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Outside the house but not in the city: Promenades in Istanbul as negotiated public spaces for women in 19th-century Ottoman novels

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Abstract

Drawing on from feminist literary theory, this article analyses the first Ottoman novels working within and consolidating the patriarchal discourse published in the rampant modernization period in the second half of 19th century, which is also named the Tanzimat (Reorganization) era of the Ottoman Empire. Having Istanbul as their settings, the discourse of the novels tackle with delineating the limits to the social and cultural transformations, which the novels' writers perceive to be the direct result of Western influence. The novels have a didactic style aimed for guiding their readers to shield certain values, which they think hold the core of Ottoman identity, from the changes. We argue that the discourse of the novels manifest ambivalence regarding the inevitable presence of women outside the house and negotiate with their readers on the place and practices of publicness. No matter how popular and crowded they had then become, the promenades, were where the male writers aimed to confine women in their outings. At one level, their emphasis on the promenades is related with the conceptualization of nature as a safe space in the context of a modernizing city. And, on the other level, they want to keep Muslim women away from Pera, the Westernized and cosmopolitan district, in Istanbul.

Keywords
Public space, Gender, Promenades, Istanbul, Tanzimat novels.

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1. Introduction

Readers of the early Ottoman-Turkish novels, which are usually referred to as Tanzimat novels, must have discerned the promenades (1): urban parks, public gardens, and meadows, as a repeating category of spaces used as an 'acceptable' setting where women and men could intermingle. From the mid- to late-19th century, starting with the first Ottoman novel written in 1851, Vartan Paşa's *Akabi Hikyayesi* (The Story of Akabi), to later novels of better renown, including Namık Kemal's *İntibah* (Awakening) (1876), Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem's *Araba Sevdası* (The Carriage Affair) (1896), and in numerous novels by Ahmet Mithat Efendi, male and female protagonists see, meet, interact with, open up to, or seduce each other in the promenades of Istanbul.

In *Akabi Hikyayesi*, although Agop notices Akabi looking out a window, their first encounter takes place in Alemdağ's Taşdelen meadows where they promise to meet again. Their affair becomes an impossible love story akin to that of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Because Akabi is an Orthodox and Agop is a Catholic Christian, their families do everything in their power to separate them. They communicate through letters and can only meet one more time at the Beykoz Meadow. In Ahmet Mithat Efendi's novel, *Vah!* (Alas) (1882), Necati sees Ferdane at the Çamlıca promenade, outside the theatre where he saves her from being harassed by a group of men. After this incident, they are only able to meet in the city's public gardens where they eventually confess their love for each other. In another novel by Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Çingene* (The Gypsy) (1887), the male protagonist falls in love with a young gypsy woman whom he sees at the Kağıthane gardens. He goes there repeatedly until he finally decides to take her under his protection in order to raise her as a respectable woman for marriage.

If these examples insinuate that urban parks and public gardens were neutral grounds for socialising but sometimes became sites of innocent love, be assured that they were also grounds for dangerous liaisons. Çamlıca is a common site of seduction. Ali Bey, the male protagonist of Namık Kemal's novel *İntibah*, falls in a love trap during his first visit to Çamlıca. Mahpeyker, a notorious courtesan in Istanbul, sets in motion a course of events that eventually lead to his demise. In a narrative set twelve years later, Ulviye Hanım seduces Mergup, a well-known dandy among the elite in order to avenge her young neighbour, Dürdane. She is the title character of Ahmet Mithat's novel *Dürdane Hanım* (Miss Dürdane) (1888) who suffers from Mergup's misconduct and reluctance to marry. For Ulviye the only way to teach her neighbor's lover a lesson is to make him fall in love with her. Hence, she goes to Çamlıca to initiate her calculated affair.

These public spaces were also stages of display where class identities are expressed. In *Araba Sevdası*, Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem depicts parks as urban spaces that allowed for social mixing and ostentatious self-presentation among members of the middle class. The novel is a satire about individuals obsessed with class distinction and the struggle to keep their status or move upwards in society with fake or borrowed assets. The dandy protagonist Bihruz Bey thinks he is infatuated with the love of his life only because her glamorous carriage mesmerizes him when the two encounter at Millet Park. All the way through until the very end, the park is the only space where these "lovers" can meet.

How, should we, then, interpret the frequent presence of urban parks, public gardens, and meadows, that enabled men and women, particularly Muslim women, to meet, flirt, seduce, and show off in the Tanzimat novels, especially when it is impossible to come across one simple instance of co-presence in other public spaces of the city such as the doorstep, the street or inner city squares? It remains striking to note that the same does not hold for encounters between Muslim men and non-Muslim women. Furthermore, within the seventeen novels dating from 1851 to 1898 that we have analysed for this article, the promenades' meaning shifts from being sites

of social degradation to sites of pure leisure and joyful encounters both manifest in the events and dialogues in the narratives. Thus, why, among many other places in the city, the writers were concentrating on and yet so ambivalent about the promenades?

Drawing on gender theory and sociological analyses of parks as emergent public spaces of modernity, we explore answers to these questions in the context of the Ottoman Empire's modernization and the reflection of this process on its capital city, Istanbul. In accordance with feminist literary criticism, from which we draw our analytical lens, we focus on literary works as discursive practice and analyse them as texts related to their socio-political and cultural climate. There is a long tradition of analysing novels, not only for understanding the experience of their milieu, but also as part of a discursive formation. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) and Janet Wolff's *Feminine Sentences* (1990) are important models of seeing the world created in narrative fiction against the social mentality of its era. The methodological perspective adopted in these interpretive works focused on the sub-text, i.e. not only on what the novels say, but on what the novel does not say, and how it does not say it, as literary critic Terry Eagleton stated (1991, p.178). Similarly, our close reading of where women are portrayed and are absent in the settings of the Tanzimat novels form the primary basis of the arguments laid out in this article. Furthermore, we analysed how the spaces, where women protagonists were present are coded in the narratives in relation to: the presence of others, the events occurring in those spaces, and how all of these are evaluated within the novels (either in the form of a value-laden statement or, more subtly, through their consequences in the narratives). Additionally, the novels are put in dialogue with other texts in a contemporary framework such as travellers' accounts, journalists' opinion pieces, and legal documents.

The novels mentioned above were written by male authors. Only four of the seventeen that are analysed for this article were written by Muslim women: *Muhadarat* (Teachings) (1892) and *Refet* (1897) by Fatma Aliye; *Pakize* (1895) by Behiye Ziya Kollar; and *Dilharap* (Devastated) (1896) by Fatma Fahrünissa. Their novels show how the patriarchal mentality prevalent and dominant in the novels of male authors can also be seen in those by female authors, even for those, who took part in the struggle for women's subjectivity. Two of the other novels were written by Ahmet Mithat Efendi, which are: Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi (1875), and *Henüz Onyedi Yaşında* (Just Seventeen) (1881). The remaining novels are: Şemsettin Sami's *Taaaşuk-ı Talat ve Fitnat* (The Love of Talat and Fitnat) (1872), Samipaşazade Sezai's *Sergüzeşt* (The Adventure) (1889), Mehmet Celal's *Bir Kadının Hayatı* (The Life of a Woman) (1890), Mizancı Mehmet Murat's *Turfanda mı yoksa Turfa mı?* (Precocious or Weird?) (1891), and Nabizade Nazım's *Zehra* (1896). We selected these novels due to their setting in Istanbul and because they were contemporary novels written in the realistic genre.

There are seminal studies on the Tanzimat novels' discursive formation through allegory and layers of meaning such as Jale Parla's B*abalar ve Oğullar* (Fathers and Sons) (1990) and Şeyda Başlı's *Osmanlı Romanının İmkanları Üzerine* (On the Potentials of the Ottoman Novel) (2010), but these works do not focus on the relationship between public space and gender. And although there are many studies in the context of Ottoman-Turkish novels that focus on the spatial settings in literary narratives, they are mostly descriptive. Moreover, the limited number of studies that explore the relationship between the public realm and literature focus on publicity but do not concentrate on gender (Günaydın, 2007; Akkach, 2010). Works, that problematize women's presence in public spaces, on the other hand, focus on the social realm in much earlier periods and in different literary genres (Ölçer, 2003; Hamadeh, 2008; and Ambros, 2016). Thus, we think that this article through its critical analysis at a discursive level

fills a gap by concentrating on the intertwined relationship between public realm, spatial practice and gender in the Tanzimat novels.

As Felski argues, among many potential examinations, novels are good sources for understanding the inherent mentality of an era, either through writers' contribution or resistance to it (2008, p.77-104). Significantly, Tanzimat novels help us understand how writers, as the intellectuals of their society, made sense of modernization as well as help us understand the inner conflicts, tensions, and anxieties inherent to modernity that is usually absent in other straightforward texts, such as newspaper accounts, memoirs, etc. (Parla, 1990, p.9; Gürbilek, 2004, p.13). As we elaborate in the following section, Tanzimat novels are critical sources because they were more influential than other later printed fictions; firstly, because they were new and the only entertaining mass media that could also be individually consumed in a time when there was no television (Tanpınar 2012, p.451). And secondly, Tanzimat novels were intentionally forming a discourse. As literary historians have also stated, they were written with an agenda and they should be seen as expressive of their writers resistance to modernity in many aspects and their will to guide the public in what to resist and how (Parla, 1990; Moran, 1983).

Furthermore, in the context of late 19th-century Istanbul, we argue that rereading Tanzimat novels testifies to the problematic nature of women's appearance in the public realm and how this was negotiated with readers. In her book *Feminine Sentences*, cultural theorist Janet Wolff (1990, p.4) argues that although women's problems related to equality and freedom cannot be resolved at the level of representation, rereading novels and other texts with a feminist perspective in a particular historical context and with a socially analytical lens can expose the discourse through how women's lives were framed. Thus, we contend that the discursive ambivalence prevalent in the *Tanzimat* novels is the starting point for understanding the collisions, conflicts, and negotiations related to the perpetuating spatial segregation of women.

2. The socio-political climate of the tanzimat era and the first Ottoman novels as discursive instruments

Tanzimat novels have their categorical name not only because they were written after the announcement of the *Tanzimat Fermanı* (Reformation Edict) in 1839, but also from their writers' common anxiety related to the circumstances and consequences of the reforms declared in the edict. The large scope of the reforms was due to the shrinkage of the Empire both in terms of territory and economy as well as the economic advantages given to European states as the result of the treasury debts that were owed to them. The fundamental aim of the reforms was to regain the empire's political and economic power by integrating its trade activities with the international capitalist economy and recentralizing the state apparatus via the creation of new institutions (Quataert, 1994, p.761-765). The reform program set the ground for a secular and democratic country. It extended more rights to non-Muslims living within the Empire and issued a 'call for equality for women' (Quataert 1994, 765). The accompanying trade agreements signed with European Governments induced many European companies to open branches in Istanbul and subsequently witnessed the influx of European officials and workers into the city. Such transformations were followed by the introduction of new institutions and spaces for the expansion of finance, education, military, and public health policies as well as new venues that changed the socio-cultural sphere (Çelik, 1986; Gül, 2009). Furthermore, developments in technology were already altering the urban landscapes, particularly in the case of access via bridges and new modes of public transportation. The ferry line and the train put an end to arduous journeys by rowboats or pack animals and provided effortless trips to the city. The city centre became easily accessible to all, particularly to women even from urban niches that lined the distant shores of the city.

During this period, Istanbul developed a second city centre. Almost all of the new buildings for new institutions with new typologies were located in the district of Pera (2). The prioritization of

Pera was an administrative choice and a response to accommodate the European capital in the city. Embassy complexes, new secular schools, as well as hotels, shops selling imported goods, European-style cafes and restaurants, theaters, bookshops, entertainment halls, and brothels all opened up one after another, making the district a European capital of its own — a city within the city (Akın, 1998). Consequently, the social and cultural life of Pera was in strong contrast with the rest of Istanbul. There were also important differences with respect to urban modernization projects. For instance, the first municipality for a district in Istanbul was planned for Pera in order to administer the infrastructure implementations in the district. The urban renovation projects in the other parts of the city, however, were "patchy" applications leaving some parts of the built landscape neglected, thus creating another contrast with the newly built Pera (Çelik, 1986, p.xvi and p.79). These distinctions between Pera and the rest of Istanbul also attracted the authors of the Tanzimat novels. The setting created opportunities for writers to take a position vis-à-vis westernization and they presented Pera against the values they were restless to conserve. Nevertheless, Pera represented an attractive poison. Although many writers spent their social and leisure time in the district, the way they represented Pera in the novels was a place of danger, such that the moment a Muslim male protagonist stepped into Pera, he found himself in the chain of events that ruin his life. The black-and-white comparison between Pera and Istanbul was one of the didactic contrasts in their narratives.

Another big change after Tanzimat reforms was the beginning of local and private press activity. 130 Ottoman-Turkish newspapers started publication between 1860 and 1878, whereas there were only two newspapers before (Kologlu, 2013). Confirming political scientist Benedict Anderson's (1983) argument on how crucial print-capitalism proved in the spread of ideologies, Ottomans were fast becoming citizens and finding outlets to their competing worldviews in print culture (Uslu, 2014, p.237). The novel was an important outlet and helped reconstruct this world in two ways. Firstly, novels were all serialized in newspapers first and then printed as books (Moran, 1983, p.17). As newspapers were critical in the establishment of the novel as a genre (Serdar and Tutumlu, 2019), the novels also helped increase the popularity of newspapers. Second, writers of the reformation era were not only engaged in literature, most were either political actors, or significant intellectuals who wrote for or ran newspapers and journals, which is an indication of that their influence criss-crossing the realms of everyday life and literature. The placement of the fictional narrative alongside news from the city, state-cases, or revelations of burglaries or murders further strengthened the didactic element of these 19th century novels (Lund, 1993). If we reference Marshall McLuhan's well-known adage, "the medium is the message" (1964), the publication of these novels in newspapers reinforced both the realism of their narratives and the public sphere they aimed at shaping.

For Tanzimat writers, novels were pedagogical devices that aimed to limit the influence of modernization on their readers. As such novels were used as discursive instruments to negotiate the consolidation of certain boundaries (Tanpınar, 2010 /1956; Moran, 1983; Parla, 1990; 2000, p.73-1112; Esen, 2006). In order to achieve these pedagogical ends, the writers applied the literary strategy of creating sharp contrasts like the one they constructed between Istanbul and Pera. They set dualities between 'Ottomans' and 'Europeans', 'inside' and 'outside' the house, as well as, 'prudent' and 'reckless' men, or 'frivolous' and 'chaste' women. These dualities were quick resolutions to the problem of confronting the urban spaces of modernity, a new social and physical environment, and new line of conduct that, as Marshall Berman states (1988, 15), promised "adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of (them) selves and the world –and at the same time, (…) (was) threatening to destroy everything (they) have, everything (they) know, everything (they) are."

The normative and didactic style of the novels aimed to guide readers with certain social, political and moral codes and to help them demarcate the limits of socio-cultural transformation. If westernization, (which stood in for the new life-style shaped by consumerism, cosmopolitanism, new institutions and the socio-economic modes that disseminated from Pera) was one paramount issue, the other was women's place in the public realm. The writers however were more ambivalent about the latter. For instance, although the fathers in the novels become more tolerant towards the education of girls, they still clung to the ideal of the mythical wife and mother in the domestic realm. Almost all female characters are expected to read and write, but not continue beyond primary school. Ambivalence was also due to new social conditions that clashed with the ideals that the writers wanted to conserve. An important social dilemma that recurs in the novels is the need to be able to choose one's spouse. But under what conditions could young men and women be permitted to see and meet with each other? What would happen if women were allowed to leave the confines of the house? Promenades, as already popular urban places, were perhaps the best candidate to bring young men and women together, but they were too popular and had already become a marriage market. Writers oscillated between two limits in their discourse. They discerned chaste, happily domesticated women from frivolous, undomesticated women who were either silly or harmful in their plots. And, on the other end, they suggested that chastity could be conserved if women could go to the promenades only on weekdays, when it was less crowded, so that they would prove that they were not interested in seeing and being seen but only enjoying the fresh air and socializing with their kin. Of course, strolling at Pera was never an option for these outings.

As previously mentioned, female novelists also remained loyal to these conventions. Although the first female Ottoman novelists Zafer Hanım, Fatma Aliye Hanım, Behice Ziya, and Fatma Fahrünnisa, who were more powerful than many others in the society (Günaydın, 2017, p.30), and were making women's intellectual contribution to society apparent, continued to work within the prevalent patriarchal discourse. They, too, problematized women's place 'outside the house,' but female writers' "good" female protagonists, like those of their male counterparts, are almost always indoors: inside their rooms, inside a house, inside a confined private garden, or inside a school. Their position is similar to female painters' in the 19th century. Griselda Pollock (1988, p.70-127) argued that female painters avoided coexisting with their subjects in realms that were considered to be male spaces and their themes almost always related to interior spaces. Likewise, female writers of the Tanzimat era never wrote about experiences related to being among strangers in the streets, in cafes, or even in public transportation, although their female protagonists had to leave the house from time to time. By contrast, male writers' protagonists exposed readers sometimes for several pages to their experiences and impressions of the public world.

We do not want to imply that female writers never included promenades in their literary topography, but their perception of sociability in that space was in tune with their male counterparts' ambivalence. They portray their "good" female characters visiting promenades for the sole purpose of taking in fresh air and contemplating. Fatma Aliye's female character Refet, for instance, visits the Fenerbahçe Park only once with her friends; and instead of strolling, they sit at the edge of the park turning their backs to the crowd so they can contemplate the horizon. Behice Ziya's protagonist Pakize, who is only interested in reading books, goes to Millet Park but only once at the insistence of her neighbour; while at the park she refuses to take part in the scene and thinks that every man in the promenade is a womanizer. That said, this one outing allows her for the first time to encounter a man she admires and falls in love with. The plot line exposes a conundrum since if she had not agreed to go to Millet Park, she would not have a love story to tell.

We argue that the male and female writers of the Tanzimat novels knew that women would inevitably leave the house, and attempted to prescribe the scope of potential activities outside. By avoiding the heart of the modern city (Pera) and suggesting that women who socialized outside the house had to take measures to safeguard their honour and status in society, they together reproduced the patriarchal mentality. Toward this end, they gave their female protagonists only conditional permission to encounter life outside the domestic realm and that only through the promenades.

3. Promenades as spaces of leisure, sociability and spectacle

It was not the case that Ottoman crowds entertained themselves elsewhere and then later, in the second half of 19th century, found shelter from the strains of urban life and industrial pollution, noise, and crowdedness in the promenades that appear in Tanzimat novels. For the Ottoman populace, spending time in the promenades, especially on grounds with running waters or close to the sea had always been a common leisure practice (Boyar and Fleet, 2010). Not only in Istanbul, but in many Ottoman towns there were such open spaces: private or communal gardens for growing vegetables and fruit for kitchen use (*bostans*), meadows for picnics in between neighbourhoods or outside the city walls, as well as cemeteries whose trees provided shelter. As the witnesses of the last quarter of the 19th century informs, small or large, these pieces of nature in vicinities of neighbourhoods offered an opportunity for women to spend time outside the house without having to go to city centres, to male-coded spaces, which also played a significant role in their popularity (Abdülaziz Bey, 2002, p.287-299; Balıkhane Nazırı, 2011, p.89-145). On the experiential level, the atmosphere of the promenades created by the land, water, and soundscapes, as well as being the place of social gatherings in nature and sometimes for watching the full moon at summer nights made them unique places offering pleasure, relaxation and recreation, suspending all daily obligations while creating moments of equality for all.

Maurice Cerasi (1985) explains the richness of promenades as lived-spaces – they were not merely grounds for strolling but spaces where a whole family or group of friends could sit for hours and sometimes days. Different groups of people could find a place on the grounds for making music, singing, dancing, and smoking together while having a picnic. There could be temporary structures or vendors serving food and coffee or sherbet.

Architectural historian Shirine Hamadeh (2008) elaborates on how promenades from the 18th century onwards became the centre of daily social and recreational activities. Hamadeh (129) argues that the juxtaposing of spatial and social experience offered by this unique type of space also played a role in the formation of a middle-class identity. As they became public venues, promenading became less related with recreation in nature, but rather became more related to sociability, visibility and networking. These spaces were the primary venues for consolidating one's place in society and demarcating class boundaries during a period of greater social fluidity. Cultural historian David Scobey (1992, 211) states that the same was in practice for mid nineteenth-century New York city where promenading in Central Park was "a peculiar mix of spectacle and restraint, creating a stage on which wealth, refinement and character could be merged (…) (and that) seeing and being seen affirmed members of the society dynamism, prosperity and civility."

In Istanbul (Figure 1), Kağıthane and Göksu were two of the oldest and most popu¬lar promenades, and they appear quite often in Tanzimat novels and the travelogues of foreign travellers. Kağıthane was located at the very end of the Golden Horn (Haliç), while Göksu was on the Asian part of what was then the northern edge of the city. Apart from spending time on lush meadows, another layer of pleasure was added to the experience with the arrival of boat journeys to Kağıthane and Göksu. Kağıthane was where; the court in 18th century went out of the Topkapı Palace for enjoying different seasons and celebrating certain events. It became both popular and was criticized due to the

design of a new palace and a series of gardens, partly likened to the palatial gardens in Paris. With its opening to the general public, the garden and the boat trips on the Kağıthane river became one of the most preferred activities for leisure and recreation, as well as sociability and displays of social status. (Eyice, 1997, p.82-86) In both Kağıthane and Göksu, people could also continue on the river by boat and reach inland meadows or stroll and ride in carriages along the rivers as they could also lounge wherever they pleased. Ahmet Mithat Efendi's novels, *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* and *Çingene* have notable pieces delineating the Kağıthane promenade and depicting different atmospheres depending on the seasons, times of day, and crowds present.

A series of leisure gardens located beside vineyards that were dotted by the mansions of the elite in between pine groves in Bağlarbaşı and Kısıklı neigborhoods in the Üsküdar district on the Anatolian side of Istanbul was another frequent backdrop to the critical events in the novels. Üsküdar district includes two of the highest hills in the city: Major Çamlıca and Minor Çamlıca both covered in pine groves. The Major Çamlıca was particularly picturesque as it offered the widest panorama of Istanbul starting with the Marmara Sea overlooking the Prince Islands, sweeping Topkapı Palace as a gateway to the walled city and Haliç, and ending with Bebek Bay on the northern half of the Bosphorus. The view from and the exceptional green atmosphere of Çamlıca appear not only in the Tanzimat novels, but also features in poems and songs from different periods (Koçu, 1965). In the long prolegomena to his novel *İntibah,* Namık Kemal describes the natural ambiance of Çamlıca and expresses his admiration for nature, explaining partially why these spaces have been so popular.

The Ottoman Empire also took part in the late-19th century global urban parks movement, establishing six municipal parks in Istanbul. These parks were smaller in area compared to the already existing promenades but featured other amenities such as permanent structures for sitting and stages for concerts and plays, as well as small pools and paved strolling surfaces. One of the first parks in Istanbul was Millet Park, which opened in 1867 and was situated near to the Çamlıca meadows. The role that Millet Park plays in Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem's novel *Araba Sevdası* is more than a setting, to the extent that, literary scholar Jale Parla (1990, 131) argues that it was a metaphor for the Ottoman Empire. Like Namık Kemal, Ekrem also starts his novel with a prolegomena that depicts the enclosing wall and the fences of the park, different kinds of trees, flowerbeds, small buildings, the bower, and the kiosk located on the small island in the artificial lake. He highlights the perfection of the park's design and that the design offered a variety of spaces for different events. But unlike Kemal's emphasis on the awakening of nature in every spring, Ekrem stresses how the park has lost its charm over the years, insinuating that such formal scenery may become popular easily but consumed quickly.

4. Promenades as sites of negotiation for women's outings

Several historians agree that although women were present and visible in the streets and the marketplaces, the only acceptable public space for leisure or entertainment were the promenades (Faroqhi, 2010, p.122; Boyar and Fleet, 2010, p.230-244). Nevertheless, co-presence with unfamiliar men was not acceptable and there was always a demarcated and obligatory female-only space reserved for women even in the promenades (Boyar and Fleet, 208). The adventures of the male protagonists in Ahmet Mithat Efendi's two novels, *Vah!* and *Müşahedat*, for instance, begin with their furtive glimpses through the partitions separating the female-only areas in the ferry and the trams. Hagop Mintzuri's memoirs (2002, p.83) dating to the last days of the 19th century testify that even opening the curtains separating male and female compartments was prohibited. However, breaching these boundaries was easier in the loose spaces of the promenades where men and women could contravene restrictions by exchanging glances, sending letters, or even passing comments and chatting for a short period.

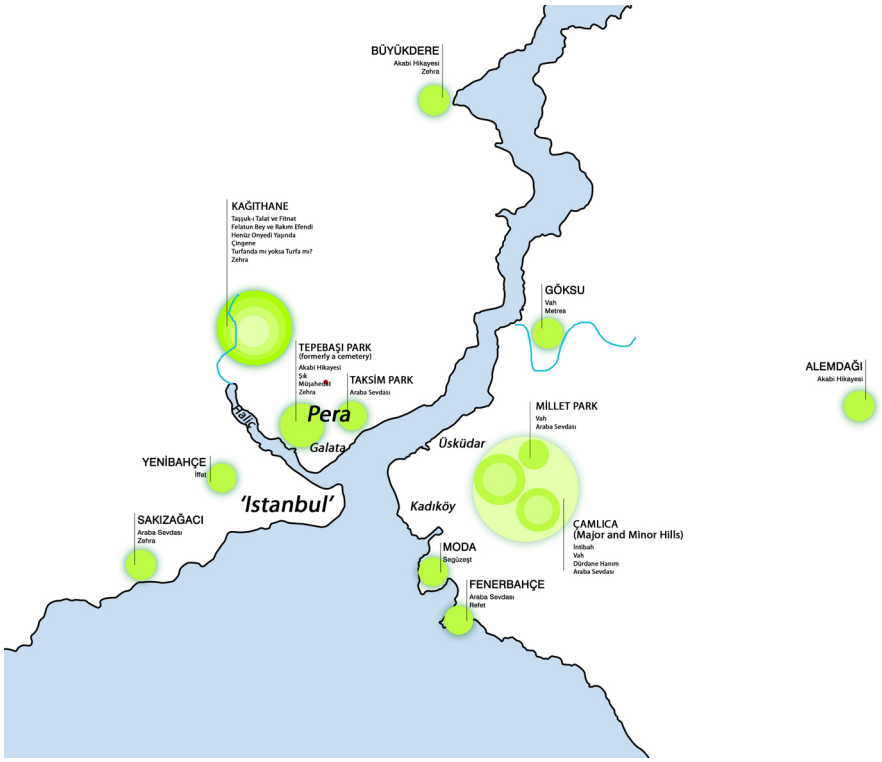

Figure 1. *Certain promenades in Istanbul corresponding to the Tanzimat novels.*

As women began to visit promenades more often, official regulations were established for controlling encounters in public spaces. An early document in 1821 banned women from going to certain promenades, not even allowing them to stop by the gardens and wait in their carriages (BOA, HH, 1236) (3). Fourteen years later in 1835 – four years before the declaration of the Tanzimat Edict – the ban established for women's promenading was lifted, but new rules appeared including precautions for verbal harassment toward women among debates on women's attire either for being too revealing or resembling courtly fashions (BOA, HH, 1250). A decree published two years later focused on the time when women should come back from the promenades (BOA, HH, 1252). Although the mingling of men and women was not addressed as an issue in these documents, a decree published in 1849 prohibited women's presence in certain promenades and further reported that although women and men were segregated, men were seen taking advantage of garden topography and vistas to peep on women. The same document stated where women and men were seen together and declared separate days for men and women's promenading. The decree ends with a detailed description for the location of the curtain separating women and men's sections (BOA, SDK, 1266). These legal documents indicate the struggle authorities faced in attempting to prevent the public enjoying the freedom that accompanied the modernization of the city, especially new public transportations and consumption trends. Several policies existed: some places were off-limits to women altogether, others were open to them on certain days, and still others allowed women in the garden as long as they remained hidden in a separate section. The main concern of these rules was the monitoring of women's public presence, which was blamed for causing men to lose their rational faculties in the face of physical attraction and, thus, was regarded as morally corrupting for society in general. Official disapprobation evident in the legal documents, ambivalence toward women's freedom of movement, and the constant negotiations of women's public presence echo the discourse found in Tanzimat novels.

The inconsistent laxity in policies regulating the promenades discussed above was not extended to other parts of the city. During the early years of the Sultan Abdülaziz era (1861-1876), a se-

ries of bills from 1862 banned women from going or sitting inside shops while shopping as well as from being on the street at night regardless of their religion or ethnicity; the law also banned women from going to promenades that were frequented by men (Alkan, 1990, p.85-95). Nonetheless, there was a "compromise" on the statement regarding the promenades, as it was uncertain which ones were popular among men and when. Such vagueness can be associated with the Tanzimat writers' ambivalence on the matter and insinuated "tolerance" for women's presence in the promenades as long as they did not visit popular gardens.

Several anecdotes written in travelogues and memoirs testify to how regulations were implemented. Traveler Edmondo de Amicis, who visited Istanbul in 1872, wrote that he was puzzled by the apparent rules on women's freedom of movement. Amicis (2013, 202) observed that women were independent in their choice to go anywhere they liked, even alone, as long as they did not mingle with men. Almost twenty years later Alexander van Milligen (2003, p.182), who lived and worked in Istanbul from 1861 until his death in 1915, criticized the surveillance apparatus that controlled women in Göksu and Kağıthane and condemned police officers for following women as if they were children who needed to be chaperoned. He pointed out that a policeman could order a woman to close her carriage window if he thought she was attracting admiring looks or that the police could abruptly stop a group of women from sailing on the Bosphorus in the evening and force them to return to their houses (183). Van Milligen lamented that such restrictions made educated Turkish women's lives difficult and shameful (183). The author Dorina Neave (1933, p.145), who lived in Istanbul between 1881 and 1907 where her father worked for the Supreme Consular Court, described the striking contrast between Muslim and non-Muslim women's freedom in their outdoor lives and speculated on how Muslim women perceived these differences.

While women's appearance in public was an important part of modernization for the supporters of reformation, conservative commentators considered it a sign of degeneration (Göle, 1997). Basiretçi Ali Efendi and Ebüziyya Tevfik Bey, two journalists of the era, wrote extensively on how women and men should behave in public. In his weekly column, Basiretçi Ali Efendi (2001, p.142) condemned any kind of observable communication between women and men in the promenades and in Pera. He further complained about how women spent extended periods in certain spots, about their inviting gestures, and about their inappropriate dress (143). Interestingly, Basiretçi argued that Muslim women were not on the same level of decency as European women, and they were abusing the opportunity that had been granted to them. Ebuzziya Tevfik Bey, on the other hand, complained about the Europeanization of Muslim women's attire and body language (Balıkhane Nazırı, 2001, p.109) and bemoaned the disappearance of decent Ottoman culture. Nevertheless, even conservative social critics struggled to make sense of the changing norms on co-existence, shared public space, and women's increasing education. For example, Basiretçi could be ambivalent in his discussion of Muslim and non-Muslim women's equality. While in one article he celebrated the ban on Muslim women walking the main streets of Pera (2001, p.128), in another he complained about the restrictions towards Muslim women in Taksim Park and expressed regret regarding the inequality in spatial practices for Muslim and non-Muslim women (48-49).

The contested arguments that we disclose here demonstrates that if Muslim women in Istanbul had to be tolerated in public spaces, then natural spaces were less threatening than urban spaces, particularly Pera. Pera not only hosted nightlife, prostitution, gambling, as well as questionable sites of socialization, and hotels, but also strangers. The dominant presence of the other in Pera prohibited it as a respectable place for the Muslim middle class. Although literary scholar Gülçin Ambros (2016) points out that promenades had niches enclosed with trees,

where it was rather easy to hide from the surveillance of onlookers, officials still policed promenades, which were easier to survey than the crowded streets of Pera. Compared to Pera's obvious moral degeneration, natural spaces were rendered asexual and childish, similar to how writers –as the voice of the patriarchy- portrayed the ideal Muslim woman.

5. Discussion: Nature and women in the modern city

We argue that promenades were "acceptable" venues for Muslim women's sociability in the discourse of the Tanzimat novels, not only due their existent popularity, but because they were understood as a neutral space between the possibly dangerous public realm and the limited options of the domestic realm. Whether a designed park, a loosely arranged leisure garden or a meadow in between districts, nature in the city belongs to an interesting spatial category of modern urbanization. In discussing the life and perception of parks in the 19th century Paris, art historian Nicholas Green (1990, p.128) avers that "(u)nlike many ideological domains where we can point to materially-located institutions as the sites from which power is exercised, nature, it seems, hangs in a vacuum." In this sense, we can refer to Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia, which posits that what is unacceptable or illicit in the city becomes somewhat acceptable in the "space that remains" or in the "vacuum" suspending social restrictions. Architecture theorist Galen Cranz (1982, p.242) supports this interpretation and writes that "while parks are mechanisms of social control, they manage to express a life force independent of social order. Plants subliminally represent the uncontrollable nature of the life force; (…) house plants, urban greenery, and park planting alike remind people whether consciously or not, that they too have an irrepressible life force within them. Parks will always be associated with the related ideas of spontaneity and freedom."

The place of promenades in the constructed division between private and public space in bourgeois ideology is parallel to the ideological distinction between nature and culture. Environmental studies scholar Margaret Fitzsimmons (1989) has argued that nature provides one pole of all the great enlightenment antinomies: nature versus society, and nature versus culture. As culture is all that is "man-made," then the summit of this cultural development, the city, is definitely "man's" territory.

Fleeting and anonymous social interactions made possible by urban anonymity became sources of anxiety and fear for the patriarchal mentality, to the extent that, many 19th-century commentators and observers advocated women's restriction to the domestic sphere as part of a natural sexual order. (MacDowell, 1999, p.154). Drawing from Simone de Beauvoir (1973), Fox Keller (1985), and Hélène Cixous and Catheriné Clement (1986), feminist theoretician Gillian Rose (1993, p.17-40) argues that women's immediate association with the house and the case for her to be protected or saved from the "outside world" is grounded in dichotomist thinking that reduces woman to her biological features. She states that such a "particular reading of (women's) bodies meant that women were represented as natural creatures, beyond culture and society, compelled to remain in the private domestic sphere by their natural maternal instinct" (1993, p.74).

The patriarchal reflex to modernity was not simply a cultural issue. Woman's presence in the public realm and her insurgence to become a subject were more related to moral norms of the bourgeoisie rather than the religious codes practiced in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, stated in his speech "Of Queens' Gardens" (1865), public speaker and art critic John Ruskin stated that home was "the place of peace" for a woman, in which "she is protected from all danger and temptation (1913, p.137)." Ruskin's public lecture has been problematized extensively and accepted as the paragon of conservative statements that consolidate the divide between the public and private realms and their identification with the masculine and the feminine (Millet, 1971, p.93; Wolff, 1990, p.77; Rose, 1993, p.45). What is remarkable for our purposes is Ruskin's use of nature

as a metaphor in the title of his speech. In his critical essay on Ruskin's speech, literary historian Walter Houghton also stresses his use of the garden as a metaphorical sphere for the woman, where certain virtues are protected from the crushing forces of modern life (Houghton 1963, 343 as cited in Roman 1992, 1). Similarly, the identity that was bestowed upon Muslim women and the meaning of promenades coincided in the Tanzimat novels, because both were regarded as "innocent" and "unspoiled." That only in the public spaces of "nature" were women allowed to appear.

6. Conclusion

Early Ottoman/Tanzimat novels offer us a critical perspective for reflecting on how dominant patriarchal mentality was sustained and reproduced through the discourse embedded in their narratives. What has been a particular interest in their discourse for this article has been the construction of public spaces in relation to gender. We discern that in these public spaces, the writers offer promenades as sites of negotiation for the infiltration of modern sociability outside the house, significantly against women's potential anonymity in the cosmopolitan city. Tanzimat novels were not simply representing city life but delivered almost like urban guides for the rising middle class to help them navigate the changing conditions that arrived with the emergence of a more inclusive public realm. From the mid-19 century onward, Ottoman women took advantage of urban anonymity, mobility via modernized public transportation, and new and advanced educational institutions. They were not only becoming more visible in the public spaces of the city, they were also becoming active subjects, participating in society and thereby contributing to the making of a truer public realm. Where and how women are portrayed in the settings of the early Ottoman novels testify to how Tanzimat writers as public intellectuals were reacting to women's claim to the urban public realm.

Counted among old as well as emerging public spaces, promenades became sites of negotiation in establishing social distinction and demarcating the spatial limits of women's publicness. Even if most commentators and writers remained unsure about the suitability of women's entry into public spaces, promenades as "natural" spaces were seen to be more innocent and neutral like a protected space in the threatening public life of the modernizing city. Not only it was more appropriate than urban, male-coded territories, it was also easier to survey and regulate compared to crowded spaces of Pera. Thus, as a guide to new urban forms of sociability, Tanzimat novels presented promenades as acceptable spaces of sociability -spaces that existed beyond the domestic realm but not quite in the city.

Endnotes

[1] Mesire was an all-encompassing Ottoman-Turkish term that is synonymous with promenade. Derived from the Arabic verb syr, it means both to promenade (verb) and the grounds for strolling (noun). The activities were never, however, restricted to strolling in natural spaces. We elaborate on the particularities of promenades and their differences from the parks in the fourth section.

[2] The name Pera literally means the other side. From the vantage point of the walled city of Istanbul, Ottomans saw the area housing the Galata tower and the Genoese walls as the other.

[3] All documents cited from the Ottoman State Archives are translated by Dr. Ömer Karakaş.

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