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Ecocritical Approach to Istanbul in Orhan Pamuk's Novel *A Strangeness in My Mind*

Metin Karadağ

Abstract

The first traces of environmental approaches to literary studies appear in the United States in the 1970s. Data on nature were used for pastoral purposes in literary texts. Along with the theoretical development of ecocriticism, these data came to be utilized in methodological terms. Ecocritical approaches narrated by outstanding men of letters have gradually achieved a global dimension. The wide use of natural themes and motives in the traditional works of Turkish literature established the basis for late modern and post-modern works. Themes and motives based on rural narratives in modern Turkish literature have developed into an urban-centred form as of the 21st century. Issues that arise from rapid urbanization, distorted settlements and the rapid exploitation of natural resources appear as criticism and sometimes as revolt in literary works. As an ardent admirer of Istanbul's natural and historical wealth, Nobel-winning author Orhan Pamuk implements an ecocritical approach in his novels that are set in Istanbul. This paper examines the dimensions of Pamuk's ecocritical approach in *A Strangeness in My Mind* and presents the impacts and reflections of this theory in terms of the author's design.

Keywords: ecocriticism, Orhan Pamuk, nature, nature and literature, ecocritical approach

Introduction: Ecocriticism

Distorted settlement caused by rapid population growth and craving for profit (or seeking for rent) in many developing countries has resulted in a disruption of the balance of nature. This environmentalist approach, which can be traced back to 17th-century's human-oriented views and actions, was initiated in the 1960s in response to this rapid disruption and brought about (have given rise to) the development of methodological disciplines over time. As a discipline that examines the positions of environmental problems in literary works, ecocriticism drew attention for the first time in the United States and then in Europe and has continued to gain recognition worldwide. Artists who assumed a sense of responsibility and concern for the future in the field of literature addressed environmental issues and environmental protection in their works. The common ground between this literature and many other scientific and artistic fields has brought ecology onto the agenda since the 20th century. In the meantime, artists have highlighted environmental themes in their works, and critical methods that focus on ecology and the environment have become popular among critics. Professor Cheryl Glotfelty, who is considered a pioneer in the field of "ecology and literature", penned the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* and was the first person to present concerns about the earth's life support system, noting that issues concerning race, gender and class have become important topics in the 20th century (Glotfelty, 1996: 25-68).

In terms of the philosophical basis of the method, efforts to maintain the welfare of humanity and society as well as to protect all lives and to prevent the distortion of the natural cycle have become prominent pursuant to the attempt of preserving the balance of nature. The violations against the earth, humankind and animal species and the brutal exploitation of nature represented as "modernity and development" in the colourful advertisements of the capitalist system especially in a large number of developing countries, While at the same time, global warming, the exploitation of water resources, the lack of seasonal balance, the degradation of natural energy resources, and environmental pollution caused by unplanned industrialization have been overlooked (Coupe, 2000: 33-45-88). Following Aldo Leopold, who took the first step towards focusing on literary ecology, environmental sciences and ethics instead of the anthropocentric mechanical world, we observe that European and American authors from the 19th century, such as Gilbert White, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Mory Austin and Edward Abbey known as the pioneers of literary ecology made progress in accordance with anthropocentric and environmental-oriented ethics (Özdağ, 2005: 176).

It is a common opinion that the first ecological criticism in the field of literature was “Literature and Ecology” by William Ruckert (Ruckert, 105-123). Following literary works and philosophical remarks, organizational criticism of ecology within the academic context assumed a more functional role in American universities after the establishment of the ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature & Ecology) in Nevada in 1992. Since then, ecocriticism has referred to the stages of criticism regarding efforts to raise environmental awareness, to convey environmental problems towards cultural and political centres and to criticize literary-cultural studies in accordance with new cultural values based on ecology (Özer, 2001: 61-62).

Environmental criticism examines the dimensions of humankind’s relation with respect to nature pursuing an interdisciplinary approach and aims to reflect environmental problems and sensitivities in literary criticism (Solak, 2012: 211-224). Polemics on the concept of “nature”, which is one of the most controversial notions in ecocritical criticism, have failed to assert definite judgements on the traditional nature-culture dichotomy which is challenged by environmentalist critics (Garrard, 2012: 39). Within the bounds of our study, we acknowledge the perception of “nature” as the sum total of exploited places during the transformation process of cities into megalopolises, destroyed natural resources, endangered species and animals, air pollution and individuals who fail to assume responsibility for the environment and who lack a green consciousness in despite of these problems. This study attempts to apply a methodical approach to the analysis of Orhan Pamuk’s depiction of Istanbul in his novels written from an ecocritical approach. Memoirs/documentaries, interviews, comments and criticisms about Pamuk’s works are thus considered in addition to his novels.

1. Problem: Literature and nature

Humankind has always produced oral, musical, and mobile actions and works for the purpose of protecting nature and natural beings with various rituals. Shamanistic culture is based on preventing calamities that shamans see or sense in nature as well as on stories, songs and dances that are generated to protect nature from an animistic perspective. Almost all mythological sources have guardian fairies that protect trees, springs, fields and hills (Berman, 2007: 45-61). However, the animistic power of nature faded with Aristotle’s saying, “*Nature, just like man, has a right to ownership and benefit*”. Scholars and thinkers who have studied animistic cultures, such as Christopher Manes and Mircea Eliade, have argued that nature is not limited to persons and that plants and animals are the main elements of this magnificent world (Eliade, 1971: 43-87).

2. Data: Environmentalist works and perceptions in Turkish literature

Anonymous folk poetry and folk narratives in Turkish literature have emerged in the historical process with a rich basis in nature and have maintained their fluidity within this scope. The reality that nomadic culture is based on a nature-oriented lifestyle has been an important factor in this regard. Humankind is not deemed to be superior before nature in the shamanist worldview of Turkic tribes. Like other living creatures (and even moreso), humankind is subject to the rule of souls that exist in nature and that encompass the invisible universe (Bayat, 2006: 26). Prof. Dr. Hikmet Birand, who published his work entitled *Anadolu Manzaraları (Anatolian Sceneries)* in 1975, is one of the leading names in this field. The most important names and pioneers of the topic comprising Istanbul in Turkish literature are Yahya Kemal and his student and admirer, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (Demirkol, 2010: 80-125). Yahya Kemal and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, who are appreciated as the greatest poets and novelists of the 20th century in Turkish literature, sought understanding of the things they had lost and perceived melancholia while they wandered around the woeful, solitary districts of the city (Pamuk, 2003: 138).

Another prominent author who depicted nature as an essential element of his narratives was Cevat Şakir Kabaağaçlı, whose pen name was Halikarnas Balıkcısı (The Fisherman of Halicarnassus). Even the titles of his works reflect his approach to nature. For example, his stories entitled *Long Live the Sea (Yaşasın Deniz)*, *The Smiling Island (Gülen Ada)*, *From the Aegean Coasts (Ege Kıyılarından)*, *Hello Mediterranean (Merhaba Akdeniz)*, and *The Bottom of the Aegean (Ege’nin Dibi)* and novels such as *The Blue Exile (Mavi Sürgün)*, *Aganta Burina Burinita*, and *Those Away at Sea (Deniz Gurbetçileri)* particularly address the love of the sea and the protection of the waters. Considered among the most important masters of modern Turkish narratives, Sait Faik Abasıyanık usually employs Istanbul as a space in his works.

His cultural comments on Istanbul are worthy of attention, and Abasıyanık usually includes elements of nature in his stories. Raised in a family of nomads, Yaşar Kemal has extensively depicted the richness of Cilician fauna in his novels and has consistently used the theme of love for nature and its protection in almost all of his works. The Dirmiş character in *Dear Shameless Death (Sevgili Arsız Ölüm)* by Latife Tekin, who is one of the pioneering figures in Turkish novels using different narratives and methods, prefers a life-style based on animistic beliefs following the forcible detachment of himself from nature. In her *Berji Kristin Tales from the Garbage Hills (Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları)*, Tekin discusses peasants who are forced to be detached from nature and the natural environment while criticizing the city order with a revolt against the environmental pollution caused by city life. We will discuss this issue further with respect to Orhan Pamuk's works, which also address the exploitation of nature in cities.

3. Methods: An ecocritical approach to Istanbul in Orhan Pamuk's works

Ecocriticism addresses the environmental circumstances as well as the transformations/changes and deformations observed by an author within an environment. This approach is not only limited to nature; it also addresses environmental factors caused by unplanned industrial activities in cities as well as the negative impacts of imbalance. Like every global metropolis, Istanbul faces threats such as environmental pollution, the exploitation of nature, the irregular consumption of natural resources and erosion caused by the heavy migration flow and increased population, especially in the last century.

Born and raised in Istanbul, Orhan Pamuk had the opportunity to witness the changes and transformations that the city has undergone over the years. He is a true lover of Istanbul who has carefully and attentively followed national and foreign works on Istanbul since he began writing. Most critics argue that Orhan Pamuk symbolizes the old-new, East-West dichotomies in the city of Istanbul, which is located where the continents of Europe and Asia intersect and is the inheritor of a grand cultural heritage that was transferred to the new Turkish state through the Ottoman Empire, as narrated in Byzantine sources. Critics note that Pamuk creates his narratives with characters that are integrated into the city (Anadolu-Okur, 2009: 68).

However, Orhan Pamuk mainly addresses the cultural context of the material world without mentioning the substance-essence conflict evidently found in every Turkish novel that addresses the binary opposition of East vs. West (Uğurlu, 2003: 43). Knowing that it is impossible journey through time, Pamuk refuses the unilateral dominance of modernity and its function of representation. He even reveals ironic reflections with sharp humour. Feeling (and even desiring) the perpetuity of Western observation, Pamuk pens his works to break orientalist expectations rather than to promote them (Doğan, 2014: 37)

Pamuk believes that *sorrow (hüzün)* is the primary characteristic of the city and has emerged for two reasons: although Istanbul has witnessed the collapse of a global empire, it has also managed to preserve its natural beauty. *According to Pamuk, Istanbul is permeated by an atmosphere of hüzün. The Turkish word has entered the vocabulary of book-reading foreigners who have succumbed to Istanbul's allure* (Tillinghast, 2012).

Pamuk studied architecture for three years and approaches the city in terms of its architectural structure while he reflects the intertwinement of stones, soil, clay, tiles and glazed tiles with humankind in historical terms. Evaluating the relationship between space and individuals, Bachelard highlights the fact that the unconscious sits in space and that spaces related to private life should be identified to comprehend the inner life (Bachelard, 1996: 37). In addition to the deformation and disruption in cities, Orhan Pamuk examines the different dimensions of the private lives of individuals in his novels, which mainly focus on Istanbul.

4. An ecocritical approach to *A Strangeness in My Mind*

Orhan Pamuk's 2014 book *A Strangeness in My Mind* is the long-running story of Istanbul's transformation in the last 50-60 years, which can also be seen in earlier books by the author. The adventures of a countryman named Mevlut who sells the traditional Ottoman drink of "boza" in the old streets of Istanbul are portrayed in this book, which is narrated with intersexuality and postmodern elements.

In this context, *The novel, A Strangeness in My Mind, can be considered as a textual representation of solid and abstract cultural values –such as ‘boza’-that define cultural memory and continuity of naïve and considerate people*(Kule: 2016. 31).

Although irregular industrialization and urban sprawl caused by unplanned and capitalistic implementations have long been addressed as sociological matters, these issues have failed to be addressed by society itself due to their inability to exceed academic circles. This gap has been filled with literary works. Orhan Pamuk was born to a bourgeois family in Nişantaşı, a high-society district of Istanbul. Since his childhood, he has “observed Istanbul” and applied social scientific data (for example, he lived in eastern Turkey, in the city of Kars, while he wrote his novel *Snow*). While writing *A Strangeness in My Mind*, he became familiar with commoners, met with people from backstreets, and conducted interviews with workers, mussel-sellers, property developers, and ice-cream sellers and observed their culture.

While Pamuk reflects the world of the labourers who struggle to survive in this megalopolis, he creates his own personal approach to the topic that can be regarded as a protest in sociological terms. *A Strangeness in My Mind* can be considered a book about environmental problems during the process of urban transformation, love and time. The protagonist of the novel, the peddler Mevlut, is a tragicomic “flâneur” who sells “boza” to the masses, who swiftly disregard tradition in the face of modernism and affluence. “*The postmodern narrative of Orhan Pamuk locates the peddler at the heart of the city as a ‘flâneur’*” (Korkmaz: 2015).

This novel addresses the corrupt system in Istanbul that began 50 years ago but accelerated in the 2000s and depicts the gloomy pattern of the ethical degeneration caused by this corruption. The novel creates its own holism with interwoven narratives, different narrators, flashbacks and sometimes tragicomic reflections and collages with grotesque treatments. Encouraged by his father, Mevlut leaves Anatolia to make money in Istanbul, *the city paved with gold*. Mevlut’s first impression of the city is subsequently recalled with melancholy, and his observations on the environment provide a clue about the upcoming transformation:

Most of the streets had been paved with cobblestones when he first arrived in the city, but now they were all asphalt. The three-storey buildings, surrounded by their own gardens, which had made up most of the city, had been razed to the ground and replaced with taller apartment blocks in which those who lived on the upper floors could not possibly hear the call of a vendor passing in the street below. (Pamuk, 2014: 28/29).

Mevlut slightly and secretly envies wealth and luxury as an outsider while he observes the environmental changes with fear and puzzlement: *However, in the last decade or so, the demon of change had cast its spell over the neighbourhood as it had over the whole city, and the fabric of that past had been torn asunder, causing those denizens to leave and the clubs playing Ottoman and European-style Turkish and continental music to shut-down, giving way to noisy new establishments serving Adana and Shish Kebabs cooked over an open grill and washed down with rakı*(Pamuk, 29).

While the rising conservative-religious government and its followers gained power with the new capital structuring and surrounded the city (and hence the country as a whole) during the social transformation process, liberals were disgusted with the military guardianship of former periods, and Kemalists, leftists and many others were struggling to hold a place in this chaos, Mevlut was observing the events like an Anatolian saint and constantly experiencing “a strangeness in his mind”. It is surprising to the reader that he does not fall into that chaos yet fails to understand what was happening (Çelik, 2015:4). This strangeness does not highlight the corruption and fight against fraud that he observes but rather brings submission, surrender and resignation, which can be considered a form of fatalism, to the forefront. Taking a share and not protesting is the natural objective of a poor man who left the rural areas for urban sites when speaking of plunder. There was a creek that was known by its old Ottoman name, Buzludere, meaning “Icy Creek”. However, *the waste generated over fifteen years by more than eighty thousand Anatolian migrant settlers on the surrounding hills, and by a multitude of factories, small and large, soon caused the river to be known as Bokludere, meaning “Dung Creek”* (55). The wonderful silhouette of Istanbul is remarkably transformed as an outcome of the “conquests” by migrants on every hill and massive environmental pollution. Known as the “city on the seven hills”, Istanbul is now condemned to lose its natural beauty due to environmental problems and *many factories, small and large; auto body shops, workshops, depots, medicine and lightbulb factories and skyscrapers, tall buildings and minarets with the ghostly shadow of the city...The city itself and its neighbourhoods —*

where Mevlut and his father sold yogurt in the mornings and boza in the evenings, and where Mevlut went to school — were only mysterious smudges on the horizon (55). Mevlut's father was an older-generation migrant who sincerely shared his feelings and observations about the exploitation and invasion of nature.

The father describes how the green hills were quickly occupied six years ago when they first arrived and says, "I explained that for the poor souls who'd come here from far away the priority was to find a job and settle down in the city, and in order to get to the city ahead of everyone else in the mornings, they all tried to build their homes as close as possible to the roads at the foot of the hills, so that you could almost see the neighbourhoods growing from the bottom of each hill towards the top (56).

Those hills usually had a view of Bosphorus, and the first shanty houses there looked like they were about to collapse any time. These one-roomed shacks were usually occupied by six or seven single males who had neither a job nor property, which gradually created the unregistered, suburban areas of Istanbul and, later, the slum culture of the city: *Mevlut and his father had built the house in Kültepe with their own hands by carrying and using hollow bricks, cement, mud and tins (60)*. The shameful tools of politics are the guiltiest parts of the environmental exploitation of Istanbul. Concessions were made for the sake of political benefits, and disrespect to nature and the formation of gangs caused the exploitation of natural resources and acceleration of environmental problems in the city:

Pollution in the city caused by the military coup of March 12, 1971, is also vividly portrayed in the novel: *The army whitewashed all of Istanbul's pavements, anything that seemed dirty or untidy (the whole city pretty much qualified), the trunks of huge plane trees, and walls dating back to the Ottoman era, turning the whole place into an army cantonment (78)*. The Turkish invasion of Cyprus on July 20, 1974 (100), and the Alevi-Sunni conflict and massacres (142) that occurred in Maraş, which is located in southeast Turkey, in December 1979 increased the migration rate to Istanbul and deeply affected life in Istanbul. The natural paradise of the Bosphorus hills laid down arms to concrete and steel, and the pastoral wealth that was reflected in this geography was subjugated to ardent destruction:

Illegal powers, which operated as the successors of gangs that seized property and goods that belonged to Greeks who were deported from the country overnight in 1964, relentlessly and jauntily continued to loot Istanbul:

The mafia here is stronger and more vicious than the gangs who run Duttepe. In the last five years, this whole place has been overrun by drifters and castaways, and there are so many poor rural migrants, Kurds, Gypsies, and foreigners who have settled on these streets that the neighbourhood is worse than Duttepe was fifteen years ago (217). As they were driving uphill on a dusty dirt road, "the world seemed to grow older with every house, chimney, and tree that passed. Single-storey houses that hadn't even been finished but already looked old; pitifully empty lots; walls built out of hollow bricks, scrap metal, and bits of wood (227)" were the general characteristics of these new living areas. These sites, which had no sewage system or regular water supply, were the source of natural and environmental problems as well as serious pollution related to individuals as well as society as a whole.

References to environmental problems appear in the novel, such as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster that occurred in Russia and the wind that brought cancer clouds to Istanbul (257) as well as the destruction by bombing of the old bridge in Mostar (301). "Nobody wanted to remember or recall" that Tarlabası had actually been a Greek-Armenian-Jewish-Syria neighbourhood since the 1920s, an old district with a unique culture (258). However, the infamous Capital Levy of 1942 marked the first strike against these minority groups, and the same government continued to oppress minorities under the Nazi impact of the Second World War. *After a crowd of people holding sticks and flags were looting churches and shops; women were being abused and priests were being chased, most Greeks fled to Greece and those who stayed had to leave their homes and lands in twenty-four hours after a legal decision had been issued by the government in 1964 (259)*. In his 20th year in Istanbul, the street vendor Mevlut becomes depressed after seeing environmental problems grow daily and experiences the intensity of a "strangeness in his mind":

He was fond of old things that reflected the nostalgic atmosphere of the city, such as “*the old cemeteries, the sight of a mosque wall covered in moss, and the unintelligible Ottoman writing on a broken fountain with its brass taps long dried up*” (261).

Mevlut feels sorrowful about the fact that a hundred-year-old wooden building called Gloria Theater (ŞanSineması), owned by an Armenian charity trust, had gone up in flames on a cold winter night in 1987 because the theatre had staged a performance that mocked Islamists and thus fell victim to arson (275). Another environmental problem highlighted in the novel is the November 14, 1991, incident in which a Lebanese merchant vessel collided with another vessel on the stretch of Bosphorus and caused 20,000 sheep to fall to the sea. Some of the poor animals made it to the shore, but the sea and the land suffered grave pollution due to the carcasses of drowned sheep. The incident was later recalled as an urban legend that stated that the sheep returned and attacked people as ghosts. Mevlutasked himself unanswerable questions;

the plight of the sheep reminded him of Jonah in the belly of the whale. What sins had the sheep committed to have ended up in that dark place? Was it more like heaven or hell in there? The Almighty God had sent Abraham a sheep to spare him from sacrificing his own son. Why had He sent twenty thousand sheep to Istanbul?(299).

There were protests from the Greek landlords, *whose lawyers took the government to court over the property seizures, and from the architects’ union and a handful of university students battling to save these historic buildings, but their voices went largely unheard*” (259).

Mevlut and his family watched the terrorist attacks in New York at the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, with awe (299), and they observed the destruction of Istanbul around *these broken old fountains, derelict bathhouses, and dusty, filthy, ghost- and spider-ridden religious retreats built by bearded and be turbaned Ottoman leaders* (403). As the historical heritage is destroyed with the demolition of ancient buildings and structures, the archaeological wealth of Istanbul, which is discovered in every excavation, is also treated as rubbish: *The hotel in Astray was a new building. While excavating the foundation, the contractor had found the remains of a small Byzantine church, and since such a discovery would normally have put a stop to the building works, he’d had to pay out some hefty bribes across the municipality to make sure no one noticed the ruins and to compensate himself for the cost, he’d dug an extra basement floor* (404).

Uneducated, labourer masses from the rural areas serve as the foundation of the happiness of “White Turks”, who are the holders of exploitation and wealth. The new settlements, in contrast, maintain their existence in gloomy panoramas of Istanbul’s identity, which has survived despite the inevitable negativity of the era, with historical aesthetics and lyricism:

Scenes showing the situation of the looted countryside are gruesome: *Istanbul has of late been a bullet train of urbanization, surging from 2 million people to 15 million in just over four decades. As in so many rising cities around the world, those shaping its future at hyper-speed seem less concerned about creating a nice place to live than fueling an economic locomotive*(Lepeska, 4).

The novel also mentions that those “*six or seven storey-high, hideous gecekondu (shanty) homes*” (443) are at risk of collapse in the anticipated Istanbul earthquake, which is estimated to be of a great magnitude, and that horrible tragedies may occur as an outcome of serious environmental problems related to the “*inadequate sewage system that cannot absorb all the water coming down the neighbourhood’s steep slopes*” (444). *The shiny and sparkling past and the destructive modernity which has failed to make a healthy communication with history has left its mark on the city*(Doğan, 293). Having observed the gradual destruction of Istanbul over the years, Mevlut grieves for his shanty house when it is being demolished by bulldozers: *When the time came for his own one-room house, Mevlut felt his heart breaking. He observed his whole childhood, the food he’d eaten, the homework he’d done, the way things had smelled, the sound of his father grunting in his sleep, hundreds of thousands of memories all smashed to pieces in a single swipe of the bulldozer shovel*(445). OrhanPamuk quotes **Baudelaire** at this point: *The form of a city, Changes faster, alas! than the human heart*”(446).

We see women, the dramatic figures of the novel, suffering from depression as they feel deeply unhappy about living in tall and ugly buildings set upon old shanty hills. People who cannot pay their debts to contractors fall to the streets; women who miss their own gardens and trees back in the village grieve when they see mulberry trees being pulled down.

Although Mevlut had long observed the horrifying transformation of the city, he still felt shocked and puzzled. It seemed as though thousands of windows on the walls were watching Mevlut. As he watched Istanbul in his apartment at the top of a skyscraper while holding the documentation of title that he was given in exchange for his knocked-down shanty, Mevlut felt fear and wished to jump into the eye-catching lines of buildings (461). This chaos and the devastating mobility constantly intensified the “strangeness in Mevlut’s mind”; he had now turned 52 and was a person who identified with the rural culture.

Mevlut’s world is based on reflections of the tangible and real functions and positions of metropolises within the context of contemporary global culture in addition to a fictional, nostalgic extension by the author:

Conclusion

One of the objectives of contemporary global intellectualism is to contribute to studies that aim to prevent environmental problems with global initiatives and artistic/cultural productions. Global environmental problems have reached a level that threatens our future. As a Nobel Prize-winning novelist, Orhan Pamuk has become a reputable author in world literature with his masterfully written novels that address the environmental problems of Istanbul, a global city that connects two continents. Pamuk has also successfully depicted the societal problems caused by these issues in his novels and portrayed the related corruption and degeneration in society.

The Ottoman culture observed in Istanbul is depicted in Pamuk’s *The Black Book*. The conflict of generations in the Early Republican period of Turkey and its reflections in the city within the framework of civilization and East-West binary oppositions are portrayed in his *Mr. Cevdet and His Sons*. Urban sprawl and unplanned industrialization in the nature-sea setting around Tuzla and its surrounding districts are explored in *The Silent House*, whereas *My Name is Red* addresses the portraits in the mysterious corridors of the palace in the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul. Orhan Pamuk designed *A Strangeness in My Mind* as an extension of the topic of Istanbul, which he has addressed since he was 22. He has portrayed the city with all of its transformations and exploitations under the guise of development. Pamuk has revealed how the texture of the city has been damaged by environmental devastation and has fictionalized how Istanbul has assumed a hybrid culture and spirit with an ironic, mostly realist and sometimes protesting tone based in environmental awareness. The novel addresses the story of a street vendor, Mevlut, who arrived in Istanbul as a migrant from the rural areas at an early age. He had children and grew old there during Turkey’s difficult period from the 1960s to the 2010s, when the country experienced conflicts of civilization. Another interesting aspect of the narrative is that for the first time, a global perspective outside of Turkey with respect to environmental problems was included in a literary work.

The protagonist of the novel, Mevlut, receives the quick and multi-dimensional transformation of the city with submission and even embraces them, although he feels depressed. The real reason Mevlut experiences a strangeness in his mind as a typical example of fatalism in the society is his “conscience”, which never leaves him. Refusing to become rich without deserving it, Mevlut feels sorrow while watching the environmental exploitation in the streets, avenues and boulevards that he wandered for many hours, days and years. In fact, almost every character in Orhan Pamuk’s novels on Istanbul experiences this sorrow.

It is understood that the main problem of *A Strangeness in My Mind* involves revealing the meaningless and absurd disorder and explaining the relentless exploitation of nature in cities. Mevlut, in a way, is the inner voice of Orhan Pamuk as a character that observes and criticizes but fails to act on problems. He reflects the conscience of lower-middle class labourers in Istanbul. Indeed, “a strangeness” will always occur in the mind of this street vendor, who cannot restrain his admiration and confusion before the hidden and magnificent power of Istanbul, which still reflects its aesthetic values and its historical and cultural heritage against all odds and damages experienced in the last century.

A Strangeness in My Mind is a revolt against a culture based on the consumer economy of capitalism and against disrespect towards nature. The novel also ironically criticizes the chaos caused by miscommunication. Seagulls that wait for a piece of “simit” (Turkish bagels with sesame) from the passengers of ferries that carry centuries-old memories in urban transportation, street cats and dogs that are destroyed or deported to Sivriada (aka Hayırsızada) by sultans so that they do not disturb “foreigners”, and “tourists who are sources of foreign currencies” are the objects of Istanbul’s centuries-old identity. The novel ironically and soul-shatteringly depicts the exploitation of natural resources for profit-seeking and the upbringing of new generations that are alien to their own identities and cultures. It reveals how these generations experience conflicts, confusion and depression related to this cycle. In *A Strangeness in My Mind*, Orhan Pamuk attempts to reveal the unique identity of Istanbul because he does not want it to remain a mere memory in old photographs and miniatures; he wants to give it a soul. He has succeeded in portraying this identity based on city-centred environmental problems that awaken readers’ sentiments.

Orhan Pamuk displays the legendary resistance of Istanbul against environmental exploitation. We see Istanbul as the main protagonist of the novel, in which lost hopes, disappointments and the intertwining of people are portrayed together. Orhan Pamuk performs this awareness and marks the future of this type of literature and art.

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