Immortal Modernity: Negotiating Istanbul as Global Metropolis **in** the Turkish Vampire Series *Yaşamayanlar*

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Introduction

'We live in a time of monsters' (Cohen 1996: vii) – and yet, monsters appear to have become increasingly difficult to recognise. This arguably even applies to one of the most clearly marked monsters in cultural imagination: in the mediated versions of American small-town life from Forks to Mystic Falls, vampires live inconspicuously among humans – thanks to overcast skies or cast spells. Following in the footsteps of the supernatural drama *The Protector* (2018-2020) and made accessible to a global audience via Netflix, the Turkish vampire series *Yaşamayanlar [Immortals]* (2018) takes a fundamentally opposed approach. Nicole Anderson suggests that science fiction – to which supernatural stories can surely be counted – 'captures our imaginations, and projects our hopes, fears, horrors, dreams, and our wonder onto something somewhere else' (2020: 83). For the modern metropolis, this simultaneous projection of horrors and hopes reflects the negotiation of modernity in an increasingly urbanised, technologised and globalised world. In this tension, the dangers of the modern city overlap with the dangers of the supernatural city – particularly as it relates to the embodied supernatural presence of vampires who 'have been increasingly attracted to modern cities in which they are free to hunt amongst the crowds' (Abbot 2003: 133). A city 'crowded and mysterious – just like Istanbul' (Eşeli 2018), as the series' intro tells us, functions as the ideal setting for the first-ever Turkish vampire series. Brimming with neon lights, *Yaşamayanlar* provides a very different experience of Istanbul than other exported television series – one that feels eerily close to mediated versions of New York, Berlin, or Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s. Between dark alleyways and stroboscopic night clubs, the series paints a picture of Istanbul not just as dangerous and gritty, but – maybe more crucially – decidedly detached from the historical heritage of the city.

Tracing the 'reconfiguration of the vampire from a premodern monster to an urban flâneur, increasingly at home in the city' (Abbott 2003: 141) arguably also reconfigures the

city itself. In the series, the image of the city and the image of the vampire become increasingly entangled: the contested presence of the vampire's monstrous body not only drives the narrative of the first (and only) season, but also shapes the image of the urban. Spanning eight episodes of just under one hour each, *Yaşamayanlar* follows female vampire Mia (Elçin Sangu) on her quest to become human again – by killing Dmitry (Kerem Bürsin), the vampire who she believes turned her two centuries ago against her will. The timing (and target) of her individual vendetta overlaps with a larger war between the organised vampires and the self-proclaimed human vampire-hunters for the control of the city. Against this narrative background, it should be noted how 'well' the vampires in *Yaşamayanlar* have adapted to their modern surroundings: they are not the intruders, the foreigners, but rather embedded in the city's urban fabric. While detached from earlier media representations, the Turkish example here appears to follow what Stacey Abbott notes about vampire films of the 1980s and 1990s in which 'the vampire is primarily an urban creature' (2003: 133). Expanding on Abbott's discussion about the re-invention of the vampire in its modern setting, I am suggesting a reciprocal relationship here: the urban setting does not only influence the embodied image of the vampire, but in turn also that of the city. Following Andrew Weinstock's suggestion that the flexibility of the monstrous as epistemological category opens up the space for negotiation (2020), the emphasis on *space* takes on an additional layer of meaning in this context.

Considering the unique status of *Yaşamayanlar* as the first-ever Turkish television series featuring vampires, the negotiation of what modern vampires mean for the national and cultural context becomes particularly interesting. Of course, this is not to say that the figure of the vampire itself is unknown to Turkish audiences[1]. However, the same renaissance of vampire stories that seems to have been taking place in the other parts of the world, and particularly in the United States, has not enveloped the Turkish television landscape (yet). At the same time, both the changes of the vampire's audiovisual incarnation and of the reach of local productions on international streaming platforms are relevant in this reading of *Yaşamayanlar*. In their discussion of pop culture tourism as a phenomenon, Mia Larson, Christine Lundberg, and Maria Lexhagen differentiate between 'settings, where fictional stories take place, and locations, where movies are shot' (2013: 75). While this paper is not primarily concerned with tourism in and to Istanbul, the negotiation of the urban as 'authentic' nonetheless plays an integral role in the targeting of an international streaming audience. Expanding the exploration of 'critical connection[s] between urban narratives and

vampires' representation' (Piatti-Farnell 2017), this article will argue that the re-imagination of Istanbul as a supernatural city is entangled with narratives of modernity, connectivity, and change. As a productive point of comparison to the discussion of visual representations of largely British and American cities[2] in and through supernatural presences, the focus on Istanbul allows for an exploration of the entanglement between the historical heritage and modern positioning of the city within the gothic as a genre already 'fundamentally concerned with history and geography' (Mighall 2003: xiv) and contemporary questions. In other words, the supernatural does not only shape the metropolis, but the metropolis also shapes the supernatural.

Ancient City, Modern World? Positioning the Past in the Present

'They call us the immortals, but on the inside, I am in ruins worse than this place' – Karmen

Following Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's idea that 'the monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move' (2020: 45), the emphasis on monsters bound to specific places and transgressing specific spatial boundaries, across national borders, but also within societies, takes on additional meaning in the context of the urban vampire. It appears that the figure of the vampire – itself bound to and yet independent of time and space – lends itself particularly to explore the spatial and temporal histories of cities. If 'to step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself' (Cohen 2020: 45), the portrayal of the city in Yaşamayanlar seems to be caught in a double-bind between the seeming stasis of the past and the unpredictability of the future – both mediated through the supernatural presence of the monster. More than exploring themes of history and heritage, then, Yaşamayanlar appears to construct an image of Istanbul detached from both the past and the present. Instead, the series constructs an alternative urban fabric drawing on fictional(ised) narratives of other places and spaces. Contrasting an understanding that 'both the history and the socio-cultural "feel" of the city cannot be separated from the visual constructs that accompany it' (Piatti-Farnell 2017), the image – and feel – of Istanbul constructed in the series is decidedly modern.

The series' female protagonist, Mia, is notably introduced to the viewer with two crucial differences: in the series' opening sequence, she is neither a vampire nor in Istanbul. As a human prisoner of unseen and unheard captors, the story begins in 1879 Thessaloniki, in a location tagged as 'Constanta Dungeon' – and with Mia begging for her life from a prison cell. This return to a different time and place continues in the opening scenes of the following episodes, which portray the same scene – Mia imprisoned, Mia dying, Mia turned – from different narrative perspectives. While the sequences in the past are both spatially and temporally defined – Thessaloniki, 1879 – the present remains somewhat vague. Following the title sequence of the first episode, the series opens on a recognisable shot of Istanbul: a view of the Bosporus strait and the city centre, and the highly visible Sultan Ahmed Mosque (also known as the 'Blue Mosque') in the background. Yet, this view of Istanbul is framed through its specific perspective from the Port of Haydarpaşa, one of the country's main shipping ports. Disrupting the calmness of the Bosporus, the shipping industry takes over more and more of the scenery, escalating from one container ship passing through the strait (and the screen) to a closer and closer view of one specific shipping container – carrying Mia's vampiric body. Being introduced to the main character in the present and as a monster through shipping – the epitome of modernity as it comes to trade routes – in a high-tech coffin disrupts the temporality between the present and the past, as well as between night and day. Especially following the introduction's emphasis on the immortal's invulnerability to sunlight – 'unlike what was told to us in tales, they walk among us even in daylight' (Eşeli 2018), the rolling text at the beginning of the first episode proclaims – the positioning of the coffin within the container points to a darkness hiding within the everyday bustle of the harbour. Yet, this crucial detour from vampire lore is not thematised further as the series progresses.

After the first few minutes of the first episode, the differentiation between day and night becomes increasingly blurred – to a point where it is nearly indiscernible what is happening when. While some locations appear to be bathed in sunlight, the filtered view of the outside – through coloured glass or covered panels – does not seem to belong to a specific time. Or to put this maybe even more poignantly: it always appears to be night in the Istanbul constructed in Yaşamayanlar. This eternal night underlines a reading of the city as in temporal limbo. Throughout the series, the past has repercussions for the present – but is not interwoven with it. Instead, the continuing darkness of the public, or at least publicly accessible, settings open up the space to imagine a new day – and with it a new time and a

new place. This re-negotiation of Istanbul as an emerging modern city can also be found in the regional plans published by the Istanbul Development Agency – outlining visions of the city to be developed over periods between 3 and 10 years. In between the two latest reports, the difference in imagining the city as modern is striking. The report for 2010-2013 imagines 'Istanbul, a city to live, conserving its cultural, historical and natural heritage; choosing high value added economic activities; raising living standards continuously' (İstanbul Kalkınma Ajansı 2008). This emphasis on heritage disappears in the following report in favour of 'Unique Istanbul: City of Innovation and Culture with Creative and Free Citizens' developed between 2014-2023. Reading a production like Yaşamayanlar as embedded in this larger socio-economic process of (re)invention makes the aesthetic references to creative capitals like Los Angeles, Berlin, and New York at their respective moments of cultural shifts particularly interesting. In doing so, the series differentiates itself notably from another Turkish Netflix original – the largely successful series The Protector. Centred around the last 'Protector', an ancient order sworn to protect Istanbul against its immortal enemies[3], the first season of the series takes place around the Grand Bazaar and key architectural sites designed by influential Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan in the search for a series of ancient artifacts. The Protector continuously references Constantinople – part of the Byzantine Empire – and this historical heritage as continuing and continued, living in the urban fabric of Istanbul today.

The visual absence of iconic markers of Istanbul for an international audience – the view of the Bosporus, the Grand Bazaar, the Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque – complicates the frequently quoted role of export elevation as a vehicle for tourism. Elaborating further on the idea of a creative city, the current regional plan posits Istanbul as 'genuine urban space enjoyed with pleasure; an "area of joy" for Istanbul residents, and the first destination for people of every religion, language, race, and sex who want to realise their potential and dreams, and who need inspiration' (İstanbul Kalkınma Ajansı 2016). The premise of the series – the killing of the 'old' through the 'new' as embodied by Mia and Dmitry – underlines the liminality of the setting as well. As a final step towards an independent, modern existence, severing all connections to the past seems crucial. Following an understanding of film and television as 'imbricated in mediating the city's spatial dynamics' (Hallam 2010: 278) allows us to explore how the series disrupts the patterns of identity constructed in and through the history of the city.

Replaceable Places? Complicating Istanbul as Cinematic Space

'The hoods are ganging up.' – Sercan

'There seems to be a public image of any given city which is the overlap of many individual images' (1990: 46), urban theorist Kevin Lynch argues in his seminal work on the imageable city. Despite being shot on location in Istanbul, the setting of Yaşamayanlar seems to suggest an artificiality: in the shallowness of the shots, the city becomes increasingly unrecognisable as the series progresses. In the notable absence of references to the established cinematic image of Istanbul as city of history and heritage as discussed in the previous section, Yaşamayanlar appears to turn to other images – more precisely to mediated versions of New York, Berlin, or Los Angeles in and of the 1980s and 1990s. If 'the Gothic lurks in all sorts of unexpected corners' (2007: 8) as Catherine Spooner suggests, the 'expectedness' of these corners in Yaşamayanlar becomes particularly striking. Nightclubs made of metal and glass are illuminated by flashes of stroboscopic light. Roads whip past with the idea of a somewhere that is nowhere in particular. An array of abandoned buildings, with boarded up windows that dilute the view through layers and layers of newspapers. Industrial kitchens, that are repurposed as a place for torture and last rites. Basements with chains attached to the ceiling, straining under the weight of the supernatural kept in place by them. Rundown rooms and empty shops. Alleyways and underpasses. Notably missing in this list of the settings is the home. There are only very few private spheres shown in the series: the living room of the apartment Ayşe shares with her immobile, unresponsive, and dying mother, the grand villa inhabited by Dmitry, and the abandoned house Mia has chosen as her temporary home. At the same time, these private spheres are equally void of personal touches or the history of a life spanning literal centuries, further underlining the specific unspecificity of the urban portrait drawn by the series. Expanding on 'how the material and symbolic geographies' (Hallam 2010: 280) of media are implicated in place-making, the urban identity constructed in Yaşamayanlar appears to be one decidedly detached from a particular, identifiable space. Instead, most of the series takes place on empty streets, with the characters moving in and towards unrecognisable spaces. Illuminated by the ever-present light of neon lamps and burning trash cans, carefully spaced out along the side of the road, these streets are coded as spaces of vulnerability and danger. Different to panoramic cityscapes 'where the way of seeing is determined by the more fleeting nature of the viewer's perspective, a gaze that is

more specifically touristic in its spectacular and mobile engagement with the visual landscape' (Hallam 2010: 288), the settings in Yaşamayanlar are notably static. Seen through an unmoving camera, the series portrays the human and supernatural bodies constantly walking, walking, walking, while the city itself remains the same. If vampires – quite literally – embody the past, their positioning within the modern metropolis creates a sphere of contrasting temporalities. 'The ways in which the conventions are reconfigured, manipulated, undermined, or abandoned, therefore, draw upon existing and emerging discourses and representations of particular urban identities' (2007: 141), Stacey Abbott argues in her discussion of the urban vampire on the screen. In Yaşamayanlar, the vampires' bodies are noticeably referencing an imagined urban appearance as well, dressed in a variety of – confidently unbuttoned – shirts with abstract prints, tight leather jackets and vests, and toned sunglasses, aviator-style. While some of the (conscious or accidental) visual references might only be recognisable to avid watchers of supernatural media narratives – from the back entrance to Buffy the Vampire Slayer's favourite, and frequently vampire surrounded, night club Bronze to the blue-tinted streetscapes of Blade – there still remains an almost uncanny undertone of places seen before. This contradiction is palpable in the responses by the viewers as well. On IMDB, one of the spaces for international audiences to discuss Turkish television series, the setting plays an integral role in the (negative) review of the series:

'It's like watching American series but in Turkish.' (@daniela_sorina, IMDB, 2018)

'Yes, the story is set in Istanbul however I couldn't help but feel it was in Newyork [sic] or Seattle, it's like they completely ignored the Turkish culture!' (@zabadnearwa, IMDB, 2018)

'Vampires in Istanbul?! It doesn't even makes sense...Casting is good but the scenario and the visuals are definitely not believable. Show doesn't blend with the Turkish culture. (@irem_akdmr, IMDB, 2018)'[4]

Notably, the criticism here lies not in the imagination of a supernatural city in general but rather the imagination of Istanbul as such. Vampires in Istanbul? It doesn't even make sense. Both the portrayal of the vampires – and the human vampire hunters – through American references could be understood as a counter to this disbelief. In the season's final episode, Sercan (Efecan Şenolsun), the leader of the human vampire hunters in Kızılkuyu, rallies his 'gang' in the season's final episode. Surrounded by the boarded-up aesthetics of the repair

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shop, the tank tops, track suits, tattoos, baseball bats as well as the thrown up gun sign emphasise the idea of a recognisable 'street culture' to international audiences. Like the Los Angeles vampires of the 1990s that move through the city as a group, as a gang (Abbott 2007), the disenfranchised human youth of Kızılkuyu increasingly resembles a gang as well. The emphasis on neighbourhoods, and the belonging to a specific neighbourhood under threat from the vampires, becomes a connecting thread between the individual human groups. 'The hoods are ganging up' (Eşeli 2018), Sercan comments somewhat dryly on the appearance of more self-proclaimed vampire hunters. Not only can this be read as a bow to Blade and the film's 'gang-like opposition between vampire hunter and vampire' (Abbott 2007: 191) but also as another positioning of the narrative through seemingly universal conventions of life in the 'underground' of the big city. The construction of the series' city as supernatural, then, hinges on an assemblage of imagined cultural signifiers of embodied 'urbanity', taken out of their original (pop)cultural context and reframed through the lens of Istanbul.

If 'the monster comes into being the moment it is called a monster' (Weinstock 2020: 3), I suggest that the metropolis also comes into being the moment it is called a metropolis – at least within the context of the series discussed here. To this end, Yaşamayanlar simultaneously suggests a double inscription of Istanbul as a place of monsters and as a place of street culture. Read through the lens of displacement, Karl Bell proposes that supernatural narratives offer 'means of tacit resistance by creating alternative, subjective, urban spatial understandings' (2018), of reasserting and reclaiming the ownership – both spatial and cultural – of an urban sphere. Following Alastair Pennycook's suggestion that graffiti is 'about the semiotic reinterpretation of urban environments' (2010: 142), both the presence of the vampire-as-monster and graffiti-as-street-culture play a role in the urban semiotics of Istanbul in Yaşamayanlar. Yet, the symbolism of the graffiti in Yaşamayanlar remains ambiguous. While they are clearly part of the urban fabric, their function as a marker of identities and territories, of claims of ownership and access to different spaces, does not factor into the narrative. Navigating graffiti as 'an authentic, rebellious subculture that challenges dominant notions of power in urban spaces' (Rowe and Hutton 2012: 68) gains prominence when interweaving the appearance of the series' human protagonists with that of the city. Dressed in tracksuits prominently featuring athletics brands – Nike, Adidas, and the occasional baseball cap worn backwards – and fashioning weapons from spearguns and baseball bats, the series interweaves a stereotypical 'hip hop culture' with a sense of urban disenfranchisement. Karl Bell draws on Jacque Derrida's work to align the street youth 'as an

individual at odds with the modern, urban, capitalist system in which he is enmeshed' (2018) with the urban ghost. In Yaşamayanlar, the human protagonists appear to be just as ghost-like as their supernatural counterparts: Both out of sight, either hidden or overlooked from anybody outside of their respective communities.

Jeannie Bank Thomas' provocative question 'Just where do we find the supernatural in the contemporary world? The answer is simple: everywhere' (2015: 11) becomes even more poignant when applied to the specific unspecificity of the setting in Yaşamayanlar. While centred around key locations, their positioning within the city remains somewhat unknown, highlighting both the urban sprawl and fragmentation of Istanbul into more and less accessible neighbourhoods. Different to Kevin Lynch's interest in making sense of the city as map and mapped (1960), the locations in Yaşamayanlar are not necessarily meant to be found, not meant to be navigated to. Rather, their familiarity, their imageability, draws on visual references to established cinematic images of other cities. In doing so, the city becomes both unrecognisable and recognisable to the stranger (or the international audience, to be more precise). Crucially, the 'genericness' of the setting does not necessarily paint a completely new image of Istanbul as modern metropolis, but rather of Istanbul as just like any other metropolis. Presenting Istanbul in this way should be understood as more than an 'Americanization' of local television narratives, as some of the review comments discussed above suggest. By drawing visual references to the supernatural urban stories set in New York and Los Angeles of the 1980s and 1990s, Yaşamayanlar also opens up the space to negotiate alternative urban visions of the future.

Unchanging Monsters, Changing Times? Negotiating Urban Communities in the City

'The history of our species has been written in coffins, vaults, and the filthiest and the most secluded streets' – Dmitry

As Stacey Abbott points out, the presence of the female vampire in American films 'undermines the perceived incongruity between women and the city' (2003: 136). Despite the visual references to these urban spaces, Yaşamayanlar appears to be caught in this precise tension between the danger of the monster and the endangeredness of women in the metropolis. One of the first times we see Mia moving through the city at night, she saves

Ayşe from a rapist in an abandoned underpass – and feeds on the perpetrator while the young woman looks on in a state of shock. Yet, Ayşe is attacked, bitten, and turned by Dmitry in the season's penultimate episode, providing a full-circle moment when Mia finds her bleeding on the dark streets, this time too late. The young woman, however, does not choose humanity when given the chance – but rather accepts her monstrosity as an ultimately less deadly life. In this decision, she is notably not the only one: of the four women highlighted over the course of the series' eight episodes, the vampires Mia and Karmen (Selma Ergeç), and the (at least in the beginning) human Ayşe (Elit İşcan), Serkan's sister, and his ex-girlfriend Zehra (Türkü Turan), only Mia dreams of living as a mortal – or, more precisely, as a mortal woman. The desire for 'changing', from a human to a vampire and vice versa, becomes crucially connected to questions of survival and power in a changed and changing city. While Dracula arguably plays with London's 'familiar locations to heighten fears of invasion, contamination and disease' (Davies 2004), the Istanbul portrayed in Yaşamayanlar is notably already invaded, already contaminated, already diseased. This distinction is crucial to a reading of Yaşamayanlar. Through the supernatural presence, however, this liminal status becomes productive. One of Zehra's first tasks – post-bite – is to change her wardrobe, courtesy of an unlimited credit card given to her by the (female) vampire who turned her. The power offered by the supernatural, then, also comes with a step up the social ladder. Zehra does blend in with the vampires and their elegant, although somewhat edgy chic but – maybe more importantly – she does not belong with the rough community of Kızılkuyu anymore. In the divided metropolis, the supernatural becomes the only way to change one's station – and to live above and outside of societal expectations and control. 'I haven't lived under anyone's protection in 200 years. And I don't intend starting it now' (Eşeli 2018), Mia defiantly announces in the final episode. Clad in layers of leather upon leather that again resemble the action heroines of the 1980s, she first kisses then kills Dmitry – boldly embracing her independence from both the human and non-human communities demanding her alliance. At the same time, Mia's position of power as a monstrous woman in the urban space becomes further complicated by her own repeated vulnerability – both in the public and ultimately also the private sphere. Injected with an unknown substance outside of a vampire-controlled nightclub, Mia wakes up bound in a strange location without any memory of what happened to her at the beginning of the second episode. The not necessarily subtle reference to a date rape scenario proposes a weakness of her as a woman that supersedes her strength as female vampire. Escalating this public vulnerability, the end of the fifth episode sees Mia being poisoned within the presumed safety of her own home. The similarity of these two instances

in the emphasis on embodied toxication and collapse challenges the idea of the body of the vampire as above human volatility. Vampirism in Yaşamayanlar does not necessarily come with a sense of empowerment, with an ownership of the city – at least by night. Rather, the conventions and politics of human-vampire relations restrict the movements of the immortal inhabitants as much as they do the mortal ones.

Contrary to other contemporary audiovisual embodiments of the vampire, the series features neither the shapeshifting form of Young Dracula (CBBC 2006-2014), the suggestive mind control of The Vampire Diaries (The CW 2009-2017), the additional abilities of Twilight (2008-2012), the superhuman speed of True Blood (HBO 2008-2014) nor even the mental and physical connection to animals of classic iterations of Dracula. What sets the monster apart from the human in Yaşamayanlar, then, only appears to be immortality – and fangs protruding in moments of emotion or hunger. As a somewhat 'minimalist' incarnation of the vampire, the immortals in the series are notably not changing with the times – they are not becoming faster, stronger, or even more exciting. If 'what is monstrous is always defined in relation to what is human' (Weinstock 2020: 358), the definition of what is modern is also pointing us towards a relationality in the series discussed here. The presence of the vampire, as the embodiment of the past, in the modern urban sphere – as sphere of progress – highlights the negotiation between past and present, and the impossibility of drastically detaching the present from the past. What Michael Dylan Foster refers to as 'intrusive anachronism' (2020: 342) in regard to stories of hauntings, here also takes on a political perspective. With an emphasis on the power structures of the present originating in the past – both for the vampires and their hierarchical rule over the other vampires in Istanbul as well as the business corporation handling the interests of the humans – stories of independent achievements, of rising socially and economically outside of circles of nepotism, are undermined.

The specific positioning of Istanbul at the intersection between Europe and Asia, between historical heritage and global power, allows for a further investigation of possibilities. A city of crossroads, here, becomes the background for a story about the fate of humanity at a crossroad as well. One of the key conflicts of the series – though not entirely original – is the desire of the vampires to come out of hiding, and to take over the rule of the city from its human inhabitants. Within this struggle, both fractions operate from their dedicated meeting spaces: the vampires from the nightclub Sessiz Karanlık (translatable as

'Silent Darkness') and the humans from a repair shop[5] in the fictional neighbourhood Kızılkuyu. While the city's streets remain a sphere of individuality and (dangerous) loneliness, the shared spaces allow for the creation of community. And both fractions become increasingly vocal in their desire to leave these spaces behind. 'We were born into the shittiest, most dangerous hoods in the city. When there were no Rottens, life was at our necks' (Eşeli 2018), Sercan urges to both accept and challenge the fate of his neighbourhood. Simultaneously, Dmitry laments in his final warrying speech that 'the history of our species has been written in coffins, vaults, and the filthiest and the most secluded streets' (Eşeli 2018). The emphasis on spatiality, on the dangerous neighbourhoods and filthy streets, becomes a connecting line between the two different groups and their shared sense of displacement. While Dmitry addresses an enraptured and silent audience of vampires from a balcony in the nightclub, the self-proclaimed vampire-hunters are positioned in a fragmented circle within the chaos of the repair shop – further heightening the contrast between the similarities of their concerns and the difference of the spaces both in positionality and power.

Following Foucault's critique on the stillness of spatiality – 'time moves, space stands still' (Pennycook 2010: 143) – the shifting back and forth between the two static settings contrasts the temporal volatility of this moment of socio-political unrest. Negotiating urban change through the presence of the 'living undead', the vampire as a body frozen in time but not in place, allows for an imagination of the city outside of the linearity of history and heritage. As 'vampires entangle themselves in the sources of power' (Auerbach 1995: 101), the presentation of power as sourced in community and communal spheres becomes striking. At the same time, this sense of community remains somewhat partial: There are the vampires and their hunters, the orphaned outcasts of society both dead and alive, but notably nobody else. Rather than a shared space, Istanbul is imagined as a city of outcasts – in which everybody, and particularly every woman, needs to find a safe place for and by themselves.

Conclusion

Using the American vampire television series *The Originals (*CW 2013-2017) as another contemporary example, Lorna Piatti-Farnell argues that the narratives of the city – in this case New Orleans – become 'entangled with – and are, at times, almost inseparable from – the fictional chronicles of the vampire in both aesthetic and conceptual terms' (2017). The

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'weaving of supernatural stories into the material fabric of the city' (Bell 2018), here becomes a reciprocal process: the supernatural does not only shape the metropolis as a sphere of dangerous individualisation (and potential community) but the metropolis also shapes the supernatural in and through the references to other urban spheres. As Michael Dylan Foster writes in his discussion of 'Haunted Modernity': 'in times of rapid flux and cultural change, it is not only the past that haunts the present. The desire for the future, for an impossible modernity, can be just as disorienting' (2020: 346). Mia's desire for a future that is the past, her return to humanity as something she once was, contrasts the portrayal of a city untied from its cultural heritage. Yet, both negotiations of past-present-future contain an element of disorientation, palpable in the somewhat confusing experience of watching a series simultaneously drawing on and diverging substantially from other audiovisual narratives of vampires in the urban.

Throughout the series, the re-imagination of Istanbul as a supernatural city is entangled with narratives of modernity, connectivity, and change. In this regard, Istanbul is not necessarily only a hub for vampires, or even the supernatural in general, but rather a hub of power – and the negotiation of this power at a decisive moment in time. Provided that 'vampires go where the power is' (1995: 6), as Nina Auerbach suggests, the continuous references in the series to other modern metropoles – particularly at their moments of cultural (re)invention – position the presence of the supernatural as a harbinger of urban change. Reading *Yaşamayanlar* as Turkey's first ever television series featuring vampires in the context of the larger renegotiation of Istanbul as 'genuine urban space' (İstanbul Kalkınma Ajansı 2016) underlines the image of a city at a cultural crossroad – potentially leading to a closer resemblance and connection to the rest of the world in a globalised (televisual) landscape. Similarly pointing to the connection between time and space, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that 'the monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place' (2020: 38). Throughout the series, the ancient myth of a ritual promises the supernatural beings 'absolute immortality' if performed on a specific day. To be performed by Dmitry, this ritual[6] is oriented around a rare planetary convergence, only possible once in a millennium. The emphasis on this specific moment in time creates another crossroad – this time not spatial but temporal. 'Whether the ritual is performed or not, the real transformation has already begun' (Eşeli 2018), Dmitry promises in the last episode. The series, crucially, ends without a clear conclusion: Dmitry has been killed by Mia, but the rest of the vampires have started to flood

the streets, making their presence in the city known for the first time in centuries. The transformation of Istanbul, it seems, has always already begun.

Endnote

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[1] The first cinematic adaptation of Dracula, *Drakula İstanbul'da* [Dracula in Istanbul] that premiered in 1953 is a key reference point here.

[2] … with notable exceptions for occasional discussion of Paris and Rome in cinema.

[3] While not vampires, the seven 'Immortals' share a continued interest in power – next to their immortality – with the supernatural beings in *Yaşamayanlar*. Even more importantly, *The Protector*'s immortals live even more inconspicuously amongst us, embedded in the political, economic, and social life of Istanbul.

[4] All user reviews of the series can be found here: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8063174/?ref_=nv_sr_srsg_3 – the examples included here have not been edited except for the removal of user names.

[5] The 'repair shop' becomes a recognisable space throughout the series, although it remains somewhat unclear what is actually being repaired there.

[6] What exactly this ritual entails is never fully explained in the series – other than that it involves a mystical dagger and the sacrifice of twelve humans.

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