

The Postmodern Turkish Novel’s Resistance to the Return of Nationalism

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Abstract

Postmodern Turkish Novel’s Resistance to the Return of the Nationalism The emergence of the first wave of nationalism in the late 18th, the early 19th century was underpinned not only by traditional historiography but also by the historical novels written to verify the legitimacy assertions of the nationhood ideals. Although at that time historical novels were not considered as passable as history books whose faculty to represent the facts was not in question, still, they served in the gathering of the people on the distant peripheries around the same central idea of commonality, perhaps, even more effectively than historiography did. The novel, along with the newspapers, as Benedict Anderson and the others argued, was the most efficient medium in concretizing the ambiguous nation imagination with the effective use of vernacular, the function to employ different writing styles, and the inherent claim to represent every member of the nation. The utilization of the novel, especially of the romantic novel, in strengthening the foundations of the nation-state, first had started in the Western countries and then spread to the all the world, including the colonies of those Western countries. This kind of utilization of the novel continued after the end of the World War II, by drawing the new borders for the new nation-states and new colonies in the world. Turkey, once a big empire with many multi-national possessions, experienced the binary positions of nationalism, during and after its Independence War (1919–1922) against the Allied Powers. Before the World War I, as Ottoman Empire, it had strived to protect its vast territories with the help of the ideal of Ottomanism that referred to the equality of every citizen of the Empire without any religious or ethnic division. But, in the end, this and other overarching ideas, such as ‘Islamism’ or ‘Westernism’, could not hold against the nationalism’s aura. Primarily, Ottoman Empire started to lose its elements in the Balkans subsequent to a series of nationalistic revolts, then the heavy loss of the World War I came. The intelligentsia was already offering the solution as Pan-Turkism; the attempts of imperial powers to share the fields of the country among its neighbors and

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stateless subjects, and then to colonize the remaining parts, only helped to consolidate them around nationhood ideal. Winning the Independence War, the founder of Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) and his staff officers established the Turkish Republic in 1923 upon the base of one nation (Turks), one religion (Islam), and one sect (Sunnism). The concept was similar to the other nation-state building processes; initially, the deportation/extermination of the elements having a different religious identity, and the assimilation of the elements having a different ethnicity, or a different sect of Islam, in the melting pot of Turk-Islamism. The role of the novelists was crucial in fulfilment of the theoretical, moreover, it was expected to show a parallelism with the suggestions of historiographers. The expectation was met, but, it also created a problem of representation. Because the presupposed real being represented was the reality of the dominant subject. However, there was still a significant amount of cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities living in the country, yet excluded from the circuit of representation. The emergence of postmodernism has shifted this paradigm which was preoccupied with the reproduction of the discourse of the dominant. Against the canonized robustness of the modernist representation and referentiality, postmodern fiction, by availing of post-structuralism, offers to turn the tables in favor of the oppressed ones. Postmodernist literature has redefined the concept of the historical fiction by diverting its course from a central, singular, and homogeneous position to a peripheral, plural, and heterogeneous direction. Postmodern historical fiction, or by the term “historiographic metafiction” as Linda Hutcheon has coined, designates a narration with two predominant features; a) It is principally a retelling of a historical occurrence from a counter-position against the supposed factuality of the original story, and b) It contains the self-reflexivity of its author which enables him/her to question boundary between fact and fiction, if there is any at all. Obviously, Hutcheon’s conception upon this particular category of postmodern fiction was mainly derived from the approach which stresses the inherent narratological characteristics in history writing, argued by Hayden White, and other theoreticians. What is my research question in this work is how successfully historiographic metafiction is utilized by postmodern writers in Turkish literature. Has postmodernism been able to challenge the traditional admissions of representation in Turkey? What kind of resistance can provide postmodern literature after the return of the second big wave of nationalism, especially, in a strongly nationalist country, like Turkey? In order to respond to these questions, I offer to analyze a certain postmodern text, *The Black Book* (“Kara Kitap” 1990; in English 1994), written by acclaimed contemporary Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk (1952–).