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**'NON-ISTANBULITES' OF ISTANBUL:
THE RIGHT TO THE CITY NOVELS IN TURKISH LITERATURE
FROM THE 1960S TO THE PRESENT**

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Central Question

I started working on the proposal for this dissertation in September 2010, at the beginning of the last quarter of a year that had been spent in celebrations of Istanbul 2010, European Capital of Culture. There were numerous events in the city – concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, panel discussions and so forth. From outside, everything looked fine; Istanbul 2010 seemed to mesh in a perfect way with the city's acceleration on the list of the hip cities of the world. On the other hand, things were not that positive for those who were being pushed out of a rapidly gentrifying city centre. Neighbourhoods such as Sulukule were being removed from the memory of the city, rents and flat prices were getting higher and higher, while in numerous neighbourhoods, people were living in anxious expectation of urban transformation projects. This made me think about these people who were suffering the most because of the drastic changes, as Istanbul was competing in the race to become a global city: these people living in poor neighbourhoods in the city centre, or in ex-shanty-towns which were whetting the appetites of building contractors.

At the same time, I was observing the extremely popular nostalgia for a cosmopolitan Istanbul, which seemed artificial and manufactured. In its adaptation by elitists, this nostalgia was hostile to rural to urban immigrants, with the message that Istanbul had been a much better place in the past, before the arrival of rural to urban immigrants, with its cosmopolitan people including a significant non-Muslim population. As this discourse ignored the fact that the Istanbul of the 1950s had already lost the great majority of its non-Muslim population, it in a way created the illusion that the rural to urban immigrants had pushed the cosmopolitan non-Muslim population out of the city. The elitist, anti-immigrant adaptation of old-Istanbul nostalgia put almost all the blame for the negative changes in Istanbul on immigrants, and saw their presence in the city as something they were in fact not entitled to.

Reflections of nostalgia for old-Istanbul were visible in popular culture and the publishing sector. Framed black and white photos of old-Istanbul were being sold everywhere, television dramas set in old-Istanbul neighbourhoods, which had had a significant non-Muslim population in the past. such as Çengelköy¹, Balat² and Samatya³, were received with enthusiasm, books about the history of the city as well as monographs on

¹ *Süper Baba [Super Daddy]* (1993-1997, Dir. Osman Sınav)

² *Yeditepe İstanbul [Seven Hills Istanbul]* (2001-2002, Dir. Türkan Derya)

³ *İkinci Bahar [The Second Spring]* (1998-2001, Dir. Uğur Yücel, Orhan Oğuz, Türkan Derya)

various neighbourhoods⁴ of it were being published one after the other to the interest of readers, historical anecdotes on the past of Istanbul were appearing in books⁵ as well as newspapers and magazines, while eating habits in old-Istanbul were becoming an area of gastronomic interest in themselves. Certainly, this is not to claim that all these cultural products adopted an elitist, anti-immigrant discourse. Rather, it can simply be argued that in the *zeitgeist* there was nostalgia, and in the hands of some this nostalgia took on an elitist, anti-immigrant discourse.

The reflections of this nostalgia in literature particularly attracted my interest. Old-Istanbul has been an ever-rewarding setting and subject for literature, and from the 1990s onwards it became even more popular. There were many books with an old-Istanbulite setting and characters. While it would not be fair to say that all novels with such setting and characters reflect nostalgia for old-Istanbul, there are various novels with nostalgia at their centre, and interest in such novels has been high.

Spotting the reflections of the nostalgic discourse in between the lines of nostalgic novels with their old-Istanbulite characters and setting, I became curious about the representations of immigrants in Istanbul in modern Turkish novels. Based on this curiosity, I started to wonder if Turkish literature had significant novels with rural to urban immigrant protagonists in Istanbul. I started thinking about some decades back, when deserted apartments in non-Muslim minority neighbourhoods were being rented by immigrants and when shantytowns were being built in numerous parts of the city. I wanted to track the representations of these experiences in literature, from the beginning of rural to urban migration to Istanbul until the present time, through the standpoint of immigrants. Thus evolved the central question of this dissertation: Similar to the ways nostalgic novels were putting a spot-light on old-Istanbulites, were there novels putting a spot-light on new Istanbulites? Just as the former were implying that Istanbul belonged to old-Istanbulites, were there novels giving the message that Istanbul belonged to anyone and everyone who chose to

⁴ For instance, *Heyamola Press* has published eighty-five monographs on different neighbourhoods of Istanbul within its *İstanbulum [My Istanbul]* series, ongoing since 2009. *Sel Press* has printed twelve monographs on ex-Greek neighbourhoods of Istanbul, the first of which published in 1998 and the last in 2016.

⁵ Within the *İstanbul'un Yüzleri [Istanbul's Hundreds]* series, ongoing since 2009, *İBB Kültür A.Ş. [Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality - Culture Inc.] Press* has published some eighty books on the city's social and cultural history, such as: *100 Tastes of Istanbul*, *100 Mansions of Istanbul*, *100 Customs of Istanbul*, *100 Families of Istanbul*.

come and live in this city? Put simply, were there novels depicting immigrants in Istanbul in such a way that is compatible with the philosophical idea of the right to the city?

If the answer to the first question was yes, then I was curious to know through which themes and with the use of which formal and stylistic elements the idea of the right to the city was elaborated in these novels? Were immigrants depicted simply as peasants in the city or were they portrayed as new urbanites? How were their strategies for survival depicted in these novels? Were they portrayed as potential agents of change in the city for good? In what type of language, with which sort of narration were these novels written? In which parts of Istanbul were they set?

As I started my research, I found out that there were various novels depicting immigrants' experiences in Istanbul in impressive ways. In these novels with immigrant protagonists, themes based on various facets of the immigration experience were treated. The novels with immigrant protagonists could be regarded almost as a counterpoint to the nostalgic novels with old-Istanbulite protagonists. I decided to analyse a selection of the novels with immigrant protagonists, tracking the idea of the right to the city in them, through themes directly or indirectly related to this idea, reciprocally with the formal features of the novels. Such a work on literary, therefore cultural, output in Turkey could help us track the changing perceptions about immigrants in the city, and discursive strategies about them, as art reflecting reality. It could also help us tackle the question of how influential these novels were on our perceptions about immigrants in the city, as art mediating reality.

State of the Art

Neither at the initial stage of my research, nor today having completed the writing of the dissertation, have I come across analytical works approaching the representation of rural to urban migration to Istanbul in literature through an inter-disciplinary perspective at the junction of literary and urban studies, placing the idea of the right to the city at the centre of the argument. However, a limited number of works, mainly in the form of articles, dealing with representations of immigration and/or urbanity in Turkish literature should briefly be mentioned here.

Among all the works in a sphere mutual to my dissertation, Ali Kurt's dissertation entitled "Immigration from Anatolia to Istanbul in Turkish novel after 1950 (1950 –1980)"⁶ which was defended at the end of 2011, is the closest one to my work. However, our dissertations are highly different from each other in many ways. His descriptive work tracks

⁶ 1950 Sonrası Türk Romanında Anadolu'dan İstanbul'a Göç (1950 –1980)

various themes and motifs in a rather large corpus of novels, and lists the instances where they appear with short analyses.

Turgay Gümeli, in his Master's thesis entitled "Rural to Urban Migration in Orhan Kemal's Homesick Birds and Latife Tekin's Dear Shameless Death"⁷, which he defended in July 2011, focuses on two novels which are also included in my corpus. However, in his thesis he also adopts a descriptive method, and lists the themes connected with rural to urban migration in the two novels without much analysis.

The article "Big Town Blues: Peasants 'Abroad' in Turkish Literature" by Talat Sait Halman, written in 1985, "addresses the way Turkish writers have dealt with the psychological effects of urbanization at home and abroad" (192). In the article, novels and short stories elaborating themes of migration to big cities in Turkey as well as to Europe are discussed. In this article, Halman argues that the Turkish novel lacks powerful novels depicting the migration experience due to four integrated reasons: "traditional lacuna of psychological depiction; ideological distortion; anti-peasant bias; 'sympathetic fallacy'" (193).

Urban sociologist Önder Şenyapılı, in his article "Rural to Urban Migration Phenomenon in Turkish Novel"⁸ published in 1983, briefly discusses the treatment of issues about rural to urban migration in various novels and short stories. The works commented upon in the article are not particularly about migration to Istanbul, some of them are about migration to other cities. In this article, Şenyapılı argues that genuine novels of rural to urban migration in Turkish literature are yet to be written, in which evaluations of the phenomenon rather than simple observation will appear (87).

Sevinç Özer's "Urbanization Phenomenon and Problems of Urbanizing in Novel and Short-Story from the 1960s to the Present"⁹, published in the same issue of Yazko literary journal as Şenyapılı's article, is also about novels and short stories with central themes related to migration. Özer's article is particularly interesting for this dissertation, since she focuses on the theme of immigrants adopting urban identities. Similar to Şenyapılı's article, the novels and short-stories Özer discusses are on migration to all big cities in Turkey. In her article, she points out that urbanisation enters Turkish novels through two central themes: the encounters of rural and urban cultures; and problems of urbanising and difficulties of life in the urban context (91).

⁷ "Orhan Kemal'in Gurbet Kuşları ve Latife Tekin'in Sevgili Arsız Ölüm Romanlarında Köyden Kente Göç ve Yoksulluk"

⁸ "Türk Yazınında Kırdan Kente Göç Olgusu"

⁹ "1960'tan Bu Yana Roman ve Kısa Öyküde Kentleşme Olgusu ve Kentleşme Sorunları"

In his article “Transition From Cultural Center Istanbul to Economic and Social Conflict Center Istanbul: Transition From Cultural Capital to Slum City”¹⁰ Çonoğlu makes a comparative analysis of Samiha Ayverdi’s *The Mansion of İbrahim Efendi*¹¹ (1964), Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’s *A Mind at Peace*¹² (1949), Orhan Kemal’s *The Homesick Birds*¹³ (1962) and Latife Tekin’s *Berji Kristin: Tales From the Garbage Hills*¹⁴ (1984), with a rather superficial approach and an anti-immigrant stance.

Finally, it might be useful to mention the following works, although they are not written at the interface of literary studies and urban studies: Doğan Hızlan’s article “Istanbul in Literature as a Symbol of Social Changes in Turkey”¹⁵ written in 2010 gives a trajectory of significant literary works, novels and poetry, that are not simply set in but also about Istanbul, from the late Ottoman era until the present day. This article, in which Hızlan groups literary works into historical periods, does not include any analysis, it is a bibliographical piece.

*One Hundred Novels of Istanbul*¹⁶, published in 2010, gives descriptive information on one hundred Istanbul novels from the late Ottoman era to the present day. Azade Seyhan’s chapter titled “Istanbul: City as Trope and Topos of Crossed Destinies” in her *Tales of Crossed Destinies* published in 2008, focuses on Istanbul’s significance in Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’s *A Mind at Peace*, Orhan Pamuk’s *The Black Book*¹⁷ (1990), and Yaşar Kemal’s *The Sea-Crossed Fishermen*¹⁸ (1978). Adnan Özyalçınır’s article “Map of Istanbul”¹⁹ lists various significant literary works in prose and poetry, as well as popular history and research books about the city from the early Turkish republic to the present day. Türkeş’s article “Urbanization in Novel: From Shanties to Villacities”²⁰ published in 1999, tracks urbanisation in world literature, as well as in Turkish literature, and the latter is discussed only in the last three pages of the article. In this part of his article, Türkeş briefly introduces various novels of Turkish literature, with the theme of urbanisation from the 1920s to the present day. Despite its title, the article mentions a couple of short story books as well.

¹⁰ “Kültürün Merkezi İstanbul’dan Ekonomik Sosyal Çatışmanın Merkezi İstanbul’a: Kültürel Başkentten Gecekondu Şehrine Geçiş”

¹¹ *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*

¹² *Huzur*

¹³ *Gurbet Kuşları*

¹⁴ *Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları*

¹⁵ “Türkiye’deki Sosyal Değişimlerin Sembolü olarak Edebiyatta İstanbul”

¹⁶ *İstanbul’un Yüz Romanı*

¹⁷ *Kara Kitap*

¹⁸ *Deniz Küstü*

¹⁹ *İstanbul Haritası*

²⁰ “Romanda Kentleşme: Gecekonduyan Villakentlere”

In setting out on the road to write this dissertation, I believed that when so many people were talking about Istanbul as it was changing dramatically, a work of analysis on its literary representations built on the idea of the right to the city could help us transcend clichés and stereotypes connected with the city through the possibilities of literary imagination. This, in turn, could motivate us to depart from the literary realm and arrive at the historical realm, and try and understand, through historical records, certain facts about stigmatised and/or gentrifying neighbourhoods and people living in them, most of whom are first or second generation immigrants. This would be an invaluable step towards understanding the inevitability of immigration and the rights of the citizens of the country in their quest to establish their lives in Istanbul. On the other hand, such research could also be instrumental in making connections between novelists who would seem disparate on the surface, which would be a worthwhile contribution to scholarship on the modern Turkish novel.

As the population living in cities keeps increasing all around the world, urban life is becoming a more and more significant topic in culture and literature. Analysing treatments of urban life in novels, with their endless themes, characters and settings reciprocally with evolving formal and stylistic aspects, seems necessary and meaningful for literary and cultural scholarship more than ever. Therefore, I believed that researching ‘non-Istanbulites’ in the modern Turkish novel would be well worth my labour.

The Material Analysed: Creation of the Corpus

In this research project, seven novels are analysed and interpreted. These novels were selected from a group of novels from modern Turkish literature which have immigrant protagonists and which are set in Istanbul. The novels selected for the corpus can be considered as belonging to four eras:

- The 1960s and 1970s,
- The 1980s and 1990s,
- After 2000
- After 2010

In the 1960s and 70s, the immigrants who are the protagonists of the novels are first-generation. In those years, a humanistic approach by an author who is not an immigrant and therefore who looks at the subject from outside, is the main tendency in approaching the issue of immigrants and their right to the city. *The Homesick Birds* (1962) and *Uncle Halo and Two Bulls* (1973) were chosen as representative of this category. The two novels have an extra

compatibility for comparison, since both of them have a father and son relationship against the background of immigration.

From the 1980s, authors who grew up in Istanbul as the children of immigrant families appear on the stage of literature, writing about first and second generation immigrants' experiences as insiders. In this respect, the works of Latife Tekin and Metin Kaçan have a significant place in the Turkish novel, almost comprising a category in themselves. Tekin's *Berji Kristin: Tales From the Garbage Hills* (1984) was selected for the corpus, despite the fact that the city it is set in is not explicitly identified as Istanbul, a point discussed in the analysis of the novel. This novel and *Heavy Roman(i)* (1995) offer rich material for comparison, due to the two unique neighbourhoods in which they are set.

Authors who have an insider's experience of the immigration phenomenon, as well as those who do not, continued writing on immigrants in Istanbul. Neighbourhood life has been a central aspect of these novels from the 1980s to the present time. As the shantytowns took an amorphous shape after legal provisions enabling owners of shanties to build apartments over their shanties, the neighbourhoods appearing in the novels also changed. Additionally, from the 1990s, the globalisation and neo-liberalisation of the city, gentrification and tourism became more and more important, which had a great impact on the shantytowns, especially from the 2000s onwards. In this regard, two novels written after the start of the millennium come to the fore, in the ways they elaborate on this issue of the changing faces of shantytowns, as well as perceptions on the meaning of periphery: Ayhan Geçgin's *On the Periphery* (2003) and Hatice Meryem's *It Takes All Kinds* (2008).

As this research was in progress, in the very final weeks of 2014, Orhan Pamuk's novel *A Strangeness in my Mind* came out. The novel seemed almost to have been written for this dissertation: it is a novel with a first-generation immigrant protagonist, and it describes the immigration phase in detail, a trait which brings it close to novels such as *Birds* and *Bulls*. It has two main settings: Duttepe, a shantytown and Tarlabası, a poor neighbourhood in the centre of the city. In this respect, it also has parallels with novels about second-generation immigrants where neighbourhood life has great significance. Within the wide time span it covers, it also includes the globalising of Istanbul, with gentrifying neighbourhoods and foreign immigrants arriving in the city, similar to the novels in the third group. Therefore, it contributed significantly to the corpus.

The Argument of the Dissertation

In all the novels in the corpus, there is the underlying idea of the right to the city²¹, sometimes explicit on the thematic level, while sometimes implicit within other themes. Thus, in this dissertation it is argued that these novels can be defined as a vein within Istanbul novels: the right to the city novels. It is also argued that the right to the city novels appear as a counterpoint to novels that have old-Istanbul nostalgia at their core.

This dissertation does not claim that these novels constitute a genre; it presents them as a vein within the category of Istanbul novels. Again, Istanbul novels are not regarded here as a genre; instead, they are seen as a long lineage of novels which have Istanbul as their setting, and in which the city appears as more than just a setting, an integral aspect of the plot as well as of the central themes of the novel.

At certain times, the idea of the right to the city is developed through explicit themes in the novels. At other times, it is elaborated within various themes such as the urbanisation of immigrants, their survival strategies and their struggle against various exclusion mechanisms, life on the periphery, and so forth. In a topic like rural to urban migration, dramatic changes in gender roles finds a place among the novels' concerns. Such changes are analysed simply as themes, not through adaptations of gender theory per se. In some novels, this theme is scarcely touched on, in which case this fact is simply acknowledged. All these themes are analysed and interpreted reciprocally with the formal and stylistic features of the novels.

Through a cultural materialist approach, it is observed that while historical developments in social, cultural and economic life find expression in the themes and formal features of novels dealing with immigrants in Istanbul, the ways immigrants appear in these novels, have, to a certain extent, an influence on society's ways of perceiving immigrants and their right to the city. This point is briefly touched upon in the conclusion chapter.

Finally, it should be noted that this dissertation aims at identifying examples of the right to the city novels from different eras. It is not argued here that all novels set in Istanbul having immigrant protagonists can de facto be defined as right to the city novels. However, it is implied here that such novels most of the time deal with the right to the city; therefore they are potential components of this vein of novels. It is to be hoped that further studies of these novels are made, and that this dissertation provides a modest contribution in this direction.

²¹ This concept of Henry Lefebvre is analysed in a separate chapter below.

Chapter Structure

The dissertation comprises six parts. The first part consists of the theoretical and methodological framework, as well as the historical context. The first chapter is on the literary theoretical and methodological approach of the dissertation. The next one is on the historical context, as regards immigrants in Istanbul. The third chapter is on the urban theoretical dimension, namely the right to the city. In this chapter, the contested concept of who is an Istanbulite is also discussed. The final chapter of this part is on literary history, concerning novels with old-Istanbulite and ‘new Istanbulite’ protagonists.

Each of the following three parts of the dissertation is on a pair of novels, including an analysis chapter of each novel²², and ending with a chapter of comparison for each pair. In the comparative analysis chapters, the focus is on the way the idea of the right to the city is developed, through themes related to setting and character. In these comparative chapters, discussions of specific themes and formal traits that become more visible when two counterpoint novels are read comparatively are also included. Therefore, in each comparative chapter there are points that are compared only in that pair of novels.

Part II is on Orhan Kemal’s *The Homesick Birds* (1962) and Muzaffer İzgü’s *Uncle Halo and Two Bulls* (1973); Part III is on Latife Tekin’s *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills* (1984) and Metin Kaçan’s *Heavy Roman(i)* (1995), Part IV is on Ayhan Geçgin’s *On the Periphery* (2003) and Hatice Meryem’s *It Takes All Kinds* (2008). Part V is on Orhan Pamuk’s *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2014). The dissertation ends with a conclusion chapter, where the novels are briefly compared with each other, first in terms of their central formal and stylistic features. This section of the chapter is followed by a comparison of the ways the following issues, the three central tenets of the urban sociological framework discussed in Chapter 3, are elaborated in the novels: the right to the city as an explicit theme; immigrants becoming urbanites; and immigrants laying claim to the city. This final chapter also includes a short section comprising brief comments on the potential influence of the novels in the corpus on real life, the way they mediate reality, to use Williams’s phrase.

The dissertation includes two maps of Istanbul. The first map shows the districts of the city. The second map shows significant neighbourhoods appearing as settings in the novels. The book cover images presented are scanned from the actual printed books. The appendix comprises short biographies of the authors of the novels in the corpus.

²² The structure of the novel analysis chapters is explained in detail in Chapter 1.

Notes on the Format

This dissertation is written in line with the MLA 2016 handbook. However, one of the in-text citation rules of this referencing system is adapted in the following way: in the novel analysis chapters, in the excerpts from the novels, the name of the novelist is not included to avoid repetition.

A minor adaptation appears in punctuation as follows: in the quotes, in order to avoid confusion between ellipsis as part of the sentence, and ellipsis used to indicate skipped words in the quotes, ellipses as part of the sentences are written without spaces as ‘...’, while ellipses to indicate skipped words are written with spaces as ‘ . . . ’. Additionally, when ellipses are at the end of the sentence, the full-stop is implied to be within the skipped part of the sentence.

Scare quotes are used only in the first appearance of the related word or phrase, except for ‘non-Istanbulite’.

In the analyses, if the novel is dedicated to someone it is mentioned. Information on the novel’s adaptations to other media and translations into other languages is given if any adaptation or translation exists.

Apart from *Hills* and *Strangeness*, excerpts were translated into English by the author of this dissertation. In the analyses of these two novels, when necessary, page numbers are indicated by “T” for the Turkish and “E” for the English versions of the book. The translations of the excerpts from novels have been made simply with the objective of rendering their content on the lexical level; the rural accents of protagonists do not appear in the translations. The information on the style of the novel, given in the Main Features section of each novel analysis and explaining whether rural accent is used in characters’ speeches is regarded as sufficient in this sense. Only in two instances in the analysis of *Heavy Roman(i)* is rural accent signalled in brackets within the conversation, because in them this use determines the contents of the conversation.

Throughout the dissertation, instead of simply using acronyms of the novels’ titles, abbreviations that create an association with the context of the related novel are used. A short explanation of each title’s English translation is included in the relevant analysis chapter.

Turkish Title	English Title	Abbreviation
<i>Gurbet Kuşları</i>	<i>The Homesick Birds</i>	<i>Birds</i>
<i>Halo Dayı ve İki Öküz</i>	<i>Uncle Halo and Two Bulls</i>	<i>Bulls</i>
<i>Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları</i>	<i>Berji Kristin: Tales From the Garbage Hills</i>	<i>Hills</i>
<i>Ağır Roman</i>	<i>Heavy Roman(i)</i>	<i>Roman(i)</i>
<i>Kenarda</i>	<i>On the Periphery</i>	<i>Periphery</i>
<i>İnsan Kısım Kısım, Yer Damar Damar</i>	<i>It Takes All Kinds</i>	<i>Kinds</i>
<i>Kafamda Bir Tuhafılık</i>	<i>A Strangeness in My Mind</i>	<i>Strangeness</i>

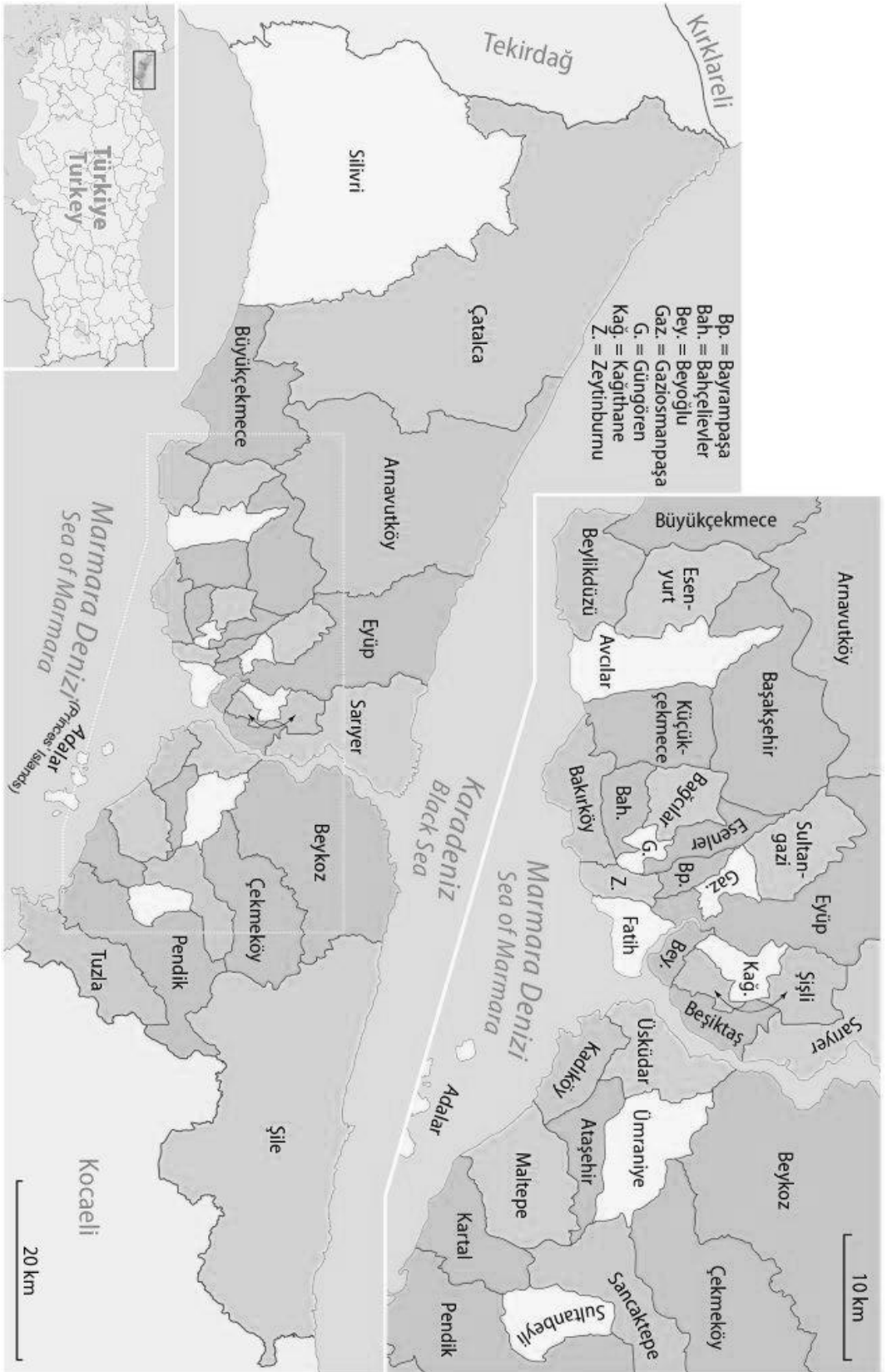


Fig. 1. Districts of Istanbul. Source: Maximilian Dörtbecker (Chumwa), *Districts of Istanbul*, 2012, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Districts_of_Istanbul.png. Open access by courtesy of Creative Commons. Accessed 14 Oct. 2016.

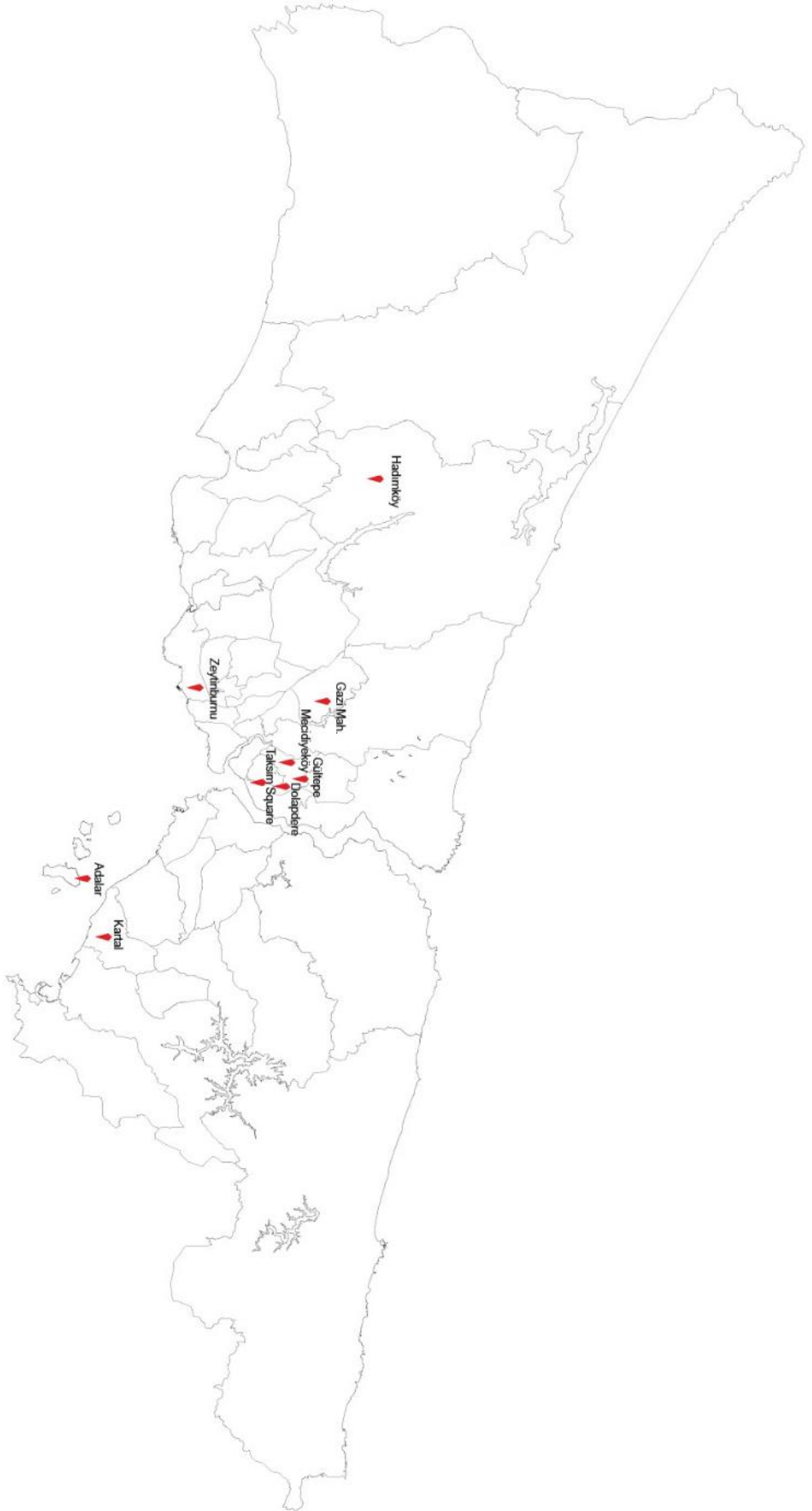


Fig. 2. Significant neighbourhoods appearing as settings in the novels analysed.

Source: Ecem Sarıçayır, *Neighbourhoods*, 2016. Courtesy of Ecem Sarıçayır