

Re-Constructing Konya Through Woolly Wanderings

Özlem Ezer

Abstract: *The narrator of the essay is presented having multiple personas, flâneuse as the prominent one while wandering in Konya, one of the major cities in Turkey. It once enjoyed the prosperity of Seljukian Sultans in the late 12th century and served as a main trading centre of the Silk Road. It is most famous as the resting place of Mevlana/Rumi, the Islamic poet and theologian whose non-materialistic worldview focuses on love. The narrator's encounters reveal challenges and opportunities for exploring the city's unfamiliar face further while pointing out the necessity and immediacy of gender-responsive policies in Konya. The structure of the essay is inspired by the title of a classical Western and divided into three: The Confusing, the Good, and the Ugly, each section reflecting different façades of the city. The narrator's main concern during the physical journey as well as the expeditions of research and writing regarding the essay revolves mainly around avoiding universal and prescriptive conclusions. As a result, her presence in the text remains ephemeral through several anecdotes of the individuals she interviewed. She indirectly positions herself in contrast to the Orientalist male travelers who have romanticized the city as the center of tolerance and mysticism over the centuries. The varying representations of the whirling dervishes override any other image of Konya and are frequently decontextualized. This essay challenges the romanticized city image by weaving itself around reminiscences of several authors and philosophers' literary and cross-genre works and first-hand observations of the narrator. Evading categorizations, both the text and the narrator travel not only through the streets of Konya but also the disciplines of Literature, Social Sciences, and Journalism while extending an invitation to the readers as fellow wanderers.*

Introduction

Özlem Ezer is a visiting scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley. She focuses on and practices hybrid genre [academic and personal specifically] writing, is currently working on a book *Lifelines: Syrian Womanhoods in Transition*. A website for this project can be found at <https://syrianwomanhoods.com>

Your cities do not exist. Perhaps they have never existed. It is sure that they will never exist again. Why do you amuse yourself with consolatory fables? [...] Why do you lie to the emperor, foreigner?

— Calvino, *Invisible Cities* 59¹

Sevginin kendisine çerçeve olarak seçtiği şehirler, benim hayatımın tesadüfleridir. The cities chosen by love as its frames are the coincidences of my life.²

— Tanpınar, *Five Cities* 1

Your narrator is an unsystematic precariat, a *flâneuse*, and it is going to affect the flow of the current essay on one of the new centers of Turkey: Konya. For the purposes of this text, I venture out of my office as an intellectual recluse and I traveled to the city several times (November and December 2015 being the most recent) to talk to people, to observe, record and eventually to write, knowing and constantly suffering from both the city's and the text's fragmented, fluid, disorganized, and itinerant nature.

The central figure of the *flâneur* in Turkey and Turkish literature is still a man and constructed only in fiction and still rarely.³ Published experiences by *flâneuses* of Turkey are non-existent. This lack of published reflection on women moving through Turkish city streets is partially tied to an increasing restriction of women to the private sphere of home that is encouraged by the governments established in the past decades. In "The Invisible Flâneuse", Janet Wolff reviews different definitions of and attributes to the word "flâneur" beginning with Baudelaire and exposes the absolute male in the concept. Flâneur is a stroller, the streets and arcades of the city are the home of the flâneur, who in Benjamin's words "goes botanizing on the asphalt" (quot. in Wolff 40).⁴ The anonymity of the crowd is comforting and offers an asylum for the stroller. Unlike the flâneur of Baudelaire, who never interacts with the others in the crowd, my use of its

¹ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*. London: Pan Books, 1979. Print.

² Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Beş Şehir* [*Five Cities*]. 1946. Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2001. Print.

³ Ferhat Korkmaz and Talat Sait Halman are the only scholars who analyzed the figure of the flâneur in Turkish fiction to my knowledge, and I am yet to encounter it in Turkish non-fiction. See: Ferhat Korkmaz, "A Postmodern Flâneur in Orhan Pamuk's *Strangeness in My Mind*: Mevlut." *Turkish Studies –International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic* (10/12 Summer 2015): 832-44. Print.

Talat Sait Halman, "Sait Faik: The Fiction of a Flâneur." *Rapture and Revolution: Essays on Turkish Literature*. Ed. Jayne L. Warner. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse UP, 2007. 363-74. Print.

⁴ Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity." *Theory, Culture and Society* 2 (1985): 37-46. Print.

female version is similar to Georg Simmel's stranger (92).⁵ Consequently, the *flâneuse* in this essay is a potential Sufi who may or may not settle down, whose self-awareness of the possibility and the prospect of solo travel, of voluntary uprooting keeps her alert. It also helps her to become a keen observer. Attributes and characteristics of writer/traveler are embedded in my definition of *flâneuse* and it defines the narrator here.⁶

By choice, this essay lacks the authoritative voice of statistics and dates, appropriates an improvised dance among Travel Literature, Sociology, and Journalism. In fact, the essay as a genre enjoys less formality in comparison to the article. An article has a longer literature review and more complex theoretical ambitions than an essay does. Lukács and Adorno's ideas on the form and tradition of essay as a genre contributed to both the brainstorming and writing process of my piece in content and style. I celebrate an essay as a hybrid form with no strict tradition, thus allowing transparency and emotions along with cultivation of ideas and fact-based observations. To use Adorno's words: "It evokes intellectual freedom" which I immensely value (3).⁷ The following text aims at becoming a spiritual descendant of some of the works by Italo Calvino, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, David Harvey, Umberto Eco, Elizabeth Wilson and Janet Wolff. My enthusiasm for writing essays about cities stems from an obsession with travel literature (academically) and being a traveler (literally) for 20 years. I chose walking as a fundamental and embodied form of experiencing urban space, similar to Michel de Certeau. Occasionally I took taxis, which proved to be invaluable sources of information thanks to the drivers' stories.⁸

My initial attempts at establishing a singular, pro-urban feminine voice kept failing so I cannot claim any mastery regarding the social and cultural space of the city. As a narrator, I can liken myself "to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life" (Baudelaire 9-10).⁹ As a *flâneuse*, I reflect the opinions and

⁵ George Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life." *The Sociology of George Simmel*. Ed. Kurt H. Wolff. New York: Free Press, 1950. Print.

⁶ See Keith Tester's *The Flâneur* for an extensive discussion on the significance and future of *flanerie* and for advanced debates on *flâneur's* current status of sociological and cultural studies.

Keith Tester, ed. *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form." *Notes to Literature*. Trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 3-4. Print.

⁸ Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City." *The Practice of Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 91-110. Print.

⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne. London: Phaidon, 1995. Print.

the first-hand anecdotes of the locals in regard to assessing the freedoms of citizens.

The *flâneuse* sets out to explore the city, but what is a city? Among several definitions, I prioritize the one by Elizabeth Grosz:

A complex and interactive network which links together, often in an unintegrated and de facto way, a number of disparate social activities, processes, and relations, with a number of imaginary and real, projected or actual architectural, geographic, civic, and public relations. The city [is] an aesthetic/economic organization of space and place to create a semipermanent but ever-changing environment or milieu (44).¹⁰

In this sense, Grosz contends, the city can be seen, “as midway between the village and the state, sharing the interpersonal inter-relations of the village (on a neighborhood scale) and the administrative concerns of the state, hence the need for local government and the preeminence of questions of transportation” (44). Konya stands out as the perfect embodiment of this midway in Grosz’s definition but it is not the only drive behind my choice.

The reason why I chose Konya over other cities is its paradoxical unity. I borrow the phrase from Marshall Berman’s analysis of modernity and claim that Konya displays “a perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (15).¹¹ More specifically, I have been fascinated by the contradictory images and realities that Konya is associated with tolerance and conservatism. Tolerance and acceptance are linked to Konya due to the ways in which Rumi is introduced and marketed in the discourses of Sufism and capitalism. And yet the strict Sunni conservatism to which the majority of its residents adhere also shapes the life of this city.

I will assume the roles of a mirror and kaleidoscope. The writing style I adopt can thus be referred to as essayistic impressionism. In Konya, I was navigated by the maps of people’s faces and expressions more than any other reference. Reading people’s face-maps has been a challenging yet the most lucid guiding star. “Smart” phones and the Internet prove to be weaker in comparison.

The sociologist Saskia Sassen describes “the zone” she enters before the methodology as a Kafkaesque one. She describes it as “a space of freedom” in which she utilizes some simple analytic tactics while feeling “epistemic indignation”. Similar to her journey of upbringing and in academia, I have also travelled across different “epistemic domains in terms of how people explain something” while the troubadour in me has kept the interconnectedness and the element of

¹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, “Bodies-Cities.” *Places Through the Body*. Eds. Heidi Nast and Steve Pile. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. 42-51. Print.

¹¹ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air – The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Verso, 1983. Print.

serendipity between myself and the interviewees alive.¹² As the social sciences and humanities people, today we suffer from the loss of poetry in our disciplines. Our attempts to impress the audience (a jury, our students or colleagues) with the terminology and/or methodology frequently become accomplices in the act. Instead, I invite the readers to share what was witnessed and communicated in Konya. I argue that when we lose poetry and human element in academic writing, we lose ourselves.

The structure of the essay regarding my impressions of and my encounters with the people and the city is inspired by an old Western film *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. My version is titled: *The Confusing, the Good, and the Ugly*. Sergio Leone's technique displays "a blend of seamless contradictions [...] playful parody and profound homage". He aimed to deconstruct old Western romanticism in this film. Similarly, I will deconstruct the romanticized widespread representation of Konya as a center of tolerance and mysticism by exposing its juxtaposed images over time, by different authors, and myself in these three subsections. Considering the length of my wanderings in the city, it should not come as a surprise that the Confusing occupies the longest section. Long-term residency would lead to sounder analysis and less confusing observations. The Good involves a reunion with an old friend, participating in the celebration of *Şebi Arus*¹³) and visiting tropical butterflies in a hyperreal setting. The Ugly contains urbanicide (aesthetic disasters and clusters of tall buildings), air pollution and security measures during *Şebi Arus* due to attendance by the president and ministers. The gender-sensitive lenses are worn at all times but used with caution throughout the writing and reading processes.

I. THE CONFUSING

A. The Journey Begins in The Air and "All That is Solid Melts into Air"¹⁴

The automatically assigned seat at online check-in is between two women, both of whom live in Konya. I listen to the announcements and when it comes to the menu options, I cannot help but to wonder about the consumption of sushi in their Istanbul-Konya flight. Konya cuisine is renowned for its meat-based choices, including okra soup so it poses some challenges for vegetarians. All the backseats are adorned with the advertisement of Lipton black tea, I imagine tea

¹² <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/01/obituaries/sergio-leone-67-italian-director-who-revitalized-westerns-dies.html>. Web. 10 March 2017.

¹³ The words mean 'Wedding Day' in Persian, marking Rumi's death, reunion with God, with the Divine and is celebrated in Konya every December 17th by his followers and other visitors from all over the world.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto*. Web. 20 Dec. 2015.

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto>>.

and water are the best-sellers on the drink menu. Turkey is and has historically been a tea-culture, as Katharine Branning underlines in her affectionate manner in *Yes, I Would Love Another Cup of Tea*.¹⁵ And tulip-shaped tea glasses are among the icons of the country.

The teenager on the window side with her fancy black sunglasses with leopard frames is immersed in her smart phone, reading (possibly re-reading) her WhatsApp messages with M. Shrouded with my excitement as a researcher-traveler, I do not question the ethics of perusing her outfit and M's tiny profile picture within a red heart-shaped icon. I imagine the way her bright red coat stretching down to her knees stands out in the crowd and how her blue-jeaned legs move steadily. Her make-up is almost professional and her sneakers are cream-colored. Her headscarf is of the Seljuk tiles' deep blue. Whether it is local silk or fake material made in China, I cannot tell but I conclude that she has a good taste overall, relatively speaking.

The older lady in her late fifties is traveling with her son who is sitting right across so when they "communicate" we all end up listening to their conversations and the flight attendants have to apologize each time they need to walk through. The mother-son tension is so clear and the son had to bear with the disapproving yet furtive looks by the surrounding passengers because of his constant insults against the poor woman, who preferred not to respond. Her outfit reminds me of the Greek-Cypriot nuns I see around Cyprus when I was an instructor there. I wonder if she would be offended by the similarity. I note down the newspaper she reads (*Habertürk*), notice my surprise that she is literate, and instead of bickering with the son in his bad mood, she buries herself into the pages of the newspaper. She keeps frowning, probably due to her son's disrespect even though he was raised in a society in which the Quranic verse "... be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour" is frequently recited (*The Quran* 17:23).¹⁶

Only at the end of the flight, can I chat with my fellow-passenger by the window, who tells me that it is okay to use her real name in my essay: Merve. In fact, this female name for her generation is so typical of parents with a certain sociopolitical tendency that there are thousands of Merves, so anonymity is a guarantee. She is a second-year student of Journalism in Selçuk University, which I am going to visit as part of my research. Merve proudly underlines that it was her choice to be in this department, something which only a minority of students can enjoy because of the university entry examination system in Turkey. I express my admiration for her in a country where the number of incarcerated journalists has been very high on the world list. She nods and accepts my

¹⁵ Katharine Branning, *Yes, I Would Love Another Glass of Tea – An American Woman's Letters to Turkey*. New York: Bluedome, 2010. Print.

¹⁶ *The Quran*. Trans. by Tarif Khalidi. New York: Viking, 2008. Print.

compliment with a modest smile. I feel embarrassed about the WhatsApp peek but glad that my eye-sight is not good enough to decipher a single word from this new forum for young people's (conservative or not) love, date, and affair business. I ask her advice about the youth's favorite places to hang out. She doesn't hesitate for a second: "Among the shopping malls, Kent Plaza is my favorite. There is a neighborhood called Yenibosna (New Bosnia)" she continues, "in general, you can observe many young people and university students there."

I will dwell on the phantasmal nature of Yenibosna in detail more than the student life on Selçuklu campus due to its paradoxical unity, contradictory images, and speculations that are constructed around the name of the neighborhood. The irony lies in the fact that the freedom of the metropolis is granted in a segregated form. Furthermore, the concept of freedom is inadequately and disappointedly restricted to cohabitation of unmarried couples, drinking and going out late at nights.

The new centers of Turkey have multi-façades which enrich and complicate the representations of the city. Yenibosna has been referred repeatedly by the local friends and strangers (e.g., taxi drivers, passengers on the plane) alike as a district which needs to be visited when I asked about different neighborhoods since it reflects the modern and the free side of Konya. Two taxi drivers' and two university students' comments are expressive yet oversimplified at times in regard to definitions of personal freedoms regarding citizens.

One of the taxi drivers, who is in his early fifties and who moved to Konya three years ago, tells me that Yenibosna is the site for immorality for the seemingly conservative family men. The most popular type of housing in Yenibosna is the one bedroom studios. Clusters of the same tall buildings with no parks or green fields stand as eyesores and evidence for rapid urbanization with the justifiable excuse of providing cheap student housing. The taxi driver told me hesitantly and in an apologizing manner that these studios are serving local businessmen (or whoever can afford) as places to cache their mistresses. Apparently, it is common knowledge among the locals. He sighs: "*Hocam*¹⁷, you cannot believe what these eyes have seen in the past three years. Conservative is the last word that comes to my mind when people say Konya now. The extent of the decadence going on here is unimaginable."

¹⁷ *Hocam* means teacher or cleric in Turkish, and it is a commonly used word both in formal and informal situations in regard to addressing people who are instructors at universities or secondary schools.

B. December 17th, Inferno of Some Syrian men, Turkish women, and Universities

Listen with ears of tolerance. See through the eyes of compassion. Speak with the language of love. — Rumi

The second taxi driver, Osman, seemed talkative and easy-going. Based on the timeline I gathered from his stories, he must have been in his mid-sixties. After retirement, he searched for a second job to keep himself busy. Otherwise, he added with a smile, he was constantly getting into arguments with his wife. He became a taxi driver and worked for Hilton Garden Hill taxi stand for many years. He was proud to have driven many professors during *Şebi Aru* some of whom would come back the next year and call him to check his availability. He was the one who took me to Yenibosna. “Student population is high and most of them lead alternative lifestyles,” he noted as we drove. I had to ask several times what is meant by “alternative” and received several explanations. Osman told me that although Konya has been notorious for its conservatism, people should visit Yenibosna to prove it wrong. People can drink, they can hang out late at nights even with girls and boys mixed. I asked where the name for the neighborhood came from. He said, probably it is linked to the immigrants from Bosnia in the 1990s, but was not sure. Then, he added that Syrian refugees were living elsewhere, not far from *Kadın Pazarı* (Women’s Market) where I got on the taxi. Then he went on with an anecdote regarding the Syrians in Konya. At first, like millions of Turkish people, he and his wife donated some of their old furniture and clothes to the refugees in need. They felt very sorry for the ones who had to leave their homes. But one day, his wife came home and told him a story witnessed by her best friend:

Three young Syrian men got on a minibus, began chatting and laughing out loud in Arabic. Assuming that nobody would understand them, one of them said: “These Turks are indeed generous. They gave us food, furniture, shelter and whatnot. I bet you if we want their wives, they’d donate them as well.” The other two laughed until they realized that the driver stopped the minibus and asked them to get off immediately. He was from Mardin and understood every word, translated the conversation to the passengers. An immediate uproar among the crowd followed. The men were almost lynched. After Osman heard the story from his wife, he decided not to accept any Syrians to his taxi. He would not give them any explanations but simply ask them to get off if they were from Syria. One day, there was one man who refused to get out of the taxi since he was in a hurry and told Osman that he just said goodbye to his wife and two children in order to go back to Syria and fight against the Assad forces. He begged for an explanation from Osman and got the story of three Syrians on the minibus. He condemned them and asked if there were Turkish gypsies in Konya. “Think of

those three guys as your gypsies, it is the same level of immorality and ignorance that they possess.” At the end of the day, Osman was convinced that not all Syrians are like these three “rotten eggs” and he might consider one more time to accept Syrians into his taxi.

It is the times like this that the academic in me kicks in with dozens of theories yet I have to keep her silent, and even with a calm face as if she just heard a local recipe. Dumfounded, I either nod very slowly or put on a fixed smile until I can gather myself. I was confused about Osman’s sense of justice, racism, and stereotyping yet the Syrian man’s example for dismantling the image of Syrians in the eyes of Osman was also worth analyzing and it hurt me as a person. Osman was asking for my approval and appreciation for his gesture of re-accepting customers with Syrian origin into his taxi. He was a retired police officer. As I got off the car, he handed me his business card, self-assured that I would call him next time I visit Konya.

My persona as a *flâneuse* refuses to become melancholic in response to these anecdotes. Instead, some lines from Elizabeth Wilson’s *The Sphinx in the City* come to mind: “Perhaps we should be happier in our cities were we to respond to them as to nature or dreams: as objects of exploration, investigation and interpretation, settings for voyages of discovery” (11).¹⁸ This is what I should be doing: discovering ideas, extracting details through the anecdotes and marinating them before cooking in my mind and heart. Tolerance, compassion and love. Key words of Rumi. And I am meeting two friends tonight to attend an “alternative” gathering for *Şebi Arus* at Dervish Brothers. Wilson will also accompany me in the heart of the city since this special night opens doors for exploration, investigation and interpretation of an international crowd who came to construct their Rumi and their Konya at a mid-December night. The stories of the almost-lynched Syrian refugees remain afar as the music soars in the room and a young woman without a headscarf begins to dance in the soothing paces of a whirling dervish. She is elegant in her navel-baring shirt and a plain skirt but judging her clothes should not even cross my mind, I reproach myself. I wonder about thousands of Muslim men’s responses had they seen the *sema* (sufi ritual often including singing, dancing, recitation of poetry and prayers accompanied with musical instruments) that she dared to perform. There is definitely a dream-like quality to what I am experiencing, which is inevitably associated with Konya too, despite the day-time taxi conversations.

On our final taxi ride at night, the driver, who had some strong opinions on how *Şebi Arus* should be handled, asked about the ceremony we attended. He was in favor of strict rules and laws even for commemorating Mevlana’s passing or his reunion with God. Therefore, he argued, the ceremony must be an orga-

¹⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder and Women*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992. Print.

nized and well-planned one. When the government and metropolitan municipality are in control of this annual event, people know what “the real thing” is like. I did not know how to respond so I remained silent. Is there a real *Şebi Arus*? The one my friends and I attended was different from the one I witnessed 20 years ago. We did not require to purchase tickets to begin with. The doors were open to anyone, there was no security check, and free hot drinks were served along with semolina *helva* dessert. One felt as part of the event, not just an eyewitness.

My next step in gathering diverse and first-hand experiences was to talk to students. I randomly chose one café in Yenibosna and ordered tea, since this is a tea-culture nation. International coffeehouse chains have to add tea to their menu in order to survive and remain popular in Konya or Turkey in general. The place is indeed full with university students, most of whom are communicating through their phones, either showing each other something or simply staring at the screen in the presence of the others around the table. I cannot help but be fascinated by the change in communication for this generation. Saskia Sassen writes frequently about the impacts of technologies on the urban economy.¹⁹ Maybe these heavily and offhandedly criticized youth who are tied to their smart gadgets are continuously intensifying transnational and translocal networks, communicating through technologies while easily escaping conventional surveillance practices of daily-life authorities. I finally spotted two friends who were having face-to-face conversation in an engaged manner without the assistance of new technologies. I introduced myself and we began to chat about being a female student in Konya and living in the Yenibosna neighborhood.

Buse and Özge were sophomores of social sciences and used to be roommates. One wears a headscarf which apparently does not prevent harassment on the streets and public transport based on her complaints. For urbanization to be sustainable and safe, both the policy makers and the local community need to understand the gender-impacts of rapid urbanization. It is not sufficient to build blocks of studios for cheap housing or open more universities. As of 2016, Konya has five universities, one of which suffers from the speculation of a shutdown due to its source of funding after the December 17, 2013 crisis between the government and Gülen movement authorities.²⁰ Özge attends this one, which she hesitates to reveal at first. She gradually opens up and tells me that the internship facilities are suddenly closed to students from this particular university because of the political atmosphere in Konya. The famous saying by then the PM

¹⁹ Saskia Sassen, “Public Interventions. The Shifting Meaning of the Urban Condition.” <<http://www.skor.nl/article-2888-en.html>>. Web. 28 Dec. 2015.

²⁰ It is a transnational religious and social movement led by Turkish Islamic scholar and preacher Fethullah Gülen. The movement was accused of attempting to overthrow the Turkish government through a judicial coup and thus the authorities determined it as a national security threat for Turkey. The university was shut down after a failed coup attempt in July 2016.

Erdoğan: "whoever doesn't take a side will be eliminated" (*Taraf olmayan bertaraf olur*) accelerated the binary oppositions in the society and as this example demonstrates each citizen may suffer from it.²¹

Both students live a modest life with limited resources and would not go out at nights. When I asked them about a well-known place for night life, they named *Inferno*. Since it is part of a luxurious hotel complex, I was curious about its affordability. Buse and Özge assured me that *Inferno* is full of students so obviously a certain group of wealthy families' children enjoy it. When I inquired about the definition of "freedom" in Yenibosna and how it differed from the rest of Konya, they told me that couples here can cohabit without marriage. Unlike Osman, they did not link women's clothing to freedom. When I asked them if there was one thing they can manage to change about the city, both replied the same, men's attitude: "They stare at us in very irritating ways. We can feel that they don't respect us, they catcall." Other than that, Buse and Özge are content with the facilities that the metropolis offers even if they don't make use of these amenities.

My final question is about other ways of socializing outside of shopping malls. They share with me that regular gatherings at homes to have religious discussions is very common. Apparently, several small groups of students attend the same religious "sohbets" (conversations) and begin to hang out together on campus afterwards. Some can act extremely conservative. There is one particular group of female students (5 out of 50 in a lecture hall) who even avoid eye contact with the male professors and read religious books during the breaks. "Their clothes are more conservative than a regular student with a headscarf like myself" comments Buse laughing modestly in her colorful clothes and headwear. "They do not socialize with other students. Their attitude seems to defy the whole concept of being at the university. A nunnery could be more fulfilling."

I take my leave, thanking Buse and Özge for their generosity in sharing their lives. In return, I share my contact information and encourage them to reach out if they need my advice for anything. I see the tram stretching its way from this neighborhood of liberty to the city center. I could have ventured it if the personal space would not have been an issue for me. Compared to the United States, personal distance here is too narrow to breathe; at times bordering on physical harassment because one ends up being touched or touching a stranger with or without wanting such forms of touch. I imagine myself whirling like a dervish in order to demark my desired personal space in public transports. Would I be regarded as a possessed or love-crazed disciple of Rumi or will someone actually receive my message? Before getting on to another taxi, I watched the young male workers at the weekly farmers' market who were jest-

²¹ Eyüp Can, "Bitaraf olan bertaraf olur" [Whoever doesn't take a side will be eliminated]. *Hürriyet Newspaper* 17 August 2010: 2. Print.

ingly wrestling and calling each other names while trying to warm themselves up around the fire they started in a big tin box by the road. The black smoke adds more to the air pollution which has been burning my lungs since I arrived in the city. The young men seem liberated.

II. THE UGLY

Urbanicide: Missing the Green

Every act of creation is first an act of destruction. — Pablo Picasso²²



Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined to come across Picasso's statement at the gate of a construction site in Turkey, yet I have. It is the peak of de-contextualizing for justifying gentrification.

Would Konya lovers be upset if the *flâneuse* shares the melancholy of not having major green sites in the center other than The Yeşil Turbe (green mausoleum) of Sufi mystic and poet Rumi? David Harvey argues in *Rebel Cities* that the city has been killed by rampant capitalist development, a victim of the never-ending need to dispose of over-accumulating capital driving towards endless and sprawling urban growth no matter what the social, environmental, or political consequences (xvi).²³ The urbanicide then occurs when an appointed (unelected) authority decides to subject the region's citizens to user fees to pay for the extravagance, dividing the community and greatly impoverishing it at the same time.

²² Diana Trout, *Journal Spilling: Mixed-Media Techniques for Free Expression*. Cincinnati: North Light Books, 2009. Print.

²³ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities – From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2012. Print.

Concrete blocks of apartments along the wide and smooth highways are the most conspicuous. I have already stated my avoidance of orientalizing or romanticizing Konya. I can only sugar-coat some of the paradoxes or uncontrolled urbanization of today with valuable references from Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's *Five Cities*. For him, Konya is the fully-fledged child of the Anatolian steppes, radiating an oasis-like beauty whose path will take anyone to the city of Seljuk Sultans (64). He personifies the city and draws parallelism with its people:

Konya is a recluse and a secretly jealous person. Magnanimous, self-sufficient, modest looking yet enjoys spiritual richness of the Central Anatolian people. Konya is either contagious like malaria, takes you to its own universe or you will remain a stranger forever. It demands a kind of initiation process, similar to Mevlevi order (64).

I may be immune to the type of malaria that Tanpınar had in mind then but I *do* sense the fever checking on me from time to time. Compared to the British or American travelers of the past or the present, I am not a complete stranger to the region. Bells of warning against Orientalism are deafening yet alluring at the same time, particularly during the *Şebi Arus* events. Auspiciously, Tanpınar's words come as remedy to my anxiety. He wrote that it was of no use to keep imagining the East and West as separate; they had to be seen as "an invitation to create a vast and comprehensive synthesis [*terkip*], a life meant for us and particular to us" (Yıldız 213).²⁴ If this were the case, there is no reason to worry too much over falling into an Orientalist's trap. If Tanpınar's words of wisdom fail, and the *flâneuse* is still up in the clouds of thirteenth-century Sufism and thus Orientalism, a bitter medicine called Turkish security officers pulls her back into the grounds of reality.

The magic of *Şebi Arus* night was shattered by the extreme security measures taken due to the presence of the president of Turkey and the ministers of the cabinet. As the highly-protected crowd left the congress center, we/the pedestrians were banned from walking to our hotel, which was only 400 meters away. It was freezing cold and the air pollution burned our lungs but being in a good mood, we ended up chatting with the young police officers who were transferred from the neighboring cities of Konya since the number of police in the metropolis seemed insufficient to protect the government authorities. When the meaning of *Şebi Arus* is considered, imposing extreme security measures is not only satirical but also ugly.

²⁴ Ali Yıldız, "Tanpınar'a Göre Doğu ile Batı Arasında Terkip" [The Synthesis between the East and the West according to Tanpınar]. *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 7 (1996): 413-25. Print.

III. THE GOOD

A. *Huzur* (A Mind at Peace)

I felt Tanpınar's presence as an academic, writer, and keen observer of East-West dichotomy and its complexities in Turkish culture during my time in Konya. In his review of *Huzur*, Tanpınar's novel set in Istanbul in the 1930s, Pankaj Mishra celebrates his tone as having no less lyrical intensity than Baudelaire's regarding Paris. With "his poetics of the indolent flâneur," Mishra argues, Tanpınar rejects the social realist tradition that was dominant in the 1940s in Turkey. Instead, he takes to heart Baudelaire's dictum that the modern artist is the painter of both the passing moment and everything in that moment that smacks of eternity.²⁵

I meet Uygur, a dear friend of mine from back in mid-nineties when we were at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. His name in Turkish means "civilized" signaling that his parents belong to a different political faction from Merve's. He represents the good of Konya with his volunteered guidance and kindness, which I connect to his adherence to the teachings of the Mevlevi order. He refers to this connection as "spiritual kinship or affinity" rather than "adherence". His mind seems at peace (*buzurlu*) and his ability to bond Rumi's ideas with other schools of thought around the world is refreshing. After we finished our lunch at a local restaurant where one gets a clear and impressive view of the Mevlana Mausoleum, I asked Uygur if we could visit a cemetery.

Üçler Mezarlığı is a historical, well-organized cemetery, right next to the dervish lodge [dergâh] and museum of Mevlana. It hosts both the laypeople and the Mevlevi, including Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch (1909-1999), a French academic and convert. Knowing that each gravestone conveys a different story both through the characters and the words engraved on the stones and through non-verbalized signs such as shape, color, size, location, structure and level of maintenance makes my stroll more purposeful. We talk about life and death, the intellectuals we used to admire at college (such as Beauvoir and Sartre), and Montparnasse cemetery in Paris. *Huzur* accompanied us. I argue that for a city to pass as a new metropolis of Turkey, its cemeteries need to be safe and clean although this criterion is based on a personal interest and preference, not to be found in the leading magazines which post the livability ranking of metropolises across the globe.

On the paths of the well-kept cemetery we can chat comfortably as if we were wandering about Luxembourg Gardens. Uygur greets some of his loved

²⁵ Pankaj Mishra, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and the Waiting Room of History." Web. 03 Jan 2016. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/28/ahmet-hamdi-tanpinar-the-time-regulation-institute-turkey-western-time>>.

and respected ones who are resting here by chanting *bu*. The chants remain engraved in my memory. Sharing vignettes of near and distant personal and public pasts in a cemetery accentuates the elusive nature of the act, bringing us closer to Calvino's historical personages, Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, the contemporaries of Rumi. I even speculate that "perhaps this dialogue of ours is taking place between two beggars named Uygur and Özlem as they sift through a rubbish heap [...] they see all the treasure of the East shine around them".²⁶ Roses in different colors and stages of bloom at the background, feeling *buzur* among other indescribable stimulants from within my soul and outside are instilled comfortably into the imagined space and mood that any traveler could ever ask from Konya.

Time passed quickly and I was taken to view the luminous city from the roof bar of Dedeman Hotel. Thousands of flickering lights glazed the city's religiosity, made me forget for a few moments that the majority of its registered residents voted for AKP (Justice and Development Party). In this luxurious enclave, we were able to sip our drinks in peace without disapproving looks or comments from the majority of the city. Although not as high as the 42-floor Seljuk Tower skyscraper within Konya Trade Center, we were still elevated enough. The standardized comfort of luxurious hotels across the globe create the illusion of safety and liberty while presenting the modern and aesthetically pleasing face of the city. We could be anywhere and still converse discursively about the ancient Chaco Canyon, Anna Sofaer who discovered the Sun Dagger site of New Mexico, Mount Shasta of California, Sille, the archaeological site in the north-west of Konya.

My musings of the city and the journeys undertaken for writing an essay are enriched with challenges posed to my language of the imagination as well as my psychological, physical and sensory states as a woman traveler, *flâneuse* and a beggar for knowledge

B. for Butterflies: A New Sightseeing in Peace

The surreal surrounding, which was created recently (opened on July 4, 2015), under a giant butterfly-shaped roof of the tropical garden contributes to the good of Konya. Guided by a young biologist, we switch the climate, suddenly we're thrown into a whirl of warm and humid air. Feeling sticky only after a few minutes, I imagine Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard joining the tropical but-

²⁶ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*. London: Pan Books, 1979. Print. Adapted from the following lines: "Perhaps this dialogue of ours is taking place between two beggars named Kublai Khan and Marco Polo; as they sift through a rubbish heap, piling up rusted flotsam, scraps of cloth, wastepaper, while drunk on the few sips of bad wine, they see all the treasure of the East shine around them" (104).

terflies tour in Konya.²⁷ Creating hyper-realities are no longer in the domain of the United States with its relatively “young” history. Hyper-real spaces can now be found even in a land where one of the earliest settlements in the world history (7500 BC) was realized.²⁸

I failed to find a sound explanation or justification for establishing this park. Obviously, a serious amount of money was spent on the project. Just before the exit, on the way to the souvenir shop there is a quotation on the wall which cannot be missed: “... you cannot see any inconsistency in the creation of the most compassionate,” (the Quran 67:3). Visitors’ departures are thus enveloped in the words of the holy book of Islam in two languages (Turkish and English), and people are reminded of the current political context in which these words appear. The impact of the replica of Indonesian forests where the world’s largest and the prettiest moths can be seen without glass containers has shattered. When all the creatures both dead and alive, which are displayed in the enclosed section of the park, are linked directly to the Quran, the line becomes more than a constellation of words. The selected line relates to the political party in power and its reigning ideology. It indicates the ones in charge at the micro and the macro systems of the new center. The signs of power are made visible deliberately in the process of development or gentrification in the city. Even the most unexpected corners of the city have become sites for vanity or bravado for the authorities who carry out the laws and the rules for the voters.

My last but not the least celebrated component of the good of Konya are the mosques. I have not seen so many historical mosques scattered to the city like a bunch of flowers with the exception of Istanbul. The tones of blue tiles, the floral motifs, and the divine ambiance that each one has are humbling. During my search for the Gazi High School where Tanpınar spent some time, I came across a small mosque named Amber Reis (1911). I walked in and admired the dark blue decorations combined with the woodwork. The air pollution and the traffic

²⁷ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990. Print.

Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001. Print.

²⁸ There is another theme park in Konya called “80 Binde Devri Alem” meaning “Around the World in 80 Thousand” (opened in April 2014). The number refers to the size of the area in meter square on which the park is established. The park is composed of three parts: “The Cotton Candy”, which is home to fairy-tale characters, the “T-Rex” area, the residence of dinosaurs, which can move and make sounds and they are claimed to be in the original size, and the “Cihan-ı Türk” in which 120 miniature replicas of the architectural and cultural heritage of Turkic and Turkish lands are displayed. I did not have the time or the interest to visit it but it needs to be acknowledged within the context of hyper-realities in Konya.

noise of the *Anıt* roundabout disappeared magically. Serenity and awe kindly stopped for me and the mosque held but just ourselves and immortality.²⁹

Conclusion

The essay form has not yet, today, traveled the road to independence which its sister, poetry, covered long ago; the road of development from a primitive, undifferentiated unity with science, ethics, and art.

—Lukács, *Soul and Form* 13³⁰

In November 2015, *Forbes Türkiye* magazine announced that there is no city in Turkey where one can balance the business world and employment opportunities with the quality of daily life. Several lists of livable and sustainable cities both in Turkey and across the world are available online and due to the divergent criteria that are used, each list is different. Health facilities, green areas, water, adult education, low crime rates, population density, the number of vehicles, five star hotels, and shopping malls among others define the quality of life (64).³¹ In the case of Turkey 2015, *Forbes* concludes that the side effects of rapid urbanization take down the quality of life as is the experience of Konya. For example, even during the limited time in the city my experience proved that the air pollution was bad enough to deprive me from breathing comfortably. In addition, the practices of university education and the student body provided enough suspicion to question the level of freedom on campuses. While reading *Forbes'* report, I am reminded that we need to consider some other issues when assessing the ranking of cities: freedom of expression, gender equality, and minority rights (of the disabled or trans-bodies) should be priorities. I am hopeful that this list might be added to future issue when *Forbes* ranks cities in 2016 and beyond.

As an urban center of Turkey, Konya is likely to have complications in its contribution to democratization and peace in Turkey since the shopping malls or universities do not offer the appropriate habitat for the youth or the women who aim for self-development. Cultural elements, such as extended family ties and hierarchical relationships between the sexes, classes, age groups, remain strongly embedded in the city and unlikely to change in near future.

I believe that despite the economic and political power over the last decades that Konya gained, the consequences of rapid urbanization will weigh on the

²⁹ Inspired by Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" Web. 02 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177119>>.

³⁰ Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1974. Print.

³¹ "İş Yapmak ve Yaşamak İçin En İyi Kentler" [Best Cities to Work and Live]. *Forbes Türkiye* November 2015: 64-68. Print.

negative side. I did not experience gender discrimination because I was a guest who was granted certain privileges that locals cannot have, mainly because having a reputation as the perfect host is still immensely valued in Turkey, which results in tolerating the outsider. However, the harassment on the streets and on public transport in Konya is an issue to be undertaken by the local authorities based on the female students' accounts. Their personal complaints (classified as information) coincided with President Erdoğan's inauguration of the rail system between Alaaddin and Adliye at Mevlana Square on December 17th, 2015. In his speech, the President claimed that "Konya has become one of the most developed cities in Turkey with its tram, subway, high-speed rail and divided roads."³² However, a developed city should be harassment-free, yet Konya is not. A developed city should not have taxi drivers who feel entitled to refuse customers based on their country of origin or race. The President's boasting when juxtaposed with the residents' daily realities is an ironic and concluding example to why the "confusing" Konya occupies the largest space in this essay.

The authors and philosophers from Turkey and beyond contributed to the challenging task of recreating a city in an essay or rather an experimental form, which I call "essayistic impressionism shaped by and traced through people's face-maps". Several residents of Konya performed in the text: Uygur as the modern and intellectually pleasing face of the city; Merve, Özge and Buse as the semi-conservative female youth exposing the gender discriminations of non-western modernity; three taxi drivers as examples of the complexity of male conservatism's crossing paths with nationalism and authority. The metaphors which served to my purpose of creating a more memorable narrator were mirror and kaleidoscope whereas Konya is presented as an enlarging palimpsest.

Grosz's definition of a city underlined the existence of a network which is complex and interactive, in which everything links together, often in an unintegrated way. Her description simultaneously summarizes the journey and structure of this essay. While everything links together, "all that is solid melts into air" as in Marx's words, which is after all not so far removed from Rumi's focus on constant change in life and deception of the form. Although presented as a Turkish *flâneuse*'s experiences in order to fill in a gap in literature, the essay welcomes other interpretations and links itself to an unlimited number of discussions. In fact, the narrator has multiple personas as the lines between a *flâneuse*, a Sufi and a wandering dervish or beggar have become woolier than ever before due to the technological changes yet I create a locality for the non-existent *flâneuse* in Turkey through this essay. I expect further debates to emerge regarding

³² "President Erdoğan in Konya." Web. 02 Jan. 2016.

<<http://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/37343/maskelerin-siyirilip-gercek-yuzlerin-ortaya-ciktigi-donemlerden-geciyoruz.html>.>

conceptions of space, time, and gender in contemporary globalizing cities of Turkey and invite interdisciplinary scholars to unentangle the modern-day contradictions without romanticizing any non-Western city with ancient histories.



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