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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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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



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**Issue Date:** 2017-06-13

## CHAPTER 4

### Literary Historical Context

In this chapter, ‘Istanbulites’ and ‘non-Istanbulites’ and their right to the city in the Turkish novel since the 1960s are briefly reviewed.

Istanbul has always been a significant subject in all literary genres of Turkish literature. When it comes to the novel, the focus of this research, Istanbul has inspired an enormous number of works where it appears not only as a setting but also as a subject. Among many Istanbul-related themes in these novels, migration from Anatolia to Istanbul and/or migrants’ struggle for survival in this city became an important topic after the 1950s, as internal migration became a central issue in the social and cultural life of the city. On the other hand, the residents of Istanbul who lived or have been living in this city for many generations and their neighbourhoods also appear as a popular topic in Istanbul novels.

In this context, in novels set in Istanbul after the arrival of internal migrants in the city, it may be possible to identify two veins based on the central characters of the works: novels dealing with new-Istanbulites, i.e. immigrants, and novels dealing with old-Istanbulites. In many of the novels set in the city, new and old-Istanbulites appear together. However, the categorisation here is based on the main characters of the novels. Even so, this categorisation is not created to argue that all Istanbul novels would simply fall into one of these categories. The grey areas between the categories below might in fact cover a larger space than the categories themselves do. The aim here is to explain the background to the selection process of the seven novels analysed in this research.

It might be worthwhile to clarify two points at this stage.

First, the number of novels about the right to the city that have been written up to now is outside the scope of this dissertation. Access to such information would require a much more extensive archival research, which would be found in a descriptive work. However, this dissertation is mainly based on text-analysis. The inventory of novels included here is by no means an exhaustive list; such an effort is outside the focus of this research.

Second, it should be noted that the large and the small corpuses in the following pages are not created based on the ideological outlook of the authors. For the creation of the corpus, many novels with rural to urban migrants in Istanbul have been examined and significant examples among them have been chosen. The authors in the corpus actually come from a wide array of philosophical and political backgrounds. Orhan Kemal is explicitly Marxist, while Orhan Pamuk is more of a liberal. Ayhan Geçgin writes from an existentialist

philosophical perspective. Latife Tekin's position can be defined as post-modernist, while Metin Kaçan is close to a nihilistic vision. Muzaffer İzgü is a leftist humourist but by no means a radical, while Hatice Meryem's works mainly reveal her feminist identity. Thus, the selection of the novels was not based on the world-views of their authors.

#### **4.1 Novels with 'Non-Istanbulites' i.e. New Istanbulites as Their Subject Matter**

These are novels with immigrant characters (first or later generations), i.e. new Istanbulites as their subject matter. The setting of these novels is usually poor neighbourhoods and/or shantytowns. This group can be divided into two categories:

##### **4.1.1 Novels Focusing on First Generation Immigrants**

###### **a)**

The first group consists of novels where the immigration theme is developed within the scope of rural to urban migration as a social phenomenon, which was an outcome of the changes in agricultural technology in Turkey. The immigration phase, almost always, appears as an important theme in these novels. The setting is usually Istanbul's shantytowns.

Significant examples:

- **Gurbet Kuşları** [The Homesick Birds] (1962) by Orhan Kemal: The main character is Memed who migrates to Istanbul in his teens from a village in southern Anatolia. The most significant setting in the novel is the shantytown of Zeytinburnu, where Memed and his wife build a shanty.

- **Halo Dayı ve İki Öküz** [Uncle Halo and Two Bulls] (1973) by Muzaffer İzgü: The main characters are Uncle Halo and his son İdiris, who is in his late teens. As they head to Istanbul from their village in Eastern Anatolia, their primary intention is to go back to their village after they make enough money, to buy two bulls. Eventually, İdiris gets settled in Istanbul while his father Halo goes back to his village. Most of the novel is set in the building sites where Halo and his son work and spend the night.<sup>69</sup>

- **Göçük** [Wreckage] (1977) by Celaladdin Çetin: İbrahim who is from a village near the city of Van in Eastern Anatolia, moves to Istanbul after dreaming for years about working as a street vendor there. When he first comes to Istanbul, he works as a servant in a mansion in Arnavutköy, on the shores of the Bosphorus, and after a while he becomes a vendor. Eventually, he can't survive in Istanbul and goes back to his hometown.

- **Kafamda Bir Tuhaflık** [A Strangeness In My Mind] (2014) by Orhan Pamuk: The

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<sup>69</sup> What we have in this novel is not a standard rural to urban migration story based on economic necessities. However, because of various reasons discussed in the analysis of the novel it is still possible to include it in this category.

main character is Mevlut, who migrates to Istanbul in his early teens from a village in central Anatolia to live and work with his father, who has moved to Istanbul to work as a street vendor. The most important settings in the novel are Duttepe, the imaginary shantytown where Mevlut stays with his father, and Tarlabası, where he lives with his wife and children.

There are two points which merit attention here. First, two novels by Latife Tekin about first generation migrants in an unidentified city are usually regarded as set in Istanbul.

- *Sevgili Arsız Ölüm* [*Dear Shameless Death*] (1983): The story of Huvat Aktaş and his family, who migrate to a big city from a village in Anatolia.
- *Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları* [*Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills*] (1984): There is no main character in the novel, but a group of characters who have recently migrated to the city. The novel is set in an imaginary shantytown called Çiçektepe.

Second, although it is outside the scope of this research, it might be useful to note that within the modern Turkish novel there are various important novels where the immigration destination is other big cities of the country such as Ankara or İzmir. *Irazca'nın Dirliği* [*Irazca's Amity*] (1961) by Fakir Baykurt, the second book of a trilogy which starts with *Yılanların Öcü* [*The Revenge of the Snakes*] (1954) set in the countryside, is the immigration story of Kara Bayram and his family from their village in Burdur, a town in southwest Anatolia, to Ankara. The final book of the trilogy entitled *Kara Ahmet Destanı* [*The Legend of Kara Bayram*] (1977) has at its centre Bayram's son Ahmet, who grows up in Ankara and goes to university there. *Kente İndi İdris* [*İdris Came Down to the City*] (1981) by Talip Apaydın is about İdris, bearing the same name as the son of the protagonist of İzgü's novel *Uncle Halo and Two Bulls*, who migrates from Yozgat to Ankara. *Gurbet Yavrum* [*Homesick Child*] (1975) by Aysel Özakin is about a man from Urfa who first moves to Izmir and then to Canada.

#### b)

The second group consists of novels where the migration theme is developed more within an individual, personal context. Migrants do not necessarily have to come from a rural background, they might as well be from towns or small cities. The motivation for migration is not limited to economic reasons; in some of the novels below the main character migrates to Istanbul to receive education. The migration phase does not usually appear as a theme in these novels. Significant examples:

- *Horoz Değirmeni* [*The Rooster Mill*] (1967) by Şahap Sıtkı: The main

characters are from the city of Kayseri. Şaban persuades Nevhiz to run away with him to Istanbul, and eventually pushes her into prostitution in this city. Nevhiz's husband Emin moves to Istanbul to find her.

- ***Kopuk Takımı*** [*Lowlifes*] (1969) by Tarık Dursun K.: The main characters are two young boys, Hasan and his friend nicknamed TheAmerican, who move to Istanbul from İzmir.

- ***Alında Mavi Kuşlar*** [*Blue Birds on Her Forehead*] (1978) by Aysel Özakın: The main character is Armağan, a young intellectual woman who works at a library in provincial Anatolia. She moves to Istanbul to live in a modern environment and be close to cultural and intellectual circles.

- ***Deniz Küstü*** [*The Sea Crossed Fisherman*] (1978) by Yaşar Kemal: The novel is set in Menekşe, a sea-side fishing village on the periphery of Istanbul. The main characters are Fisherman Selim, who comes to Istanbul in his mid-teens for treatment when he is injured during his military service, and Zeynel, who comes to Menekşe as a child on his own.

- ***İlk Kadın*** [*The First Woman*]<sup>70</sup> (1983): In this semi-autobiographical novel by Nedim Gürsel, the central character is a boy in his early teens, who comes to Istanbul for his secondary education at a boarding school.

- ***Kumru ile Kumru*** [*Kumru and Kumru*] (2005) by Tahsin Yücel: The main character Kumru moves to Istanbul in her mid-teens when she gets married to Haydar, a thirty-year-old man from the same Anatolian town, who has moved to Istanbul some years before and established his life there working as a janitor.

- ***İnsan Kısım Kısım, Yer Damar Damar*** [*It Takes All Kinds*] (2008) by Hatice Meryem: The central characters are Zümrüt, who has probably moved to Istanbul when she got married and her sister Elmas who moves to Istanbul to stay with Zümrüt, leaving her home town because of a problematic love story. The novel is set in an imaginary ex-shantytown called Kozluk, on the outskirts of Istanbul.

- ***Aksak Ritim*** [*Syncopated Rhythms*] (2009) by Gaye Boralıoğlu: The central characters are Güldane and Halil. Güldane is a young Romani girl. Her parents have moved from the Thracian city of Edirne, where many Romani people live, to Istanbul when she was three and a half years old. The novel, which is about the love story between Güldane and Halil, does not give any information about the background of Halil, a taxi-driver living in Istanbul.

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<sup>70</sup> First published as *Kadınlar Kitabı* [The Book of Women].

- ***Kopoy*** [*Kopov*] (2011) by Barış Andırınlı: The main character Osman, who is a purposeless thirty-year-old unemployed man living in provincial Anatolia, comes to Istanbul for a temporary job. The novel is set in Şirinevler, an ex-shantytown.

Two memoir-novels should also be mentioned here, although they are autobiographies rather than fiction.

- ***Masalını Yitiren Dev*** [*The Giant Who Lost his Fairy-Tale*] (2000) by Adnan Binyazar: Binyazar comes to Istanbul, around the age of six, from a town near Elazığ, a city in Southeastern Anatolia, to stay with his father who has moved to the city leaving his family behind. He stays in the city for eight years, from the beginning to the end of the 1940s. During this time he has a very difficult life trying to survive with almost no support from his father. His memories of Istanbul have an important place in the book.

- ***Tespîh Taneleri*** [*Beads*] (2006) by Mıgırdiç Margosyan: Margosyan, born in Diyarbakır, moves to Istanbul at the end of the 1940s, in his early teens, to stay in an Armenian orphanage and receive his secondary education.

#### 4.1.2 Novels Focusing on Second or Third Generation Immigrants

Novels set in the shantytowns of Istanbul are almost always in this category, since most people living in them arrived in Istanbul after the 1950s. The migration phase does not appear as a subject in these novels, since the central characters are second or third generation immigrants. However, although the main characters are second (or in some cases third) generation, their parents who are first generation immigrants also appear in these novels.

In addition to the new shantytowns established by immigrants, old and poor neighbourhoods in the city centre can also be the setting of these novels<sup>71</sup>. Some of these central neighbourhoods are former non-Muslim minority areas which have fallen from grace and eventually got populated by immigrants. Thus, novels set in such neighbourhoods might also include minority characters whose ancestors have been in Istanbul for many generations. In either case, the neighbourhoods have an important place in these novels, where they sometimes appear almost as characters in their own right. This category can be divided into two groups:

a) The novels which provide the information that their central characters are second or third generation immigrants.

- ***Ağır Roman*** [*Heavy Roman(i)*] (1990) by Metin Kaçan: The novel is set in the

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<sup>71</sup> The Turkish expression for such neighbourhoods is *kenar mahalle* *mot-à-mot* translation of which is *periphery neighbourhood*. However, since these are poor neighbourhoods in the city center, in English, *poor neighbourhood* is a better counterpart. This point will be explained below.

imaginary neighbourhood of Kolera, a representation of the old Greek neighbourhood of Dolapdere near Beyoğlu. The main character is Gili whose parents have moved to Istanbul from Anatolia.

- ***Kenarda*** [*On the Periphery*] (2003) by Ayhan Geçgin: The novel is set in the imaginary neighbourhoods of İncirköy and Taşlıbağ. These two neighbourhoods are thinly disguised representations of Kazlıçeşme, around where there were many factories and shanties until the early 1990s. The central character, who is unnamed, is the son of an immigrant couple living and working in this area.

b) The novels which do not explicitly say that their central characters are second or third generation immigrants. Although no information is given about the local backgrounds of the characters, it can be inferred that they are second or third generation internal migrants.

- ***Evlerden Biri*** [*One of the Houses*] (1966) by Orhan Kemal: The novel, set in a poor neighbourhood called Cibali, focuses on the life of Sadi Bey and his family. The neighbourhood is home to many immigrant families who have come to Istanbul from different parts of Anatolia.

- ***Dar Sokaklardaki Duman*** [*Smoke in Narrow Streets*] (1992) by Muzaffer Buyrukçu: The main characters in this novel are the members of a family whose story was told in an earlier book by Buyrukçu, the short story collection entitled *Kavga* [*The Fight*] (1967). In *Kavga*, the immigration of the family from Bitola, Macedonia to Istanbul is related. This kind of migration is not an example of the internal migration which is the focus of this research, therefore the novel is not listed next to *Periphery* and *Roman(i)*. However, this book is mentioned here since the place where the family lives is an old and poor neighbourhood, the name of which is not revealed in the novel, where many internal migrants live together with Greeks, Armenians and Jews.

- ***Minare Gölgesi*** [*The Shadow of the Minaret*] (2013) by Engin Ergönültaş: The novel is set in a poor neighbourhood on the Golden Horn shore of Istanbul. The book, which does not have a central character, consists of a collage of stories of poor people living in this neighbourhood.

One novel which may fit in more than one of the categories above is:

- ***Istanbul Istanbul*** (2015) by Burhan Sönmez: The novel has four main characters. One of them is Küheylan Dayı [Uncle Küheylan], a Kurdish man who has migrated to Istanbul from Anatolia, having listened to stories about the city from his father for many years. The other character Demirtay has grown up in Istanbul and it is hinted that his mother is a first generation internal migrant to the city. The other two, The Doctor and Demirtay has grown up



in Istanbul, but the novel does not give enough clues as to whether their parents were internal immigrants. The book is set in a police station where the four characters tell stories to each other as they wait for their turn to be questioned, under torture, about their connection with illegal left-wing groups.

It should be noted that among the novels with immigrants as their subject matter, the absence of novels dealing with the plight of the internally displaced Kurds in Istanbul in the 1990s constitutes a serious gap in modern Turkish literature.

#### **4.2. Novels with ‘Istanbulites’ i.e. Old-Istanbulites as Their Subject Matter**

These are novels whose subject matter is characters whose ancestors have been in Istanbul for at least a couple of generations, who can therefore be called old-Istanbulites. The novels are set in old-Istanbul neighbourhoods.

In this dissertation, it is argued that many of the novels with immigrant protagonists in Istanbul create a vein in modern Turkish literature that can be defined as the right to the city novels. Such a vein of literature can be regarded as a counterpoint to novels that have at their centre nostalgia for a past Istanbul i.e. the Istanbul before the arrival of rural to urban migrants.

It should be noted that not all novels with old-Istanbulite characters are nostalgic. Some of them are and some of them are not. Therefore, the right to the city novels create a counterpoint only to the nostalgia novels, as these nostalgic novels longing for a semi-imagined old-Istanbul are usually loaded with an implicit anti-immigrant discourse.

Examples from both categories of novels with old-Istanbulite characters are included below: nostalgic and not nostalgic. This can help readers have a grounding in the comparison between the two types of novels with old-Istanbulite protagonists.

##### **4.2.1 Novels about Old-Istanbulites Where a Feeling of Nostalgia Is Predominant**

Significant examples:

- *Bir Küçükburjuvanın Gençlik Yılları* [*The Adolescent Years of a Petit-Bourgeois*] (1979) by Demir Özlü: The book is set in old neighbourhoods such as Cihangir and Kadıköy in the second half of the 1960s, when internal migrants are becoming more and more visible in the city. The main character is Selim, an Istanbulite petit-bourgeois. There is nostalgia in the book for the Istanbul of the times before the arrival of the immigrants. However, the narrator also praises the leftist potential of immigrant neighbourhoods.

- *Geçmiş, Bir Daha Geri Gelmeyecek Zamanlar* [*The Past, Times That Will Never*

*Come Back*] by Selim İleri, a series comprising five novels set in old and prestigious neighbourhoods of the city such as Cihangir, Kadıköy, The Bosphorus, and the Princes' Islands.

❖ ***Mavi Kanatlarınla Yalnız Benim Olsaydın*** [*Only If You Were Mine with Your Blue Wings*] (1991): This episodic novel tells the stories of various Istanbulite characters living in the 1950s.

❖ ***Gramofon Hâlâ Çalıyor*** [*The Gramophone is Still Playing*] (1995): This is another episodic novel about various Istanbulite characters, set in 1955-60.

❖ ***Cemil Şevket Bey, Aynalı Dolaba İki El Revolver*** [*Mr. Cemil Şevket, Two Revolver Shots at the Mirrored Cupboard*] (1997): The book tells the story of Mr. Cemil Şevket, a gay writer, from the end of the Ottoman empire until after the 12 September 1980 coup, through vignettes of Istanbul in those years.

❖ ***Solmaz Hanım Kimsesiz Okurlar İçin*** [*Ms. Solmaz, for Solitary Readers*] (2000): With Ms. Solmaz, one of the characters of *Mavi Kanatlarınla* . . . as its main character, the book looks back at the Istanbul of 1920-1980.

❖ ***Daha Dün*** [*Only Yesterday*] (2008): In this final book of the series, Istanbul from the 1800s to 1990s appears through the stories of the characters in the four earlier books.

○ ***Kumral Ada Mavi Tuna*** [*Blond Ada Blue Tuna*] (1997) by Buket Uzuner: The main characters are Tuna, Ada and Aras. Ada is a young Istanbulite girl who comes from an elite family. Tuna and Aras, who are brothers, can be regarded as second-generation immigrants, since their father has immigrated to Istanbul from Bulgaria and their mother is from Iğdır, a city in Eastern Anatolia. Still, the novel is about Istanbulites rather than immigrants when the whole scale of characters and setting is considered.

○ ***İstanbul Bir Masaldı*** [*Istanbul was a Fairy Tale*] (1999) by Mario Levi: Set in various Non-Muslim minority neighbourhoods of Istanbul, the novel tells the stories of three generations of a Jewish family from the 1920s to the 1980s. As its name indicates, the book looks at the past of Istanbul with a feeling of nostalgia.

#### 4.2.2 Novels about Old-Istanbulites Which Are Not Nostalgic

Significant examples:

○ ***Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*** [*Mr. Cevdet and His Sons*] (1982) by Orhan Pamuk: This is

the saga of a family from Nişantaşı, a high class neighbourhood of Istanbul, for three generations starting from 1905 and ending in 1970. It gives a panorama of the city through these decades without a nostalgic timbre.

- ***Bizans Sohbetleri*** [*Byzantine Conversations*] (1988) by Vivet Kanetti<sup>72</sup>: The narrator, who comes from a somewhat elite Jewish family in Istanbul, tells about her life in this city with reference to the stories of her family members and relatives.

- ***Öfkenin Şenliği*** [*The Festival of Anger*] (2011) Jaklin Çelik: The narrator comes back to Istanbul, to the neighbourhood she grew up in, to sell the family's run-down empty house. The novel touches upon the lives of three generations of an Armenian family from the *Meds Yeghern* until the present day.

- ***Turuncu Geçmişin Kıyısında*** [*On the Edge of the Orange Past*] (2011) Melih Özeren: The novel tells the story of various Istanbulite Greeks, through the memories of Taki from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s.

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<sup>72</sup> Kanetti got this novel published under her pseudonym E. Emine.