



Research Article

Echoes of the Street: Localism and Traditionalism in *A Strangeness in My Mind*

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Abstract

This paper studies *A Strangeness in My Mind* by Orhan Pamuk, focusing on the ideas of localism and traditionalism. The novel is about fifty years of the life of a street vendor named Mevlut Karataş in Istanbul who has seen the changes the city has undergone due to a rapidly changing and modernising world.

The paper argues that localism the novelist see localism not as something physical but it is about memories, emotional bonds, day to day life of connecting with people around. For the protagonist, Mevlut 'local' means knowing the city and spaces around through experiences and not ownership of a tangible space.

The traditionalism is seen as something which the migrants carry with them from rural areas and small towns. It is something which dwells in villages and help them adjust to city life, even when the city itself is constantly changing and moving away from traditionalism.

The focus of the paper is to study how Pamuk showcase a struggle between fast modernization and the slow, human process of holding on to identity and how Mevlut's traditionalism acts as a bridge between the "Intention of the Heart" and the "Intention of the Tongue," permitting him to remain genuine in an increasingly artificial landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

Istanbul has always been a most intriguing back drop in Orhan Pamuk's novels. A breathing, living space with an emotional atmosphere, often described as *hüzün*, a feeling of shared sadness and nostalgia. In this novel, Pamuk chooses to tell a story of the city through experiences of an ordinary man, Mevlut, who sells *boza* on the streets.

The novel covers the Istanbul of 1969 to 2012, a period of urbanisation at the cost of losing the old neighbourhoods and replacing them with new buildings, rapid growth in all ways possible, migration from rural to urban lands in search of better lives. During this time, Mevlut who comes from a village to Istanbul struggles to hold on to the tradition and adapt to the new order. He stands between the two worlds. On one side is his village experiences, full of traditions and simple values of life and on the other side, stands the modern city, driven by ambition, new found money, rapid construction and changing human values. While everyone strives to be rich and prosperous, Mevlut holds on to his roots in the past and to the everyday life of the streets.

This paper explores how Pamuk through Mevlut's tells a story of change. And how this change, from tradition to modernism alters a city and its culture, memory and identity to make pave for a new order.

In the novel, localism and traditionalism function are depicted not as stagnant pillars of an era gone by, but as essential anchors of identity, in a city that is undergoing drastic shift. It is not about belonging and living in a place, it is about identity, it is about recognising a place by its smell, sounds and human relationships.

The traditionalism in the novel is transported by the migrants to Istanbul from their rural customs, beliefs, and ways of thinking. The traditions and customs also adapted the city way of life.

Through Mevlut Orhan Pamuk has perfectly represented this idea.

The street cry a vendor selling 'Boza', a traditionally fermented wheat drink, is the most visceral "echo" in the novel. Mevlut's call of "Boza!" is more than just a way to sell his drink. His voice reminds the people of a time, which is still lingering on in the midst of modern noises of traffic and machines and construction in the city of Istanbul. For a moment, it transports people to their past.

It is interesting to observe that Boza which is slightly alcoholic, is enjoyed in a society with religious restrictions. It is an example of how culture is not always simple or strict, beliefs and practices find their own fine balance in it. Boza, the drink Mevlut sells, carries strong symbolic meaning in the novel.

Boza is a symbol of culture, history and tradition. With every sip it brings back the memories of the older times and connects them to a cultural past that is still present. The shift from boza to bottled beer indicates a gradual move from local, to global consumption. Mevlut's insistence on selling boza and his street cry is an act of protecting the tradition.

The change in the people is seen through their idea of land as property and investment, totally opposite of the Mavlut's idea of understanding a city. He understands the city by walking

through its streets, knowing the people, families and their addresses, the new houses built in place of the old ones. His idea of the city takes shape when he walks in the same streets again and again.

This kind of knowledge he has about the city is very personal, intimate and emotional, it is not economic. It shows that being "local" is about connection, not ownership. Pamuk shows that history lives on in the little things, like the way people behave, the food they eat, the smell of the lanes of the cities they inhabit and in they hold on to these little things. These details are easily put at stake in the name of modernisation and growth. Mevlut, by simply not giving up on his routine He becomes the one who preserves these memories. He may not write history, but he lives it.

Mevlut strong believe in fate helps in accepting his life as it is, without trying to change or control everything. This is contrary to his cousins who constantly chase money and success through risky or dishonest means.

Mavlut has not achieved much material success even than his firm belief in fate brings peace and satisfaction to him. It shields him from the tension and stress of the life facing rapid change at the cost of loss of tradition. The pressure to choose between *niyet* (intention) and *söz* (word) does not affect him much. This reflects in the novel through a conflict between the internal, spiritual connection with the past through traditionalism and the struggle to be someone else required to survive in a politicized, profitmaking modern world is the core of the novel.

Pamuk suggests that social relationships change when the physical spaces change. The *gecekondu* houses in Istanbul, built by migrants, represent traditional community living. The *gecekondu* built with the support of the community and the life shared with each other, represented a form of localism where the residents built their own history. Pamuk meticulously documents the "verticalization" of Istanbul.

"When Mevlut looked at the city from the hills, he saw not just lights, but the ghosts of the houses he had helped build."

With modernisation these traditional homes of migrants were replaced by modern apartment buildings, which widened the gap among people and reduced social interaction. Neighbours become strangers.

The tradition is woven in story of the marriage of Mevlut too. The traditional values are brought to the city when a conflict arises to choose between two sisters. His confusion and dilemma is shown through the love letters which reflect the rules and tradition of the family and the honour and pride attached to it.

The people living in the cities are still bound by the tradition, showing subtle connection to the roots still present in the modern world.

The "strangeness" in the title of the novel shows how Mevlut feels strange in the modern changing times holding on to his tradition and values. Even after many years of migration to Istanbul, he still feels he is a stranger, like he does not belong to the city. The changes brought in by the modernity widens this gap in his mind and it becomes unfamiliar to him.

The people around him, his friends and relatives accepts, adapts and change to achieve success but he remains the same. His association to the tradition makes him feel out of place. Orhan Pamuk suggests that this connectedness with the memories are melancholic and also the change in the city which you have loved so dearly.

For Mevlut, walking through the city at night becomes a quiet, almost spiritual experience. The walking around the lanes connects him deeply with the city. It almost a spiritual experience for Mevlut, unlike for his relatives and friends. This shows how localism can transform into a deeply personal and emotional attachment with a place.

A Strangeness in My Mind is a story that reassures us that localism and traditionalism are essential parts of human identity. It lives on through people who value them and does not let it lost.

The novel depicts that the cities are not made of buildings, bricks and mortar, they are living spaces which preserve culture, traditions, values, memories, and people. Through the character of Mevlut's Pamuk shows that when the physical city changes, the emotional connection to it can remain strong.

Mevlut's "strangeness" is his strength and this strength allows him to hold on to a version of the city that others have forgotten.

In a rapidly changing world, cherishing the past, preserving the memories and and valuing traditions is the gentlest and the most powerful act.

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