At Home: Istanbul’s Cosmopolitanism and Literature and Language Politics in Turkey.

The government enforced move from the use of Arabic letters to Latin alphabet in 1926, and subsequent nationalization of language, famously referred to by Jacques Derrida as "coup de lettre" (1997), marks a chasm between the language and its speakers as well as between the past and the present. The coup has been associated with Istanbul above other cities, which was devoid of its former glory with the move of the capital to Ankara, only to assume its power with its growth due to mass migrations starting in 60s, into a city where no one ever since feels at home (Pamuk, 2003).

This paper presents two novels that address, in their different ways, the notion of home within this void, Latife Tekin’s Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills (1984), and Orhan Pamuk’s The Black Book (1990). Both writers are marked with their controversial use of Turkish, and their unusual depictions of Istanbul. Tekin presents an uncanny Istanbul through her descriptions of “gecekondu,” impoverished neighborhoods built overnight that provide all sorts of encounters between the squatters and the inhabitants of the city, thus presenting an unusual instance of cosmopolitanism. With Pamuk, on the other hand, Istanbul’s uncanniness extends over the city’s ambiguous cultural and political history as a bridge between the East and the West, as well as within postcolonial studies and cosmopolitanism.

Through the above examples, this paper aims to present Istanbul as a case study for cosmopolitanism, especially in the wake of its status as a European Cultural Capital in 2010 and to situate Turkey in relation to postcolonialism.