

3 Reflections on the relationship between imaginative literature and religious and national identities

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At the center of the various manifestations of modernity stands the nation-state. Expertise on the state and its institutions is habitually provided by academics, journalists and political practitioners. From time to time, in speaking about the state, we also hear voices on the role of literature. To associate fictional literature with state-building may at first seem like a far-fetched idea. On closer examination, however, it turns out to be decisive, especially when considering the modern state, which reaches deep into the daily lives of its citizens. For the role of the state in modern society is incomparably more intrusive and pervasive for individuals than ever was the case with central authorities in pre-modern societies.

The American sociologist Dennis Wrong has called attention to the contributions of fictional literature to the understanding of political relationships. In his *Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses* (1979), he refers extensively to Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* in his analysis of various forms of legitimation of power.¹

With regard to the relationship between fictional literature and political science, several initiatives have originated in literary circles. A recent contribution has been made by the Turkish professor of comparative literature, Azade Seyhan, with her 2008 book *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*. Seyhan's analysis of the development of the modern Turkish novel is anchored in a theoretical perspective emphasizing the close relationship between literary narratives (especially the novel) and the formation of national identities in the modern era. This approach is eloquently summarized by the author as follows:

Nothing allows us a more insightful access into other times and cultures than narratives. The relentless passage of time brings in its wake inevitable surges of amnesia and awakens in human consciousness a sense of irredeemable loss. From the desire to reclaim what is lost or beyond reach spring narratives that connect us to our pasts and to others in webs of intimacy and memory as well as in webs of enmity and error. Such narratives respond to the universal human need for identification or affiliation with a clan, a community, a religious or ethnic group, or a state. Contingencies of

history and politics, however, pose a constant threat to any stabilization of collective identity, for these entangle us in the histories of numerous others, leading to fragmentation and reconfiguration of allegiances. It is precisely because of the unstable and unpredictable nature of life and history that we draw on fiction to lend in retrospect sense, unity, and dignity to fragmented lives and times. Within multiple frames of narrative, characteristic of many literary texts, operates a dialectic of remembrance and anticipation. In a world where tides of globalization threaten the specificity of local cultures and ethnic and religious strife is an all too common occurrence, the question of identity writ large has acquired an unprecedented intensity. Literature, as an institution par excellence of memory and a universally employed mode of human expression, untiringly explores ways of articulating who we are and of understanding both the incommensurability and the interconnectedness of our histories.²

In the above passage, Seyhan specifies the various social contexts in relation to which identities develop: “a clan, a community, a religious or ethnic group, or a state.” The state and the nation thus assume special significance in the era of modernity. The author’s approach is based on the idea that certain genres of literature play a vital role in the construction of modern national identities. By pointing out this intimate connection between certain political processes and fictional literature, Seyhan prepares the way for deeper insights into the political and cultural dynamics of modern Turkish history.

In light of Seyhan’s contributions, I will offer examples of how religion or literature or a combination of both has contributed to the formation of national identities in a Turkish context. I will focus on three well-known authors from the early republican era: the poet Mehmet Akif Ersoy (1873–1936), a faithful believer who wrote the words of the Turkish national anthem; the novelist Halide Edib Adıvar (1882–1964), a pioneer concerning women’s rights; and the poet and playwright Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983), who became one of the first active promoters of political Islam in Turkey. While Mehmet Akif represented a deeply religious form of nationalism, Halide Edib supported a form of nationalism (and secularism), which did not turn against religion but included it in its discourse. The main emphasis in this chapter is laid on the staunch nationalist and Islamist Necip Fazıl, who left literature behind and turned his energies to a political and ideological struggle against Kemalism and official secularism. Necip Fazıl’s trajectory offers a good opportunity for reflection on the various forces at work in the formation of national identities. Fazıl’s decisions greatly bothered the secular elite, and puzzled those who had seen in him a promising literary personality.

National identities in literary narratives

One of the basic theoretical themes set out by Seyhan is drawn from George Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel* (1971 [1920]) – “one of the most important

philosophical treatises on the development of the genre.”³ Lukács’s contention was that the novel had become “the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God”⁴: the novel had been transformed into a medium that gave meaning to an otherwise fragmented existence. It thus filled a void in an era characterized by secularization and disenchantment.

Analyses of Turkish literature should not exclude these kinds of general theoretical reflection. Nevertheless, the analysis of the literature of any country also requires its own specific explanations and/or theories. As such, it becomes possible, and important, to observe mutual impacts across the geographic and political borders of various literary theories.

For a long time, literary critics in the West, especially of a Marxist persuasion,⁵ regarded the modern novel as the specific mirror image or reflection of the bourgeoisie. The individual was placed at the apex, turning the novel into the expression par excellence of the special ethos, the self-consciousness or self-confidence of the bourgeoisie, but also of the bourgeoisie’s inner contradictions, growing pessimism and tragic decline. In making social class the focus of analysis, however, literary scholars and critics failed to recognize the influence of the nation-state. This was also the case in analyses of modernity more generally, and in developments within the fields of culture and/or literature more specifically. The attention paid to the formation of the modern state and national identities during the process of modernization springs instead from analyses that also involved the history of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Ottoman Empire. Max Weber’s disagreement with Marxism was to a large extent rooted in the fact that he had developed a theory more sensitive to the historical realities of Central and Eastern Europe.

These insights are indeed confirmed with respect to late Ottoman society. Literary analyses in this easternmost part of Europe could hardly be expected to deal with class relationships. There, the bourgeoisie was not only relatively feeble in economic terms, it was also split along ethnic and sectarian lines. As an effect of the convulsions before, during, and after the World War I, followed by the establishment of the Republic and the population exchanges of 1923 and 1924, the core of this class – the non-Muslims – had almost completely disappeared. Even where this substantial part of the late Ottoman middle class did not materially disappear in leaving for new independent states, in massacres or in deportations, it came to experience social and political degradation.

Since the late Ottoman era, modern ideas were mainly developed and launched by state-bound professionals and intellectuals whose focus was not so much on economic class interests as on ethnic, sectarian and/or national interests. This was the case initially with non-Muslims, and later with Muslims.⁶ Thus, in the Ottoman context, it was not the bourgeoisie, with its individual, liberal ethos, but the nation, with its collectivist, community ethos, that mattered.⁷

These socio-historical differences between Central and Eastern Europe on the one hand and Western Europe on the other were also singled out by Sir Lewis Namier in his classic *1848: the Revolution of the Intellectuals* (1946).⁸ According

to Namier, the revolution of 1848 initiated a new age, not of liberalism, as many of the revolutionaries had wished, but of nationalism, which was to undermine liberal constitutionalism. “The springtime of the peoples”⁹ thus gave way to more authoritarian, state-imposed forms of modernization in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. The Ottoman Empire represented a variation of the Central and Eastern European pattern. In Azade Seyhan’s words:

The genesis of the Ottoman Turkish novel at the end of the nineteenth century is intimately linked to the ideas of freedom and the sovereignty of nations [*not* the autonomous individual, EÖ] – the dream of freedom [here meaning freedom of the nation, EÖ] as a response to absolute imperial authority seen as an impediment to all manner of human rights, the concept of sovereignty a consequence of the insurgent movements that resulted in the independence of the Balkan nations.¹⁰

As historical and sociological analyses of Eastern Europe have been added to those of Western Europe, the overall understanding of the modernization process has been modified. The role of the state (and the nation) in this process has gradually become more widely accepted.¹¹

The literary narrative is essential to the process of identity formation. In a modern context, special emphasis is given to the role of literature in national (nation-state oriented) identity formation. Stress is thus put on the relationship between modern literature (in particular the novel as a literary genre) and the emerging individual as he/she becomes identified with the national (nation-state) context. Whether the literary narrative itself emphasizes collectivistic (nationalistic) or individualistic themes is not decisive. What matters is the creation of a national literature, which serves as a “basket” of shared experiences and conceptualizations.

Interruptions

At this point, I would like to pose the following questions: what happens when the yearning for national identity appears before a vital tradition of modern literary narrative has been articulated? When the literary narrative develops rather slowly and feebly, or is interrupted, as was the case in Turkey, by profound social, economic and political crises and transformations? And what if a viable “imagined community”¹² remains too fragmented to meet the demands of identity formation?

A fundamental concept in Azade Seyhan’s analysis is “belatedness,” of which she offers a valuable and intriguing critique. For a long time, comparative literary studies have culminated in negative conclusions as to the achievements of non-European literature. Turkish literature has been no exception. Conceptualized in terms of simple binaries, Turkish literature, as an example of “Eastern” literature, has been evaluated as “belated,” imitative, and lacking in originality and creativity. Seyhan rejects this kind of simplistic underestimation of Turkish and other non-Western literature.¹³

Without questioning that critical analysis, I would like to call attention to another, additional perspective underlying the concept of belatedness. The problem in this context is not alleged imitation, lack of originality or creativity in modern Turkish literature, but lies in the fact that there is a gap between the demand for national identification and the availability of suitable or credible narratives.¹⁴

In a situation marked by such incongruity, other cultural spheres or discourses are apt to replace, substitute or complement existing literary narratives. The most familiar and historically most deeply embedded narratives indeed derive from the religious sphere.

To be sure, the problem here is neither with the quality, depth or volume of the existing body of literature, nor with its individual writers. It is question of how literary production reaches out to the reading public. It goes without saying that the high rate of illiteracy throughout the Turkish republican period played a very important role. A literary narrative requires a wide (and critical) readership to develop, but illiteracy was 90 percent in 1927 and almost 50 percent as late as 1970.

The nation-state conceptualized as a “survival unit”

The development of a common national culture is vital for modern society. Scholars of modernity and nationalism have made this affirmation in various ways. Ernest Gellner has defined nationalism as a “political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”¹⁵ Thanks to its simplicity, this definition of nationalism has served as a pedagogical tool in the general understanding of the basic logic of the modern nation-state. A more elaborate version, most likely constituting the foundation of Gellner’s later expositions, is Elie Kedourie’s definition from 1960:

Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It pretends to supply a criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state, and for the right organization of a society of states. Briefly, the doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government.¹⁶

Gellner emphasized the role of general education, which serves a double function: first, it secures a shared culture (“language” both linguistically and culturally); and second, makes possible a high level of social mobility, necessary for the proper functioning of an industrial (in contrast to agrarian) society. The sociologist Norbert Elias (1897–1990), known for *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969 [first published in 1939 by Haus zum Falken, Basel]) developed his theory of modern state formation around the notion of the “survival unit.” In modern society, it is the state that constitutes the survival unit of

the individual, while it was the family, the tribe, or the village in pre-industrial/pre-modern society. Thus, as a “survival unit” the state is a relative newcomer on the historical stage.

Elias’s concept of “survival unit” appears more imaginative and captivating when it comes to identity formation than Gellner’s emphasis on social mobility and general education in industrial society. “Survival unit” suggests survival not only in a material sense, but also in a sense of social belonging (identification). There is also an existential dimension to the notion. However, due to the complex structure of modern societies, built as they are on very high-level labor divisions – “increasingly longer chains of interdependencies”¹⁷ – the relationships between individuals and various organizations and institutions are almost impossible to overlook. For the individual, the encounter with the nation-state easily leads to associations with a treacherous, Kafkaesque labyrinth.

In a modern context, national identity formation is vital. This was not the case in pre-modern society, where individuals mainly identified with the family, the clan, or the village community. The problem in the Turkish context was that the demand for a common national identity was strongly felt before literary narrative had developed into a viable tradition of shared culture. Therefore, instead of literature, existing religious narratives continued to occupy the minds of many intellectuals – and broad sections of the people – even after the establishment of the modern Republic. Now, however, religious narratives would come to stand as markers of national identity.

Mehmet Akif Ersoy (1873–1936)

Mehmet Akif Ersoy wrote the words of the Turkish national anthem and freely blended both religious and nationalist sentiments.¹⁸ Akif was born in Istanbul to Albanian immigrants. He studied languages, including Arabic, Persian and French, and tried out various professions throughout his life: teacher, imam, veterinarian and intelligence officer. While engaged in these various occupations, Akif remained an active contributor to literary journals including the Islamic weekly *Sırat-ı Müstakim* (1908–1925),¹⁹ in which he published poetry and prose poems. During the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress (1908–1918), he travelled extensively in Egypt, and later to the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia, and to Lebanon.

Mehmet Akif was elected to the first parliament in Ankara in 1920. During the War of Independence (1919–1922), he traveled extensively throughout the country, including to the battle fronts, where he gave sermons in which he appealed to the people to support the nationalists against the imperial regime in Istanbul.

Akif came from a pious family and was himself an ardent believer. In 1921 he won the contest to write the words for the national anthem, *İstiklal Marşı* (Independence March). Written amid raging warfare, the outcome of which was highly uncertain, the text is filled with powerful emotional appeals to a common sacred destiny: armed resistance must be pursued to save the community of Muslim believers. In the text of the anthem, Islamic values and symbols overshadow values of Turkishness.²⁰

After the end of the war of independence, the establishment of the new Republic (1923), and the abolition of the Caliphate (1924), Mehmet Akif fell out with the new Kemalist regime. He clung to his religion and disapproved of the radicalism with which the secularist reforms were carried out. In 1926, he left the country for voluntary exile in Hilvan, south of Cairo, where he stayed until 1936. He died only a few months after his return to Istanbul.

Upon leaving Istanbul for Hilvan, Akif had reluctantly taken on the commission of translating the Koran into Turkish: for Akif, a pious Muslim, the Koran could not be translated, only interpreted. A first draft was finished in 1929, but Akif continued to work on it until the end of his life. When he returned to Istanbul in 1936 because of health problems, he left the manuscript with a friend in Cairo, exhorting him to burn the manuscript if he could not make it back. The pages have never been recovered.

Halide Edib Adivar (1882–1964)

Another literary personality who preferred life in exile was Halide Edip Adivar. Adivar came from an aristocratic Ottoman family, making her social background very different from Mehmet Akif's. Adivar's mother had died early and the future writer was raised by her father, grandmother and stepmother. "She grew up amid different cultures – her grandmother's traditional Ottoman household, her father's Westernized world, and her stepmother's European books."²¹ She learnt Arabic, went to a Greek primary/secondary school, and studied at the American College for Women in Istanbul. Right after graduation she married one of her tutors, with whom she had two children, but divorced him when he took a second wife. At the age of 35, Edib Adivar remarried to Adnan Adivar, a politically active intellectual like herself.

Edib Adivar did not come from a deeply religious milieu, but she had great respect for the spiritual dimension of human life and was convinced that the Ottoman and Islamic heritage had to be molded into the national identity of the new Turkish republic. This preference for a more inclusive nationalism – and conciliatory secularism – than the one represented by the Kemalist elite, is evident in her rich literary output, which encompassed 21 novels, four short-story collections, two dramas, four scholarly books and a two-volume autobiography (*Memoirs of Halide Edib* – originally published in English in 1926).²² *Ateşten Gömlek* from 1924 (translated both as "The Daughter of Smyrna" and, literally, as "The Shirt of Flame") is considered "one of the best fictional accounts of the War of Independence."²³ Halide Edib was a first-hand witness of the atrocities and sacrifices of the war, since both she and her husband fought actively during the war of independence.

Despite being part of the inner circle of nationalists during the war, Halide Edib and Adnan were unable to reconcile themselves with the Kemalist leadership after the establishment of the new regime. As a result they went into exile in 1926; the same year that Mehmet Akif left the country. They lived in France and the United Kingdom, but they also traveled extensively in the United States, where Halide Edib worked as Visiting Professor of history at Barnard

College, connected to Columbia University in New York. She was also invited to India to participate in a series of conferences.²⁴ The couple did not return to Turkey until 1939, one year after Atatürk had passed away. In 1950, Halide Edib ran for the liberal-conservative Democrat Party and served as an MP for that party until 1954, when, disappointed by the party, she resigned. Ten years later she died in Istanbul at the age of 82.

Halide Edib's legacy is that of a public intellectual who wanted to build a new and westernizing Turkey by incorporating its Ottoman as well as Islamic heritage. Hers was a tolerant and inclusive nationalism; her brand of secularism did not set itself up in opposition to religion.

Her negotiations among languages and cultures naturally led to a peripatetic perspective that invested her work with the urgency to rethink nationalism not in terms of territorial, religious, linguistic, and ethnic unity but in terms of the possibility of finding alternative systems and syntheses that unequivocally tolerate diversity.²⁵

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in her life and output, not only on account of her enduring skill as a writer, but because her more conciliatory approach to questions of cultural and political identities has had greater resonance in the more open and democratic atmosphere of the last two decades.

The republican leaders were unable to understand the genuine patriotism of religious-minded personalities like Mehmet Akif, or liberal-minded intellectuals like Halide Edib. Instead of listening with a more sensitive ear, they overreacted, turning to a highly repressive course of action against all opposition – allegedly reactionary – groups. In the ensuing oppressive atmosphere, there was no place for middle-of-the-road intellectuals. The field was instead left to those, who, lacking more moderate sources of inspiration, single-mindedly focused on religion in their search for a nationalistic narrative. Consequently, two extremist discourses, one politicized religious and the other “vulgar positivist,”²⁶ came to feed on each other in a kind of vicious circle. It was in this polarized and overheated atmosphere that Necip Fazıl Kısakürek appeared on the scene. He, more than anyone else, openly spoke his mind. His transition from promising writer to oppositional ideologist was symbolic of the fact that fiction and the quest for national identity had lost touch with one another. This situation arose during the inter-war period and continued for a good part of the post-war era.

Literary narratives set aside – Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983)²⁷

Necip Fazıl came from an elite Ottoman family in Istanbul. His father died when Necip Fazıl was young and he was therefore raised by his mother. As a secondary-school student, he entered the Turkish Naval Academy, but quit and studied philosophy and literature at Istanbul University instead, making for a truly secular education. He was among the first students from the Republic to be

sent abroad (to Paris) for his higher education. Something of a dandy, he dressed fashionably and was well known for his taste in gambling.

Fazıl's outgoing personality eventually turned into an enthusiasm for religion. His religious involvement began when he became acquainted with a renowned sheikh in the Nakşibendi Sufi order, Abdülhakim Arvasi, who at that time served as imam at the Ağa Camii in Beyoğlu. Necip Fazıl's relationship with his tutor from the Nakşibendi order lasted nine years, from 1934, when he first met him, until 1943, when Abdülhakim Arvasi died. Necip Fazıl described his encounter with the sheikh in different books and essays, such as *Başbuğ Velilerden 33* ("Number 33 of the Leading Sheikhs," referring to Arvasi's order in a *silsile* or chain originating with the prophet Muhammad), *O ve Ben* (He and I), *Rabuta-i Şerife* (The Noble Connection) and *Tasavvuf Bahçeleri* (The Gardens of Mysticism).²⁸

By the post-war era, the language traditionally used to communicate religious experiences and commitments had changed. The personal dependency that was characteristic of the traditional Sufi *mürîd-mürşid* (disciple–master) relationship never appealed to Necip Fazıl, and it was only in relation to Abdülhakim Arvasi that he accepted unconditional devotion. Even this fidelity was not absolute, since he would not always obey his sheikh on issues of prayer and other rituals. After the death of Abdülhakim Arvasi, Necip Fazıl never again entered into a similar relationship. As a matter of fact, this branch of the Nakşibendi order was dissolved after Arvasi's death. The broken *silsile* became symbolic of Necip Fazıl's self-dependency. In the absence of Abdülhakim Arvasi, he discovered new ways to communicate his moral concerns and existential broodings. Instead of relying on the spoken word of an intimate relationship, Fazıl began to communicate with written messages directed at an anonymous mass of people.

Necip Fazıl's discussion of moral and religious questions brought him up against the secularist regime. However, it was mainly as a critic of the Kemalist establishment in general, and not as an Islamic revivalist, that Fazıl first gained a reputation for being politically outspoken. During the 1930s, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had been praised to the skies and was regarded by his devotees in an almost sacred light. Such idolization of a leader in circumstances otherwise marked by materialistic worldliness roused Necip Fazıl's sense of justice and decency. In 1939, the year after Atatürk's demise, he started to write for the daily *Son Telegraf* (The Last Telegram). The focus of Fazıl's criticism was not in fact Atatürk, but his successor İsmet İnönü. And given that Fazıl's début in opposition journalism corresponded with the outbreak of World War II, Fazıl found that he had ample opportunity to focus on world politics, a favorite topic. Many of Fazıl's articles dealt with the war and its related strategic matters.

Necip Fazıl's opposition did not go unnoticed by the government. Under existing censorship provisions, based on the Press Law of 1931 and amendments to the Penal Code in 1936 (paragraphs 142, 161 and 163), Prime Minister Refik Saydam issued a warning to the Press Board (*Basın Yayın Müdürlüğü*) in 1942. However, such measures did not discourage Necip Fazıl. Rather, they seem to have spurred him on to increase the pitch of his criticism. Consequently, in 1943 he founded his own publication, *Büyük Doğu* (Great East). For many years, he used this

publication as a channel for his *dava*, his mission to foster greater respect for Islam. As early as 1944, however, *Büyük Doğu* was closed down for a time, accused of disseminating propaganda hostile to the regime. Subsequently, Necip Fazıl was repeatedly the victim of state persecution, and was imprisoned a total of 11 times in all in the subsequent decades, although usually for short periods.

The political liberalization of the 1950s did not significantly increase Fazıl's scope of action. Necip Fazıl's relationship with the Democrat Party and its leader Adnan Menderes was complicated and contradictory, for although *Büyük Doğu* continued to fall foul of the law, Necip Fazıl is said to have received financial support for the publication from the Prime Minister's special funds.

From the beginning of the 1960s until the end of the 1970s, Necip Fazıl was engaged in an intensive series of conferences throughout the country. When the *Milli Selamet Partisi* (National Salvation Party) was created under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan in 1972, Fazıl extended his support, albeit with certain reservations. In the few years following the creation, he wrote for the party's daily, the *Milli Gazete*. When the party joined with the Republican People's Party (the party of Atatürk) in a coalition government in 1973, his ardor cooled. The compromises of real-world politics did not suit his disposition. Fazıl's idealism exceeded the bounds of practical politics, and towards the end of the 1970s he transferred his sympathies to the less-pragmatic, more-unyielding ultra-nationalist party *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (the Nationalist Action Party).

When Necip Fazıl died in 1983, at 79 years old, he was on sick-leave from prison, where he had been serving yet another term of imprisonment. His funeral became a great rallying point for the different Islamic groups in an era marked by the repression of the then-military regime. Necip Fazıl was an intellectual and activist who appealed to people from different walks of life and ideological persuasions. His ideology combined revivalist Islam with nationalism and modernity. His was a "boundary" or mixed mindset. In addition, his outspokenness had a liberating effect on his supporters by making visible and articulating existing – but often overshadowed or suppressed – antagonisms.

As much as he struggled against official secularism, Necip Fazıl also stood up in the defense of nationalism. Although political Islam and nationalistic values may appear contradictory, Fazıl embraced both systems. Indeed, he paved the way for the later popular notion of "Turkish Islam." Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's life and works clearly fused Islamism and nationalism into what later became the popular notion of "Turkish Islam."

The emergence of a broader literary public sphere

Many observers have been puzzled by the fact that such a promising poet and playwright left literature behind and poured his energies into a harsh political and ideological struggle. Evaluated in the light of Azade Seyhan's theory of the quest for literary narratives in the formation of national identities, a cautious interpretation could be that Necip Fazıl came to believe that he and his colleagues' literary output was not in harmony with or did not resonate enough with the mindset of the

uneducated masses.²⁹ The literary narrative of which he was part may have appeared too lofty and fragmented to address the truly significant questions of identity formation on the national level. In order to reach his dispossessed or culturally homeless audiences, Necip Fazıl implicated himself in an ideological struggle with strong allusions to religion. This second narrative was more easily recognized³⁰ and therefore more effective in terms of identity politics. As such, Necip Fazıl's life and career indicated a special social and historical conjuncture: a weak literary narrative, but a strong demand for national identities. This pushed Fazıl towards a politicized (or nationalistic) interpretation of Islam.³¹

Since the 1980s, however, the situation has changed. Literary narratives play a much more prominent role in public life today than half a century ago. Better educated and broader audiences are keen to access the now more vital and existentially concerned literary narratives of today.³² The renewed interest in Halide Edib Adivar is only one case in point. Another writer with a kindred mindset, whose literary works have been republished in numerous new editions since the beginning of the 1990s, is Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar (1901–1962).

Tanpınar's most important novels *Huzur* (A Mind at Peace) and *Saatleri Ayaralama Enstitüsü* (The Time Regulation Institute) were first published in 1949 and 1954 respectively. A collection of historical essays, *Five Cities* was originally published in 1946 by Milli Eğitim, Yayınları, Istanbul. As well as being an outstanding novelist, and a writer of poetry and short stories, Tanpınar was also a literary critic and much sought-after lecturer. Paul Valéry and Marcel Proust became his sources of inspiration.³³ Tanpınar is counted among the ranks of the early modernists, but his style was developed in a literary atmosphere still dominated by social realism.

Huzur is a love story, "the best love story I have read in the Turkish language," Turkish literary critic Fethi Naci remarked.³⁴

What is more, it is not only one love story, a man's love for a woman, the novel contains two love stories pleading to each other, feeding upon and developing through each other: Mümtaz [the main character, the author's alter ego, EÖ] is as much in love with Istanbul as he is in love with Nuran.³⁵

In this novel, Tanpınar gives voice to important sentiments of the late inter-war period, but in addition to its social significance the narrative is also intellectually demanding.

A Mind at Peace is a novel of ideas, wrapped in a love story that runs its tragic course against the background of a time of acute anxiety, as Turkey stands on the brink of the Second World War I, which it desperately tries to stay out of. While the story is told in a straightforward manner, without the intrusion of post-modern riddles, its question only raises more questions, and the polyphonic structure of the novel creates a complex web that suspends issues and postpones answers. The dialectic of ideas and ideals that move the narrative resists closure, and signals that the search will go on.³⁶

The Turkish literary public was not ready for this kind of narrative in 1949, neither politically and ideologically speaking, nor in terms of aesthetics or self-reflection. It would take almost half a century for the Turkish readership to catch up with one of its most important writers.

As literary narratives become more vital parts of Turkish identity formation, the pressure for politically and ideologically oriented religious narratives will lose significance. As I see it, this is exactly what is happening in Turkey today, where the secularist/Kemalist hegemony is breaking down, leaving room for more freedom in the formation of a variety of secular national identities, including secular narratives based on religious sentiments. And as long as religion and secularism are not seen as polar opposites, there is indeed no contradiction in making this claim.

Conclusion

Examined over a longer historical and sociological perspective, Necip Fazıl's life coincides with a critical phase in the modernization of Turkey, that is, the period when villagers in significant numbers left their traditional communities for large urban and metropolitan centers. Important values and communities may be said to have been lost in the process. As an aesthetically, morally and religiously kindled zealot, Necip Fazıl channeled his energies into an ideological and political struggle against a political establishment he saw as an over-ambitious and illegitimate guardian of the new order. However, by sacrificing literature and Sufism for the political and ideological struggle, he became, in spite of his outrage against official secularism, a co-actor in the process of secularization. This was the unexpected consequence of his political activism. By taking the steps that he did, he was drawn into the orbit of existing power-holders. His predicament was subsequently repeated on a larger scale by the Islamic movement under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan: politicized Islam, in spite of all its rhetoric, contributed to the secularization of moral and religious values in a process that Olivier Roy calls "*de facto* secularization."³⁷

Such "*de facto* secularization" has also been complemented by other secularizing trends like developments in the literary field. Azade Seyhan's analysis of the modern Turkish novel sheds important light on these processes. The fact that literary narratives are becoming more vital in the constitution of nation-bound identities is as good a sign as any of the emergence of an increasingly vigorous public sphere.³⁹ Different processes here work together in forming a more open society – that is, a promising and not altogether Utopian vision for the future of Turkish society.

Notes

- 1 Dennis Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979, pp. 104f.
- 2 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, pp. 1–2.
- 3 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 10.

- 4 George Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, London: Merlin Press, 1971 [original publication 1920], p. 88; quoted in Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 10.
- 5 Important contributions to the sociology of literature have been made by scholars affiliated with the Frankfurt School, such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Leo Löwenthal. Already mentioned is Georg Lukács (1885–1971), who only after *The Theory of the Novel* (see note 4) turned Marxist. He wrote extensively on European “bourgeois” literature (Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Thomas Mann, etc.).
- 6 It is clear that nationalism began among the non-Muslim population of the Balkans. Only later, after important parts of the Empire had broken away, did it spread to the Arabs and eventually to the Turks.
- 7 This general trend in favor of a collectivist ideology does not entirely preclude an individualistic ethos, as in the case of writers and intellectuals such as Namık Kemal (1840–1888) and Şinasi (1826–1871), who were advocates of liberty and constitutionalism and opponents of slavery.
- 8 Sir Lewis Namier, *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946 (Raleigh Lectures on History, British Academy, 1944). For a discussion of the differences between liberal and authoritarian forms of nationalism, see also Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1960.
- 9 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962.
- 10 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 23.
- 11 See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: State Formation and Civilization*, Vol. 2, Oxford: Blackwell, 1982; Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (eds), *Formation of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- 12 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.
- 13

The inferences I draw from reading the novels of this study can be contested, altered, revised. But scrutiny and reflection, conditioned by a wealth of recent and not so recent studies of the novel, necessitate a correction of fairly entrenched clichés about the nature of the Turkish novel, regardless of hermeneutic bias. Such stereotypical notions arise from an outdated conception of comparative literature that sees novels in terms of such binaries as Western–Eastern, high literary–popular, and romantic–realistic. In the framework of convenient binaries and periodizations, the Turkish novel is often marked as belated and imitative, which then leads to the notion that it is a translation, in the negative sense of lacking originality or creativity, of even plagiarizing.

(Seyhan Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 8)

For an earlier discussion of the notion of belatedness in a Greek context, see Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

- 14 For a similar problem in a Swedish–Finnish context, i.e., the frustration of lacking a language with which to connect oneself to the national culture, see the Swedish–Finnish author/priest Bengt Pohjanen’s novel *Smugglarkungens son* (The Son of the Smuggler King) (Stockholm, Nordstedt, 2007). I am grateful to Johanna Tjernström for pointing this out.
- 15 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, p. 1.
- 16 Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, London: Hutchinson, 1985 [1960], p. 9.

- 17 Norbert Elias: *What is Sociology?* London: Hutchinson, 1978.
- 18 This short review of Mehmet Akif Ersoy's life is taken from Refik Durbaş (ed.), *Mehmed Akif. Hayatı ve Toplu Şiirleri* (Mehmed Akif. His Life and Collected Poems), Istanbul: Kırmızı 2008, pp. 9–20.
- 19 *Sirat-ı Müstakim* means the straight road, implying the Islamic religion.
- 20 The national anthem, which starts “Don't fear!” is thoroughly permeated with the idea of survival, and can therefore be described as an “anthem for survival.”
- 21 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 43.
- 22 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 45.
- 23 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 76.
- 24 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, p. 45.
- 25 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, pp. 45–46.
- 26 The expression “vulgar positivism” is used by Şükrü Hanioglu in *The Young Turks in Opposition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- 27 This section is based on Necip Fazıl's autobiographical novels, such as *Başbuğ velilerden 33* (Number 33 of the Leading Sheikhs); *O ve ben* (He and I), *Rabıta-i Şerife* (The Noble Connection); and *Tasavvuf Bahçeleri* (The Gardens of Mysticism), all published by Doğu Yayınları, Istanbul. See also Özdalga, E. “Necip Fazıl Kısakürek: Heroic Nationalist in the Garden of Mysticism.” *Meddelanden* (Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul and Stockholm), 19, 5–27 and http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necip_Faz%C4%B1l_K%C4%B1sak%C3%BCrek.
- 28 All publications edited and published by Büyük Doğu Yayınları, Istanbul.
- 29 For an illustration of this hunger for religious themes among the uneducated sections of the rural population, see Mahmut Makal's well-known autobiographical *A Village in Anatolia*, London: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co., 1954.
- 30 Şerif Mardin has emphasized the importance of a special idiom in his analysis of the religious “renewer,” Said Nursi. See Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey. The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, Albany and New York: SUNY Press, 1989.
- 31 The internationally much better-known Nazım Hikmet also turned to politics, but as a Marxist/Communist.
- 32 This has been repeatedly pointed out by Orhan Pamuk, especially in connection with his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006.
- 33 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Huzur*, Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2008, foreword by Professor Mehmet Kaplan.
- 34 Fethi Naci, *Yüz Yılın 100 Türk Romanı* (One Hundred Novels over One Hundred Years), Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007, p. 207.
- 35 Fethi Naci, *Yüz Yılın 100 Türk Romanı* (One Hundred Novels over One Hundred Years), Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007, p. 207.
- 36 Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: the Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Perspective*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008, pp. 140–141.
- 37 Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- 38 Jürgen Habermas: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.