'Non-Istanbulites' of Istanbul : the right to the city novels in Turkish literature from the 1960s to the present

Cengiz, N.B.

PART V - CHANGING IMMIGRANTS, TRANSFORMING ISTANBUL

CHAPTER 14

A Strangeness in My Mind: A Love Story of a Man and His City

Kafamda bir Tuhaflık [A Strangeness in my Mind][492], Orhan Pamuk's ninth novel and his second since winning the Nobel Prize in 2006, was first published in December 2014 by Yapı Kredi Publishers (YKY). According to information from YKY, by May 2016 it had come out in its fourth edition, and by July 2016, approximately two hundred and forty thousand copies had been sold (Kalyoncu 2016). The book has been translated into thirty-eight languages ("'Kafamda Bir'").

The idea of the right to the city enters the novel in various ways. Primarily, it is implicitly developed through the elaboration of the theme of the quiet encroachment of the ordinary as a survival strategy of immigrants. The concept evolves into the quiet encroachment of the unordinary in the book, distilled through the Lefebvrian notion of the city as oeuvre, owing to its sophisticated protagonist. In the novel, Tarlabaşı, a so-called dilapidated neighbourhood on the verge of urban transformation has a significant place. Based on this setting, various themes related to the right to the city are treated. With its unique approach to the narrative situation, where characters share the task of narration with the narrator, the novel invites readers to look at its issues through the eyes of immigrants rather than follow the authority of an urban narrator.

[492] References in this dissertation are made to the first impression of the novel. English translations are taken from the first impression of the English translation of the novel.

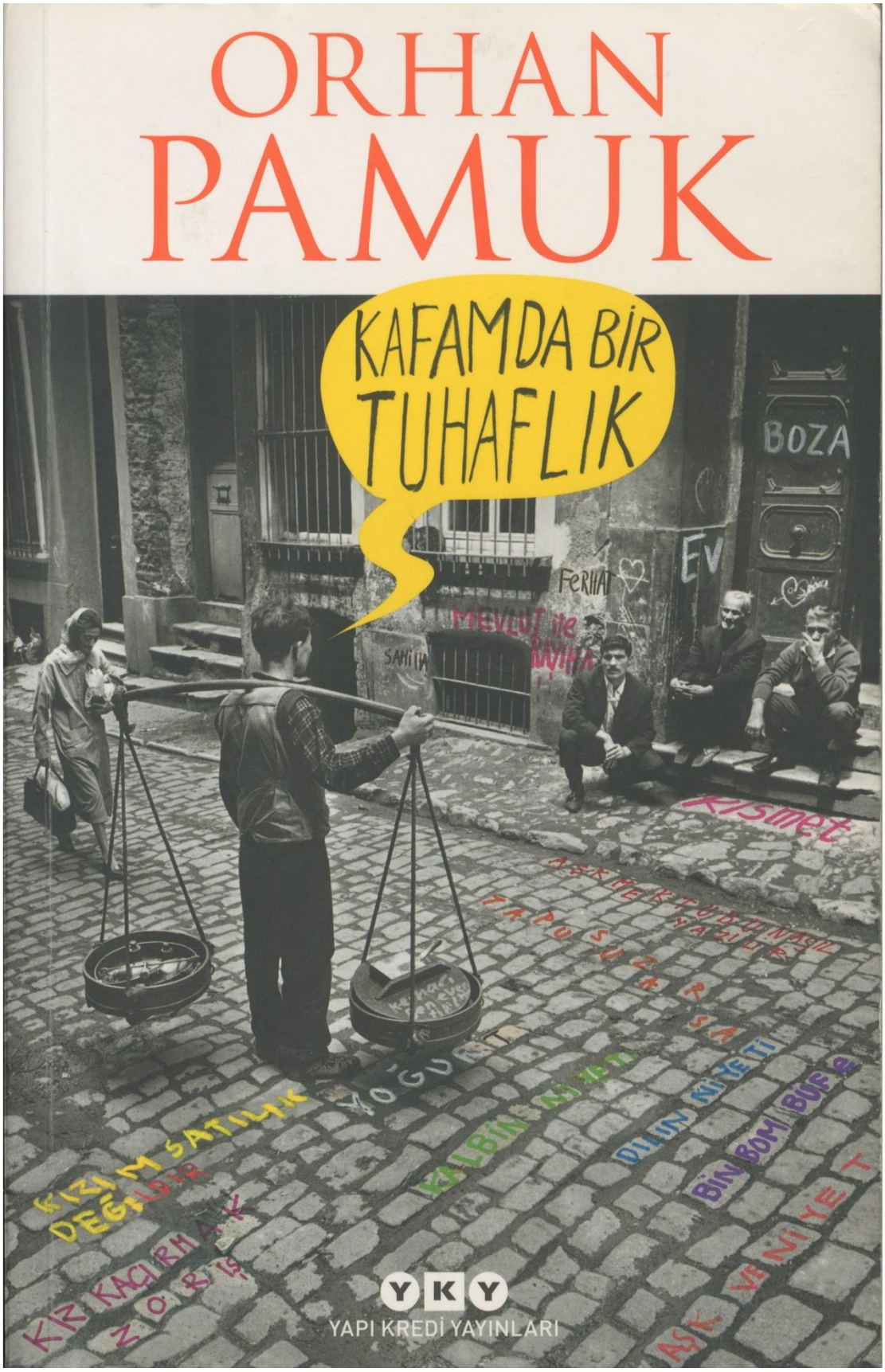

Fig. 10. The cover of the Turkish impression used in this analysis.

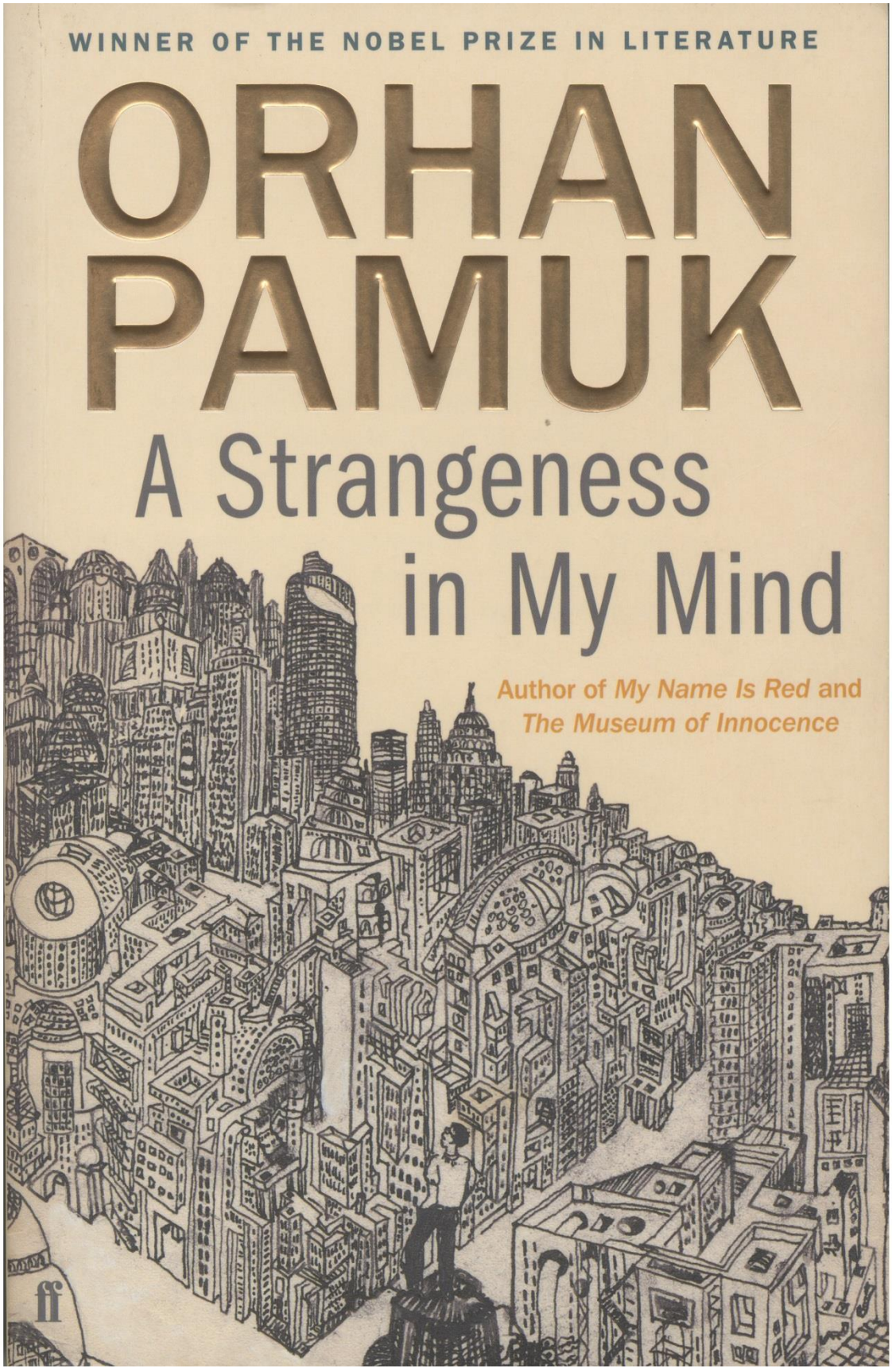

Fig. 11. The cover of the English impression used in this analysis.

14.1 Plot Summary

The novel starts with introductory information by the narrator about the protagonist Mevlut, and the structure of the novel. In 1978, Mevlut attends the wedding of his cousin Korkut with Vediha. There, he is attracted to one of Vediha's two sisters, whose names he does not know. For three years, Mevlut writes love-letters to this girl. Süleyman, Korkut's brother, passes these letters on to her. Having received all the letters, the girl agrees to elope with Mevlut. Süleyman helps Mevlut to organise the elopement. When the plan is realised in June 1982, Mevlut notices that Rayiha is not the girl he was attracted to but her older sister. It comes out that Korkut has cheated Mevlut by telling him that the name of the girl he liked was Rayiha. In fact, the girl Mevlut liked was Samiha, the pretty sister. Rayiha is not pretty at all. However, having been cheated by Korkut, Mevlut has eloped with Rayiha. He hides the situation from Rayiha, who when they first meet again feels there is something wrong, but soon after is convinced that everything is fine.

The second part of the novel starts on March 30th, 1994, on a night when Mevlut is out in Gümüşsuyu, a quarter close to Taksim Square, selling boza[493]. That night he gets robbed and decides to quit selling boza, which he has been doing for twenty-five years.

The third part of the novel covers the time between September 1968 and June 1982. Mevlut, born in 1957, finishes primary school in the summer of 1968. At the end of the next summer, when he is twelve years old, his father Mustafa, who works in Istanbul, comes home to his village and takes Mevlut to Istanbul to work together with him. Their shanty is in Kültepe (a fictional neighbourhood) in the vicinity of Zincirlikuyu (a real neighbourhood). Mevlut's uncle Hasan, who immigrated to the city with Mustafa, and his family have recently moved to the nearby shantytown of Duttepe (a fictional neighbourhood). Mevlut's father has an ongoing conflict with his brother regarding a shanty they were building together, and feels resentment at being betrayed by Hasan, who now lives in a much better shanty than his. Therefore, he does not want Mevlut to have a close relationship with his uncle.

Soon Mevlut starts school, working as a yoghurt vendor at the same time. On 12th March 1972, there is a coup which drastically changes daily life and makes things difficult for street vendors. However, after a while they find ways to survive this situation. In the meantime, Mevlut becomes friends with Ferhat, a fellow student with a rebellious attitude, who sells games of chance in the street. Mevlut graduates from secondary school and starts

[493] "Boza is a fermented drink made from grains such as corn, barley, rye, oats, wheat or millet. It has been produced and consumed for over 8000 years, therefore it is one of the most historical drinks known in Turkish culinary culture."Boza" comes from the word "buze" which means millet in Farsi language" ("Boza").

high school. However, at the end of his first year at high school, he fails all the classes. That summer, he refuses to go back to the village for the summer holiday, and has a great time selling games with Ferhat. He eventually passes his first year exams in the summer of 1974.

As a result of the highly politicised atmosphere, tension occurs between Duttepe, dominated by right-wing Sunnites, and Kültepe, dominated by left-wing Alevites and home to a significant number of Kurds. Mevlut is influenced by Ferhat, who is an Alevite and a leftist. In the meantime, Mevlut's cousins living in Kültepe join the far-right organization the Grey Wolves. One night, the police, together with the Grey Wolves, attack the Alevites in Kültepe and Duttepe, and arrest many of them, as a result of which many Alevites leave these neighbourhoods.

In the summer of 1977, Mevlut is still at high school, being the oldest student there. He makes an application to the school administration to suspend his studies for a year. However, he does not submit a health report to be used as his excuse for this request. This practically means that he drops out of school. Around that time, his uncle Hasan and his sons Korkut and Süleyman, who have a good relationship with the building contractor Hacı Hamit Vural, a man with mafia connections, take the piece of land which was originally chosen by Mustafa and Hasan together. Next spring, Mevlut learns that his cousin Korkut is getting married. At Korkut's wedding, he falls in love with the bride's sister. His father is annoyed with Mevlut, because he has been to the wedding. As a result of the accumulated tension, Mevlut leaves home, and starts working in the restaurant in Beyoğlu where Ferhat works, and starts staying in the dorm with other waiters and washers-up. In this dormitory, Ferhat writes love letters on behalf of Mevlut to the girl he has fallen in love with. Mevlut is now twenty-two years old, and he can no longer get out of doing his military service. So he spends two years in the army, sixteen months of it in Kars, a town on the Turkish-Russian border, and completes his service. During his time in Kars, the 12th September 1980 coup takes place. Meanwhile, Mustafa dies in his sleep, and Mevlut gets a week's leave to attend the funeral of his father. Mevlut completes his military service in March 1982, comes back to Istanbul and rents a place in Tarlabaşı. Soon afterwards, he starts preparations for his elopement, together with his cousin Süleyman.

The fourth part of the novel starts where the first part ends: as Mevlut and Rayiha make their way to Tarlabaşı. Initially they have a religious marriage. Rayiha's parents forgive them for their elopement, and for their official marriage the couple has a wedding ceremony in Istanbul. After working as an ice-cream vendor, in 1982 Mevlut starts working as a rice vendor. After a while, he starts selling boza at night. Mevlut and Rayiha have two daughters:

Fatma, born in 1983; and Fevziye, born in 1984. In the meantime, Samiha, Rayiha's younger sister, whom Mevlut was in fact initially attracted to, decides to elope with Ferhat, although she had first given hopes to Süleyman. In his seventh year as a rice vendor, in 1989, Mevlut's rice stall gets stolen. He spends the summer as an ice-cream vendor. After a while, he starts working in a cafe near İstiklal Street, which continues until early 1994 when it gets shut down.

The fifth part of the novel starts with the story of the boza shop which Mevlut and Ferhat open together in Beyoğlu. Their wives also help them in the shop. However, the shop does not make enough money. This is not a problem for Ferhat, who has a job at Yeditepe Electricity. Rayiha starts to get jealous of Mevlut about his feelings for her sister Samiha. Their relationship enters a more difficult phase when Rayiha gets pregnant but decides to have an abortion despite Mevlut's unwillingness. Ferhat wants to close the shop since its rent becomes higher, so it is closed, and Mevlut starts selling boza at night again while looking for a daytime job. After a short time, he finds a job as a watchman at a car-park. However, his life gets turned upside down as Rayiha, who has missed the legal abortion phase, dies when she is trying to abort the embryo herself. Soon after this, Ferhat offers Mevlut a job at Yeditepe Electricity and he accepts it. Even though he makes good money from that, Mevlut continues selling boza at night. In the meantime, Samiha leaves Ferhat, who was being unfaithful to her for some years. After some time, Ferhat gets killed. Mevlut quits the electricity job and starts working in the community centre for immigrants from the town of Beyşehir in the daytime. Fatma graduates from high school and gets accepted into the tourism management department of a university in Istanbul. Soon afterwards, she gets married to a fellow student and the couple moves to Izmir, hometown of the groom, and continue their studies there. In 2001, Fevziye elopes with a young taxi driver. Mevlut gets very upset at the beginning, but he soon forgives his daughter. He becomes good friends with the boy's father Sadullah, and the two organise a wedding for the couple. Around that time, the relatives start to talk about how in the past Mevlut wrote love letters to Samiha which mistakenly went to Rayiha. They comment that Mevlut and Samiha should get married now, since they are both bereaved. Mevlut refuses to admit that he intended the letters for Samiha. However, after a while, to share his loneliness he decides to marry Samiha. He confesses to her, upon her insistence, that he initially wrote the letters to her. Mevlut and Samiha get married in 2002 and move to the shanty where Mevlut lived with his father when he first came to Istanbul.

In the sixth part of the novel, after the couple lives in the shanty in Kültepe for seven years, Mevlut sells it to Vural in return for a flat in the building to be built on the same land.

The couple moves to Mecidiyeköy temporarily, until they move to their flat in the apartment building where Korkut and Süleyman also live with their families.

In the seventh and last part of the novel, Samiha starts to sense that Mevlut had loved Rayiha much more than he will ever love her. They decide to move to the flat in Çukurcuma which Samiha inherited from Ferhat, since she wants to stay away from their relatives. The novel ends on a night, soon before they move there, when Mevlut is selling boza, telling a customer that he will do this until the end of the world. As the novel comes to its close, he walks the streets of Istanbul thinking that he had loved Rayiha more than anyone in this world.

14.2. Main Features

The book is four-hundred-and-fifty-three pages long, consisting of seven parts. Parts I, II, VI and VII comprise a single chapter, while the rest of the parts comprise multiple chapters: Part III: 19, Part IV: 18, and Part V: 16 chapters. Each chapter has two titles: the main title is about the events which take place in this section, while the subheading is most of the time a quote from a speaking person in the chapter.

Parla finds inspiration from the picaresque novel in this book, since it is the story of the main character's survival in the city. The book has the sub-heading: "Being the Adventures and Dreams of Mevlut Karataş, a Seller of Boza, and of His Friends, and Also a Portrait of Life in Istanbul Between 1969 and 2012 from Many Different Points of View", which Parla describes as a pastiche of the first pages of picaresque novels (121). However, she adds that Mevlut is rather an "anti-picaro", since he does not become a trickster in his struggle for survival (121).

The novel has several characteristics of postmodern fiction such as metafiction, intertextuality, elements of detective fiction, pluralism and humour (Yaprak et. Al 665-680). It also has, in many respects, a realist approach to setting and characters, as well as dialogues. In this sense, it is not possible to simply place the novel in either category.

The style of the novel can be summarised as follows. The narrator uses colloquial language. In the dialogues, dialect is not used.[494] Both in the narration and in the dialogues, the word order is unmarked, i.e. inverted syntax is not used. In the novel, at some points long and complex sentences are used, but such sentences do not dominate. The use of punctuation is standard.

[494] Pamuk said in an interview that he deliberately avoided the use of dialects in the novel ("Mesele Duyguyu" 26).

In the novel, a mixture of first and third person narrations are used. At the beginning of the first-person narration parts, the name of the narrating character is given. However, this is more like speaking rather than narrating, since these characters are aware that they are novelistic characters. It is as if they hear what other characters say and what the narrator narrates, and then reply to these. When there is a transition within a chapter from the first-person narration to the third-person, a boza-vendor icon appears, a gesture which might encourage the reader to associate Mevlut with the narrator. These parts are narrated by a narrator who claims that he personally knows Mevlut. However, the narrator does not appear as a character in the storyworld. No information is given about the narrator's gender or age. The parts narrated by this narrator are close to figural narration since Mevlut as the reflecting character is emphasised more strongly than the narrator. This is for the most part an unmarked narrator, who mainly narrates in an unengaged manner with only a little commentary or non-neutral adjectives.

14.3 Title and Beginning

The title of the novel *Kafamda Bir Tuhaflık* [A Strangeness in my Mind] signals the unique inner world of Mevlut, the protagonist of the novel. Throughout the book, the nature of this strangeness is slowly revealed based on his psychological dynamics, as the reader is introduced to his inner world. At the centre of this world lies Istanbul, as discussed below.

The first part of the novel is about Mevlut and Rayiha's elopement. The sole chapter of this part starts with three paragraphs of general information about the novel. In these three paragraphs, the narrator addresses the reader and makes comments about the structure of the novel. The passage introduces the narrator as a person who personally knows Mevlut. The narrator also says that all the events in the novel are real (T:15; E:3-4).

The ending of the first chapter, particularly with the narration, gives important clues about the general themes of the novel.

> Rayiha had already been to Istanbul once for her elder sister's wedding. But still she humbly asked, "Is this Istanbul now?"
>
> "Kartal counts as Istanbul, I suppose," said Mevlut, with the confidence of familiarity. "But there's still a ways to go." He pointed out the Princes' Islands ahead of them and vowed to take her there one day.
>
> Not once during Rayiha's brief life would they ever do this. (13-14)[495]

[495] "Rayiha İstanbul'a ablasının düğünü için dört yıl önce bir kere gelmişti. Ama alçakgönüllülükle gene sordu: 'Burası İstanbul mu?'

The narration in the passage, including words such as "humbly", and "confidence of familiarity" regarding the conversation about Istanbul, signals the prestige of having spent time in Istanbul. The emphasis on Rayiha's humbleness here, which indulges Mevlut with the opportunity to reveal his familiarity with the city, is a foreshadowing of the way their relationship will evolve: Rayiha's good-natured, humble and supportive character will make Mevlut feel safe and secure around her. The setting at this point, Kartal, the outskirts of the city, with the Princes' Islands just across the sea, one of the most picturesque areas of Istanbul, appears almost as imagery hinting at the different faces of Istanbul. Living in Istanbul might mean commuting for hours every day from a place like Kartal to the centre of the city, yet it might mean the pleasure of visiting the islands. The city offers them all, as living in Istanbul can be like torture as well as pleasure. The very last sentence is an indication of Rayiha's early death. The sentence might also hint at a counterargument to the anti-immigrant discourse, which suggests that because of ignorance, immigrants do not go sightseeing or visit historical places in Istanbul. The sympathetic tone in the sentence seems to imply the economic and other factors preventing Mevlut and Rayiha from ever visiting the islands. Such a tone is a sign of the novel's stance regarding the new citizens of Istanbul.

14.4 Characters and Related Themes

14.4.1 Quiet Encroachment of the 'Unordinary'

Asef Bayat, in an article where he searches for a way out of the dichotomy of "elite rule and subaltern's failure" ("Politics in the" 110) in times of neo-liberal urbanity, stresses that the left sees the "neoliberal city [as] a lost city" (116) where subaltern do not have hope for better lives (116) and "where the ideal of the right to the city is all but vanished" (116-117). While agreeing with various aspects of these arguments, Bayat draws attention to the need for surpassing "categorical dichotomies as passive-active, or win-lose" and examining "what possibilities the neo-liberal city may unintentionally furnish for subaltern struggles" (119). He defines streets as "indispensable asset/capital" for the subaltern where they can "subsist and reproduce economic as well as cultural life" (119). He defines this as a form of "street politics" (119) and describes it as follows: "Street vendors who spread their business in the pavements, poor people who extend their lives into the sidewalks, squatters who take over public lands, or protestors who march in the streets are all involved in street politics" (120).

'Kartal artık İstanbul sayılılır,' dedi Mevlut konuyu bilmenin güveniyle. 'Ama daha var.' Rayiha'yla karşıdaki adaları gösterdi. Bir gün mutlaka Adalar'a gezmeye gideceklerdi."
Ama bunu Rayiha'nın kısa hayatı boyunca bir kere olsun yapamadılar." (24)

Bayat defines their strategies as "encroachment" ("Politics in the" 120), as well as "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (*Life* 80). He explains that " . . . the reclamation, by the poor people, of public space through encroachment, stretching out, functioning, and subsisting constitutes an expression of street politics, while simultaneously feeding into and accentuating the political street. In other words, through this encroachment, the dispossessed are constantly engaged in struggles in and about the urban space" ("Politics in the" 120). Obviously, this quiet encroachment of immigrants in their struggle to survive in the city appears in this or that way in almost all the novels analysed in this research. Encroachment on land by building shanties for shelter appears in many of them, as is the case in *Strangeness*. Vending in the street, which is another form of quiet encroachment, has always been an important phenomenon in the lives of immigrants in the city, since it is a way of self-employment in a place where there are not enough jobs for everyone. As a matter of fact, these two phenomena, together with the self-organised public transport of immigrants in the form of the share-taxi appear in the title of an important book on rural to urban migration in Istanbul: *Gecekondulu, Dolmuşlu, İşportalı Şehir* [The City with Shanty, Share-taxi and Vendors] (Tekeli, Gölüksüz, Okya 1976).

Vending in the street, a form of quiet encroachment, appears as a central motif in *Strangeness*. Working as a street vendor is central to the psyche of Mevlut, the protagonist of the novel. Mevlut, who is a rural to urban migrant, a poor man trying to survive in Istanbul, is a unique novel character since he is portrayed as a sophisticated individual. In an interview, Orhan Pamuk argues that the novel of the poor person as an individual does not get written (Oral, Günay, Ak). Metin Celal, responding to this claim in his review of the novel, stresses that various authors from different parts of the world, as well as from Turkey, particularly those who follow a socialist realist tradition, have elaborated the individuality of their poor characters ("Kafamda Bir" 10). It is difficult to disagree with Celal. However, Pamuk does not seem to claim to be the first person in literary history to have written the novel of the poor individual. In order to understand what he might mean by these words, we need to understand what makes Mevlut, the protagonist of *Strangeness*, such a unique character.

Towards the end of the novel, at the beginning of the seventh part, there is an epigraph from J.J. Rousseau: "I can only meditate when I'm walking" (561)[496]. Throughout his life, Mevlut feels better when he is working outside rather than indoors. He works as a street vendor, selling yoghurt or rice in the daytime, and goes out to sell boza at night as an extra

[496] "Ben yalnızca yürürken düşünebilirim" (447).

job. Selling boza at night is not something Mevlut simply does to make money, as the pleasure aspect is predominant. In fact, selling boza is not that profitable an occupation. At night, when he feels stressed, unhappy or melancholic, selling boza makes him feel better, since to do that he walks in the streets of the city for hours. During these long nights, he feels that the city is speaking to him. Either in his daytime jobs, or at night selling boza, he feels free when he is outside. Mevlut is like a flâneur in this sense.

Belge points out that "neither [Mevlut's] culture, nor his income is suitable to describe him as a 'flaneur'; yet he is a 'porteur', a 'carrier' at least as much as a 'flaneur' " ("Usta İşi" 21). No matter how far he is from a flâneur socially and culturally, Mevlut is close to one psychologically. It is striking to see how Keith Tester's words describing Baudelaire's poet, probably the most characteristic flâneur in cultural and literary history, are also valid for Mevlut: " . . . a man who is driven out of the private and into the public by his own search for meaning. He is the man who is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically" (2). Unlike a flâneur, who strolls in the city for pleasure, Mevlut is out in the city as a vendor; this includes the times when he is out selling boza as, despite the predominance of pleasure in this act, he is still a vendor in the streets. Unlike the middle class flâneur who strolls in arcades, Mevlut is in the streets, around apartment buildings. This is the outer reality. On the other hand, where the inner reality is concerned, Mevlut carries the soul of a flâneur, of Baudelaire's poet. Tester underscores that "the Baudelairean poet" has "an ability to make for himself the meaning and the significance of the metropolitan spaces and the spectacle of the public" (4). Mevlut is just like that. On his walks, Mevlut perceives the world around him with a sophisticated outlook, in a manner many educated urbanites would not be able to do. Parallels between Mevlut and the flâneur do not seem to be a random choice. As Belge stresses, it is difficult to think that an author like Pamuk, who has a vast knowledge of world literature, would not be aware of the resemblance between Mevlut and the flâneur (Personal Interview). Embodying Mevlut, the poor immigrant with the outlook of the flâneur, a highly middle-class, even elite figure, Pamuk blurs the distinctions between the elite urbanite vs. the rural immigrant in this novel.

As mentioned earlier, Mevlut's passion for Istanbul is usually distilled through the motif of his walks in the city. Selling boza at night is a way of life for Mevlut: " . . . his long nightly walks weren't just part of his job anymore; they were something he felt he *needed* to do" (350)[497]; and when he is working at Binbom, he feels a sort of claustrophobia: " . . . he

[497] "Her gece sokaklarda uzun uzun yürümek artık mesleki bir alışkanlıktan çok bir ihtiyaç olmuştu" (285).

may as well have been chained to the shop" (362)[498]. His feelings about selling boza at night are described as follows: "He sensed, now, that the streets on which he sold boza in the night and the universe in his mind were one and the same" (363)[499]. Via psycho-narration his views are rendered: "of course the only antidote to the loneliness of the streets was the streets themselves" (373)[500]. The narrator adds that working at Binbom for five years have made Mevlut a melancholic person. At one point, Mevlut tells Ferhat that he would always want to continue selling boza (T:312; E:382).

Mevlut is a vendor who enjoys walking in the streets of the city with a rich fantasy world based on the historical heritage of the city. The narrator explains with empathy how historical things remind Mevlut of the existence of "another realm within our world" (391)[501]. While other immigrant characters in the novel take pride in their material achievements in the city, Mevlut is interested in connecting with the soul of the city. Remnants of history, enigmatic artefacts reflecting the rich historical heritage of the city such as "a mossy old wall" (271)[502], and a gravestone "dating all the way back to Ottoman times" (273)[503] appeal to him. All of these excite Mevlut the 'non-Istanbulite', details which many Istanbulites would not even notice, or simply ignore as usual and ordinary elements of the city, maybe because they are too accustomed to them. As a protagonist, he is very much developed on the terms of his relationship with the city. To sum up, certainly authors such as Sait Faik or Orhan Kemal created characters who were poor people with an urban identity. Indeed, Mevlut is one such character. Pamuk has developed Mevlut the poor man and his idiosyncrasies in great depth. With the words above, Pamuk might be referring to the scale of his project of developing Mevlut, the poor man as a unique individual in love with urban life.

Bayat's conceptualisation of the survival strategies of the poor, the quiet encroachment of the ordinary can be perceived on a further level, based on a character like Mevlut. Here obviously, there is the quiet encroachment of the poor immigrant in the city, in his shanty, on the streets with his stall. However, there is much more than that. What we see here is a man who has a passion for the city. In Mevlut's case, the quiet encroachment not only makes it possible for the immigrant to survive in the city, but also enables him to become an urban individual with a strong bond with the city. In the novel, Mevlut the immigrant is not

[498] "bir dükkana zincirlenmiş gibi" (295)
[499] "Geceleri boza satarken yürüdüğü sokakla kafasının içindeki âlemin artık tek bir bütün olduğunu seziyordu" (296).
[500] "Sokakların verdiği yalnızlığın asıl ilacı tabii ki gene sokaklardı" (304).
[501] "bu dünyanın içinde gizli bir başka âlem" (318)
[502] "taşları yosun tutmuş eski duvar" (223)
[503] "Osmanlı zamanından kalma . . . mezar taşı" (225)

portrayed simply as someone who prefers to live in the city because he can earn his daily bread here. His real tie with the city is one of passion. He is in love with the historical heritage of the city, with its aura. This aspect is emphasised over and over again in the novel. As a result of this, the right to the city does not appear in the novel simply in terms of material needs. The right to the city in Mevlut's case involves a social and cultural belonging to the city, which once again can be explained in terms of the city as oeuvre. Mevlut is in love with the city as oeuvre. He has neither the money nor the social circles to be a part of the high culture and art world of the city, or to go sightseeing like a tourist. He never does this kind of strolling through the city. However, in the very centre of the city he simply enjoys old buildings, graveyards, crowds, simply the soul of the city, as he pushes his stall or carries his boza basket. He invents his very own lifestyle which makes it possible for him to experience the city as oeuvre. This makes Mevlut a unique immigrant character.

Bayat stresses the urban poor's potential to find alternative ways to survive, as opposed to those who see them as simply passive. Pamuk's novel stresses this point, and takes it to a further dimension: that of individuality. The immigrants in the city struggling to earn their daily bread can develop an urban identity though their experiences in the city, as opposed to living as peasants in the city. In Mevlut's case, the quiet encroachment of the ordinary, it might be argued, takes the form of the quiet encroachment of the unordinary.

14.4.2 Men and Women in the City

During the summer of his last year as a student, Mevlut falls in love with a woman he keeps meeting in the street. He calls this woman Neriman, and after a while he starts following her. A passage where Mevlut's thoughts about her are rendered via free indirect discourse is particularly important in stressing how Mevlut appreciates the city as an entirely different place from his village. Here, Mevlut is thinking that if his sisters were followed by a man in the village, the way he is following Neriman right now, he'd want to beat them up, "but Istanbul was not a village" (106)[504]. Mevlut's awareness of being in the city is stressed here, as if encountering the anti-immigrant discourse that immigrants are not aware that they are in the city.

However, Mevlut imagines his sisters being followed in the village, yet he does not imagine them being followed in the city. No information is given about what he'd feel in that case. As such, the novel leaves unanswered how much his perceptions on such issues are changed. However, from the way that Mevlut's daughter Fevziye has the freedom to study at

[504] "Ama İstanbul bir köy değildi" (98).

university, it can be inferred that his views about women's independence is quite in line with urban perceptions. He also admires Fevziye for her effortless ways in socialising in the city. However, Mevlut never encourages Rayiha to be a part of urban life. They never appear together going sightseeing in the city, or enjoying the city together. Rayiha is always at home, in the domestic, private sphere. His daughter, as a second-generation immigrant woman, has much more liberty than her mother.

In the novel, the characters other than Mevlut whose love for Istanbul is mentioned are women. Samiha is the most significant character in this sense. She explains her feelings about the city as follows: " . . . the crowds, the people dodging buses as they run to the other side of the road, the girls in skirts, the horse-drawn carts, the parks, the big old apartment buildings; I love it all" (252)[505]. The resonance of the city as oeuvre in Samiha's words, especially in her inclusion of old apartment buildings, is worthy of attention. The way she describes how and why she loves the city also reflects her desire to get liberated as a woman in the city, surpass male hegemony on what to wear and how to behave. The feeling of freedom is an important reason for her attachment to the city, as her words reveal. In fact, in the Turkish original, she says she likes "girls wearing skirts freely"[506] (T: 208), a nuance lost in the translation above simply rendering it as "the girls in skirts" (E: 252).

After marrying Ferhat, Samiha works as a domestic worker in apartments in the city centre, and enjoys being in central areas of Istanbul. Similar to Mevlut, she also thinks that the city talks to her (237). She admires Ferhat for having grown up in Karaköy. "It was nice to think that Ferhat had spent his childhood in Karaköy, right in the middle of the city, and when I got home I would ask him to tell me about those days" (289)[507]. Like Samiha, Vediha, the oldest of the three sisters who is married to Korkut, loves travelling in the city, as mentioned by Süleyman when he describes their visits to seek out eligible girls for marriage: "Vediha loved being out of the house so much . . . " (299)[508]. Vediha explains that visiting candidates for Korkut is the easiest way for her to get permission from her husband to go out in the city (T: 246; E: 300). Korkut eventually ends up with a female singer, to his family's disgust.

Other than these insignificant details, the novel does not deal with the gender dimension of immigrants' life in the city.

---

[505] "Şehrin kalabalığını, otobüsler arasında karşıdan karşıya koşarak geçen insanları, özgürce etek giyen kızları, at arabalarını, parkları ve eski büyük apartmanları; her şeyi seviyorum" (208).
[506] özgürce etek giyen kızları
[507] "Ferhat'ın çocukluğunu Karaköy'de, şehrin tam ortasında geçirdiğini düşünmek hoşuma gider, evde ona o zamanları anlattırırdım" (237).
[508] "Evden çıkıp gezmeyi o kadar severdi ki Vediha . . . " (245)

14.5 Setting and Related Themes

Bayat observes that "the neoliberal city is a 'city-inside-out,' where a massive number of urban residents, the subaltern, become compelled to operate, subsist, or simply live on the public spaces—in the streets, in a substantial 'out-doors economy'" (113). Throughout the novel, with Mevlut's occupation as a vendor, this aspect of the neoliberal city is constantly stressed.

The importance of being and living in the centre of the city is also implied in the novel. If Mevlut was not living in a central area of the city like Tarlabaşı, butfor instance, in Gazi like Ferhat, he would not be able to sell boza at night in places like Şişli and Feriköy.

The areas of Istanbul where the characters of the novel live can be analysed in two sections: Kültepe and Duttepe; Tarlabaşı and Gazi.

14.5.1 The Shanties of Kültepe and Duttepe

Like in most novels which deal with the theme of rural to urban migration, the shanty, both as a setting and as a theme, has a significant presence in *Strangeness*. In the novel, the setting of shanty has a central function in the representations of Mevlut's feelings of solitude and isolation during the first phase of his time in Istanbul. The problems of housing in the city enter the novel through the physical conditions of shanties and flats where immigrants are accommodated, and through the difficulties of life in neighbourhoods where these shanties and flats are located.

The third part of the novel covers the period between 1968 and 1982, from Mevlut's arrival in the city until his marriage with Rayiha. The first chapter of this part ends as Mevlut and his father arrive in their shanty. In fact, because of their luggage they are not accepted on buses, therefore they end up walking for four hours after they get off the ferry they take at the Haydarpaşa pier. The second chapter is entitled "Home"[509], with the subheading: "The Hills at the End of the City" (46)[510] and opens with the following sentence: "Home was a *gecekondu*, a slum house" (46)[511]. The narrator explains that Mevlut's father most of the time refers to the place as a "gecekondu" [shanty] and rarely as home. The shanty is a one-room place with a dirt floor and has a primitive toilet outside (47). There are only the following pieces as furniture: "an old table, four chairs, two beds (one with bedsprings and one without),

[509] "Ev" (52)
[510] "Şehrin Bittiği Yerdeki Tepeler" (52)
[511] "Ev bir gecekonduydu" (52).

two cupboards, two windows and a stove" (47)[512]. Obviously, these are difficult physical conditions, and the atmosphere of the shanty is grim. Shanty housing and being on the periphery are juxtaposed in the beginning section of this part of the novel. "Their house was at the edge of the city, on the lower part of a balding, muddy hill dotted with mulberry trees, and with a fig tree here and there (49)[513]. Mevlut's father takes him to the highest point in the area to show him around:

> From here, you could see the slums that were rapidly taking over the surrounding hills . . . , the city's biggest cemetery (Zincirlikuyu), factories of all shapes and sizes, garages, workshops, depots, medicine and lightbulb manufacturers, and, in the distance, the ghostly silhouette of the city with its tall buildings and its minarets. The city itself and its neighborhoods – where Mevlut and his father sold yogurt in the mornings and boza in the evenings, and where Mevlut went to school – were only mysterious smudges on the horizon. (50)[514]

Here, being on the periphery is emphasised. However, Mevlut is not presented as an unhappy person feeling that he is living in misery, in a shanty on a hill at the edge of the city. He is rather portrayed as a self-sufficient person, always capable of finding entertainment for his mind, owing to his rich imagination.

The novel explains the informal procedures for building a shanty in detail (T: 60-62; E: 57-59). This passage is important, since it stresses the difference between those who build shanties for shelter and those who build them for rent. It also emphasises the fragility of shanty dwelling life, always living with the possibility of demolition. Some pages later, the fact that some people use shanty for rent is explained in detail by Korkut (T:106-107; E:117-119). The narrator describes the shanty as "four walls and a ceiling" (281)[515]. In this way, the novel accomplishes a difficult mission: giving a realistic picture of the evolution of shanties without appraisal or condemnation. The novel's stance on the shanty phenomenon is one of empathy for those who build them for shelter. Readers of the novel who are totally unfamiliar with life in shanty housing get a glimpse of shanty life through the novel, where it is depicted with great potential for sympathy. In addition to the descriptions of the shanty where Mevlut

---

[512] "Eski bir masa, dört sandalye, biri somyalı diğeri somyasız iki yatak, iki dolap, iki pencere, bir de soba vardı" (52).

[513] "Ev, şehrin bittiği yerde, üzerinde dut ağaçları ve tek tük incirler olan yarı kel, çamurlu bir tepenin aşağı kısmındaydı" (54)

[514] "Buradan, gecekondularla hızla kaplanmakta olan diğer tepeler . . . , şehrin en büyük mezarlığı (Zincirlikuyu), irili ufaklı pekçok fabrika, araba tamirhaneleri, atölyeler, depolar, ilaç ve ampül fabrikaları ve uzaklarda şehrin hayaletimsi gölgesi, yüksek binaları ve minareleri gözüküyordu. Şehrin kendisi, babasıyla sabahları yoğurt ve akşamları boza sattığı ve okula gittiği mahalleler uzaklarda, esrarengiz birer leke gibiydiler." (55)

[515] "dört duvar bir dam" (231)

and his father live, the novel introduces Samiha's comments on the shanty where she lives with Ferhat (T: 229; E: 278), enriching the way the theme is developed in the novel. Towards the very end of the novel, the narration of Mevlut's feelings, as he watches the demolition of the shanty where he lived with his father in his first years, come to the fore in a passage where the emphatic stance of the novel about shanty housing is at its strongest:

> When the time came for his own one-room house, Mevlut felt his heart breaking. He observed his whole childhood, the food he'd eaten, the homework he'd done, the way things had smelled, the sound of his father grunting in his sleep, hundreds of thousands of memories all smashed to pieces in a single swipe of the bulldozer shovel. (559)[516]

The difficulties immigrants face in the city as they try to find accommodation options other than the shanty are included in the novel in a realistic manner. Immigrants not living in shanties either live in janitors' flats in the basements of the apartment blocks which they look after, or in the run-down apartments of poor neighbourhoods called dilapidated neighbourhoods in a pejorative manner. While shanties and poor neighbourhoods have a significant place in the novel, the janitor way of life appears once, when Samiha is talking about her friend Zeliha's place: " . . . the doorman's quarters, which were smaller than the room we lived in lacking even a window (285)[517]. If the narrator described the place using such squalid details, it could have sounded like sympathy from above. However, when such comments come from an insider, the effect is much different: the call for empathy is effortless.

The comparison of living in run-down houses in poor neighbourhoods with living in a shanty on the periphery, which are the most common housing options for immigrants, appears as a minor theme in the novel. At one point, Mevlut, expecting Süleyman's visit to the apartment where he lives with his family, wants to open the windows because of the smell in the room. Rayiha, concerned that their daughters will feel cold, asks him: "Doesn't their house in Duttepe smell exactly like this?" (263)[518] Mevlut's response reflects his resentment towards his uncle Hasan for his selfishness in the past during the conflict about the shanty. However, it also has a connotation of satisfaction about living in the city centre: "It doesn't. They've got that huge garden, they've got electricity and running water, it's all like

---

[516] "Sıra kendi bir odalı evine gelince Mevlut'un kalbi kırıldı. Buldozerin tek bir kepçe vuruşuyla çocukluğu, yediği yemekler, çalıştığı dersler, kokladığı kokular, horuldayarak uyuyan babasının sesi, yüz binlerce hatıra, her şey bir anda parçalanıp yok olunca gözleri nemlendi" (446).

[517] "Bizim tek oda gecekondudan da küçük ve tek penceresi bile olmayan bodrumdaki kapıcı dairesinde . . . " (234).

[518] "Onların Duttepe'deki evi de aynen böyle kokmuyor mu?" (216)

clockwork. But we're much happier here" (263)[519]. Here, the bad physical conditions of apartments in Tarlabaşı are implied as the cost of living in the city centre.

14.5.2 Stigmatised Neighbourhoods and Immigrants

Two of the most stigmatised neighbourhoods in Istanbul play an important part in the setting of the novel: Tarlabaşı and Gazi. As discussed above, in the earlier parts of the book, the fictional shantytowns of Kültepe and Duttepe are central to the setting. This situation changes after Mevlut moves out of his father's shanty. After he rents a flat in Tarlabaşı, a stigmatised neighbourhood, this area becomes the locus of his life, therefore of the novel. Gazi is another stigmatised neighbourhood, albeit in entirely different ways, since it is a completely different urban setting from Tarlabaşı. This neighbourhood also has a significant presence in the novel. The way these two neighbourhoods appear in the book is worth a close look.

a) Tarlabaşı[520]:

The representation of the neighbourhood of Tarlabaşı has a function in more than one context in the novel: Tarlabaşı as a stigmatised neighbourhood; and urban transformation and Tarlabaşı. In this part, the focus is on Tarlabaşı as a stigmatised neighbourhood.

Tarlabaşı, an area near the Grand Rue de Péra, was a place where almost only Greeks and Armenians lived and ran businesses until the 1930s. In the 1930s, Muslim families started to move into the area, renting or buying houses there. In the 1940s, there was an increase in the number of Muslims moving into the area; however, in this period, Pera and Tarlabaşı were still dominated by minorities and Levantines. After the Wealth Tax (1942-43), various businesses in the Beyoğlu area, including Tarlabaşı, were transferred to Muslim owners from minorities. After the 6-7 September Pogrom of 1955, minorities, particularly Greeks, started to leave the country, selling some of their properties (Üsdiken 218). With the enactment of the 1964 Decree, 35-40 thousand Greeks were expelled from Turkey (Demir and Akar 157-8). Since these people had to leave the country very quickly, they could not sell their properties, and eventually these started to be rented to third parties by unauthorised people. These developments had a direct and massive impact on Tarlabaşı:

> Especially after the 1960s Tarlabaşı and surroundings became an area inhabited by low income groups due to internal migration and the changes in the property structure.

---

[519] "Kokmuyor. Duttepe'de, kocaman bahçeli evde, elektrik, su, herşey püfür püfür oturuyor onlar. Ama biz burada çok daha mutluyuz" (216).

[520] For those who are not familiar with Istanbul, it might be useful to note that Dolapdere, which is mentioned numerous times in the analysis of *Roman(i),* is a neighbourhood next to the Tarlabaşı neighbourhood.

> Low-income immigrants from Anatolia, the unemployed and so forth started to move in as renters or squatters, into low-standard residences of Tarlabaşı, some of which were abandoned.[521] (Akbulut, "Tarlabaşı Bulvarı" 219)

M. Rıfat Akbulut adds that the running down of the neighbourjood and degradation of the buildings of the area, the moving in of people working in the nightlife of Beyoğlu, as well as various illegal activities finding a place in Tarlabaşı, pushed the neighbourhood into a "complete dilapidation"[522], and created discomfort in public (219). As a result of a rehabilitation project, turning Tarlabaşı Street into a boulevard, a massive and controversial demolition programme took place in the area in 1986-1988. A total of 368 buildings, 167 of which were registered as historical heritage, were demolished (219).

In March 1982, Mevlut comes back to Istanbul upon completing his military service and moves to Tarlabaşı, renting "a second-floor apartment . . . in an old Greek house . . . " (197)[523]. In a passage depicting Süleyman's visit to Mevlut's place, there is a long section where Süleyman explains, with great enthusiasm, how after the 12th September coup, the carpenters and mechanics were pushed out of Tarlabaşı by the new mayor and the bachelor dormitories were shut down, and he adds:

> In the last five years, this whole place has been overrun by drifters and castaways, and there are so many poor rural migrants, Kurds, Gypsies, and foreigners who have settled on these streets that the neighbourhood is worse than Duttepe was fifteen years ago. Only another coup could clean this place up now. (264)[524]

The five-year period mentioned here is the period after the 1982 coup. In Süleyman's comments, discrimination against ethnic minorities and rural to urban immigrants can easily be felt, but not the discourse stigmatising Tarlabaşı as a hive of criminals. Süleyman also adds that the Vural family has attempted to buy a couple of precious buildings here cheaply, but then stepped back because of title deed problems. His discriminatory discourse concludes with a wish for a forceful, inhumane transformation of the neighbourhood which will, as a matter of fact, serve capitalist interests. It should be remembered that the time is 1987, the period of Tarlabaşı's demolition. The choice of adjectives in the narrator's words in the quote

---

[521] "Özellikle 1960'lardan itibaren Tarlabaşı çevresi iç göç ve mülkiyet yapısındaki değişikliklere bağlı olarak alt gelir gruplarının yerleştiği bir bölge haline gelir. . . . Anadolu'dan göçle gelen dar gelirliler, işsizler vb Tarlabaşı'nın bir kısmı terk edilmiş düşük standartlı konutlarına kiracı ya da kimi zaman işgalci olarak yerleşmeye başla[r] . . . ."

[522] "tam bir çöküntüye" (219)

[523] " . . . eski bir Rum evinin ikinci katını kiraladı" (167).

[524] "Beş yılda yersiz yurtsuz gariban takımı doldurmuş buraları, Anadolu'dan İstanbul'a gelen yoksul kalabalık, Kürtler, Çingeneler, göçmenler öyle bir yerleşmiş ki, sokaklar bizim Duttepe'nin on beş yıl önceki halinden daha da beter olmuş. Artık buraları iyice temizlemek için bir askeri darbe daha lazım" (217).

below stresses the use of a stigmatising discourse for the legitimisation of the demolishing process:

> The program of demolitions was announced as an effort to clean up and modernize the city, an approach that appealed to everyone. Criminals, Kurds Gypsies, and thieves currently squatting in the neighbourhood's vacant buildings would get kicked out; drug dens, smugglers' warehouses, brothels, bachelor dormitories, and ruined buildings that served as hubs of illegal activities would be demolished, and in their place would be a new six-lane highway taking you from Tepebaşı to Taksim in five minutes. (317)[525]

In the quote, the argument of the public officials about the neighbourhood, given as indirect discourse, is much harsher than Süleyman's discriminatory words. Here, the case is not only discrimination but also stigmatisation.

The narrator's stance about Tarlabaşı is neutral. In an early paragraph in the twelfth chapter, the situation in the neighbourhood is described thus:

> As the conflict in Eastern Turkey grew more violent, Mevlut watched the streets of Tarlabaşı fill up, one family at a time, with Kurdish migrants. These newcomers were tough people, nothing like easygoing Ferhat. Their villages had been evacuated and burned to the ground during the war. They were poor and never bought any boza, so Mevlut rarely went to their neighbourhoods. He stopped going altogether when drug dealers and homeless, glue-sniffing young men began to frequent the area. (310)[526]

At this point, a historical fact should be remembered. The excerpts above are taken from the passage about Tarlabaşı in the period during the late 1980s, shortly before the opening of the Tarlabaşı Boulevard in 1988. However, the arrival in Tarlabaşı of Kurds whose villages were burnt down, is a phenomenon of almost a decade later, of the mid-1990s. In this case, this might be an authorial decision to enmesh the atmospheres of Tarlabaşı in different periods, or simply some important facts might have been overlooked in the writing process of the novel. The reader has no way of knowing this. In this quote, after the description of the arrival of the Kurds in Tarlabaşı (T:253-4; E: 310), the paragraph draws attention to the stigmatising

---

[525] "Yıkımlar, herkese hoş gözüken temizlik, modernlik sözleriyle ilan edildi. Sahipsiz evlere yerleşen haydutlar, Kürtler, Çingeneler, hırsızlar temizlenecek, esrar ve uyuşturucu yuvaları, kaçakçı depoları, randevuevleri, bekar odaları, kanunsuz işlere yataklık eden viraneler yıkılacak, yerine Tepebaşı'ndan Taksim'e beş dakikada gideceğin altı şeritli bir yol yapılacaktı" (259).

[526] Doğu'daki savaşın kızışıp büyüdüğü yıllarda Mevlut Tarlabaşı'nın aile aile, sokak sokak Kürt göçmenlerle doluşunu gördü. Bunlar Ferhat gibi ılımlı değil, sert insanlardı. Savaşta köyleri boşaltılmış, yakılmıştı. Mevlut o mahallelere bu yeni ve yoksul insanlar hiç boza almadığı için az gidiyordu artık. Daha sonra esrar, hap ve uyuşturucu satanlar, tiner koklayan yersiz, evsiz çocuklar da bu sokaklara dadandığı için de oralardan uzaklaştı. (253-4)

discourse about the neighbourhood (T:253; E:310), with an emphasis on how Kurds and Roma are included alongside drug dealers, robbers and prostitutes as potential criminals within this discourse.

At a later point in the book, in the 1990s Ferhat tells Mevlut: "You can't live in this neighbourhood anymore unless you've got a gun," (442-443)[527] and adds: "Drugs, prostitutes, transvestites, all kinds of gangs…" (442-3)[528]. Ferhat's comments are not based on ethnic and/or sectarian prejudice; he observes the dangers in the neighbourhood, without wishing for an iron fist to change it. He may or may not be exaggerating the situation, this entirely depends on which streets and alleys of Tarlabaşı he is talking of. Introducing such comments, the novel manages to include the dominant discourse about the area.

Towards the end of the novel, when the date is the early 2000s, about a decade before the start of the massive Tarlabaşı urban transformation project, rumours about the project pervade the neighbourhood. At this point, it is explained that Mevlut has never actually felt as if he belongs to Tarlabaşı. However, with the recent changes in the neighbourhood, he feels more estranged there. The narrator explains:

> The old carpenters, blacksmiths, repairmen, and shopkeepers trained by the Armenians and the Greeks had all left, as had those hardworking families ready to do any job to survive, and now the Assyrians were also gone, replaced by drug dealers, immigrants moving into abandoned apartments, homeless people, gangsters, and pimps. (524)[529]

The narrator goes on to explain the rise of gangs in the neighbourhood in an objective manner.

The overall position of the novel about Tarlabaşı can be regarded as being against a stigmatising discourse. It underlines that there were and are people engaged in minor or major illegal activities in this neighbourhood. However, there are also many people living there who have nothing to do with such a lifestyle, just poor people who are trying to survive in the city. The novel also stresses the benefits of capitalists in the two transformation operations in the neighbourhood, and that the stigmatising discourse is used as a vehicle for legitimising these operations.

b) Gazi:

Gazi is one of the areas of Istanbul which has a significant place in the setting of *Strangeness*. The first point to discuss about the depiction of Gazi in the book is the way it has

---

[527] "'Artık bu mahalleye silahsız girilmez,' . . . " (357)

[528] "'Uyuşturucular, orospular, dönmeler, her türlü çete … . . . " (357)

[529] "Ermenilerin, Rumların yetiştirdiği eski marangoz, demirci, tamirci ustaları, dükkan sahipleri, şehirde tutunmak için her işi yapan çalışkan aileler, en son Süryaniler uzaklaşmış, yerlerini uyuşturucu satıcıları, metruk evlere yerleşen göçmenler, evsizler, haydutlar, pezevenkler almıştı" (420).

been fictionalised. As mentioned earlier, the novel includes numerous events from history adhering faithfully to historical data. In an interview, Pamuk explains that "in the novel Turkey's, particularly Istanbul's transformation in the last forty years is told" (quoted in Parla 121)[530]. The fact that the shantytowns of Kültepe and Duttepe are fictional is an exception to the realistic, chronicle-like stance of the novel. However, it must be noted that Kültepe [Ash Hill] and Duttepe [Mulberry Hill] are depicted as representations of neighbourhoods such as Kuştepe [Bird Hill], Gültepe [Rose Hill] located in similar places, near Mecidiyeköy and Zincirlikuyu; and obviously, the "hill" [tepe] in their names is an open reference to these real neighbourhoods. Celal argues that Pamuk's decision to give fictional names to these realistically depicted shantytowns might be simply because he did not want to deal with discussions of precise compatibility with reality (10). However, when it comes to the appearance of Gazi in the novel, the situation is unique. In the novel, Gazi, a real neighbourhood, appears in a form which is semi-fictional. Before discussing the results of such a gesture in the novel, it might be useful to give brief information about Gazi, a periphery neighbourhood of Istanbul.

Pérouse draws our attention to the mythology about the Gazi Neighbourhood based on catastrophism and sensationalism (72). He asserts that this mythology has three main constituents. Based on this mythology, Gazi is an Alevite, leftist and Kurdish neighbourhood (73). Pérouse stresses that within such a framework, "Gazi is a dangerous . . . 'stigmatized' neighbourhood"[531] (73), and adds that the events in March, 1995[532] contributed to this perception about Gazi (73-74). Depending on his research in the register's office archives as well as his fieldwork in the area, Pérouse observes that Gazi is not a Kurdish neighbourhood (82). He adds that although Alevites are the majority, there is a significant Sunnite population in Gazi (85). From his conversations with Gazi people, Pérouse underscores that "Gazi can neither be described as a 'leftist neighbourhood'"[533] nor as a "'liberated area'"[534], as the majority of the Gazi residents are far from supporting the armed radical leftist groups (91). However, he stresses that constant psychological agitation by the police in Gazi, both before

[530] " . . . bu romanda Türkiye'nin, özellikle de İstanbul'un son 40 yıllık dönüşümü anlatılıyor."
[531] "Gazi, tehlikeli . . . 'damgalanmış' bir mahalle."
[532] "In March 1995, Sunni radicals opened fire on several coffee houses" in the neighbourhood, and as a result of the unrest arising consequently "some thirty people died" and the government had to send soldiers to the area to maintain order (Zürcher and Linden 130).
[533] "'solcu mahallesi'"
[534] "'kurtarılmış bölge'"

and after the events of 1995, lead to a "consciousness of difference stemming from a mutual feeling of 'oppression'"[535] (92).

The Gazi that appears in the novel is an amalgam of the Gazi Neighbourhood and another neighbourhood in Istanbul called 1 Mayıs Mahallesi [1st of May Neighbourhood]. As Ş. Aslan explains in detail, 1st of May Neighbourhood was established under the leadership of leftist groups in the second half of the 1970s (87-115). In other words, the story of 1st of May Neighbourhood is adapted to Gazi in the novel. Two points call for an answer here: What is the reason for such an adaptation? What is its effect on the overall message of the novel?

Making speculations about the author's decision might lead us to intentional fallacy, so this might as well be avoided. In an interview, Pamuk makes it clear that, in connection with Ferhat's existence in the story, Gazi neighbourhood was one of the places he visited in the city for this book (Oral, Günay, Ak 23). In the novel, there is a three-page long passage on the establishment of the Gazi neighbourhood (230-233). However, in real life Gazi was not established in this way, the establishment story related here belongs to the 1st of May Neighbourhood. In another interview, Pamuk replied with the following words when asked whether the story of Gazi in the novel is true:

> Yes, but this is the story of 1st of May Neighbourhood. There had happened sort of a socialist uprising. Like in all shanty quarters, in that quarter, too, there was an agha who had his gunned men in charge of distributing the land, and who had connections with the state. People, primarily university students have an uprising, take the papers in the mukhtar and give them to the excluded Alevites.[536] ("İnsanlar Biraz")

Put simply, the identities of Gazi and 1st of May neighbourhoods are juxtaposed in the novel to create a fictional Gazi. As discussed above, this is an interesting gesture in a novel which is extremely faithful to historical facts. Certainly, the Duttepe and Kültepe neighbourhoods are a deviation from real life events. However, the existence of these two places in the novel cannot be compared with that of Gazi. Duttepe and Kültepe are fictional neighbourhoods which are inspired by the shantytowns founded on the hills in the vicinity of Mecidiyeköy and Zincirlikuyu in the 1970s. However, Gazi is a real-life neighbourhood which is partly fictionalised in the novel. The crucial point about such a move is that the way Gazi is fictionalised in the novel is completely in line with what Pérouse calls mythologies about the

---

[535] "ortak 'ezilme' duygusundan kaynaklanan bir farklılık bilincini"

[536] "Evet ama bu, 1 Mayıs Mahallesi'nin hikayesidir. Orada bir çeşit sosyalist halk isyanı olmuştur. Tüm gecekondu mahallerinde olduğu gibi orada da arsaları dağıtan silahlı adamları ve devletle ilişkisi olan bir ağa vardır. Üniversite öğrencileri başta olmak üzere halk ayaklanır ve muhtardaki makbuzları alarak, dışlanan Alevilere verirler."

neighbourhood: that it is a Kurdish, Alevite and left-wing neighbourhood. Most probably, many of the readers of the novel will not check whether the story of Gazi in the novel is based on real events or fictionalised. It is very likely that they will assume it is based on historical facts. In this way, the novel, probably unintentionally, contributes to the reproduction of these mythologies about the stigmatised neighbourhood of Gazi.

14.5.3 Istanbul and the Minority Heritage

It is difficult to elaborate themes related to the minority heritage in the city without creating an atmosphere of old-Istanbul nostalgia described in Chapter 2. Since the disappearance of the non-Muslim minority, once a significant element of the city population, was a great loss, it is difficult to completely avoid a feeling of nostalgia when writing about related themes. *Strangeness* finds a balance and manages to treat the non-Muslim heritage without an overdose of nostalgia.

Mevlut has a direct connection with the Greek past of Tarlabaşı through the members of the remaining community who are not more than a handful. He has chats with " . . . Greek ladies who lived in moldy, gloomy, ancient apartments around the Çiçek Arcade, the fish market, and the British consulate" (315)[537]. Old, rusty and dark facades are images which emphasise the condition of the minority heritage today. There are various instances in the novel where the memories of the minority past suddenly appear, usually with similar imagery: in the case of Mevlut's search for a place to park his rice-stall in Talimhane: " . . . between a stack of timber meant for a construction site and an old abandoned Greek house" (336)[538]; when Vediha tells her daughters to play in the " . . . fairy courtyard of the Assyrian church" (328)[539], or when Rayiha talks about the "herbal tea with leaves [she] picked from the tree in the courtyard of the Armenian church" (241)[540].

In the novel, there is a three-paragraph long passage about the shameful incidents in Turkish history which resulted in the departure of the majority of the non-Muslim population. The passage opens with the following sentence: "Though no one likes to think or talk about it anymore, Tarlabaşı used to be a neighborhood populated by Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Assyrians" (315)[541]. In the passage, the Wealth Tax, the Istanbul Pogrom and the exile of the

[537] "Çiçek Pasajı, Balık Pazarı, İngiliz Konsolosluğu arasındaki yüz yıllık eski, küflü, karanlık apartmanlarda yaşayan ihtiyar Rum kadınlar" (258).
[538] " . . . bir inşaatın kalaslarının yığıldığı köşeyle terk edilmiş eski bir Rum evinin arasında . . . " (275)
[539] "perili Süryani kilisesinin avlusu . . . "(268)
[540] "Ermeni kilisesinin avlusundaki ağaçtan topladığ[ı] ıhlamurları" (201)
[541] "Kimse hatırlamak, söylemek istemiyordu, ama eskiden Tarlabaşı bir Rum-Ermeni-Yahudi ve Süryani mahallesiydi" (258).

Greeks in 1964 are all mentioned as stories Mevlut hears from the old residents of the quarter. Towards the end of the third paragraph, Mevlut's conflicting feelings as tenant in a Greek apartment are explained. Sometimes Greek people come to see their properties, and gangs unofficially renting these in collaboration with the state and the police, get kids to throw stones at these Greek owners of the buildings. Mevlut wants to stop the children but stays silent, as his landlord is also on the side of the gangs. Here the Anatolian immigrant's position, living in property belonging to the departed minority is depicted as a silent collaboration. Yet, for someone like Mevlut who admires the non-Muslim minority heritage in the city, it is not without cost, as he experiences this as a dilemma.

On a night when Mevlut is feeling melancholic, he goes out to sell boza and gets called upstairs by a customer in a Greek apartment in Feriköy (T: 296; E: 363-364). He remembers that he sold yoghurt with his father in this apartment when he was very young. Mevlut notices that the flat their customers lived in then is now a textile workshop (T:296; E:362).

> Mevlut looked closely at the stucco reliefs on the walls, the big mirror with a gilded frame, and the chandelier made of fake crystals –all left behind by the Greek families who'd live here once. For many years, whenever he would think back to this room, he would become convinced that his memory was playing tricks on him, that he hadn't seen that chandelier or that mirror. (364)[542]

Mevlut's remembrance of the past and the blurred lines between fantasy and memory get enmeshed with the feeling of nostalgia here, with the implication of how the past can seem like it was never real. The presence of the non-Muslim minority seems like such a faded memory today, as their communities are almost invisible.

The invasion of the properties belonging to minorities by third parties mostly connected with the mafia is a gripping motif in the novel, connected with the theme of the lost minority population of Istanbul. At a quite early stage of the novel, in the description of the room Ferhat stays in with other waiters, we are told that instead of the owner of the building who lives in Athens, they pay rent to someone from Sürmene[543] (T:143; E: 166). After two pages, the Greek buildings in the area are taken over by a gang comprising men from Sürmene (T:145; E: 168). In a later instance, the fact that the shop Mevlut and Ferhat run for a while in Beyoğlu, like many other buildings in the area, is rented by a gang is revealed

[542] "Mevlut bir zamanlar burada yaşayan Rum ailelerden kalma alçı kabartmalara, yaldızlı çerçeveli büyük bir aynaya ve sahte bir Kristal avizeye dikkatle bakmasına ragmen, daha sonra —yıllarca—bu odayı her hatırlayışında, avize ve aynayı aslında görmediğini, hafızasının kendisini aldattığını düşünecekti" (296).
[543] A town in Northern Anatolia.

(T:343; E:422). The novel's way of doing this is sophisticated: the narrator does not make these explanations, it is the characters from whom the reader learns these facts, a trait that prevents the novel being didactic or giving explicit messages.

Towards the end of the novel, in a moment of psycho-narration of Mevlut's thoughts on Tarlabaşı, it is told that the men acting as landlords of the apartment he lives in Tarlabaşı have been changing every five to six years, and they look like gang members (T:420-421; E:525-6). In the passage, in fact throughout the novel, the setting of Tarlabaşı appears almost as the graveyard of the Greek population in Istanbul, reinforcing the theme of the great void left by the minorities. The passage implies the continuation of the problem, since these properties are still not being given back to their owners.

A lament is also felt in the story of Sadullah, Fevziye's father-in-law, who becomes a good friend of Mevlut. Sadullah's father comes from Düzce during the Second World War and starts working as the apprentice of an Armenian shoe-maker. After a while he becomes the co-owner of the shoe-shop. The shop gets looted in the Istanbul pogrom. After this, the Armenian man transfers his shares to Sadullah's father and leaves Istanbul (T:402; E:501).

The theme of the lost heritage of minorities comes to the fore in another instance when Mevlut replies to Süleyman, who makes derogatory comments about Tarlabaşı: "'I wouldn't be so quick to dismiss it, if I were you. All the brightest, most creative Greeks, Assyrians used to live here. Craftsmen are the lifeblood of Istanbul'" (266)[544]. These words of Mevlut, together with the depiction of his dilemma when he cannot stop children throwing stones at the Greek owners of the buildings in Tarlabaşı, appear as the elaboration of a sensitive theme in the novel: the Anatolian immigrant's encounter with the non-Muslim minority heritage in the city. As discussed earlier, in Chapter II, the old-Istanbul nostalgia discourse creates a feeling that because of the arrival of the Anatolian immigrants in Istanbul, the non-Muslim minority disappeared, and the city lost its cosmopolitan identity. Obviously, as discussed various time above, Istanbul lost its minority for other reasons. These reasons are openly reminded to the reader in the novel. However, the novel also depicts what is behind this correlation between the arrival of rural to urban immigrants and the disappearance of the minority. Rural to urban immigrants moved into the buildings which were once resided in by the cosmopolitan population of the city. These buildings were rented unofficially by men with mafia connections. The novel depicts how even an immigrant like Mevlut who appreciates the minority legacy becomes a silent collaborator in the invasion of the minority's property, a

[544] "'Sen bu mahalleyi fazla küçümseme. Eskiden en akıllı, en zanaatkar Rumlar, Süryaniler yaşarmış burada. İstanbul'u yaşatan esnafıdır'" (219).

collaboration which creates the illusion that rural to urban immigrants came to Istanbul and pushed the minority out of their places and the city.

14.5.4 In a Transforming Istanbul

Strangeness is a novel set within a time span of forty years. The changes in the city have significance in relation to the setting as well as to the treatment of various themes in the book. At the very beginning of the novel, there is a long passage where the narrator explains Mevlut's perception of the changes to the city after he has spent twenty-five years in Istanbul. The narrator first mentions the changes to streets and houses, and when it comes to people, he makes the following comment: "The quiet, brownbeaten folk in gray and drab clothes who used to populate the streets had been replaced by rowdy, energetic, and more assertive crowds" (19)[545]. This depiction, together with Mevlut's thoughts on the new immigrants of the city quoted below, appear in the novel as an expression of a binary opposition of the reasonable good immigrants of the past and intimidating bad immigrants of the present; a point discussed in the next chapter.

For a very long time, Mevlut tries to be in harmony with the changes in the city. He enjoys feeling himself to be a part of these changes, since they happen when he is living in the city:

> He didn't see the city as a place that had existed before his arrival and to which he'd come as an outsider. Instead, he liked to imagine that Istanbul was being built while he lived in it and to dream of how much cleaner, more beautiful, and more modern it would be in the future. (318)[546]

Feeling himself a part of these changes contributes to Mevlut's belonging to the city and strengthens his identity as a member of it. However, as the novel proceeds, Mevlut's views on the changes in the city start to alter and move in the opposite direction. All these changes now begin to create unsettling feelings in him: "The city was no longer an enormous, familiar home but a faithless space in which anyone who got the chance added more concrete, more streets, courtyards, walls, pavements, and shops" (509).[547]

Mevlut's negative feelings about the changes in Istanbul are stronger when it comes to the changing nature of the social fabric of the city. The changes in Tarlabaşı come to the fore

---

[545] "Sokaklardaki boz ve solgun kıyafetli sessiz ve ezik insanlar gitmiş, yerlerine gürültücü, hareketli ve iddialı kalabalıklar gelmişti" (29).

[546] "Şehri, kendinden önce yapılmış ve kendisinin dışarıdan gelip içine girdiği bir yer olarak görmüyordu. İstanbul'u kendisi içinde yaşarken yapılan ve gelecekte çok daha güzel, temiz ve modern bir yer olarak hayal etmekten hoşlanıyordu" (260-261).

[547] "Sanki şehir tanıdığı bir yer, geniş bir ev olmaktan çıkmış, her önüne gelenin sınırsız beton, sokak, avlu, duvar, kaldırım ve dükkan eklediği tanrısız bir yere dönüşmüştü" (408).

in this respect. The increasing presence and visibility of gangs, drug dealing and prostitution, lowering the standard of living in the neighbourhood, have been discussed above within the context of Tarlabaşı as a stigmatised neighbourhood. Below, depictions of other sorts of changes in the neighbourhood are analysed, together with changes in other parts of the city.

Mevlut's unhappiness about the changes in Tarlabaşı, which leads him to his decision to move out of the neighbourhood, is developed in the chapter entitled "New Quarters, Old Faces" (517)[548] in the fifth part of the novel. Mevlut feels estranged both at home and in his neighbourhood. On the one hand, there is the rise in gangs, and on the other the changing neighbourhood fabric: "All these people who hung their underwear and shirts out to dry between each other's buildings, turning the whole neighborhood into one big Laundromat, made Mevlut feel that he no longer belonged here" (525)[549]. The people mentioned here are the new immigrants in Tarlabaşı. In reality, the majority of the new immigrants in Tarlabaşı in the 2000s were Kurdish immigrants, most of whom had come to the city in the mid-1990s due to involuntary migration. However, as mentioned earlier, the arrival of these Kurdish immigrants is included in the novel as an event of the mid-1980s. In any case, "these people" in the passage refer to the new immigrants in the neighbourhood, most of whom had come from Kurdish villages which were evacuated. Mevlut is also not happy about the increasing number of street stalls in Tarlabaşı, and he does not like the new street vendors running them. The increase in the number of foreigners, most of whom are transit migrants, in Tarlabaşı, also adds to his feelings of estrangement there: "By now he was getting used to the idea of Tarlabaşı as just a temporary stop on so many longer journeys" (526)[550]. All these remarks imply an important point: each generation of immigrants see the next newcomers as outsiders. In other words, while former immigrants feel the right to belong to the city, they do not 'grant' immigrants who come after them this right. Mevlut lives in Tarlabaşı, a neighbourhood which is one of the areas of Istanbul most, if not the most, directly affected by the waves of immigration, and where related changes are extremely visible. Therefore, he becomes an early and insider witness of all these changes. In a free indirect discourse, the reader is introduced to what Mevlut thinks about the new immigrants in Istanbul: "Istanbul was crawling with Ukrainian women smuggling contraband in their suitcases, African immigrants, and shady operators who sucked people dry; the city had become a hotbed of

[548] "Yeni Mahalleler, Eski Tanıdıklar"(414)
[549] "Donlarını, gömleklerini evden eve asıp mahalle sokaklarını büyük bir çamaşırhaneye çeviren bu yeni insanlar da Mevlut'a artık buralara ait olmadığı duygusunu veriyordu" (420).
[550] "Tarlabaşı'nın bir yerden diğerine giderken kalınan geçici bir konak olması fikrine de alışıyordu artık" (421).

corruption and bribery . . . " (395)[551] Although the focus of the quote is foreigners, the expression "çeşit çeşit tuhaf insan" [all sorts of strange people] which appears in the English translation as "shady operators", obviously includes all newcomers from inside or outside of Turkey. In comments like this, the boundaries between the narrator and Mevlut become blurred. The way Mevlut looks at these new people is similar to the way Istanbulites looked at immigrants in the former decades, when many of them, such as Mevlut, first arrived in the city. The psycho-narration following the above quote stresses the divide between the old and the new immigrants. Mevlut observes "a new category of poor people"[552] (481), who picked up the rubbish on streets which were " . . . changing . . . very fast. There were too many words and letters, too many people, too much noise" (481). He also identifies ". . . a new class of tougher, angrier hawkers" (481)[553]. He sadly witnesses that "the older generation of street vendors had been swallowed up in the tumult of the city…" (481)[554] In the globalising Istanbul of the present time which Mevlut observes, upward mobility is more difficult, which makes poor immigrants almost aggressive in their struggle to survive in the city.

Urban transformation changing the face of the city is another important factor in Mevlut's feelings about the city. This is not only an emotional response; it has direct influences on his life. These are the early 2000s, just before the Tarlabaşı urban transformation project is to be announced. Mevlut is concerned about not being able to afford the increasing rent. Tarlabaşı becomes a more and more bizarre place with each passing day: "He also suspected that these gangsterish types – his so-called landlords (who changed every five or six years) – might suddenly pull out and leave the house to real-estate brokers, property speculators, developers eager to build hotels, or to some other gang, as had happened elsewhere over the past two years" (525).[555] Tarlabaşı was now a focus of the rent economy: "After having been largely ignored for so many years, the whole neighbourhood had suddenly become a magnet for all the misery and destructive appetite that the city could muster" (525).[556] These are all utterly realistic depictions of the situation in Tarlabaşı, portraying the vulnerability of the immigrants living there and in other poor neighbourhoods targeted by the

[551] "Bavul ticareti yapan Ukraynalı kadınlar, Afrika'dan gelen göçmenler, insanın kanını emen çeşit çeşit tuhaf insan, ahlaksızlık ve rüşvet sarmıştı İstanbul'u . . . " (322)
[552] "yeni bir yoksullar sınıfı" (387)
[553] ". . . hızla değişiyordu. Çok fazla yazı, çok fazla insan, çok fazla gürültü vardı. Sokaklarda daha sert, daha öfkeli yeni bir satıcı kuşağı belirmişti" (387).
[554] "Eski satıcı sınıfı şehrin karmaşası içerisinde kaybolup gidiyordu…" (387)
[555] "'Ev sahibi' dediği yarı haydut kişilerin (bunlar her beş altı yılda bir değişmişti) şu son iki yılda olduğu gibi birden aradan çekilip evi emlak tacirlerine, spekülatörlere, otel yapmak isteyen girişimcilere, başka çetelere bırakıp gidebileceğini de hissediyordu" (420-421).
[556] "Yıllarca kimsenin dikkat etmediği mahalle birden şehirdeki huzursuzluğun ve derin bir tahribat arzusunun odaklandığı bir yer olmuştu" (421).

rent economy. This point is closely connected with the right to the city, as urban transformation projects are being carried out with a great breach of rights, as discussed earlier, especially for renters. The novel just implies the situation in Tarlabaşı, and does not include the realisation of the project in the story, since its focus is the changing face of Duttepe and Kültepe in relation to Mevlut's inner world.

14.6 Nostalgia in the Novel and Concluding Remarks

Towards the end of the novel, we follow Mevlut as he walks towards Kültepe. He walks through apartment blocks built on sites which were completely empty when he was growing up in the neighbourhood. These are buildings not found worthy of demolishing and re-building by Vural Yapı, the building firm which has a monopoly of the area. The narrator calls them "hidous *gecekondu* homes, six or seven stories high (555)[557]. The use of the adjective "hideous" here is a clear indicator of the narrator's opinion. The passage continues with a paragraph of Mevlut's thoughts on the incredible growth of the city:

> Throughout the happy years of his marriage to Rayiha . . . he'd always thought that Istanbul would never change, that all his hard work out on the streets would gain him a place of his own someday. All this had happened, to an extent. But ten million other people had joined him in Istanbul over the past forty years, latching on as he had to anything they could find, and the city had emerged transformed. Istanbul's population had been only three million when Mevlut had first arrived; now, they said there were thirteen million people living there. (556)[558]

Mevlut's thoughts are somewhere between an objective observation and a feeling of unease about these facts regarding the developments in the city. This penultimate part of the novel ends with his feelings as he watches the shanty he grew up in get demolished for an apartment building to be built by Vural Yapı.

Mevlut's feelings of estrangement in the city in the last couple of years constitute the focus of the final part, therefore, of the ending of the novel. He reflects on his feelings, trying to find the reasons for them: "Was it because of that unstoppable, swelling flood, the millions of new people coming to Istanbul and bringing new houses, skyscrapers, and shopping malls with them? [Mevlut] began to see . . . demolished not just ramshackle houses in poor

---

[557] "altı yedi katlı berbat gecekondu apartmanlar" (443)

[558] " . . . Rayiha ile evlendiği, mutlu olduğu yıllarda şehrin hiç değişmeyeceğini, kendisinin sokaklarda çalışa uğraşa orada bir yer edineceğini, ona uyum sağlayacağını sanırdı. Bu aslında olmuştu. Ama kendisiyle birlikte son kırk yılda şehre on milyon insan daha gelip, kendi gibi şehre bir ucundan saldırınca şehir de bambaşka bir yer olmuştu. Mevlut İstanbul'a geldiğinde nüfusu üç milyon olan şehrin şimdi on üç milyon olduğu söyleniyordu" (443).

neighbourhoods, but even proper buildings in Taksim and Şişli that had stood for over forty years" (574)[559]. He thinks about the old buildings and the people living in them:

> As those old people disappeared along with the buildings they'd made, new people moved into new buildings – taller, more terrifying, and more concrete than ever before. Whenever he looked at these new thirty- and forty- storey towers, Mevlut felt that he had nothing to do with any of the new people who lived in them. (574)[560]

As the passage reveals, the changes are a result of neoliberalism and Istanbul's becoming a global city. The rent economy, urban transformation, urban poverty and international immigrants are all connected with these. In the passage, the focus is on anxiety as a result of urban transformation. On the following page, Mevlut's thoughts about the new immigrants in Istanbul are intertwined with the feelings created by the city's changing landscapes, rendered through an instance of psycho-narration: " . . . a new class of strange people had moved into the old *gecekondu* homes . . . But the newest destitute multitudes mostly lived in the farthest reaches of Istanbul, farther out than the second ring road around the city, where even Mevlut had never set foot" (576)[561]. The landscape is changing as fast as the social fabric: "What amazed Mevlut even more were the strange new buildings that had begun to rise from these quarters like phantoms, so tall that you could see them from the opposite shore of the Bosphorus. Mevlut loved to watch these buildings from afar" (576).[562] The use of the adjective "strange" twice, which is also included in the title of the novel, is noteworthy in the quote. The focus here is on urban poverty. The place where Mevlut thinks about all these is Süleyman's top floor flat in the tower block. Süleyman, Korkut and Mevlut are there with their wives having dinner, after which Mevlut has a seat on the balcony to enjoy the view: "He felt dizzy for a moment, both from the height and the sheer expanse of the landscape before him" (577)[563]. As he looks around, Mevlut remembers the past of the hills around there. The city seems extremely changed now and he feels dizzy from the massive number of

---

[559] "Şehre durdurulamaz sel dalgaları gibi büyüyerek gelen milyonlarca yeni insan ve onların yeni evleri, yüksek binaları, alışveriş merkezleri yüzünden mi? Mevlut . . . yalnız gecekonduların değil Taksim'deki Şişli'deki kırk küsur yıllık apartmanların da yıkıldığını görüyordu" (457).

[560] "Yaptıkları binalarla birlikte o eski insanlar gözden kaybolurken, yerlerine yapılan daha yüksek, daha korkutucu, daha beton binalara yeni insanlar yerleşiyordu. Mevlut otuz kırk katlı bu yeni binalara baktıkça bu yeni insanlardan biri olmadığını hissediyordu" (457-8).

[561] " . . . eski gecekondulara yeni tuhaf insanlar girmişti. Ama yeni yoksullar kalabalığı şimdi daha çok şehrin en dışındaki, ikinci çevreyolunun da dışındaki en uzak mahallelerde yaşıyorlardı. Arkalarındaki bezden el arabalarını çeke çeke şehirde dolaşıp çöp tenekelerini karıştıranlar Mevlut'un da hiç adım atmadığı bu mahallelerdendi" (459).

[562] "Mevlut'un daha da şaştığı, oralarda yükselmeye başlayan ve İstanbul'un diğer yakasından bile görülebilen hayalet misali tuhaf yüksek binalardı. Mevlut onlara da uzaktan bakmayı çok seviyordu" (459).

[563] "Bir an yükseklikten de, manzaranın genişliğinden de başı döndü" (460).

buildings around him. It is the fact it is the first time he has looked at Istanbul from such a height which creates mixed feelings: "Istanbul could still make him flinch, but even now at fifty-five years of age, he still felt the urge to leap right into this forest of staring buildings" (578)[564]. The minutes of looking at the view from the balcony turn into a moment of contemplation, which enables Mevlut to define what lies behind his passion for selling boza: " . . . walking around the city at night made him feel as if he were wandering around inside his own head" (579)[565]. After the dinner meeting is over, Mevlut goes out to sell boza.

The narrator explains that recently Mevlut has been seeing Rayiha in his dreams, in an old mansion the door of which he cannot open. So he keeps walking in the streets and opens the doors of many mansions desperately trying to reach her. The narrator adds that in recent years, imagination and reality have started to get jumbled up in his brain. As Mevlut walks in the night's darkness, he starts thinking what he would like to tell to the city which has been talking to him for all these years. At that point, a customer invites him upstairs. As Mevlut hands over the boza and is about to leave, the customer woman compliments him for doing this job. Mevlut replies to her, saying: "I sell boza because it's what I want to do" (584)[566]. The woman feels even more sympathetic and supportive at this reply: "Don't ever give up, boza seller. Don't ever think there's no point trying among all these towers and all this concrete" (584)[567]. Mevlut replies with the words: "I will sell boza until the day the world ends" (584)[568]. He continues walking along a street "toward the Golden Horn, down a road that felt as if it were descending into oblivion . . . " (584)[569], and finds what he wants to tell to the city: "I have loved Rayiha more than anything in this world" (584)[570].

Mevlut's feelings of estrangement give way to a dreamlike lament to the past as the novel approaches its end. The motif of boza, a tradition from the past, inevitably brings a significant doze of nostalgia to the novel, from first page to last, since it has a central place in Mevlut's life and inner-world. The focus on this motif in the closing pages of the novel intensifies this nostalgic atmosphere. In these final passages, the act of buying boza, which is as nostalgic as selling boza, is also brought to the fore. It should be noted that the final dialogue is not between Mevlut and one of the main characters of the novel, but it is between

---

[564] "Mevlut şehirden hem ürküyor, hem de şimdi elli beş yaşında olmasına rağmen, . . . binalar ormanının içine atlayıp girmek istiyordu" (461).
[565] "Şehrin sokaklarında geceleri gezmek Mevlut'a kendi kafasının içinde geziniyormuş duygusu veriyordu" (462).
[566] "İçimden geldiği için boza satıyorum ben" (466).
[567] "Hiç vazgeçme bozacı. Bu kuleler, betonlar arasında kim alır deme. Sen hep geç sokaklardan" (466).
[568] "Ben kıyamete kadar boza satacağım" (466).
[569] "Haliç'e doğru, sonsuzluğa gider gibi bir inen sokaktan . . . " (466)
[570] "Ben bu âlemde en çok Rayiha'yı sevdim" (466).

Mevlut the boza-seller and an anonymous boza-buyer. The two communicate in a special code, that of love and nostalgia for an almost lost Istanbul: an Istanbul where street-vendors would walk around the streets and they would have many customers. For the woman buying boza, Mevlut with his boza basket is a symbol of the good old days of the city: "Don't ever think there's no point trying among all these towers and all this concrete" (584)[571] she tells Mevlut. The reference here is directly to the changing urban landscape. Imagery based on towers and concrete dominate the last pages of the novel.

Another dimension of nostalgia stems from the timing of these final passages of the novel: it is the night of the Eid holiday. As Mevlut enters the flat from which he is called for boza, with the strong scent of rakı he senses, he expects a group of people gathered around a table drinking rakı. Instead, he comes across a group of family and friends who have come together for the holiday. The way people used to celebrate the Ramadan and the Eid holidays in the past is a bygone tradition in Turkey, a strong motif of nostalgia. The description of this setting and Mevlut's feelings about it are important in this regard: "He saw loving aunts, dignified fathers, gregarious mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, and an indefinite number of children" (583)[572]. The atmosphere leads to a moment of introspection: "These people's happiness pleased Mevlut. Human beings were made to be happy, honest, and open" (583)[573]. Despite the melancholy of nostalgia the passage leaves optimistic feelings, as it stresses that there are still large families out there enjoying a holiday altogether.

The imagery in Mevlut's dream is another detail reinforcing the nostalgia in the ending of the novel. As explained above, he sees Rayiha in an old mansion, which is one of the ultimate symbols of the picturesque old Istanbul. He cannot reach her in the dream, as the streets he walks keep changing. This theme of constant changing and the impossibility to find the beloved waiting in the old mansion is obviously connected with his love for an Istanbul which is fading away, indeed which has mostly faded. The setting of the very last scene of the novel is a street around Feriköy extending to Haliç, the Golden Horn. These streets are at an intersecting point where Muslim and non-Muslim neighbourhoods meet. They are places which have not been completely destroyed by the urban transformation yet, and still have a touch of the old Istanbul feeling. Mevlut's final words, which are also the final words of the novel, are his declaration of love for Rayiha, who is no longer in this world. Put simply, the novel ends with a longing for a bygone past: bygone good old days with Rayiha, in a bygone

[571] "Bu kuleler, betonlar arasında kim alır deme" (466).
[572] "Şefkatli teyzeler, makul babalar, geveze anneler, dedeler, nineler ve sayısız çocuk gördü"(466).
[573] "Mevlut onların mutluluğundan sevinç duydu. İnsanlar mutlu, dürüst, açık olmak için yaratılmışlardı" (466).

Istanbul. The Istanbul Mevlut shared with Rayiha has also almost disappeared; however, Mevlut is tracking its remnants in old streets of the city which are still, albeit barely, alive. This is not the Istanbul where Rayiha once existed. Or Rayiha no longer exists in a changed Istanbul. It is difficult to dissect which comes first, just the way it is difficult for Mevlut to dissect the realm in his mind from the realm in which he lives.

To sum up, as Strangeness ends with depictions of Mevlut's great love for Istanbul, the idea of the right to the city flowing throughout the novel is emphasised. The city belongs to those who are able to appreciate its beauty and heritage. The right to the city does not simply comprise material necessities, it includes the right to experience the city as oeuvre. The first condition for this is to be able to establish a life in the centre of the city. If the city centre gets covered with more concrete, more towers, hotels and plazas, there will be no way for the poor to live and spend time in the city centre; in other words, to inhabit the city, and to experience the city as oeuvre.