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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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Citation

Cengiz, N. B. (2017, June 13). 'Non-Istanbulites' of Istanbul : the right to the city novels in Turkish literature from the 1960s to the present. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/49670>

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Issue Date: 2017-06-13

CHAPTER 2

The Historical and the Social Context: Istanbul and Immigrants

In the following pages, a brief history of Istanbul after the 1950s is discussed as regards immigration to the city, particularly internal rural to urban migration starting in the 1950s, and related topics such as the immigrants' integration into urban life and their perception by old-Istanbulites.

Eric Jan Zürcher, at the beginning of his book *Turkey, A Modern History*, emphasises the inevitability of periodisation while studying history, and divides the 1950s to 1990s period in Turkey's history as follows: "the rule of the Democratic Party, 1950–60; the second Turkish Republic, 1960–80 and, the Third Republic: since 1980" (Contents). This chapter loosely adopts this periodisation, together with Tahire Erman's periodisation regarding studies on informal shanty type housing in Turkey: the 1950s and 1960s; the 1970s and early 1980s; the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s; and the late 1990s (984).

2.1 Background Information about Istanbul

Istanbul was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire from A.D. 330 until 1453, and the Ottoman Empire 1453-1923. During the 18th and 19th centuries, as it became the centre for commerce and trade, its cosmopolitan identity became even stronger (Keyder and Öncü 14). Since the imperial palace and administration were in the city, there were a significant number of Westernised upper class Muslims in the city, which contributed to its cosmopolitan atmosphere. Until World War I, the city included a wide array of people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds with its population comprising of Muslims, Greeks, Sephardic-Jews and Armenians (Keyder and Öncü 14-15). As the 1885-1886 census reveals, as of 1886, Muslim Turks living in Istanbul constituted only forty-four percent of the city's population which was around one million (*Istanbul: Kitaların* 201).

A series of events following World War I (WWI) decreased the minority population in the city. Although the population exchange in 1923 excluded the Greeks in Istanbul, in the period between WWI and WWII Istanbul lost a significant amount of its wealthy non-Muslim minorities and foreigners who were no longer feeling safe and secure in the city (Keyder and Öncü 15). After the Kemalist regime made Ankara the capital of the Turkish Republic, Istanbul, which "became the symbolic vestige of decadent Ottoman cosmopolitanism . . . was marginalized not only politically but also culturally" (15). However, after WWII, as a result of the dynamics in Turkey's international political and economic relations, Istanbul became the "growth pole" of the expanding economy (16).

2.2 The 1950s and 60s

Between 1950 and 1970 private manufacturing enterprises spread in Istanbul and “51 percent of total employment in Turkish private industry” was located in the city (Keyder and Öncü 17), which created a significant need for labour. Additionally, Adnan Menderes, the prime minister of the time, launched an extensive urban transformation project, with devastating effects on the city’s historical and cultural heritage, in the second half of the 1950s, which turned the city into a massive building site and created demand for labourers, including many unskilled ones.

Sema Erder describes the past and the present Istanbul as “a destination for migrant populations, changing and cosmopolitan in its composition” (“Where Do You” 161). She points out that, until the 1950s, the Muslims and minorities i.e. Armenians, Greeks and Jews which were not only the religious but also the ethnic minorities of the city, comprised an urban population (161). As Erder underscores, after the 1950s the city’s population went through two major changes almost synchronically: on the one hand the minority population shrank and on the other hand two major waves of immigration happened in the city: immigration from the Balkan countries based on international agreements, and internal rural to urban migration i.e. immigration of rural population from Anatolia to Istanbul (161).

The first stage of the shrinking of the minority population in the city was the outcome of the Wealth Tax. In November 1942, a tax was imposed aiming at those who had profited from the war. “But the way in which this law was applied was scandalous: . . . the small non-Muslim communities, . . . were subjected to rates ten times higher than those of Muslims” (Zürcher 199-200). The Istanbul pogrom on 6-7 September 1955 against the Greeks in the city where some members of the Armenian minority were also attacked, and the exile of Greeks in 1964 were other devastating events that resulted in the loss of the city’s non-Muslim population.

Where immigration into the city is concerned, Erder emphasizes that since immigrants from the Balkans were settled in the city under the supervision of the public authorities, their reception was unproblematic, which was not the case for Anatolians who tried to find their own ways to survive in the city. These Anatolian immigrants were “peasants” in the eyes of the old urbanites of the city (“Where Do You” 161), who regarded “their mode of arrival, occupation of land, construction of housing, search for employment, and style of life . . . as alien” (162). This led to the discourse of the “peasantization of cities” and an “urban-peasant divide” (161). As Erder observes, peasants in the cities, who were seen as a homogenous group, were expected to integrate into urban life by “changing [their] life styles” and the

characteristics of this integration was a hot topic for journalists and scholars until the 1980's (162). She adds that, when the complications of urban life were discussed, the attention was on whether immigrants were successful enough in this integration or not. Those who were not successful in integration were criticized for their failure (162). At this stage, a brief overview of the shanty phenomenon in those years can be a good base to understand issues concerning the presence of immigrants as well as their life-styles which Erder refers to.

Shanty (squatter) settlements started by the end of 1940s, as “a non-market solution for those who were excluded by the formal housing market as well as the state”²⁸ (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 112). The word for these shanties in Turkish is *gecekondu* which literally means ‘built overnight’. The first era shanties, as its name implies, were built by rural to urban immigrants “on the Treasury land in the periphery of the city”²⁹ (113). Oğuz Işık and Melih Pınarcıoğlu emphasise that, during this era shanty settlements did not create a serious conflict owing to two factors. The first is the “*multi-stage migration*”³⁰ (114) which enables the immigrant to continue to have his financial and social ties with his hometown and to have the chance to go back for a while, and bring his family to the city after he is established, which reduces the traumas of migration (115). The second factor was the structure of land ownership. In Turkey the state owns the largest share of the areas in and around cities, which is called Treasury land (115). At the first stages of migration, as pieces of the Treasury land were occupied by immigrants for building shanties, the state preferred to stay as “a silent collaborator”³¹ in the process (115). Işık and Pınarcıoğlu also remind us that localism [hemşehrilik] relationships, as a form of network relationship, was another significant characteristic of the early era shanty life (117). As Çağlar Keyder points out, since the state was not acting as a welfare one in practice, newcomers in the city were supporting each other to a certain extent through “kinship and neighbourhood reciprocity” (“Globalization” 127).

Erman finds significant changes in the way shanty dwellers were perceived in the four periods of studies mentioned above. She asserts that, in the 1950s and 1960s they were seen as ‘the rural Other’. As the title implies, in the first phase the dwellers of the shanties were seen as those people in a city who have arrived with their rural culture. ‘Peasant’ would be the derogatory term to stigmatize them. She underlines that “under the influence of [modernization] theory, Turkish scholars expected the assimilation of rural migrants into the modern urban society” (985). As Erder’s excerpt above illustrates, such an approach

²⁸ “hem formel konut piyasasının, hem de devletin dışladığı kesimlere yönelik *piyasa dışı* bir çözüm”

²⁹ “kentnin çevresinde yer alan Hazine arazileri üzerinde”

³⁰ “*aşamalı göç*”

³¹ “sessiz bir ortak”

dominated public opinion as well as the institutions in terms of urban planning and organisation.

Keyder's analysis summarises the 1950s and 60s in a lucid way. He underlines that through Menderes's developmentalist vision Istanbul was seen as the locomotive of the "political economy of national development" ("Capital City" 3). In the city where the population "doubled from the 1950s to the 1960s" Keyder notes, the growth was characterized by lack of order and planning since "shantytowns developed where it was easiest to occupy and to build, industry was located where it was easiest to pollute" (3-4). This was the picture of the city as it reached the end of the 1960s.

2.3 The 1970s

In the 1970s, shanties started to evolve from poor immigrants' inevitable solution to their housing problem to "profitable commodities" (Erman 986), as some of the owners of these houses started renting or selling them to others. This era also coincides with the interest in upmarket housing in the suburbs of the city, which made the land outside the city centre more precious. However, the ruling parties did not act against shanty builders, as these were the years of leftist activism and the people of the shanty settlements were naturally potential supporters for the left movement (987). Erman adds that, in the 1970s and early 1980s the perspective in shanty studies shifted to 'the disadvantaged Other'³² (984).

Overall, until the 1980s, as Erder explains, immigrants' presence in the city did not really create a problem. Immigrant men worked hard for low wages, while their wives were useful as helpers in middle and upper class homes. "For politicians they were a potential store of votes to be tapped, and for government officials they were 'people' less demanding than citizens . . ." (162). However, the city was by no means a bed of roses, either for immigrants or for the old-Istanbulites. Keyder describes Istanbul of the 1970s as "a grimy, unkempt, and dark third-world metropolis" reminding us that in the city, where almost four million people were living by the middle of the decade, even upper-class areas had infrastructure problems and "gloomy facades" (4). It should also be noted that Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974 resulted in the departure of more Greeks from Istanbul, leaving a bitter feeling in the social atmosphere of the city.

2.4 The 1980s

After the 1980 military coup which brutally repressed the leftist movement of the country, a new government was formed. As Erman underlines, the liberal economic policies

³² Inverted commas belong to Erman.

of the government of the new Prime Minister Turgut Özal had serious negative effects on the majority of the population. The number of people migrating to large cities increased while “unemployment rates and hence social discontent” was climbing (Erman 1987). She adds that as distribution of income changed to the detriment of the poor in those years, this discontent accelerated among “the economically disadvantaged strata, particularly among rural migrants in the city” (1987). In the meantime, as Erman draws attention, the shanty laws which were passed in the Özal era rendered it legitimate to build up to four-storey buildings on the shanty land. This resulted in “the commercialization of *gecekondu*, which could be interpreted again as the government’s ‘bribing’ those who suffered the most for their liberal policies” (1987). So, while apartment blocks started to be built in place of former shanties, the shanty phenomenon lost its initial meaning and function and turned into a tool for easy wealth for its owners as “the ‘apartmentalisation’ of *gecekondu* became a widespread phenomenon” (1987). However, this was not a successful time for all the shanty population. As Erman notes, in the 1980s some members of this population were becoming rich thanks to their apartment buildings while others were suffering from “increasing deprivation” (1987). Hence her description of the perspective in shanty studies between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s as “‘the urban poor Other(s)’ versus ‘the undeserving Other(s)’ and ‘the culturally inferior Other(s) as sub-culture’” (1984), implying the separation between shanty dwellers. Erman stresses that outcomes of this process were manifested in the tension between the culture of new rich immigrants and the urban elites. She adds that in the 1980s and the 1990s it became clear that “rural migrants/*gecekondu* people [could] rapidly jump up to a higher economic stratum” and also “shape the city by creating their own ways of life and sets of values” and there was a wide gap between their life styles and values and those of the “modernising urban e’lites” (1987). Some immigrants who had formerly been living in shanty housing could make money using their shanty as rent, Erman adds, and with this money they started to live in apartments carrying “their own culture” to their new spaces. Erman defines this era as the stage when “rural migrants/*gecekondu* people” were regarded as the “‘the culturally inferior Other as sub-culture’” (1987). In conclusion, with the 1980s the split in society took on a more complex and multi-dimensional form than a simple “urban-peasant divide” (Erder, “Where Do You” 162).

It should also be noted that, from the middle of the decade onwards the city’s face started to change in line with the process of its globalization (Keyder, “Globalization” 128), a phenomenon examined below.

2.5 The 1990s

Social, economic, cultural and political life in Istanbul in the 1990s, especially after the mid-1990s, was marked by various interrelated phenomena which were closely related to the issue of immigration and immigrants in the city which will be discussed below.

2.5.1 Arrival of Internally Displaced Kurds in Istanbul

As the guerrilla attacks of *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*³³ (PKK) fighting for the Kurdish national movement since the 1980s against the Turkish Republic increased and took the form of a low-intensity war, Kurdish villages started to be evacuated by the Turkish state, which wanted to prevent the residents of these villages from supporting the guerrillas. Together with other policies and enforcements which made life in the area unbearable, an estimated two to three million people were internally displaced (Çelik 980) which is described by Cihan Ahmetbeyzade as an “internal diaspora” (161).

The inrush of a substantial number of Kurdish citizens of Turkey residing in the Eastern and South-eastern parts of the country into its metropolises, most of them in its Western parts, especially in the second half of the 1990s, was different from the earlier migration of Kurds due to economic reasons. Even though, in fact, economic difficulties ‘force’ people to migrate, if we term economic migration as voluntary, then we can call the migration in the 1990s involuntary. Bediz Yılmaz draws attention to the fact that this type of migration is usually designated *forced migration*, however she stresses that the term *involuntary migration* is more suitable since it covers forced migrants who migrated from evacuated villages, as well as those who migrated “due to various reasons connected with the conflict environment”³⁴ (135).

Deniz Yüksekler lists the problems triggered by internal displacement in the 1990s as follows: “urban poverty, lack of access to education and health services, lack of social security, unemployment, and discrimination within urban spaces” (256). The Kurdish population living in the countryside who made their living through agriculture and stockbreeding did not have any means to compete in the job market in urban centres, as they did not have the necessary education or job experience. Moreover, unlike the economic migrants, the involuntary migrants did not have the benefits of multi-staged migration. These involuntary migrants lived in very bad houses, could not feed themselves and their children properly, most of these children did not have the opportunity to go to school (264). Yüksekler

³³ Kurdistan Workers Party

³⁴ “çatışma ortamıyla bağlantılı olarak çeşitli sebeplerle” Both italics belong to Yılmaz.

adds that in the case of internal displacement “traditional solidarity networks” were not functional, as most of the relatives were also poor and they were also mostly involuntary migrants (264). Additionally, building a shanty was not an option for the involuntary migrants in Istanbul, since they did not have the financial means to build them in the few areas left in the city where this might be possible. Thus, they either rented shanties with no infrastructure or apartments in rundown neighbourhoods. Some involuntary migrants could buy a shanty or a rundown apartment in neighbourhoods such as Fener, Balat or Tarlabası if they had the opportunity to “sell their livestock or some of their property just before displacement” (Yükseker 265-266).

Kurdish forced migrants did “informal and irregular jobs” such as “periodic work as street peddlers or as construction workers” while some of them worked as “seasonal agricultural labourers”; some children worked on the streets selling “tissue paper and bottled water”, some women worked in “childcare or housecleaning” while a significant amount of “the teenage daughters worked in garment workshops” (Yükseker 267-268). Recycling (collecting raw-material) is also informal work that forced migrants try to make some income from (Çağlayan et. al 23).

Many of the internally displaced Kurds did not have the necessary language skills to communicate in Turkish. To this was added the hostile feelings against Kurds which escalated in response to the guerrilla war and terror attacks of PKK, resulting in discrimination against Kurdish involuntary migrants. This was different than the prejudice against the economic migrants of earlier decades, harsher and much more hostile. Yüksek stresses that one of the results of internal displacement is “being subject to discrimination in urban spaces” which leads to social exclusion (257). As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, rural to urban economic migrants faced prejudice due to stigmatization as peasants, yet Kurdish immigrants experienced a double prejudice both for being Kurdish and for being peasants (274). Hamza Aktan underscores that as the Kurdish neighbourhoods struggled with poverty, they became isolated, a situation which pushed both Kurds and Turks away from a common mental ground based on empathy (64-65). Therefore, when thinking of the 1990s and globalisation in Istanbul, social exclusion should be regarded as an important topic.

2.5.2 Globalisation, Urban Poverty and Social Exclusion

Urban poverty in Istanbul, which started with the neo-liberal economic policies in the Özal era increased with the effects of globalisation. It resulted in the social exclusion of the poor, a large portion of whom comprised involuntary Kurdish immigrants.

Istanbul had the primary role, as Turkey was trying to connect with a globalizing economy after the 1980s (Öncü, “Myth of the” 57; Keyder “Globalization” 124). As Keyder underlines, in the 1990s the economy of the city was changing towards “informality” and “deindustrialization” (“Globalization” 128). The service sector mostly replaced manufacturing in the city and the *modus operandi* of the working class changed visibly: now fewer workers could join unions, while many of them did not even have “formal social security arrangements” (129).

Keyder acknowledges that in this process those new to the city could no longer rely on people they knew through their hometown and kinship relations in order to find jobs or make social connections. He adds that the discrepancy between the privileged and the disadvantaged grew larger in this era, and in the 1990s poverty was a phenomenon that could easily be seen around the city (“Globalization” 124). As Keyder points out, polarisation, a valid term for globalising cities of the first world, is not sufficient to explain the situation in globalising cities of the third world such as Istanbul, in which exclusion is experienced in addition to polarisation (128). Keyder, defines social exclusion as “a failure of social integration at economic, political and cultural levels”, and notes “failures in the welfare regime and . . . the lack of cultural integration” as important catalysts of this phenomenon (128).

Keyder acknowledges that while before the 1990s immigrants who were building shanties were somewhat accepted owing to populist policies, after the 1990s they have been regarded as “invaders of public property and beneficiaries of unfair privilege” (“Globalization” 130). In the absence of the shanty, now the newcomers to the city did not have any other chance than renting, and what they could afford was grim places in remote parts or in rundown neighbourhoods of the city (130). Keyder describes the former official approach to the shanties, which made it possible for immigrants to solve their housing needs, as the most effective of the non-formal dimensions of the welfare regime during the entire developmentalist era (131). He explains that the disappearance of this dimension and related mechanisms played a significant role in the emergence of social exclusion, since people who could not make a shanty anymore, had to live in an isolated way or even became homeless (131). Similarly, Işık and Pınarcıoğlu assert that we need to understand “the evolution of the shanty phenomenon”³⁵ in order to be able to grasp the dynamics which led to the emergence of urban poverty in Turkey (103). The immigration process as well as the ethnic, social,

³⁵ “gecekondulu olgusunun evrimi”

economic and cultural background of immigrants were other important factors in the emergence of social exclusion (Keyder, “Globalization” 131), as discussed in the section about internally displaced Kurds.

2.5.3 The Rise of Political Islam

In such a context, the left, having lost most of its power with the 12 September 1980 coup, could not be influential among immigrants in shanty neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city or in the poor neighbourhoods in the city centre. This paved the way for the emergence of a new influence: political Islam. As Cihan Tuğal explains, “the Islamist party started to appeal to a rural-to-urban immigrant population after the 1980s—due in part to its social justice agenda as well as to the repression of the Left, the previous carrier of that agenda” (430). He adds that, as the provincial bourgeoisie became powerful and did more business in big cities, “in the 1990s the party also got votes from metropolitan centers” (430). Tuğal stresses that this led to consideration of “the connotations of ‘the urban’ . . . to be more positive” for Islamists. He defines the agenda of the Islamist party at this stage as the “reconquest of Istanbul” (430). In the 1989 elections, Islamists took two periphery municipalities of Istanbul, Sultanbeyli and Arnavutköy, while in the municipal elections of 1994, the Islamist party became the leading one in the whole country, and R. Tayyip Erdoğan became the mayor of Istanbul. Analysing the impact of this development in the context of Istanbul, Tuğal draws attention to the fact that there were two tendencies within the Islamist party at the time: those with “more neoliberal tendencies . . . argued that after its ‘conquest’ Istanbul would be more integrated with the world”, while others “wanted to see the termination of the elitist exclusion that had kept the masses on the borders of cities” (431). He explains that Islamists managed to win shanty votes owing to their skills “in mobilizing various kinds of squatter networks” (431). He also draws attention to the debut of “a new religious middle class”, albeit a much smaller community than the residents of shantytowns (431). Consequently, “a gradual Islamization of cities” (431) was inevitable.

Tuğal explains that political Islam’s approach appealed to various “classes within rural-to-urban immigrants”, while it managed to aid the poor in some ways (431). Political Islam managed to find “an answer to the desire to find one’s place in the city and articulating the shared populist reaction against the urban center and the urban elite” (431). Tuğal defines “two elements [which] were central to the Islamist construction of the urbanizing subject: being in need of guidance (being ‘lost’) and being different from the elite” (431). To a significant extent “Islamism . . . gives marginal settlements and rural-to-urban immigrants a

new sense of identity” (436). As Tuğal observes, the Islamist party “cultivate[s], explore[s], and shape[s] the new popular imagination” while it “builds itself on the identities and self-organizing capacity of the immigrants as much as it shapes these” (436). Tuğal stresses that “Islamist politics actually comes in when existing immigrant identities and communities risk remaining parochial and weak” and adds: “Islamism, rather than simply support and include immigrants’ subjectivities and communities, transforms the city through interacting with them, but also redefining them” (436).

Before concluding this section on the 1990s, it would be useful to remember that the earthquake in 1999 almost ended migration to the city (Keyder, “Globalization” 125).

2.6 The Late 1990s and the 2000s

As Keyder aptly puts it, “problems of human rights, equal citizenship and recognition” are experienced in municipal politics where the new urban poor is concerned (“Globalization” 133). He draws attention to the fact that after the 1990s, the media adopted a discourse hinting that a sort of unrest was growing in the shantytowns (133). These were also the years when shantytowns started to be called *varoş* in a pejorative manner. *Varoş*, which is the Turkish version of the Hungarian word *város* literally means a neighbourhood on the periphery of the city. In Turkey, it is “a label that artificially defines low income settlements as a homogenous space and in recent years has carried a robust exclusionary potential” (Demirtaş and Şen 87). In line with these developments, Erman describes the image of people living in shanties, in the late 1990s as “the threatening/*varoşlu* [*varoş* dweller] Other” (984). Keyder points out that in the mainstream media “the demand for full citizenship rights (civil, political and social)” is reflected as the outcome of cultural difference with a primarily class-based and secondarily ethnic edge, “overlaid with the modern/traditional divide” (“Globalization” 133). Therefore, he adds, when people cannot modernise, they are blamed for holding too much onto their traditional culture and values, while “absence of mechanisms of incorporation” (133) are not mentioned. Additionally, those who are in the in the richer echelons or in dominant positions, create the illusion that poverty is “an individual problem of a transitory nature”, and support through charity mechanisms can be sufficient to deal with it (133).

The impact of globalisation and neo-liberal policies continued in the 2000s as well. In February 2001, a major economic crisis led to a very significant increase in unemployment. In 2002, the AKP, which defined itself as a moderate Islamic party, formed a single-party government. Keyder notes that the neo-liberal AKP was well aware of the potential of Istanbul for business and investment. After the 2001 economic crisis, they carried out various

reforms “which made the integration of the economy into global networks of capital flows more stable” (“Capital City” 5). As Keyder observes, the next step was making Istanbul ready for its new role. The city started to have a new face that could attract foreign entrepreneurs as well as tourists. Thus, new glamorous offices and residences, as well as “hotels, cultural centers, congress venues, museums and restaurants” were being opened (5). Consequently, the urban transformation of the city accelerated. The Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) found ways to clear away all remaining shanties in the central parts of the city, with a wide scale of excuses “such as protection of heritage, absence of earthquake preparedness, environment and creation of green zones” (5). People who were living in shanties in the areas being transformed found themselves in mass-housing, offered officially, in remote parts of the city (5). While trying to pay off huge debts on these flats, these people were suffering from serious problems related to their new residences, such as monthly maintenance charge, strict rules and isolation.

During the globalisation of Istanbul, gentrification appeared as a significant phenomenon in the city, as old neighbourhoods became an object of desire for investment (Keyder, “Capital City” 5). Istanbul’s historical landmarks, food culture and its expanding cultural life became its top promotional aspects (6). It became the new hip city, climbing to the top of the ‘places to visit’ lists of tourists as well as a fertile land for international entrepreneurs.

Before concluding this section, it might be useful to briefly remember the nostalgia for old-Istanbul, a discourse which emerged in the 1990s and which is still alive today. Keyder points out that Istanbul, like other cities in competition to become a global city, had to boast about its historical heritage. While the classicists wanted Istanbul to stand on its Byzantine city identity, those sympathetic with Islamist culture wanted the city to be promoted as “the Islamic city of the devout . . . promised to the believers” (Keyder, “Capital City” 6). Eventually, those with Islamist leanings and the secular elite met on the common ground of “the Ottoman capital of many cultures” (6). This emphasis on the cosmopolitan aspect of Istanbul the Ottoman capital resulted in an “exceedingly popular trend of nostalgia tak[ing] as its reference point a certain idealized representation of Istanbul in the late 19th century” which appears in “novels, articles and scholarly projects, and in the everyday discourse of Istanbulites” (Örs 134)³⁶. Referring to Ayfer Bartu, İlay Örs emphasises that “a yearning towards an idealized multicultural coexistence” and its symbols evolved as a reaction to the

³⁶ As a matter of fact, Örs calls this nostalgic discourse “cosmopolitan nostalgia” [kozmpolitan nostalji] (Personal Interview).

changes in the social fabric of the city as a result of rural immigrants' arrival (135). The nostalgia for an idealised late Ottoman Istanbul produces nostalgia for an imaginary early Republican Istanbul as well. It is imaginary because, as discussed above, during the time between the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 until rural to urban immigrants arrived in the city in the 1950s and became visible in daily and social life in the 1960s, the size of the non-Muslim population had already shrunk significantly. What makes this discourse more problematic is that, when the disappearance of the cosmopolitan minority is juxtaposed with the appearance of rural immigrants in the city, an illusion is created as if Istanbul's minorities were pushed out by arriving immigrants to create space for themselves. Rıfat Bali, who tracks this discourse particularly through its manifestations in the popular media, points out that in the 1990s there was a significant number of journalists who were unhappy about the state of Istanbul, seeing it as having lost its character and identity, lamenting for the city's minority heritage in their writings (142). The illusion about minority also has a subliminal dimension since rundown apartments in ex-minority neighbourhoods, which have been dilapidating since the days they were emptied by the departure of minority residents, have been rented by various generations of immigrants. One of the severest urban transformation projects was launched in one such area, Tarlabası.

2.7 2010 and After

Such changes in the city peaked during the celebration of Istanbul 2010, Capital of Culture. Asu Aksoy points out that during the preparations for the celebrations, the 2010 Initiative Group was concerned about the ills that the lower economic social strata would suffer as a result of the gentrification in the city (94). She adds that not only people but also the cultural heritage of the city was damaged by the activities of urban transformation in the historic areas of the city (95). The urban transformation projects which created controversy, particularly those carried out in Sulukule and Tarlabası, resulted in massive public debate. As a result of the former, the Romani people were kicked out of their homes in Sulukule. Tarlabası, a former Greek neighbourhood, where Romani and Kurdish people as well as African immigrants without residence permit lived (Aksoy 105), have mostly been emptied with the project launched in 2005 and practically started in 2010. In the meantime, a renewal project in the historic neighbourhoods of Fener, Balat and Ayvansaray was launched in 2006. In addition to these historic central areas, urban transformation projects were also launched in shanty neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city such as Fikirtepe and Ayazma, since gated communities were being built around these areas making the land valuable.

As early as the 1980s, in relation to globalisation, Turkey started to receive foreign immigrants, and “its migration profile has changed from the massive emigration of the 1960s and 1970s to extensive immigration during the 1990s and 2000s” (İçduygu 9). As Ahmet İçduygu stresses, “the first part of the 2000s has witnessed immigration flows from four different categories: (1) irregular labour migrants; (2) transit migrants; (3) asylum seekers and refugees and (4) regular migrants” (5). Unsurprisingly, Istanbul hosts a large majority of these foreign immigrants. The number of Syrian refugees, who first started to come to Turkey in April 2011, is around 500,000 (“Suça Karışan”) in Istanbul.

Additionally, since the government started attacking Eastern cities such as Sur and Cizre in summer 2015, a new wave of internally displaced Kurds continues to arrive in Istanbul, as of the time this dissertation is being written.