

“Worldliness in Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul: Memories of a City*“¹

Verena Laschinger

Assistant Professor of American Culture and Literature
and Vivian Blaxell

Associate Professor at Fatih University

Orhan Pamuk’s 2005 autobiography *Istanbul: Memories of a City* is situated in a city transformed by global interactions at the time of the Ottoman Empire, and twentieth-century globalization². The text is firmly connected to actuality and can be called worldly in the way Edward Said describes in “The Text, the World, the Critic:”

Texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and practical, that even in their most rarified form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence are worldly. (4)

It is the *worldliness* of literary texts, as Said calls it that allows them to produce and convey meaning. Consequently, Said claims that texts place themselves in the world and thereby “place restraints upon what can be done with (and to) them interpretively” (9). The distinct place any drama, poem or novel takes in the world, however, derives from “a discursive situation involving speaker and audience; the designed interplay between speech and reception, between verblivity and textuality” (9), in short it is the performative quality of texts that instates their *worldliness*, and constitutes their links with “the world of discourse” (14), where they become “facts of power, not of democratic exchange” (14). In the world, literary texts work as discursive agents. Said reminds of Foucault’s discovery, that discursive agents simultaneously recover, re-circulate and disguise dominant power relations.

Driven by his “impatience with theory” (Robbins 72) and his concern with practice, Said adds the critic’s *worldliness* to the notion of a text’s *worldliness* in “The Text, the World, the Critic.” While *worldliness* derives from exile the critic generally need not endure a physical dislocation. Rather, for the worldly critic, exile is a state of

¹ Parts of this essay written in German appeared first in: Laschinger, Verena. „Das Ende der hüzin: Orhan Pamuks *Istanbul: Memories of a City* und der Traum von Europa“. *Grenzgänge. Beiträge zu einer modernen Romanistik* 13/26 (2006): 107-17.

² Late twentieth-century globalization is a descendant of free trade, migrating labor forces, and the transnational exchange of culture and commodities beginning as early as the thirteenth century, when commercial and trade relations were established between East Asian, African and European nations along the Silk Road trading conduit. According to the *International Business Report: Emerging Markets 2007*, published by accounting organization Grant Thornton International, Turkey is currently undergoing a powerful transitional phase as the next major emerging market, “waiting in the wings” to have “huge impacts on the global economy” (5).

mind, an obligation to perform professional libertinism and to steer clear of prescribed sets of values of any kind. Derived from an exile consciousness, the critic's *worldliness* is itself bracketed by an urgent political imperative. Said traces back his own uncompromising engagement in the political cause of the Palestinians and his lifelong commitment as a literary scholar to represent silenced voices to the experience of having to live a life 'out of place', as the title of his memoir suggests. Paradoxically, in Said's concept of *worldliness* it is the experience of exile, that ultimately leads us to a "new investment in the local [...] and makes a place where action can be accomplished" (Robbins 76). As Catherine Gallagher puts it: "Said's work presents us with a paradigmatic attempt at integrating the roles of the literary critic and political advocate, at giving them a joint foundation" (37).

In the September 17, 2001 issue of *The Nation*, Said extends the notion of local engagement to a global scale claiming that the recent processes of globalized economy fuse the roles of the writer and the intellectual/critic at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In his 2001 article in *The Nation* Said suggests that literary writers, novelists, poets and playwrights, are intellectuals in the sense that "both act in the new public sphere dominated by globalization". In the 1993 Reith Lectures (later published in a collection entitled *Representations of the Intellectual*) Said spent much thought on the question of what it means to be a contemporary intellectual. Here he developed his definition of the intellectual as independent amateur rather than as institutionalized professional with reference to Gramsci, Foucault and Sartre and their respective notions of the organic, specific and writerly intellectual. In 2001, however, he emphasized the processes of globalization, compelled by the powerful inscriptions of writers into the "global discursive agenda" via:

the formation of numerous writers' parliaments and congresses devoted to such issues as intolerance, the dialogue of cultures, civil strife (as in Bosnia and Algeria), freedom of speech and censorship, truth and reconciliation (as in South Africa, Argentina, Ireland and elsewhere); and the special symbolic role of the writer as an intellectual testifying to a country's or region's experience. ("Public Role")

These inscriptions had turned the writers into intellectuals who interfere on the global stage of politics. According to Said it is a recent transformation:

Yet at the dawn of the twenty-first century the writer has taken on more and more of the intellectual's adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to

power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, and supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority. (“Public Role”)

Thus, Said detects a *worldliness* of the contemporary writer-intellectual, who he finds best embodied in “Salman Rushdie, Nadine Gordimer, Kenzaburo Oe, Derek Walcott, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz, Elie Wiesel, Bertrand Russell, Günter Grass, Rigoberta Menchú” (“Public Role”). One writer, that could be added to this list of Nobel Prize winners is Orhan Pamuk. His name, too, triggers “in the mind an emblemized region, which in turn can be seen as a sort of platform or jumping-off point for that writer's subsequent activity as an intervention, in debates taking place very far from the world of literature” (“Public Role”). Ever since his controversial statements about the killings of Armenians on Turkish soil, which prompted his being charged with degrading Turkishness in accordance with Article 301 of Turkey’s penal code, Pamuk has won an international reputation as a politically engaged writer. He also has become a prominent and controversial intellectual figure in contemporary Turkey.

Grounded in Foucault’s discourse theory, Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* makes a strong argument about the nineteenth-century British novel’s immersion in the imperial process and in the political reality of the Empire from which they emerged. Said acknowledges that imperial power laid some groundwork for the globalized world:

I am temperamentally and philosophically opposed to vast system-building or totalistic theories of human history. But I must say that having studied and indeed lived within the modern empires, I am struck by how constantly expanding, how inexorably integrative they were. [...] the British empire integrated and fused things within it, and taken together it and other empires made the world one. (4)

But in 2001 Said highlighted recent processes of globalization and how their impact on the literary realm decisively changed the quality of the writer’s political engagement. Here, Said foregrounds the processes of globalized publishing and especially the speed of global news coverage on the internet that offer great possibilities but also put enormous pressure on authors. These pressures lead to the demise of the autonomy of the literary writer’s realm and the subsequent transformation of the writer into a public intellectual. From this perspective, the writer-turned-intellectual cannot avoid political involvement and is, thus, worldly.

In the following I consider the *worldliness* of Pamuk’s autobiography *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, where the writer-intellectual Pamuk contemplates the formative years

of his early artistic development. The lonely, troubled main character spends his youth intrigued with the individualism cherished and described in so much philosophical and literary writing of the nineteenth-century. At the same time, Pamuk's narrator is continuously confronted with the historical and social remainders of Istanbul's legacy as economically and culturally globalized urban center. When Pamuk's fictional alter ego finally decides to pursue his calling as a writer, he does so on the grounds of an incorporated notion of global interconnectedness. And, the reader knows that the Stephen Dedalus-like young artist of Pamuk's phylogenetic portrait will develop into today's politically engaged, worldly writer-intellectual. Hence the text suggests that the state of an inner exile makes the evolution of a critical consciousness possible, which then can be effectively used for a worldly engagement. With his story bracketed by long paragraphs on cultural and literary criticism the lonely young narrator faces up to his responsibility to critically engage in the world. In this sense the author Pamuk himself makes globalization responsible for his growing to be a worldly writer-intellectual.

In *Istanbul: Memories of a City* Pamuk fixes his gaze on the former capital of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Here in Nişantaşı and Beyoğlu, where architectural remnants remind him of his nation's glorious past, Pamuk explores how Western writers constructed Istanbul as an Oriental idyll in their nineteenth-century travelogues.³ The city's splendor invited Western writers to exoticize idiosyncracies and to relish picturesque landscapes. Heavily loaded with orientalist inaccuracies, these writers' texts are not only documents of cultural imperialism but also of economic change at a time when imperialist finance capital penetrated Ottoman Turkey, literally turning the Empire into "a raw-materials-supplying semi-colony of the expanding European economy," as Berch Berberoglu puts it in *The Internationalization of Capital* (117).

For Berberoglu the penetration of imperial finance into Ottoman Turkey is tantamount to colonization. But Pamuk does not go as far as that. He does not find so much harm done by Western representations of Istanbul romantically embellished and embroidered with thrilling "fantasies about the East" (218). Emphatically he claims: "we were never a Western colony" (218). While the travelogues themselves serve as a reservoir of beloved memories of the Mevlevi dervish lodges, or the harem, he blames the radical Turkish modernizers native to the city of using the books of foreign observers to do real disservice to Istanbul:

³ Here, Pamuk hooks on a discourse, which Taylor among many others has helped to keep striving, even though neither his travelogues nor his poetry did focus on Istanbul. Across historical time and global space the contemporary Turkish autobiographer and the nineteenth century American poet get connected.

It was a brutal symbiosis: Western observers love to identify the things that make Istanbul exotic, non-Western, whereas the Westernisers amongst us register all the same things as obstacles to be erased from the face of the city as fast as possible. (Pamuk 218)

Pamuk stresses the collaborative character of the transformative processes ,westernizing'⁴ the city. In fact, he attributes major agency to the Empire's comprador bourgeoisie, which was largely "involved in import/export trade and domestic marketing tied to European imports (...) comprised of Greek and Armenian merchants and primarily concentrated in large urban centers such as Istanbul and Izmir" (Berberoğlu 117). Making a case for Turkey, Pamuk corrects a distorted picture of the unequal power relations between an active, perpetrating ,West' and a passive, victimized ,East'. His is an understanding that owes much to the complex and age-old joint venture of European and Asian economic interests with Istanbul / Constantinople and Izmir / Smyrna marking pivotal points of global exchange within the continent-crossing constraints of the Ottoman Empire.

Wandering the streets of Istanbul, the first person narrator of *Istanbul: Memories of a City* explores the city's darkest corners to get a sense of himself. During his last noctambulist excursion the young narrator finds his vocation to be that of a writer. Pamuk's narrator watches the burning of the magnificent Ottoman mansions along the Bosphorus, these violent acts of incinerating houses from the position of a bystander with mixed feelings: shock and grief at these attempts to extinguish a national identity grounded in an imperial past; excitement about these acts as "creative destruction," a term coined by Joseph Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* to describe "the essence of capitalism" (qtd. in Friedman 11). Following Schumpeter, journalist James Surowiecki describes a market ruled by the paradox of "creative destruction" as follows:

Innovation replaces tradition. The present – or perhaps the future – replaces the past. Nothing matters so much as what will come next, and what will come next can only arrive if what is here now gets overturned. While this makes the system a terrific place for innovation, it makes it a difficult place to live, since most people prefer some measure of security about the future to a life lived in almost constant uncertainty. (qtd. in Friedman 11)

Acts of vandalism such as deliberate incinerations and acts of modernization such as considerate urban planning have been equally responsible for Istanbul's changing appearance since the 1920s. Ottoman architecture is still being replaced by indistinct

⁴ It is one paradox of *Istanbul: Memories of a City* that Pamuk despite his obvious intention to overcome the essentialist notion of a Western and an Eastern identity prolifically uses terms like Westerners, the West, to westernize etc..

concrete buildings erasing the city's historical and national heritage on a large scale. Consequently, the urban space develops an appearance similar to other urban centers in the globalized world. As in Walter Benjamin's Paris of one hundred years ago, architecture in Pamuk's Istanbul signals economic transition.

Pamuk's juvenile first-person narrator is a figure of 'betweenness', shifting between being a self-absorbed artist or a worldly writer. In order to be able to make that decision Pamuk introduces the paradigmatic notion of an 'inner exile' of his culturally detached, yet locally attached alter ego. He is not yet a writer, not yet an intellectual, but by intersecting the autobiographical narration with long paragraphs of literary and cultural criticism Pamuk achieves Saidean *worldliness* with the text. He creates a dialogical performance between the young narrating figure and the adult worldly critic, whose analytical praxis will eventually lead to political engagement. By alternating chapters on family life with chapters about urban life in Istanbul, interspersing both with literary and cultural analyses, Pamuk lets the juvenile first person narrator - "Another Orhan" as the opening chapter suggests - and the adult critic take turns in telling the story from their respective points of view, one being private, the other worldly. Thereby the reader is taken on a passage moving from the narrator's inner landscape to the outer cityscape, the one continually intertwined with the other. A third narrative space is created by a large number of photographs of Istanbul and the Pamuk family taken by a variety of photographers among them the author himself and famous Armenian born Ara Güler. Walking in the city Pamuk's young narrator performs what Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* calls a pedestrian speech act:

The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple 'enunciative' function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation is an 'allocution', 'posits another opposite' the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action). (Certeau 97-98)

The walking narrator can read his life story in regards to the specific circumstances of time and place. As a result of the spatial practice of walking a space opens up, where he can enunciate *hüzün*. *Hüzün* is a feeling of loss arising from the ruins of ancient Constantinople and evoked by the humiliation of a downfallen Ottoman Empire. Since

hüzün was invented by means of the exoticized images of Istanbul in the travel writings by French authors like de Nerval, Gautier, Flaubert, Baudelaire among others, Pamuk's narrator finds his history, his culture and his feelings through the eyes of these 'Western outsiders.' He accepts these Orientalisms, because they help him accept the fact that Turkey has lost a splendid future that could have resulted from the imperial power of the Ottomans:

For people like me, Istanbul 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 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.
(Pamuk 260)

In *Istanbul: Memories of a City* Pamuk reads the history of his hometown in connection with the imprints French culture has made on Istanbul. He understands French as *pars pro toto* for the Western world. And it is from these Western sources that he gets an idea of his hometown's history. By reappropriating someone else's memory as if it were his own, Pamuk and "millions of other Istanbulites" generate the "luxury of enjoying our own past as 'exotic'" (117). Despite his acknowledgement of Said, who unravelled the exoticized view of Western travel writers on the Orient as a discursive strategy of imperialism and denigration, Pamuk aims to revitalize their Orientalism as a strategy of empowerment. By integrating the exoticized view of Istanbul into his own reservoir of memories he tries to overcome the very dichotomy between 'the East' and 'the West', between the Orient and the Occident, which Said has explicated in his 1978 study *Orientalism*:

The Orient is *watched*, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the *Description de l'Égypte* called "bizarre jouissance." The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness. And this tableau quite logically becomes a special topic for texts. Thus the circle is completed; from being exposed as what texts do not prepare one for, the Orient can return as something one writes about in a disciplined way. Its foreignness can be translated, its meanings decoded, its hostility tamed;
(Said, *Orientalism* 103)

These tactics threaten to evacuate indigenous identities, but in Pamuk's view evacuation has been headed off by local appropriations of Orientalist images: „Istanbul's greatest virtue is its people's ability to see the city through both Western and Eastern eyes" (232).

Pamuk thereby lays bare the reality-producing power of discourse by acknowledging that the real cannot be separated from the imaginary space.

Pamuk's narrator observes his city's distinctive geography, topography, history, and culture and articulates a globalized space to be inhabited by himself and his fellow citizens. His is an interstitial identity lived geographically between the European and Asian continents, lived culturally between the Orient and the West, topographically between an urban center and a great decentered web of village-like neighborhoods, politically between a military regime and a democratically elected government, and religiously between Islam and Secularism. But Pamuk's representation of the idiosyncracies of his hometown highlights similarities rather than difference. Pamuk defies outdated stereotypes which 'Istanbul' continues to trigger to this day. Istanbul's bi-continental geography and heritage as an intercultural entrepot is seductive. The city tempts us to imagine it as both a material and symbolic space where East meets West, and where crossing the Bosphorus from Kabataş to Üsküdar crosses two radically opposed cultural traditions. But the seduction is difficult. The pleasure of reading Istanbul in these ways recovers enduring and naturalized notions of otherness, an otherness based on inequality. Pamuk's Istanbul emerges from dialogical acts in which Istanbulis take up their otherness and turn it back as hybrid. Here, Pamuk sides with Said, who in *Culture and Imperialism* had emphasized, that "indeed every cultural form is radically, quintessentially hybrid" (68).

Instead of reaffirming the concept of difference, Pamuk examines how the inhabitants of Istanbul have received orientalist representations and how they contested them by way of appropriation. By allying himself with Turkish national writers such as Yahya Kemal or Tanpınar, Pamuk struggles to create a sense of self that owes as much to the Western travel writers as it does to these Turkish authors. Being profoundly attracted to the aesthetics of Hugo, Zola, Mallarmé, and Proust, they amalgamated them with their concerns about Istanbul. There is a fusion of innovative aesthetics and local issues like "the decline and fall of the great empire into which they were born" (Pamuk 101). The literary works of Kemal and Tanpınar found their origins in Istanbul's poor Muslim neighborhoods. In portraying, characterizing and depicting the most pathetic sites in town, they not only voiced the terror and grief that generations of Istanbulis felt, but made a claim to reappropriate parts of a city and an identity that had been lost and taken away from them. Because they expressed this grief in their books they saved a whole city from despair:

The Istanbul in which they lived was a city littered with the ruins of the great fall, but it was *their* city. If they gave themselves to melancholic poems about loss and destruction, they would, they discovered, find a voice all their own. (Pamuk 101)

By integrating the contradictory perspectives of the outsider and the insider, *hüzün* - the distinct melancholic trait of Istanbul's inhabitants resulting from the violent process of cultural colonization and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire - was given a literary expression, a cultural space, where it was channeled and made productive. Thanks to Kemal and Tanpınar *hüzün* became the emotional emblem of a cultural identity lost and painfully regained. It is in their acknowledgement of *hüzün*, of the cleft between a status quo ante and a status quo past the experience of being culturally imperialized, where the pain about that overpowering and the estrangement that comes along with it resides next to the powerful will to reclaim this identity in an act of cultural survival. Albeit the terror of being forced into an inner exile, of experiencing displacement inside their own culture, Tanpınar, Kemal, and ultimately Pamuk accept a cultural identity that is uncontestably hybrid.

Pamuk claims for himself and the citizens of Istanbul a cultural identity deriving from an inner exile. Even if the essential sadness that accompanies the inner exile can never be surmounted, since exile according to Said always "carries with it [...] a touch of solitude and spirituality" ("Reflections on Exile" 181), comfort can be found in the global connectedness it brings with it. This identity is imbued with the notion of globalization, because it results from a collaborative process, an equal investment of Western and Turkish writers. In James Clifford's terms this global sense of self results in a "strength of consciousness" (qtd. Mufti 97). What is more, this consciousness serves as the ideal prerequisite to operate in the modern globalized economy. Eventually his exile state of mind will turn Pamuk's narrator into a concerned writer-intellectual, who operates as a voice for the silenced in a globalized world. In order to follow Said's model as a worldly critic, who succeeds to make a scrupulous political case for 'the Colonized', 'the Palestinians', 'the Minority' in his texts, Pamuk's juvenile narrator yet needs to grow up. The teenager is still self-reflexive and self-absorbed - his joy of masturbation being but one point in case.

Where the Saidian worldly critic turns to the world as a consequence of exile, Pamuk's teenage outsider still tries to cure his feeling of estrangement by a radical turn towards himself. It is at moments of physical sensation when the boy gets a grip of

himself, quite literally it is his penis, which reassures the insecure kid and briefly provides him a sense of identity. Once the teenage writer arrives at an altruistic empathy in the interests of other people and grows to become a worldly critic, however, he will find himself addressing the world at the dawn of the twenty-first century speaking “truth to power.” He will, in Said terms, serve as “a witness to persecution and suffering, and supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority” (“Public Role”). In short, he will have grown to be a writer-intellectual with his consciousness fed by an inner exile, which he embraces because, „Istanbul’s fate is my fate: I am attached to this city because it has made me who I am“ (Pamuk 6).

In proposing his struggle to cope with the globalized history of his hometown as exemplary for others, Pamuk raises his voice as a writer-intellectual. Here, as a genre the autobiography works splendidly as an intermediary between role models and the public. The autobiography is not only a crucial document of the economic growth and intellectual motion of Turkey, it also historicizes the role of the writer, who in the globalized world of the twenty-first century must overcome the solipsisms of the nineteenth century’s artistic loner, and engage in worldly matters. Trying to offer guidance to his fellow-citizens Pamuk’s narrator embraces *hüziin* – the state of exile - as a source of power and agency for the worldly writer-intellectual.

Pamuk’s autobiography of 2005 exemplifies the late Saidean concept of *worldliness*. In the globalized world of the twenty-first century, where the writer-intellectual’s political engagement claims as much or sometimes even more public attention as his texts do due to aesthetic reasons, the autobiographical genre becomes the quintessential literary format of *worldliness*. Pamuk’s text is a vehicle to introduce the literary and critical performance of the political pariah, later visiting professor at Columbia University, and first Turkish Nobel Laureate for Literature. It promotes the *worldliness* of writer-intellectual Orhan Pamuk.

Works Cited

- Berberoglu, Berch. *The Internationalization of Capital: Imperialism and Capitalist Development on a World Scale*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988.
- Friedman, Thomas L. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. New York: Anchor Books A Division of Random House, 2000.
- Gallagher, Catherine. „Politics, the Profession, and the Critic.“ *Diacritics* 15.2 (Summer 1985): 37-43.
- Grant Thornton International, *International Business Report: Emerging Markets 2007*. URL:

- <<http://www.grantthornton.com/portal/site/gtcom>> 7.6.2007.
- Mufti, Aamir R. "Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture." *Critical Inquiry* 25.1 (Autumn 1998): 95-125.
- Pamuk, Orhan. *Istanbul: Memories of a City*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.
- Robbins, Bruce. "Review: Homelessness and Worldliness." *Diacritics* 13.3 (Autumn 1983): 69-77.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- . "Interview: Edward Said." *Diacritics* 6.3 (Autumn 1976): 30-47.
- . *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. (1978) Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995.
- . "Reflections on Exile." *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2003. 173-86.
- . *Representations of the Intellectual*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- . *Out of Place: A Memoir*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- . "The public role of writers and intellectuals." *The Nation*, 17-24 September 2001. URL: <www.thenation.com/doc/20010917/essay> 21.11.2007
- . "The Text, the World, the Critic." *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8.2 (Autumn 1975): 1-23.