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## THE REGIME OF MEMORY IN “THE MUSEUM OF INNOCENCE”: THE PAST AS AN AGE OF INNOCENCE

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### Introduction

In this paper, the regime of memory that *The Museum of Innocence* -a museum created and curated by Orhan Pamuk in 2012 in line with his 2008 novel of the same title- produces will be discussed. In the manifesto that appears in the museum catalogue, a new form of museum is called for in place of the conventional museums and whether this objective is fulfilled in this museum will be examined here. The process of modernization in Turkey is criticized in the novel/museum for being imposed from above; for having created a society that is an imitation of the West and for the commodity fetishism that it produced. This paper tries to answer the question whether the museum that criticizes the process of modernization in Turkey on many

levels generates a productive and transformative memory regime that questions the modern understandings of man, time, space and reality and creates an awareness of multiple perspectives on history.

The employment of the term novel/museum referring to *The Museum of Innocence* in this paper results from the idea that although the novel *The Museum of Innocence* and the museum of the same title are two distinct products, there is a close relationship between them. In the novel, the protagonist Kemal Basmacı collects the belongings of the woman that he loves and the objects that remind him of her and he speaks of constructing a museum in order to exhibit his collection which fill in for the lack of his beloved and he wants the author Orhan Pamuk to write their story. As a matter of fact, the novel was first designed by Orhan Pamuk as a museum catalogue. But later Pamuk wrote the novel, opened the museum in which the collection of Kemal Basmacı, the protagonist of the novel is exhibited and wrote a catalogue for the museum titled *The Innocence of Objects* (2012). Although the museum was opened four years after the publication of the book, the idea of constructing a museum was an important part of this design from the very beginning (Pamuk 2012: 11).

*The Museum of Innocence* designating at once a novel and a museum reinforces ambiguity regarding the distinction between reality and fiction since both in the novel and in the museum, the fictional and the real are interwoven and it is nearly impossible to separate them from each other. Intertextuality is pushed to its limits through the positioning of different texts upon each other and the idea of absolute reality is problematized. Through the positioning of the author Orhan Pamuk in the novel, the novel reveals its constructedness, its fictive nature; and through the positioning of Kemal Basmacı, a fictive character as the creator of the museum and fictive characters such as Füsün and Celal Salik -a character both in this novel and another novel by Orhan Pamuk titled *The Black Book* (1990)- in the creative team of the museum, the line between fiction and reality is once more disturbed.

There is a cyclical referential relationship between the novel and the museum which eliminates the question regarding the original and which renders both the novel and the museum open-ended. According to Jacques Derrida (1976: 145), the place of the supplement “as substitute” “is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness”, but it is also “exterior, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it”. The idea of the original is put in danger in the relationship between the museum and the novel as supplements.

*The Museum of Innocence* materializes the journey/experience of the reader making way for the questioning of the position of the reader/visitor. Reader turning the pages of the novel is put

in a concretized world of the novel, but always with a degree of excess, in the museum. In the entrance of the museum, there is a quotation from Celal Salik; in the 68<sup>th</sup> glass box Bozacı Mevlut, another character from one of Pamuk's novels, *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2014) which in fact was published later than *The Museum of Innocence* appears; in the 19<sup>th</sup> glass box the death announcements of real people such as the journalist Abdi ipekçi who was murdered in 1979 are mixed together with the death announcements of fictional characters such as Cevdet Işıklı and Celal Salik from Pamuk's novels. The reader/visitor floating between different narratives gains awareness about her own position as a reader/visitor and about the textuality of the "real" world.

Conventional forms of novel and museum have been products of the individualistic desire to conquer the world in all its aspects through the composition of a closed and a controllable world:

(...) museums and novels share a lot in common. Each affords us the pleasures that come from entering complete and self-contained worlds, and what's more, worlds that have been reduced to a miniature scale, at least in comparison with the universe that they reflect" (Morris 2012: p.6).

Mikhail Bakhtin addresses two competing stylistic lines that have been prevalent throughout the process of the development of the novel in his article titled "Discourse in the Novel": the first one that has been the dominant style in the novel genre "knows only single language and single style" (Bakhtin 1934-5: 375); the key features of the second style which is more productive, questioning and transformative is "heteroglossia" (polyphony) and "the auto-criticism of discourse" (Bakhtin 1934-5: 412). In Bakhtinian terms, *dialogical* novels which enable a democratic dialogue between the voices in the novel (the voice of the author, the voices of the characters and the voices of the socio-ideological groups represented in the novel) and between the author and the reader belong to this second stylistic line. These novels, besides leading the reader to question the novel in terms of form, content and discourse, lead her to question the social, cultural, historical and ideological structures that she herself is a part of. In the following chapters, the regime of memory reproduced in *The Museum of Innocence* will be analyzed and whether the formal technics used to establish the novel and the museum as metafictional works help to create an awareness about history will be discussed.

## The Museum of the Individual: A New Museum?

*The Museum of Innocence* -both the novel and the museum- tells the story of the modern individual and everyday life in a modernizing non-western society. Nevertheless, every museum puts forth a claim about history:

Whether we like it or not, every acquisition (and indeed disposal), every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object or work of art, together with other objects or works of art, within the context of a temporary exhibition or museum display means placing a certain construction upon history, be it the history of the distant or more recent past, of our own culture or someone else's, of mankind in general or a particular aspect of human endeavor (Vergo 2006: 2-3).

In the manifesto titled “A Modest Manifesto for Museums” that appears in the museum catalogue, the principles that shape *The Museum of Innocence* are introduced. This manifesto puts forth an individualistic understanding of museums and *The Museum of Innocence* is the embodiment of the principles of this new museum.

Pamuk criticizes the state-sponsored museums that represent the state and he praises the museums that can speak for individuals just as the novels. According to him, large national museums such as the Louvre and the Hermitage “present the story of the nation -history, in a word- as being far more important than the stories of individuals”, but “the stories of the individuals are much better suited to displaying the depths of our humanity” (Pamuk 2012: 55). Interestingly, nationalism and individualism spring from a common worldview since both of them are products of the modern way of seeing: both of them reproduce a romantic, triumphant and a humanist self-image and indeed romanticism is a movement that praises nationalism to the skies as much as individualism; both construct their subjects (the individual and the nation) as absolute and essential concepts; both produce and depend on an illusion of grandiosity that is constructed not in relation to, but against others. It is ironic that although Pamuk introduces the nation as a problematic issue, he takes the notion of the individual for granted. Althusser places the concept of the subject at the heart of ideology; according to him, “the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing” (Althusser 1975: 175). The distinction between the stories of individuals and the story of the nation causes one to ignore the fact that both produce a unified, homogeneous and a limited perspective. The national museums telling the story of the nation support individualism by constructing the visitor as a subject who takes pride in his ancestry and thus, in his very own self. *The Museum of Innocence* reflects Pamuk’s unitary vision about Turkey, Istanbul, modernity and the process of

modernization in Turkey and thus fails to present multiple perspectives on history just like the national museums he criticized for reproducing official history.

*The Museum of Innocence* is a novel/museum of objects and the objects are qualified by innocence in the novel/museum because it is the individuals who give them their meanings, not the nations and cultures. The use of ordinary and everyday objects in the museum displaces the question of authenticity and originality prevalent in conventional museums and this seems to be the aim of Orhan Pamuk considering his manifesto for museums. As a result of the association of authenticity with *constructed* institutional meanings which are imposed upon the individual from above, the ordinary is seen most suitable to tell the story of the individual. But it is questionable whether the unique arrangement of ordinary objects in an artfully constructed museum do not attain the so-called aura that is associated with the elitist art objects found in the sanctioned museums. Individual is positioned in contrast to the structures, community, institutions and the state in Pamuk's manifesto. But if the problem with national museums is that they produce and impose a unitary ideology, can Pamuk's museum escape the production and imposition of a unitary vision of its own making?

### **The Voices in "The Museum of Innocence": Singularity Reinforced**

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*The Museum of Innocence* claims to be the museum of the individual in opposition to national museums which produce a unitary vision regarding history. Based on the Bakhtinian idea that dialogical narratives could produce multiple perspectives on history, the dialogue between the different voices in *The Museum of Innocence* will be discussed here. The entrance of Orhan Pamuk into the novel is a reflexive technique causing the reader to gain awareness about the constructedness of the novel, but it also reinforces realism since the character of Orhan Pamuk in the novel tells that he has written the story that Kemal has told him in the first-person singular: "In the book you are telling your own story, and saying 'I,' Kemal Bey. I am speaking in your voice. Right now I am trying very hard to put myself in your place, to be you" (Pamuk 2009: 707). After Pamuk settles into the position of the subject that was filled by Kemal until that point, Kemal turns into an object of the story told. Kemal as the collector also becomes the object of his own collection when he moves into the museum: "He to whom the collection belongs, belongs also to the collection" (Maleuvre 1999: 97). Pamuk, being the mirror-image of Kemal, rather than considering Kemal's perspective from an ironic distance, identifies with him and this lack of distance between the two characters prevents a shift in perspective. The shift of narrators becomes meaningless in the end and it turns into a technique that plays into the hands

of the critiques of postmodern literature who evaluated it as play; however, if an ironic perspective had been adopted and Pamuk had reserved his own voice, it would have led the reader to problematize the perspective presented in the novel. The proliferation of the narrating voices in the novel rather than producing multiplicity, ends up reproducing a strengthening of singularity.

*The Museum of Innocence* creates a multi-layered experience for the museum visitor. The first layer consists of the experience of the museum visitor with regards to his relationship with the single objects in the museum based on his own memories. The visitor who is familiar with the Istanbul of that period will be able to relate with the objects in the museum personally. The second layer consists of the museum visitor's experience of the design of the whole museum which could itself be seen as an artwork. The third layer consists of him experiencing the museum through the remembrance of the place, role and function of the objects in the novel. And the fourth layer consists of an experience resulting from the consciousness about how the objects in the novel are pieced together in the museum. In a museum designed as such, the experience of the visitor who has read the novel is expected to be a complex one involving the dialogue, congruity and conflict of these four levels. This heterogeneity has the capacity to create a rich experience generating multiplicity of meanings. But the nostalgic memory regime prevalent in the museum undermines the multiplicity of meanings created by these different layers of experience because even though the past is brought to the present time in *The Museum of Innocence*, this is a unitary past captured dead.

The architecture of the museum is constructed in a way that shapes the visitor as the subject-object: "wherever one stands inside it, it should be possible to see the entire collection, all the display cases, and everything else" (Pamuk 2009: 712). Kemal says that "Because all the objects in my museum -and with them, my entire story- can be seen at the same time from any perspective, visitors will lose all sense of Time" (Pamuk 2009: 712). Although presented as a cubist technique, this form of architecture puts the individual in the center of the miniature world created in the museum and reproduces the belief that the visitor subject who can see everything is the sole ruler and controller of that world while he is actually captured and objectified by the discourse of the museum. So rather than losing sense of Time, the visitors lose sense of their own historical existence. The architecture of the museum resembles the architectural form of the Panopticon. Foucault argues that discipline is reproduced through surveillance and he discusses Bentham's Panopticon as an architectural representation of a disciplinary society:

The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power (Foucault 1995: 201-202).

Power is constituted through seeing without being seen in disciplinary societies. The ideology of perspective also constructs the subject as the subject-object: while the all-seeing individual put in a subject position thinks that he has control over the seen, he is actually objectified by the discourse. The architecture of the museum reproduces panoptic power relations by turning the museum visitor into a subject-object.

The museum avoids using the white-cube aesthetics which is the dominant form of display in the twentieth century where the museum space with its "plain white walls and neutral decoration" "aimed to focus attention on the individual work of art" suggesting "the art work's independence from the outside world" (Gieselhausen 2006: 55). Although *The Museum of Innocence*, being a home -a space where the protagonist of the novel lives in- destructs the illusion of the distance of the exhibited works from the lives of the visitors, the glass-boxes that the objects are exhibited in reproduce the distance between the objects and the visitors.

In his manifesto, Pamuk says "We can see that the transitions from palaces to national museums and from epics to novels are parallel processes. Epics are like palaces and speak of the heroic exploits of the old kings who lived in them. National museums, then, should be like novels; but they are not" (Pamuk 2012: 55). According to Pamuk (2012: 55), museums should tell "the ordinary, everyday stories of the individuals" and no more try to "construct the historical narratives of a society, community, team, nation, state, tribe, company, or species" like the big national museums. But the problem with the national museums is not that they try to construct historical narratives of a society, community or nation, but rather that they construct an absolute historical narrative that is produced through the elimination of differences, exclusion of others' stories and the concealment of the constructedness of the narrative. As for *The Museum of Innocence* it monumentalizes not the nation but the individual and thus a unitary and single perspective is imposed upon the reader/visitor.

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### **Nostalgia, Progress and Rationality: The Absolutization of the Past**

The way of seeing that the conventional museums produce is problematized in *The Museum of Innocence*, but still it cannot escape absolutizing the past. It absolutizes the past by embracing the modern ideology of progress and rationalism both in its form and discourse and by reproducing nostalgia.

The glass boxes in the museum are designed to form a narrative simulating the chronological order of the novel's chapters; each box that has the identical title and number in the book corresponding to a chapter, representing the themes and events of the chapter. Thus, the museum visitor is dominated by the ordering structure of the novel/museum. The visitor who has not read the novel is more likely to create a different story if he avoids listening to the audio guide in which quotations from the novel are pieced together with quotations from the catalogue since the audio guide provides a summary of the novel that results in the recreation of the same story in the novel by the visitor.

The museum/novel's discourse also reproduces progressivism through the qualification of Turkish society by lack in means of modernization in relation with its Western model. The problem with modernity for Pamuk is not that it creates unequal and hierarchical relationships, but its lack. This is a historicist understanding that defines Turkish society as in the childhood stage of modernity.

This progressivist narrative style of the museum/novel prevents it from escaping rationalism. Each glass box is like an illustration of a chapter although the objects are not organized according to this chronology. In the second glass box titled "The Şanzelize Boutique", Kemal's first encounter after years with his distant relative Füsün in the Şanzelize Boutique where she has been working is represented through objects such as the sign of the boutique, Füsün's yellow shoes and belt that she wore on that day, the camel bell that jingled when Kemal walked into the store and the Jenny Colon bag that Kemal wanted to buy for his fiancée Sibel from that boutique. In the 7<sup>th</sup> glass box titled "The Merhamet Apartments" the apartment is represented as a memory-space through objects that were put into that flat by Kemal's mother because they were outmoded and that remind Kemal of his childhood and of Füsün because she has touched these objects when she came to that flat. In the glass box titled "Fuaye" a photograph of this European style restaurant most loved by the wealthy people of İstanbul is coupled with the matches of these kinds of restaurants that are mentioned in the chapter and the relationship between the original and its copy is discussed through these restaurants which try to imitate the European ones although with a lack. Even though Pamuk argues for expression against representation in his manifesto, each box turns out to be a representation of the identically titled chapters in the novel and thus imposes an absolutized perspective of time upon the visitors preventing them to make their own connections between objects and create their own story. The museum visitor, rather than being in the subject position, turns into an object who collects the pieces of the puzzle together. The imaginative capacities of the museum visitor is suppressed by the rationalistic form and discourse of the museum/novel.

The conception of the past in the novel/museum is purely nostalgic. Although Kemal's problematization of the values and ideals of his own class -the class that embraced modernity - enables him to criticize the process of modernization in Turkey, he reproduces that very same way of seeing. "Nostalgia (from *nostos*- return home, and *algia*- longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (Boym 2001: xiv). Since modernity is qualified by homelessness, nostalgia is a modern response to that situation, but in nostalgia the past is idealized and aestheticized by the elimination of its discomforting aspects and thus, it is turned into an absolute category. Svetlana Boym (2001: xiv) defines nostalgia as "an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure". The nostalgic past does not constitute a threat to the present, but rather it helps to forget the problems regarding the present time. Thus, nostalgia reproduces the modern way of seeing that depends on forgetting the past. This is reflected in Kemal's words regarding the construction of a museum; he says that when his story is told in the museum it becomes a story to "take a pride in" rather than a story to be ashamed of (Pamuk 2009: 711). Together with Kemal, the reader/visitor returns home -the museum- exempted from guilt and responsibility.

### Conclusion

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Although Pamuk's museum focuses on the ordinary, everyday story of an individual, it can't escape absolutism through the absolutization of the story of the individual. The museum chooses to tell the stories of the individuals because individual is thought to be innocent in opposition to groups, communities and nations. Thereby the individual is emancipated from responsibility and guilt and the past is absolutized. The idea of innocence (being yourself, innocence of individuals, innocence of objects) creates "timelessness" -which is praised in the novel/museum- by eliminating history. The guilt and responsibility is attributed to institutions, companies, nations etc. and the individual's life is represented as made up of a set of neutral commodities, places, landscapes, cultural products and objects in the museum. But within the opposition between the structures and the individual, it is overlooked that all of these components are also value-laden and ideologically charged. They are not neutral objects.

Through the objects in the museum/novel an integrated, a coherent and a unified past is composed and thus, the past is absolutized. By the exhibition of the past as an exotic object, its capacity to make the reader/museum visitor to problematize the present time is drained from it and thus, the reader/museum visitor sees the objects and the past composed through them as a tourist. Elena Prus argues that "the touristic cultural pattern becomes dominant in the

postmodern society, causing muzealization of both institutions and of everyday life, viewed as a work of art and as a total Museum” (Prus 2014: 51). The musealization of everyday life reproduces the touristic gaze that reduces the past into a category that can be conquered. The cabinets of curiosities of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries exhibited extraordinary objects and images of a distant culture and besides constructing the collector as the powerful self, established dominance over that culture through them. In the same fashion, Pamuk’s museum absolutizes society through ordinary objects rather than extraordinary ones and with an anthropological perspective represents Turkish society as the “other”. Yin Xing argues that Kemal “brings the past into the present” (Xing 2013: 209) which he actually does, but only as a dead object which is disconnected from the present time preventing the reader/visitor from questioning it.

The distinction made by Pamuk between the individual and society is also misleading since while the social is constructed by the individual, the individual is shaped by society. Pamuk conceptualizes his understanding around binary oppositions: he sets novels against epics; expression against representation; homes against monuments; stories against histories; persons against nations; individuals against groups and teams; and lastly small and cheap against large and expensive (Pamuk 2012: 57). The supported sides of these oppositions seem to reflect a postmodern understanding at first sight but the logic of dualities that also qualify modern thought depend on the attribution of stable, fixed and unified qualities to each side of the opposition and thus reproduce absolutism. A more democratic and open narrative would result not from setting these categories against each other, but by presenting them as interrelated ones. Then the museum/novel would put the visitor/reader in a more ambiguous position providing her the power to problematize the process of modernization, the classes in Turkish society and their roles.

Although *The Museum of Innocence* -both the novel and the museum- blurs the distinction between fiction and reality, because it creates a coherent past for a coherent self, constructs unified and integrated identities for its characters from different classes; absolutizes the category of the individual; and produces a unified historical discourse by absolutizing the past as an age of innocence, it cannot escape absolutism and essentialism and cannot become a “historiographic metafiction” (Hutcheon 1988: 4) in which history turns into a category that is questionable. In *The Museum of Innocence*, formal consciousness does not cause the reader/visitor to question his own position in the world and thus, does not give way to historical and historiographic consciousness. The museum reproduces a historicist, nostalgic understanding of the past by accepting the main principles of modernity such as progressivism, individualism and rationalism

unquestioningly and it fails to represent multiple perspectives on history just like the national museums that it criticizes.

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#### SUMMARY

##### **The Regime of Memory in "The Museum of Innocence": The Past as an Age of Innocence**

In this paper, the regime of memory produced in *The Museum of Innocence*, a museum created and curated by the author Orhan Pamuk is discussed. The museum was opened in 2012 in Istanbul and it was based on Pamuk's novel of the same title published in 2008. The intertextual novel -museum and the museum-novel blur the distinctions between fiction and reality, as well as the distinctions between individual and social memories and focus on everyday life and personal objects rather than the "monumental" national history. The regime of memory produced in this museum is discussed in this paper in relation with the process of modernization in Turkey. The understanding of time, space, reality and individual prevailing in the museum are evaluated in order to understand whether the museum produces a creative remembering that problematized the process of remembering or a regime of remembering that is based on absolutizing the past.

#### KEYWORDS

Modernization, Turkey, museum, history, nostalgia

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