture their chemistry on paper. (2005 333)


40 The same theme also appears in *The Black Book*; Galip’s survival in the city depends on the tales that “his senses stumble on” while looking for his lost wife (1994: 194).
Writing emerges at the end of the text as alchemy. It is the primary pursuit of happiness, “the sole consolation,” just as the tripartite narrator at the end of The Black Book tells us (1999: 400). Both Galip, the detective-pedestrian, and Orhan, the protagonist of Istanbul find solace in the views of Istanbul that they transcribe. At the end of his autobiography, Pamuk stands on the edge of an urban definition of himself, by writing his passion for the city: I write, therefore I am. Istanbul, this text on the self and the city, thus starts and ends with writing.

**Inventing: Self and the City**

Istanbul, as Pamuk reflects on it, is the sole constant in a world of fleeting experiences and sensations, a multifaceted entity, which shapes the individual. The city writes the self, and Pamuk’s memoir is a translation of his pedestrian experience into writing. Just as the self and memory do not guarantee the construction of a reliable and truthful account of things past but a being that needs to be shaped, so does the city that forms a part of the self. For Pamuk, not only a coherent self, but a coherent, tangible, and solid city is a fiction:

[B]ir şehrin genel nitelikleri, ruhu ya da özüne ilişkin her söz kendi hayatımız hakkında dolayılı olarak konuşmaya dönüştür. Şehrin bizim kendimizden başka bir merkezi yoktur. (2003 327)

For anything that we say about the city’s [soul or] essence, says more about our own lives and our own states of mind. The city has no centre other than ourselves. (2005 316)

Istanbul, then, makes Pamuk what he is. Conversely, Pamuk sees in Istanbul what he expects to see. Endowed with human attributes, Istanbul transcends its use as a ground for Pamuk’s personality as it appears in the text, but becomes the reflection of the author himself. Yet, the relationship between the self and the city speaks not only to identity, but to multiple concerns. This city of chaos and contrasts is to be invented:
Belki de yaşadığımız şehri,ıpkı ailemiz gibi, başka çaremiz olmadığı için severiz! Ama onun neresini, neden seveceğimizi ietat etmemiz gerekir. (2003 328)

Perhaps we cannot help loving our city like a family [because we have no other alternatives]. But we still have to decide which part of the city we love and invent reasons why. (2005 317)

Just like family, the space one inhabits is an inescapable constituent of the I. And again like family and body, it needs acknowledgement, acceptance and love, which then must be justified. The self/city duality that Istanbul announces from the very outset is thus revealed to be an invention. In that sense, Pamuk’s Istanbullu, the inhabitant of Istanbul, evokes Baudelaire’s modern man: the self is not to be discovered, but invented. In “What is Enlightenment?” (1984), Foucault remarks that modernity is “a mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself.” He notes that for Baudelaire, modern man is “the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate the man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself” (42). For Pamuk the city is as much an invention as the self. Pamuk’s Istanbul is an unreal city, as is Eliot’s London in The Waste Land.

Yet, the fictionality of Istanbul is not simply a sign of its modernity nor of its myriad facets, but of its history as an Ottoman city. The very existence of a Middle Eastern City has been a question for Ottoman historians since Max Weber’s contention that the city, as we know it, is a feature of Christian Europe (1958).\footnote{The following excerpt from the introduction to a study of three Ottoman cities, demonstrates how Weber’s remark can pose a challenge in contemporary Turkish urban historiography: “Weber, who defines city as a self-governing commune whose inhabitants possessed a distinct sense of collective identity, argues that such an entity evolved, and thus becomes meaningful only in Christian Europe. […] Muslim cities were inhabited by distinct clan or tribal groups who competed with one another, rather than joining together for the common civic good in the creation of an identity that was specifically urban. […] Weber concludes that whereas diversity became a hallmark within and}
emphasis on the city acquires a historiographic significance. He places Istanbul on the map as a city, focusing on its collective soul, narrating its public spaces and secular organization, in a text that is factual and poetic, with aesthetic claims that also respond to historiographic concerns.

The invention of Istanbul has more intimate implications as well. Pamuk writes from the city where he has lived all his life. Yet, he is also a stranger in his home city, as the Istanbul of the moment of writing is considerably different from the Istanbul of childhood. The population of the city increased tenfold in the past fifty years due to waves of immigration from Central and Eastern Anatolia. In contrast, the advent of the republic marks the emigration of non-Muslim inhabitants who composed the half of the city’s population as late as 1920s (Yerasimos). This change in ethnic and cultural makeup of its inhabitants turned Istanbul into a city of alienation, where no one feels “completely at home” (103). At the same time, Pamuk’s identification with the city shows that despite the drastic transformations the city has undergone in the past century, it offers a space of self-realization. If home is where no one feels at home, then being at home is also defined differently.

Pamuk’s account shows how locality may act on the self in question. By giving an account of how he invents the self and the city, Pamuk presents the act of inventing as yet another everyday practice. In other words, he makes familiar not only the self and the city, but also the act of inventing. And that invention, Pamuk shows us, multiplies the I of the narrator, not only because giving any account of oneself involves making I an other but because the history and location of the city are constantly reinvented by other voices and narratives.42

between European cities, Islamic cities all share certain fundamental characteristics due to the pervasive role of Islamic law in both the public and the private spheres of their inhabitants’ lives. In short, Weber’s Islamic cities are monolithic and undifferentiated” (Eldem 1).

42 Pamuk’s inclusion of the other into his account evokes Judith Butler’s idea that giving an account of oneself implicates a multiplicity of identities: “I am compelled and comported outside myself; I
Within the context of Turkish language, narration points foremost to a void. Language was already the site of a verbal chasm between the Ottoman seat of power and its subjects. In the same vein, the plans for language reform, to close, in the Turcologist Erik Jan Zürcher’s words, “the chasm between the written Ottoman of the literate elite and the vernacular of the Turkish population,” date back to the mid-nineteenth century (189). The bridging of this gap took place as part of the Kemalist reforms that sought to modernize the country. In 1928, five years after the advent of the Republic, and four years after the abolishing of the Caliphate, the state implemented a reform of the alphabet, giving up Arabic script in favor of the Latin alphabet. This was followed by the language reform of 1936, which purged the Turkish language of its Ottoman vocabulary and syntax, introducing newly coined words from Turkic language. These policies, accompanied by a new historical thesis that bypassed the Ottoman past, aimed to sever the remaining ties with Islamic heritage and the Ottoman Past, in order to facilitate processes of Westernization.

This chasm between the language and its speakers, the old and the new, the past and the present, is considered to be the major problem in Turkish cultural identity after the advent of the Republic in 1923. Traced back to the government enforced move from the use of Arabic letters to Latin alphabet, Turkish modern history is marked by a rupture, famously referred to by Jacques Derrida as a “coup de lettre” in his postcard from Istanbul (“Istanbul”). In an article on contemporary Turkish cultural identity and Europe, Kevin Robins refers to the same problem: “There has been a creative void at the heart of modern Turkish culture. The elite put the old order into question, but it was not able through this process to liberate new meaning of a creative kind” (68). Ironically, the same void also characterizes Pamuk’s work and notably his memoir, which might be considered a response to the lack of creativity find that the only way to know myself is precisely through a meditation that takes place outside of me, exterior to me, in a norm or convention that I did not make, in which I cannot discern myself as an author or an agent of its making” (23).
noted by Robins. Pamuk’s memoir feeds on the void and turns it into an inhabitable space by making it more familiar. The chasm characterizes Istanbul and by extension Turkish identity. Selim Deringil concludes his article “The Turks and ‘Europe’: The Argument from History” (2007) on a similar note: “when your identity crisis has lasted for more than 200 years, it is no longer a crisis. It is your identity” (721).

**Autobiography through the Other**

This text on the city and memories consists of a wide array of its representations, as if to point to the ‘truth’ of the city from as many perspectives as possible, and to recount the traces of others on the writer and his city:

[H]ayatta yaptığımız çeşitli şeyler hakkında başkalarının ne dediği bir süre sonra yalnız bizim kendi fikrimiz olmaz, yaşadığımız şeyin kendisinden de önemli bir hatırlaya dönüşür. Yaşadığımız hayat gibi, yaşadığımız şehrin anlamını da çoğu zaman başkalarından öğreniriz. (2003 16)

Once imprinted in our minds, other people’s reports of what we have done end up mattering [not simply] more than what we ourselves remember, [they turn into memories more important than our experiences]. And just as we learn about our lives from others, so too, do we let others shape our understanding of the city in which we live. (2005 8)

Pamuk presents a self and a city, which are formed through others’ accounts. Just as self-knowledge always entails the other, so does knowledge of the city. The two sources of knowledge, the self and the other, are intertwined in such a way that the self is, to quote Rimbaud, is not only an other, but others.

Pamuk’s memories of the city are constructed through others’, ranging from his immediate family to painters and men of letters. Just like family and the city, literary lineage emerges as another family that Pamuk loves, and he shares with the reader his reasons for this
love. The inclusion of different accounts of the city in the autobiography is not simply a sign of erudition; Pamuk privileges other accounts over his own feelings and experiences. In this sense, the memoir reminds one of Jean-Paul Sartre’s autobiography, *Les mots* (1964), where Sartre presents a self formed by books. Nevertheless, whereas the range of books that Sartre reads is restricted by his grandfather’s library, Pamuk’s choices are shaped by the city.

The constitution of identity based on Istanbul is not exclusive to Pamuk. Since the advent of the Republic, the capital of the crumbling empire has been the locus for imagining Turkish community, a political agenda two earlier Istanbullu writers of the Republic shared, with the aim of establishing a national identity (226-27): Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, the novelist of Istanbul, whom Pamuk considers the greatest Turkish novelist of the twentieth century (225), and Yahya Kemal, the great poet of the republic and of Istanbul. Unlike Tanpınar and Kemal, Pamuk’s politics does not exclude the non-Muslim minorities from the history of the city (158-59); nor does he exalt nationalist sentiments. On the contrary, even a penchant for reading Western accounts, otherwise a problem pointing to a lack of Turkish historiography, can be celebrated as a means to “fend off narrow nationalism” (217). Further, numerous references to the multiple ethnic identities of its inhabitants as well as of himself points to a vacillating cultural identity. Chapter 19, entitled “Conquest or Fall? The Turkification of Constantinople,” gives an account, among other similar examples, of how his wife was chided during her studies at Columbia University, for referring to Ottoman seizure of Constantinople as a ‘conquest,’ rather than a fall (156), tracing thus nationalist discourse on a personal level.\(^{43}\)

The memoir introduces two other early twentieth century writers from Istanbul. Reşat Ekrem Koçu, the writer of the unfinished *Istanbul Encyclopaedia*, the world’s first encyclopedia on a single city, Şinasi Hisar, the Bosphorus memoirist. These four writers,\(^{43}\) In the English version, the chapter is entitled “Conquest or Decline.” “Fall” appears a more appropriate translation of *düşüş*, which means both fall and decline in Turkish.
Tanpınar, Kemal, Koçu and Hisar, shared the same concern for preserving an *Istanbullu* voice while writing in Western forms:

Geçmişle günümüz ya da Batılıların sevdiği deyişle Doğu ile Batı arasındaki karmaşık ve yaratıcı tutumlarıyla bu dört hüzünlü yazar, bana sevdiğim kitaplar ve modern sanat zevki ile yaşadığı şehrin hayatı ve kültürü arasında nasıl bir ilişki kurabileceğini sezirdiler. (2003 110)

[T]hese four melancholic writers drew their strength from the tensions between the past and the present, or between what Westerners like to call the East and West; they are the ones who taught me how to reconcile my love for modern art and Western literature with the culture of the city in which I lived. (2005 99)

Pamuk gives an account of the literary circles that preceded him, establishing a lineage of writers who sought to achieve authenticity through their intimacy with the city. His account also carries on the tradition of communicative memoir, a popular means of autobiographical writing in Turkish literature, which focuses on the writer’s milieu and treats his community as an extended family.

Pamuk’s literary family is not exclusively Turkish. He allocates a chapter each to his favorite Western artists and gives reasons for their inclusion in his artistic family. Accordingly, we learn that the only accurate representations of the panorama of late eighteenth-century Istanbul are by the German painter Antoine-Ignace Melling (Ch. 7). Literary representations, on the other hand, mainly give an account of the sensations the city evoked in the writers. Théophile Gautier (Ch. 24) poeticized the melancholy of the city, while Gustave Flaubert (Ch. 31), preoccupied with his syphilis and his future plans, mostly ignored the city. Pierre Loti on the other hand, admired the city as the seat of an oriental empire on the point of disintegration. Pamuk finds that western artists have mainly seen Istanbul as an exotic locale.
The otherness of Istanbul is not simply a problem inherent to literature or autobiography; it is historiographic. There are few chronicles by its Muslim inhabitants and the actual histories of the city are produced mostly by Westerners, a problem voiced in the memoir (226), as well as by historians of the city (Eldem). Pamuk, with his westernized upbringing and education feels obliged to read about his city-self through visitors’ accounts, some of whom I mentioned above. The result is a further split in the objectifying of his subjectivity: reflecting on the self through an ‘other,’ seeing the self through an ‘other’ eye/I constituted by western discourse. The self, an interior text at the crossroads of other selves and texts, is shaped around an east-west axis:


Whatever we call it—false consciousness, fantasy, or old-style ideology—there is, in each of our heads, a half legible, half secret text that makes sense of what we’ve done in life. And for each of us in Istanbul, a large section of this text is given over to what Western observers have said about us. For people like me, İstanbullus with one foot in this culture and one in the other, the ‘Western traveller’ is often not a real person—he can be my own creation, my fantasy, even my own reflection. [But because I cannot accept the texts of the past as one text, I need a foreigner who can add meaning to my lie with a new text, writing, painting, or film.] So whenever I sense the absence of Western eyes, I become my own Westerner. (2005 260)44

44Compare my addition with Freely’s translation: “But being unable to depend on tradition alone as my text, I am grateful to the outsider who can offer me a complementary version—whether a piece of writing, a painting, a film.”
Knowledge of the self entails adopting the discourse of the other, and thus becoming an other to the self. Istanbul’s location, however, adds different undertones to discussions of otherness. Pamuk incorporates material on historical and contemporary Turkey into his account. The foregoing passage questions the implicit understanding of the split self as something negative, introducing it instead as a means of generating abundance within the ‘I.’ Istanbul is written by the westerners, who in turn create Pamuk’s self, which in turn writes about the West and the city.

In Istanbul, exteriority acquires multiple significations as it relates to Istanbul’s history and its Oriental/Ottoman heritage. In this respect, the city is no different from Beirut as represented in the Western media, a point that Edward Said posits in Orientalism: a city that “belongs to the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval” (12). Edward Said’s work resonates with Istanbul and indeed, with this study. Focusing on a reflection of East-West dynamics, this study draws from Said’s Orientalism and more specifically, his attention to the problems of self-knowledge and identity. For Said, self-knowledge means tracing the discourses that have formed the Oriental self (25). This preoccupation with self-knowledge and the discourse of the other that goes into its formation is evident in Pamuk’s autobiography as well. However, unlike Said, who considers Beirut’s association with Chateaubriand and Nerval a disregard for the inhabitant of Beirut and a valorization of the Western onlooker, Pamuk posits being “Under Western Eyes” as a poetic opportunity to pluralize the self. What Pamuk does, then, is to poeticize the split subjectivity and otherness of the self in a text that traces Istanbul’s varied trajectories. Neither the East-West duality nor the persistent effort to adopt

45 A similar concern can be observed in Said’s autobiography, Out of Place (1999), where he captures his Palestinian identity in writing. His autobiography is more a remembrance of familial past and of the various shades of English language and culture he has been exposed to.
the European model to the point of a break with the past are negative; both become a privilege that enables the Istanbullu to consider the past self as “exotic” (217).

**Homelessness and Identity**

Pamuk reads the singularity of the city and its tradition within the dynamics of post-colonialism, as a privilege that allows the inhabitants of the city to have a dual perspective:

Especially when reading the Western travellers of the nineteenth century—perhaps because they wrote about familiar things in words I could easily understand—I realize that my ‘city’ is not really mine. [...] [At once object and subject of the Western gaze] I waver back and forth, sometimes seeing the city from within and sometimes from without, I feel as I do when I am wandering the streets, caught in a stream of slippery, contradictory thoughts, not quite belonging to this place, and not quite a stranger. (2005 260-61)⁴⁶

Here the question of the Westerner’s gaze takes a different turn, tending towards alienation from one’s own culture, as well as identification with the colonizer’s gaze. Pamuk celebrates the city’s, and accordingly his own positioning on the periphery of the West as a means of generating further possibilities of textual stratification.

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⁴⁶ Compare with the English: “I will often feel that I’ve become one with (the) Western traveller, plunging with him into the thick of life, counting, weighing, categorizing, judging and in so doing often usurping their dreams, to become at once the object and the subject of the Western gaze” (261).
This note on being homeless at home necessitates a detour to establish the notion as an important theme in literature. The lines cited above resonate with the feeling of homelessness and exile that characterizes Istanbul as a literary capital. In recent discussions of world literature, Istanbul is regularly viewed as the ‘birthplace’ of comparative literature (Apter, Li). In this context, Istanbul is a locus of exile: a gaping void out of which the discipline of comparative literature, as it was institutionalized in the U.S. emerged. Erich Auerbach’s acceptance of a teaching post at Istanbul University in 1936 (fleeing Nazi persecution and joining his mentor, the humanist Leo Spitzer) culminated in the 1946 publication of *Mimesis*, the “magisterial,” in Edward Said’s words, history of representation in Western literature. In the epilogue, Auerbach refers to the time and place of writing: “the book was written during the war and at Istanbul, where the libraries are not well equipped for European studies” (557). The locale, in other words, serves as a sort of apology for the scope of the work. Yet Auerbach is quick to add that the lack of resources mobilized him, suggesting that it “is quite possible that the book owes its existence to just this lack of a rich and specialized library” (557). In other words, absence creates presence, with Istanbul helping Auerbach bridge the canonical texts of Western Literature.

Auerbach’s remark on Istanbul is notable not only because it contextualizes his work, but also because of the place Edward Said assigned to him. Said has referred to Auerbach’s *Mimesis* on numerous occasions and indeed, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1982) opens with a discussion of Auerbach’s composition of Mimesis as a product of exile. Istanbul, Said notes, is not just anywhere outside Europe:

Istanbul represents the terrible Turk, as well as Islam, the scourge of Christendom, the great Oriental apostasy incarnate [...] For centuries Turkey and Islam hung over Europe like a gigantic composite monster, seeming to threaten Europe with destruction. To have been an exile in Istanbul at that time of fascism in Europe was a deeply resonating and intense form of exile from Europe. (6)
For a scholar of medieval and Classical literature like Auerbach, Istanbul as the seat of “the Turk,” represents the antagonistic other of Europe, evolving throughout centuries from “the scourge of Christendom” to the Oriental despot, the sick man of Europe, and finally the Eastern question (Almas; Neumann 49-54). Istanbul provides the vantage point from which Auerbach can reflect on the European literary tradition as a whole. Yet, the location complicates Auerbach’s position as a humanist and scholar of European culture who, exiled by a product of that culture, now attempts to rescue it in the very city that has been for centuries represented as Europe’s greatest enemy.

The perceived importance of Istanbul to Auerbach’s work undergoes some changes in Said’s subsequent statements. In a later interview, Said contends, “There was no discernible connection between Auerbach and Istanbul at all... his entire attitude while there seems to have been one of nostalgia for the West, which gave him the spirit to sit down and write this great saving work of Western humanism” (Power 127). Said here changes his interpretation of the connection, arguing that nostalgia for the West, here viewed as regressive, was the motivating impulse and connection. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said comments again on the locus of exile that sparked Auerbach’s work. Mimesis, according to Said, “owes its existence to the very fact of Oriental, non-Occidental exile and homelessness [...] not only a massive reaffirmation of the Western cultural tradition, but also a work built upon a critically important alienation from it” (*Culture* 8). Said locates Auerbach’s achievement in his alchemy of homelessness. Like Auerbach, Said is silent about Istanbul’s heritage, thereby presenting the city more narrowly as a locus of exile.

This link between Said, Auerbach, and Istanbul has become one of the major themes in recent discussions on literary studies, and has been explored by Emily Apter, among others.\footnote{Probably the most curious among these is David Damrosch’s 2000 novel *Meetings of the Mind*. One character, a scholar from Istanbul, considers Auerbach’s exile “an excuse for not to read, not a}
Auerbach’s stance “highly questionable,” contending that intellectual life in Istanbul during the 1930s was far livelier than Auerbach has implied. Apter’s comment on Said’s introduction to *Mimesis* is revealing. On a first read she sees “nothing obviously ‘Saidian’ about the preface” (69). Said’s read has been more recently criticized for its failure to question the monolithic and Orientalist image of Istanbul that emerges in the last paragraph of *Mimesis*. A poignant critique comes from Selim Deringil, who reads Said’s Ottoman Empire as “a sort of epiphenomenal, (and dare one say it, quintessentially ‘Oriental’) creature” and contends that Said has “fall[en] into much the same trap as the writers he critiques in his epic *Orientalism*” (313). Deringil continues, “That Auerbach was sitting in the city that was the seat of much of what stood for Western Civilization seems to have passed unnoticed by the authors of both *Mimesis* and *Orientalism*” (314). In the context of comparative literature then, Istanbul appears as a nondescript city.

This bleak image of the city and its cultural life, obviously an exaggeration, points nonetheless to the cultural complexity of the period of Auerbach’s stay. In a letter to Walter Benjamin, dated January 3, 1937, he notes an insurgent nationalism in his new locale: “Here all traditions have been thrown overboard in an attempt to build a thoroughly rationalized compelling necessity” (53). He adds: “Auerbach was exaggerating his exile in Istanbul... He was not trapped in some tent on the edge of a desert after all” (57). For scholarly work, see Mufti and Konuk.

Apt lists a literary journal published under Auerbach’s editorship and a number of European politicians, intellectuals and artists who either worked or sought refuge there during his residence, including Leon Trotsky, Hans Reichenbach, Paul Hindemith, and Steven Runciman (50-52).

Apter analyzes Said’s silence on Auerbach’s Orientalist depiction of Istanbul on another read as “taking up the challenge of using Auerbachian humanism to fashion new humanisms” (72).

A recent work on the subject is Kader Konuk’s *East West Mimesis* (2010). Konuk’s major critique of Said is his failure to “acknowledge Auerbach’s presence” as a result of the “old age-long contact and exchange between Ottomans and Europeans” and an implicit suggestion of a univocal image of the city (14). Konuk’s work on Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, contextualizing the writing of the book within the Turkish cultural politics of the period, reads mimesis as both “a textual practice used for representing reality and mimesis as a form of cultural practice deployed in the Westernization of Turkey as a whole” (11).
state that will be both European and extremely Turko-nationalistic” (Apter 260). Can these remarks, obviously referring to the language reforms of the new republic, contain Auerbach’s silence on Istanbul? Apter reads them anachronistically, as a platform to conceptualize the scope of comparative literature. She comments: “It was the volatile crossing of Turkish language politics with European philological humanism that produced the conditions conducive to the invention of comparative literature as a global discipline, at least in its early guise” (50). Istanbul, Apter contends, has shaped the discipline with its significance as “a place where east-west boundaries were culturally blurry” (56). Apter’s remark here itself is blurry, pointing to the popular image of Istanbul as a locus of the east-west divide. Nevertheless, the cultural blur, or the mist as I will refer to it in the following sections, is a component of the city and its imagery, and one of the themes that mark Pamuk’s Istanbul.

Pamuk’s self-positioning as a homeless writer begs comparison with this reading of Auerbach. The notion of exile has also impacted on the understanding of the development of a Republican Turkish literature. Pamuk’s insistence on creating a new space that is equidistant from two different cultures evokes the feeling of homelessness and the void hinted at by Auerbach and taken up by Said. The feelings of homelessness and estrangement introduced in the memoir, however, are quite different from the exile that is associated with Auerbach. Pamuk’s exile is at home. In a recent interview, Pamuk states:

I am not in geographical or physical exile [...] But obviously I have been in trouble ideologically, politically, and felt not “at home” at home. (2008 PMLA)

This remark reveals Pamuk’s self-proclaimed status as an unusual outsider, along the lines of Auerbach and Said. As such, it can be read in conjunction with both. Yet, it also shows that his exile is idiosyncratic. From a historical perspective, the notion of exile has obviously impacted on the development of a Republican Turkish literature, and notably on Pamuk’s

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51 See the 2008 PMLA special edition on Turkish Literature, in particular Adak and Parla.
Pamuk’s homelessness, however, moves beyond the Turkish case. As he also attests in the same interview, it resonates with Theodor Adorno’s view of homelessness at home as a moral value. Exile in Adorno’s, and I would contend in Pamuk’s case, is the necessary distance one takes from forms and spaces of identity and identification, allegiance and affiliation, to be able to question all without reserve. Two decades after Said’s reading of Auerbach, Pamuk’s work provides new instances of Istanbul’s productive homelessness, as well as the relevance of Istanbul in international literary space.

In a city that alienates its residents as much as it draws them to itself, aesthetics is not a luxury but a necessity for the city dwellers to take part in the city and its everyday reality. Pamuk’s account clamors for a different positioning of the city, its culture, and inhabitants. His autobiographical space draws from the history of the city, including its imperial past and as such, it personalizes the public. However, it also makes the personal public by offering the self as a space that can be inhabited by those who like to stroll through the streets of the city, and perhaps more importantly, as a space that can be appropriated by anyone who seeks affiliation with a city on the periphery of Western discourse. The city-self identity is not exclusive to Pamuk, or to the inhabitants of Istanbul. Pamuk presents Istanbul as a city that has many parallels with the metropolises in the developing world:

Benim özel konumum, Batılılaşma sonucu İstanbullu okurların ve yazarların, [ve belki de artık bütün dünyanın kaçınılmaz olarak Batılılaşma sonucu] dünyanın Batı dışındaki bütün şehirlerinde yaşayanların çok da özel olmayan konumudur. (2003 227)

[My special position] may not, in the end, be special to Istanbul, and perhaps, with the Westernization of the entire world, it is inevitable [for those who live in the metropoles outside the West]. (2005 216)

52 There is also a temporal overlap, as the Istanbul of the 1940s and 50s is the site and basis of the memoir, especially in the visual sense, through the inclusion of photographs of the period.
53 Said refers to Adorno in “Reflections of Exile,” to comment on Auerbach’s exile (147, 148).
In the above account, identification with a city at the margins of Europe appears as a situation that Pamuk shares with those who live in the non-western cities, but also as a political awareness, one that moves beyond the oriental history of the city to reframe it as one that belongs to the global network of non-western cities.

**Conclusion**

Istanbul shapes and is shaped by the writer/self. The city of the memoir emerges as a void, locus of exile and homelessness for reasons that relate to Istanbul’s and Turkish cultural history. Pamuk’s own sense of ‘homelessness at home’ becomes a transnational marker of identity, evoking the idea of otherness as constitutive of the self, while retaining its specific relation to Istanbul. It is framed, in other words, not only in terms of the self-other, but also of east-west and core-periphery divides. Just like the otherness of the self, the division between Eastern heritage and Western influence is productive; it becomes a resource, rather than a liability. The ‘I’ that emerges in Istanbul is not simply an ‘other’; instead, the split selves add to the multiplicity of voices within. The void, characterizing the self, Istanbul and by extension Turkish identity, appears no longer as an unfathomable emptiness but as a space of multiple possibilities.