

## 58. Inquiry into the (Con)textual and cultural gist of Orhan Pamuk translations in English

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### Abstract

The translations of the works by Orhan Pamuk are significant in a variety of ways. Some of the notable English translators of his eminent works, namely Maureen Freely and Güneli Gün, shed light on how translation strategies can be employed influentially and effectively in that they contribute to the cultural exchange between Türkiye and the United States and the United Kingdom. Their strategic choices not only promote their achievement in cultural transfer into target American and British audiences by their target texts but also reveal the ways wherein such translation studies notions and concepts such as identity and ideology of the translator have crossed over national boundaries in the globe, which is the playground for international agents, power relations, and bonds of sovereignty. Henceforth, the visibility of Maureen Freely and Güneli Gün in their target texts both illuminates the nature of the multifaceted profound role of the translator and enables us to interrogate the intertwined effects of the cultural exchange both on Anglo-American and Anglo-Saxon audiences as receptive cultures and Turkish source culture as the hereditary of a rich cultural and literary tradition. Within this study, the English translations of Orhan Pamuk's *İstanbul Hatıralar ve Şehir* by Maureen Freely and *Yeni Hayat* by Güneli Gün have been selected as the sampling. As for relevant methodology, textual analysis and document analysis have been prioritized. The findings both involve translation studies in particular and (global) culture in general.

**Keywords:** Translation strategies, identity and ideology of translator, Orhan Pamuk

## Orhan Pamuk'un İngilizce çevirilerinin (bağlam)metinsel ve kültürel özüne yönelik sorgulama

### Öz

Orhan Pamuk'un eserlerinin tercümelemleri birçok yönden önemlidir. Maureen Freely ve Güneli Gün gibi, Orhan Pamuk'un önde gelen eserlerinin başarılı İngilizce mütercimlemleri tercüme stratejilerinin etkili kullanımıyla Türkiye ile Birleşik Devletler ve Birleşik Krallık arasındaki kültür mübadelesine katkıda nasıl katkıda bulunabileceği konusunda yol göstermektedirler. Strateji tercihleri hedef metinler yoluyla Amerikan ve İngiliz okuyucularına kültürel aktarımı kolaylaştırmaktadır. Üstelik, mütercimim kimlik ve ideolojisi gibi çeviribilim kavramlarının nasıl küresel dünyada ulusal sınırları aşabileceğine işaret etmektedir ki, bu ortam uluslararası eyleyiciler, güç ilişkileri ve hükümlerlik bağları için bir mücadele alanıdır. Böylelikle, Maureen Freely ve Güneli Gün'ün hedef metinlerdeki görünürlüğü, hem mütercimim çok yönlü ve derin rolüne ışık tutmakta hem de gerek alımlayıcı konumundaki Amerikan ve İngiliz okuyucuları için gerekse de kaynak Türk kültürü için kültürel mübadelemin çoklu etkilerini anlamamızı sağlamaktadır. Kaynak Türk kültürü zengin bir edebiyat

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geleneğinin vârisidir. Bu çalışmada, Orhan Pamuk'un *İstanbul Hatıralar ve Şehir* ile *Yeni Hayat* eserlerinin İngilizce tercümeleri örneklemini teşkil etmektedir. Metodoloji bağlamında, metin analizi ve doküman analizi öncelenmiştir. Bulgular hem çeviribilim özelini hem de kültür genelini ilgilendirmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** tercüme stratejileri, mütercim kimliği ve ideolojisi, Orhan Pamuk

## Introduction

This study interrogates the contextual and cultural gist of Orhan Pamuk as available in his translations in English. The inquiry of the study is the intellectual profundity of Orhan Pamuk as well as his controversial author identity even including his so-called blasphemy as if he were the culprit. He has been blamed likewise by some Turkish intelligentsia; however, it could be argued that he is better understood and interpreted abroad than in his homeland.

His standpoint which underlies his in-depth literary universe is a combination of self-orientalism and post-modernism. His majestic narrative concerning the imagery of Istanbul as available in *İstanbul Hatıralar ve Şehir* has been conveyed into Anglo-American and Anglo-Saxon contexts skillfully albeit in a way that opens doors for scholarly debates and even controversies within the tradition of translation studies. His rich literary universe full of metaphors as well as imagery within intertextual ties with Turkish culture and literature can also be interrogated through his novel *Yeni Hayat*.

This study aims at revealing the contextual and cultural gist of Orhan Pamuk's enigmatic rich profound universe by the methodology which is a combination of textual analysis and document analysis in the light of his translations of the two literary pieces in English. Document analysis as well as associations made by scholarly works of prominent figures in social sciences allow this study to see the bigger picture in which Orhan Pamuk allies with the West.

## Method

The methods of document analysis and textual analysis have been used within this study. Textual analysis exploits both the source texts and target texts and it will have been done in the Discussion.

Content analysis is gathering and analyzing the contents of texts. Contents include words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any conveyable message. A text is any written, visual or oral element that functions as a channel of communication. Texts include books, articles in newspapers and journals, advertisements, speeches, official documents, films or video recordings, lyrics, photographs, dresses, websites, or artistic works (Neumann, 2022, pp. 586-588).

Content analysis is neutral in that the process of placing words, symbols, and messages into the text to convey them to the reader or receiver occurs without noticing that a researcher will analyze them. The purpose of content analysis is to see and reveal the messages, meanings, and symbols of the text. Furthermore, it provides recurring definite results about the text (Neumann, 2022, p. 589). Furthermore, content analysis can reveal the messages within the text that are difficult to notice with a superficial look (Neumann, 2022, p. 550).

There are four figures in the study. Figure 1 describes the steps of the methodology of the study. Thereby, it summarizes the stages of the content analysis which has both planes, that is the source text and target

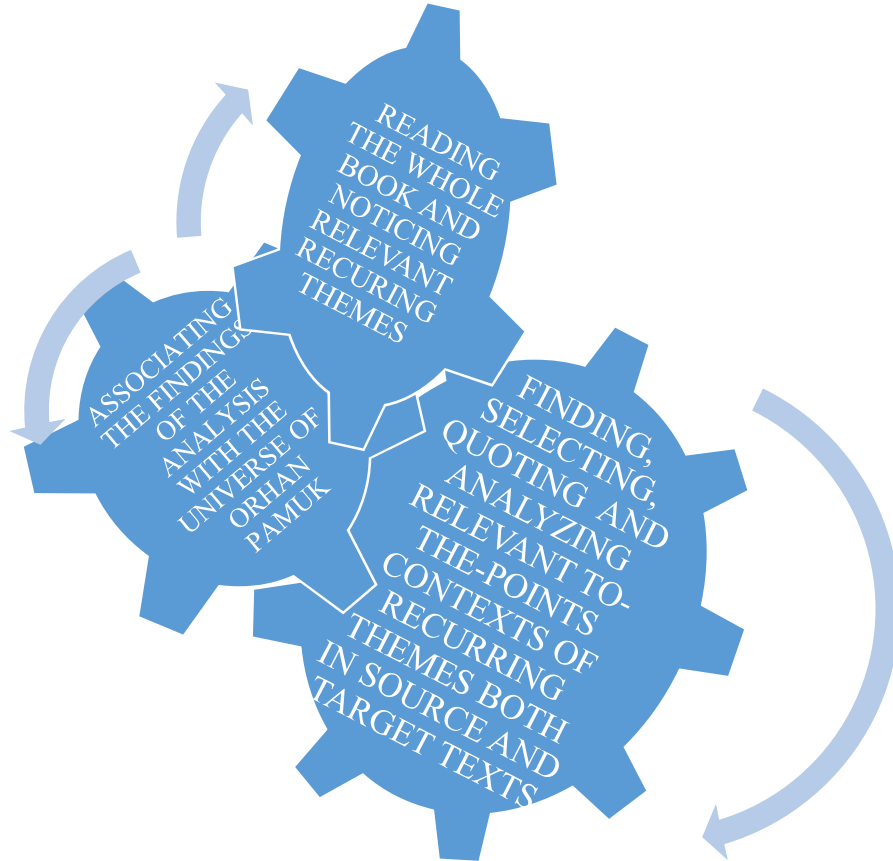
text. Figure 1 has been designed by the researcher. Figure 2 shows the division of the world: the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery. Its reference has been shown both at the top of the figure and in the References. Figure 3 shows the relations between the core and the (semi-)periphery. The reference of the figure has been shown both in the figure and in the References. Figure 4 sketches Orhan Pamuk's political preferences and the relevant status quo in Türkiye both of which move in opposite directions. Figure 4 has also been designed by the researcher.

The research questions are as follows:

- 1- How can Orhan Pamuk be re-interpreted and thereby be explained intellectually and in terms of his prolific creativity in rich textual profundity?
- 2- Can his translations in English achieve in maintaining the same cultural and literary equivalence and what are the weaknesses and strengths of his translations in English?
- 3- Why has he been blamed by Turkish scholars and intellectuals?

The answers for the above-mentioned research questions will have been discussed in the Discussion and they will have been concluded in the Findings, Results & Conclusion.

Figure 1: The Methodology of the Study



## Literature Review

According to (Aksoy, Nazan & Aksoy, Bülent, 2018, pp. 259-261), Orhan Pamuk's book named *Istanbul Memories and City* can be interpreted and considered in several aspects: it is an autobiography, a *Künstlerroman*, and a history of Istanbul. The third level is also the history of modernization from a traditional world and the search for a new identity from the Ottoman period to the Republican era.

According to Aksoy & Aksoy (Aksoy, Nazan & Aksoy, Bülent, 2018, pp. 266-268), while Orhan Pamuk traces the footsteps of this image, he reveals and displays the exotic gaze embedded in Istanbul's image. Both features necessitate looking at the view and the city outside, and to be foreign to be able to taste the beauty.

According to Akyıldız (Akyıldız, 2018, p. 209), Western-educated Orhan Pamuk has already had a "Western" and even an Orientalist gaze to consider his society. There is no confusion in his mind about the issue. It is for sure that his multi-stranded texts do not impose anything. On the contrary, for example, *My Name is Red* narrates a "situation" with all its sophisticated and controversial structure and it does not directly suggest any solution for the problems it includes. It is difficult to encounter any character who stands for the voice of the author because he does not search for any "solution," "formula," or "synthesis." Just as in Bakhtin's definition of a *dialogic* novel, controversies take place without any hierarchy and diverse tendencies and thoughts stand for a dialog though they contradict one another.

If Orhan Pamuk's translations in English is a matter of interrogation, the natural basis of inquiry is translation studies, which is a new academic discipline with a lot of area of interest however new it is. From this standpoint, the following argumentation is going to be discussed in the Discussion having cited the relevant literature briefly.

Translation studies, as an academic discipline, celebrates the cultural turn pioneered by the academic works of Lawrence Venuti in the 1990s, which has liberated translation theory from the boundaries of applied linguistics and foregrounds the notions of equivalence, authenticity, substitution between languages in the name of converting source text into target text foregrounding interfacing cultures and the relevant notion of translation. As translation has turned into the arena of inquiry of the issues such as subjectivity, cultural difference, ideology, and transnational literary export and import at least in part, translation theory has been attempted to be articulated into literary studies. Thereby, literary studies have been affected by a translational turn. Henceforth, translation studies have been proposed to be a new basis for comparative literature. It has been accepted that the only way to make literature *world* literature is through translation (Mattar, 2014, pp. 42-44).

Lawrence Venuti considers language, and the linguistic preferences of the translator as a resisting force against translation's violence as a politicized cultural perpetrator from his poststructuralist standpoint. Though foreignization versus domestication has a dichotomous character, they have both enabled translation studies to enter mainstream literary and cultural criticism. Plus, according to Mattar, literary sociology fixes the frame for the consumption of foreign text and determines the political effects of the language beforehand. Furthermore, domestication versus foreignization is the linguistic category that feeds literary studies in harmony with the sociology of translation (Mattar, 2014, p. 44).

According to Güneli Gün (Horta, 2017, p. 105), Orhan Pamuk purposefully and efficiently uses the strategies and mechanisms that make a Third World author re-known and popular in the First World.

Furthermore, his personal choice of becoming a first-class world writer is a deliberate one. Pamuk's both translatability and his wide-range world author identity are the beneficiary of other literary agents as well as him: translators, editors, and the publishing house themselves. He is not only a global player as a worldly author but also his target audience is Türkiye, too. Thereby, he is both alluded to by the global market and pre-requisites and is sometimes resistant to relevant international markets. Pamuk delineates that the editor plays a crucial role in shaping the text of an author whose language is distant from those known by metropolitan publishing houses in the West (Horta, 2017, pp. 105-107).

The English version (Pamuk, *The New Life*, 1998) of *Yeni Hayat* (Pamuk, *Yeni Hayat*, 2020) shows that the role of the editor such as in maintaining Pamuk's narrative strategies is as important and important as the translator with her intuition. Editorial comments on the book cover its distinctive narrative strategies inspired by religious mysteries like initiation, revelation, re-birth, and death as well as obfuscation (Horta, 2017, p. 116).

On the other hand, Wallerstein conceptualizes the space of the world. Wallerstein's TimeSpace concept is based on Braudel's devaluing uniform time. Braudel has made a distinction between different time versions. He focused on long-term vision and slow-changing structures, which have different spatial structures, networks, and different cores. Wallerstein's TimeSpaces operate on different durations and scopes. The formation of the whole worlds-systems operates on structural TimeSpace in which there are expanding boundaries and a divided structure based on core versus periphery dichotomy. The traits of personhood are timeless and spaceless. Wallerstein's conceptualization of space emphasizes social processes. According to him, space cannot be reduced to isolated distances. Social space is subdivided into structured material space, social-economic space, political space, and cultural space. Within this framework, the world system has been divided into three: the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery. The semiperiphery is not a distinct group but it is an intermediary zone in between the continuum of core and periphery. Semi-peripheral states including Indonesia, Pakistan, Iraq, Türkiye, and South Korea have diverse characteristics (Terlouw, 2002, pp. 1-5). Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the above-mentioned division and the relationships. Orhan Pamuk could be located in the bigger picture of the notion of the world system, a temporospatial conception by Wallerstein.

Figure 2: The Division of the World: The Core, the Semi-Periphery, and the Periphery. Taken from (Elwell, 2005)

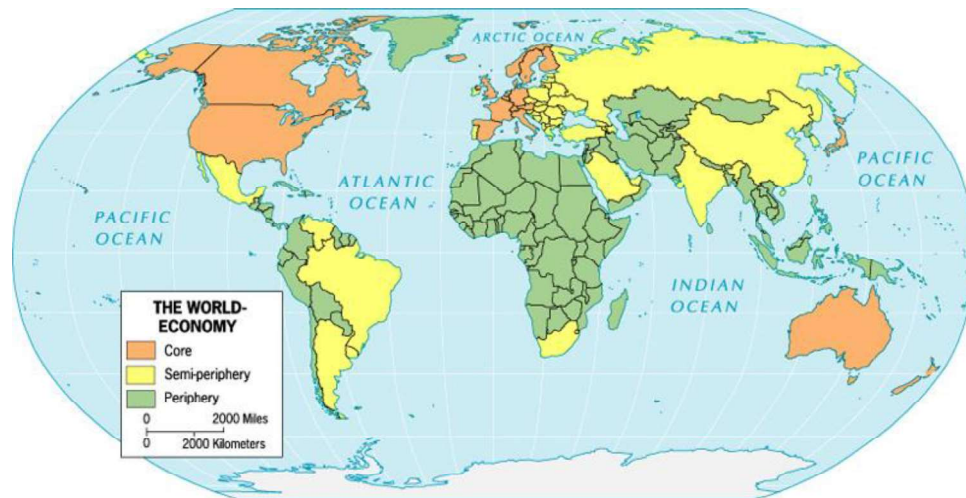
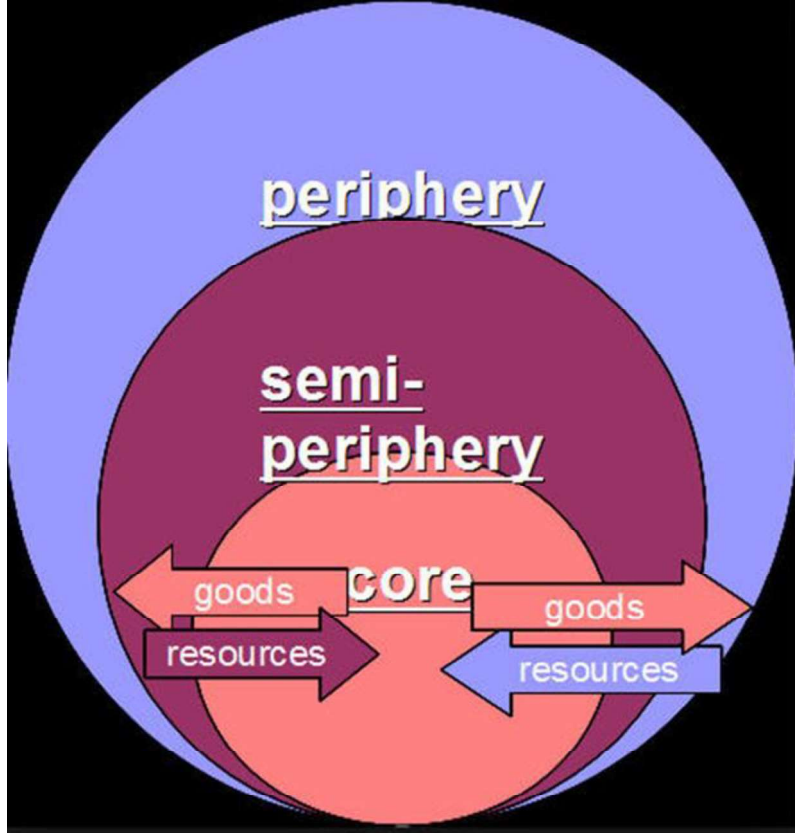


Figure 3: The Relations between the Core and the (Semi-)Periphery (taken from (Elwell, 2005))



## Discussion

This proceeding argues that both the book and all its layers are multi-stranded and have both surface and deep meanings. Moreover, its contextual gist is embedded in the deep structure. The cultural roots and gist are so profoundly embedded that re-interpreting Istanbul Memories and the City at the surface level would be so misleading that it could result in blaming Orhan Pamuk's intellectual identity, which is the case now.

The proceeding further argues that the above-mentioned characteristics delineate some part of the framework of Orhan Pamuk's self-orientalist perspective.

Orhan Pamuk leaves a plethora of prominent questions unanswered and sometimes the literal meaning of his sentences does not denote what he means. It could be argued that his approach is highly post-modern. However, that causes a good number of misunderstandings and misinterpretations though it is part of the dynamics that makes him a great immortal artist. For example, the literal meaning of his sentences may make sense as if he were conservative though he is highly non-conservative and highly self-orientalist supporting Western values.

Furthermore, Orhan Pamuk is highly beneficiary of the tendency of Turkish society to polarize politically and ideologically. However, it could also be argued that he suffers from Western versus non-Western dichotomy and polarization as observable in the axis shift in Türkiye, too. In other words, the political

tendency in Türkiye is inclined to be a political downturn in its relations with the West within the Western axis as could also be inferred from Kutlay & Öniş (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021). The second decade of the Justice and Development Party tends to highlight the shifts in international relations options (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, pp. 1085-1086). Thereby, Türkiye in 2023 is not the same as when Türkiye had negotiations with the European Union for accession in 2005. Plus, the socio-political status quo in Türkiye is more different than at times when Orhan Pamuk expressed his support for the Turkish government (BirGün, 2020) for backing their efforts to enter the European Union at times. Orhan Pamuk (Pamuk, Pamuk: Ayasofya'nın müze olması laiklik mesajıydı, 2020) has critiqued the Turkish government for converting Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque and critiqued the government's way of expressing to the rest of the world a kind of dissatisfaction with the West by converting the museum into a mosque. This may also be an indicator of his ever-existing self-orientalist post-modern perspective within the framework of fully adopting, supporting, and defending Western values in Türkiye and abroad despite the political climate and tendency against the West which has frequently been available in Türkiye.

Both the following source text and the target text are going to be analyzed having quoted the excerpts from them as follows:

«Öte yandan bu ölen kültürün, batan imparatorluğun hüznü her yerdedi. Batılılaşma çabası, modernleşme isteğinden çok, yıkılan imparatorluktan kalan keder verici, acıklı hatıralarla yüklü eşyalardan kurtulma telaşı gibi gelmiştir bana: Tıpkı birden ölüveren güzel bir sevgilinin yıkıcı amsından kurtulmak için elbiselerinin, takılarının, eşya ve fotoğraflarının telaşla atılması gibi. Yerine güçlü, kuvvetli, yeni bir şey, Batılı ya da yerli, modern bir dünya kurulamadığı için bütün bu çaba daha çok geçmişi unutmaya yaradı; konakların yakılıp yıkılmasına, kültürün basitleştirilip güdükleştirilmesine, ev içlerinin yaşanmamış bir kültürün müzeleri gibi düzenlenmesine yol açtı. Yıllar sonra ağır ağır benim içime işleyecek bütün bu tuhaflığı ve hüznü, çocukluğumda bir sıkıntı ve kasvet olarak yaşadım. Şehrin içinde gömüldüğü ve bir türlü çıkamadığı hüznün duygusu, tıpkı babaannemin farkında olmadan terliğin ucuyla tempo tuttuğu 'Alaturka' müziği dinlerken kimi zaman hissettiğim gibi, ölümcül bir sıkıntıya kapılmak istemiyorsam hayal kurmam gerektiğini hatırlatırdı bana» (Pamuk, Resimli İstanbul Hatıralar ve Şehir, 2021, pp. 68-70).

"Still, the melancholy of this dying culture was all around us. Great as the desire to Westernize and modernize may have been, the more desperate wish, it seemed, was to be rid of all the bitter memories of the fallen empire: rather than a spurned lover throwing away his lost beloved's clothes, possessions, and photographs. But as nothing, Western or local, came to fill the void, the great drive to Westernize amounted mostly to the erasure of the past; the effect on culture was reductive and stunting, leading families like mine, otherwise glad of Republican progress, to furnish their houses like museums, I felt in childhood as boredom and gloom, deadening tedium I identified with the 'alaturka' music to which my grandmother tapped her slippered feet: I escaped this state by cultivating dreams" (Pamuk, Istanbul Memories and the City, 2006, p. 27).

Here Orhan Pamuk has both a self-orientalist perspective and ideology. He may be right in his highly critical points. His force majeure is not national sentiment but a satirical Western perspective and maybe he is straightforwardly objective at the same time.

Self-orientalism is by its nature not the ideology of the colonial powers of the past. However, it is the ideology of their collaborating partners in the vernacular cultures of the former colonies of the West.

This is part of the dynamics of why the target excerpt cannot maintain a high-level cultural equivalence in effect in terms of reflecting the self-orientalist standpoint of Orhan Pamuk. Furthermore, when the temporospatial dimension of both Orhan Pamuk's source texts and their translations as well as the specific semi-peripheral character of Türkiye has been inquired, some socio-cultural characteristics unique to Türkiye make achieving an exact cultural equivalence for Orhan Pamuk's translations including İstanbul the City and Memories and the New Life becomes a hardship. The imperial heritage of Turkey allowed her to preserve her military and bureaucratic institutions in a relatively well-functioning manner during the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century though they could not resist the collapse, thereby Türkiye has never been a colony but a semi-colony. The socio-cultural structure of the age was turbulent in that the endeavor to rescue the last Turkish Empire was based on conflicting and controversial political ideologies: Turkism, Westism and pan-Islamism. According to Sözen (Sözen, 2021, pp. 371-372), the conflict between these ideologies has been part of intellectual and political agenda of Türkiye since then. In recent years Orhan Pamuk has arguably been articulated into the Westist discourse of Türkiye though he could hardly be articulated into Atatürkist circles. His courageous critiques against the circles that are against the West could become comprehensible from this standpoint. On this plane, Turkey has always been unique, thereby post-colonialism as a dominant discourse has pitfalls to re-interpret the Turkish case. That makes attaining cultural equivalence via translation a big dilemma.

The following excerpts taken from both the source text and the target text are going to be analyzed and are likewise going to be interpreted from their discourse levels as follows:

*“Kitabı okuduktan sonra bütün hayatım değişti, dedim. İçinde yaşadığım odam, evim, dünyam olmaktan çıktı da yabancı bir dünyada yersiz yurtsuz hissettim kendimi. Kitabı ilk senin elinde gördüm, kitabı sen de okumuş olmalısın. Kitabı ilk senin elinde gördüm, kitabı sen de okumuş olmalısın. Bana gittiğin ve geri döndüğün dünyayı anlat. Bana o dünyaya ayak basabilmek için yapmam gerekenleri anlat. Bana neden şimdi, hâlâ burada olduğumuzu açıkla. Bu dünya nasıl kendi evim gibi tanıdık olabilir, kendi evin nasıl bütün dünya gibi yabancı, anlat bana (Pamuk, Yeni Hayat, 2020, p. 20).*

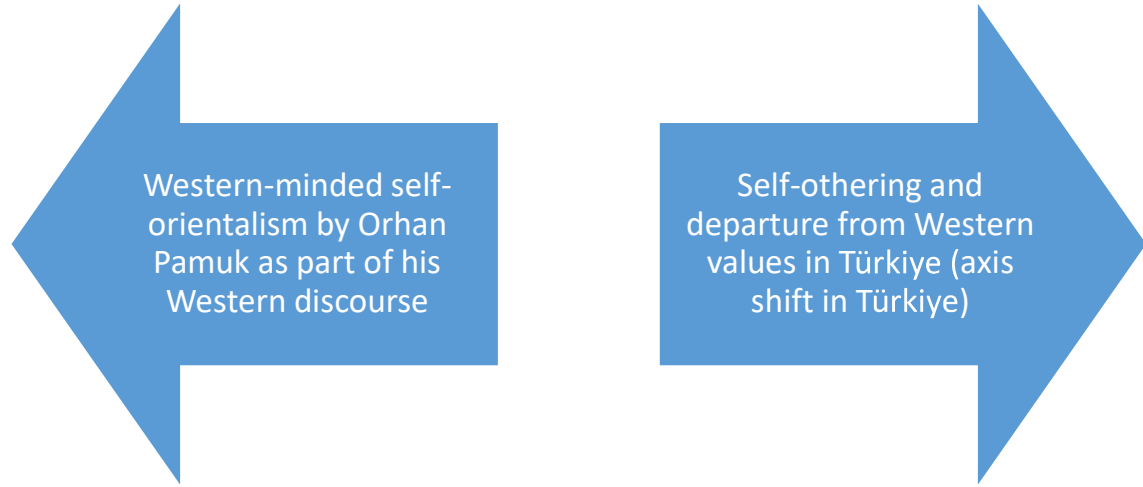
*“My whole life was changed after reading the book, I said. The room, the house, the world where I ceased to be mine, made me feel I have no domicile. I first saw the book in your hand; so, you must have read it. Tell me about the world you traveled to and back. Tell me what I must do to set foot in that world. Give me an explanation as my home and yet my home as strange as the new world (Pamuk, The New Life, 1998, p. 20).*

Here again, Orhan Pamuk asks great questions: What is this book or what does this book stand for? How is the process or experience to *read* the book? Is there a voice or echo that belongs to the author?

Whereas he does not answer any of his questions. Thereby, he leaves them unanswered on purpose. Part of his purpose, arguably, is his post-modern standpoint supported by a kind of Bakhtinian understanding of the novel. He is post-modern because he makes his audience the center of the novel to give/produce and re-produce/create the answers. He is Bakhtinian, because opposite controversial standpoints, thoughts, or even ideologies co-exist with no advantage or disadvantage against the other. Their co-existence does not have any controversy or clash. Furthermore, they do not reach any resolution. The author does not have control over and domination of his novel from this standpoint.



Figure 4: Orhan Pamuk's Political Preferences and the Relevant Status Quo in Türkiye



### Findings, Results & Conclusion

It is almost for sure that reading or interpreting Orhan Pamuk's books in general and in *Istanbul City and The Memories* and in the *New Life* in particular at the surface level would be misleading in a variety of ways and result in misunderstandings and misconceptions. His multi-stranded and sophisticated works are profound and there are voids in general and in between the lines in particular. These voids are left blank for the readers or receivers deliberately. S/he is the post-modern reader who is to find the missing pieces and unanswered questions and fill in the voids. From this standpoint, his both novels' post-modern and Bakhtinian character becomes visible. On the other hand, his fully Western gaze enables him to write in a way that experiences the aesthetics of life and Turkish culture just as he was an outsider. However, the outsider is highly and fully Western.

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