

TURK’S EVER-LASTING QUEST FOR IDENTITY: AN ANALYSIS OF TURKISH MODERNIZATION THROUGH A.H. TANPINAR NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide a discussion on the nature of the identification process of the individual in general and on that of the Turkish national identity in particular through the exploration of the great Turkish author, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’s literary works. This study illustrates that Tanpınar differs significantly from the early Republican authors of his time by the competence of his conceptualization of identity issue besides his artistic mastery. Moreover the author’s conceptualization of identity catches the intellectual level of the contemporary poststructuralist thinkers who show that identity as a sign or process of signification which is subject to constant transformation. In this respect, the article also offers discussions on the differences of the conceptualization of identity between Tanpınar and the early Republican thinkers and on the similarities between him and contemporary poststructuralist thinkers. It is argued that such an inquisition into the Tanpınar’s works provide us a more competent understanding of the nature of the Turkish national identity and its conditions of its possibility, that is to say the Turkish modernization process.

Key Words: identity, Turkish modernization, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, early republican period, poststructuralism

Türk’ün Dinmeyen Kimlik Arayışı: A.H. Tanpınar Romanları Üzerinden Türk Modernleşmesinin Bir Değerlendirmesi

ÖZET

Bu makale büyük Türk yazarı, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’ın edebi eserlerinin incelenmesi yoluyla genelde bireyin kimlik edinme sürecinin, özelde ise Türk milli kimliğinin doğası üzerine bir tartışma sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Tanpınar’ın dönemindeki erken Cumhuriyet yazarlarından sanatsal ustalığının yanısıra kimlik meselesini kavramsallaştırmasındaki yetkinliği ile de önemli derecede ayrıldığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca yazarın kimlik kavramsallaştırması, bir işaret veya anlamlandırma süreci olarak kimliğin sürekli değişime maruz kaldığını gösteren günümüz postyapısalcı düşünürlerin entellektüel seviyesini yakalamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, makale Tanpınar ve erken Cumhuriyet dönemi yazarlarının kimlik kavramsallaştırmasındaki farklılıklarına ve onunla günümüz post yapısalcı düşünürlerin benzerliklerine dair tartışmalar da sunmaktadır. Tanpınar’ın eserlerinin böyle derinlemesine bir incelemesinin, Türk ulusal kimliğinin doğasına ve bu kimliğin

oluşabilme koşulu olan Türk modernleşme sürecine dair daha yetkin bir anlayış sağlayacağı iddia edilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: kimlik, Türk modernleşmesi, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, erken cumhuriyet dönemi, post yapısalcılık

Introduction

The problematic of identity has been one of the basic issues of discussion among the Turkish intelligentsia throughout the long lasting process of Turkish modernization since the Tanzimat edict of 1839. In this respect, moral decadence due to the over-westernization was a dominant theme of the Turkish literary products from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Mardin, 1974). The novels of the Tanzimat era and the Turkish press of the late nineteenth century all emphasized the moral dissolution of the Ottoman society, that is to say the Ottoman Muslims due to the appropriation of both the material products and cultural characteristics of the West (Brummett, 2000). Hence the Turkish intellectuals never stopped to formulate the best recipe for the construction of the Turkish identity which would provide equilibrium between the traditional culture and that of western.

Similarly, identity has been the dominant theme of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's novels. However the great Turkish author differs significantly from his predecessors and contemporaries with respect to his conceptualization of the problematic of identity. In this respect, his understanding seems to go beyond his time and catch the aura of the contemporary intellectual climate. In contrast to the authors of his time and similar to the contemporary poststructuralist thinkers, Tanpınar acknowledges the fact that individual's quest for identity is an ever-lasting business due to the very nature of identity. Throughout his novels, the author emphasizes that identity is a lack which can never be fulfilled.

This paper is an effort to understand the nature of the individual's identity in general and the Turkish national identity in particular which are concepts dominating Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's novels and short stories. In this respect the paper illustrates Tanpınar's intellectual competence over his contemporaries which was based on his profound knowledge of Western thinkers of psychoanalysis and led him to correctly and differently analyze the identity question of his time.

Throughout the article a number of Tanpınar's literary products are inquired such as *Mahur Beste*, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*, *Bütün Öyküleri*, *Beş Şehir* and *Huzur*. Tanpınar appropriates a host of representations in his conceptualization of the issue of identity.

Therefore the article begins with offering a discursive analysis of Tanpınar's works with respect to his representations and tries to provide a comprehension of Tanpınar's conceptualization of identity.

It is argued that the analysis of the Tanpınar's literary works provide us a better understanding of the issue of identity which has always been a major problematic of the Turkish modernization process. Finally the article also offers discussions on the differences of the conceptualization of identity between Tanpınar and the Republican thinkers and on the similarities between him and contemporary poststructuralist thinkers. In this respect it tries to offer an analysis of the nature of identification process in general and Turkish national identity in particular.

Problematic of Identity in Tanpınar's Works

Mahur Beste

Mahur Beste, *Huzur* and *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* were published in 1944, 1949 and 1950, respectively. The themes and characters of these three novels are very much related.

Although the novel of *Mahur Beste* takes place in the years of the reign of Abdülhamit the Second in Istanbul, the main theme of *Mahur Beste* is very much similar to *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*. Individual's feeling of loss and instability as an effect of the dissolution of the Ottoman civilization and the westernization project of the Young Turks which was later on appropriated by the Turkish Republic are opened to a long discussion by Tanpınar.

The conversation between a Young Turk called Sabri Hoca and a friend of him from Ottoman judiciary, İsmail Molla is very significant in terms of understanding Tanpınar's comprehension of the reasons of the feeling of loss generated in the Ottoman people and passed onto the next generations. According to Sabri Hoca and Tanpınar, Ottoman civilization is bankrupt with all its institutions. Since a civilization with its values provides the cultural material of the identity of an individual, the Ottoman subject has lost the order or integrity of his identity as a result of the disintegration of the Ottoman civilization. Tanpınar explains this in the following words of Sabri Hoca:

My son Behçet, do you know what the bankruptcy of a civilization? he said. Man is degenerated, he is ruined; a civilization is a system of the moral values that constitutes a man. Do you now get the seriousness of the problem? ...If you are ignorant; you study and learn. If you are backward; you progress. If

there is lack of man; you educate and one day he comes out. If you have no money, you win. There is a solution for everything. However if man is degenerated, there is no cure for that. You make binder; you know what headband (headband of a bound volume, order) means. In our society human being is bereft of headband. Life is governed by a bulk of dead values which are inharmonious, discordant and unable to reply to the contemporary life... We live in a mass of contradictions. A whole eastern world is suffering. It changes shirt continuously. Indian, Chinese, Afghan, Arab, Turk we all strip; as we strip, we find out that the things we take off are insignificant joints and that we need to take off some other things from down inside. Then we get afraid; we look around in our place as if we call for help. After that we start again, we strip off again, we take off some more things as we unskin ourselves with our scratches...But it does not help. What we need, is not changing a shirt, but changing from inside...All social life is established around a mentality. We need to constitute man all over again, with new principles; a man who lives with new values. Whereas this is impossible. (Tanpınar, 1988, pp.103-104) ¹

As Tanpınar puts it, integrity of identity is based on the civilization and its culture. Since individual's identity is defined and constituted in and by a civilization that is to say the social sphere, disintegration of that civilization results in the instability of individual identity according to Tanpınar. The bankruptcy of Ottoman and/or Eastern civilization results in the feelings of instability and suffering in the individuals of these civilizations. In order to come over this instability, individuals try to change their identities but it is an impossibility for Tanpınar. Tanpınar describes this situation as a threshold which cannot be transcended and thus results in inconsistency and despair. Sabri Hoca as a Young Turk who suffers from this situation is described in the following:

As a matter of fact he was staying hesistantly and unfortunately over a threshold without moving backward and forward...Although all the temporary conditions that lead to the destiny of the society are come over, there was a wall, deep down inside, insurmountable. This was a mentality infused to the

¹ The quotation indicated above is translated from the original text in Turkish by the author of this article. The original quotation is as such: "Oğlum Behçet, sen bir medeniyetin iflası nedir, bilir misin? dedi . İnsan bozulur, insan kalmaz; bir medeniyet insanı yapan manevi kıymetler manzumesidir. Anlıyor musun şimdi derdin büyüklüğünü? ...Cahilsin; okur, öğrenirsin. Gerisin; ilerlersin. Adam yok; yetiştirirsin, günün birinde meydana çıkıverir. Paran yok; kazanırsın. Her şeyin bir çaresi vardır. Fakat insan bozuldu mu, bunun çaresi yoktur. Sen cilt yapıyorsun; şiraze (kitap sayfalarını birleştiren ince şerit;nizam) nedir bilirsin. Bizde insanoğlu şirazesiz kalmış. Hayat onun için ahenksiz, birbirini tutmayan, günün hayatına cevap vermeyen bir yığın ölü kıymetler tarafından idare ediliyor...Yığınlarca tezat içinde yaşıyoruz. Bütün bir şark dünyası ıstırap içinde. Muttasıl gömlek değiştiriyor, Hind'i, Çin'i, Efgan'ı, Arab'ı, Türk'ü hep soyunuyoruz; soyundukça üstümüzden attığımız şeylerin alelade ekler olduğunu, daha derinden birtakım şeyler çıkarıp atmak lazım geldiğini görüyoruz. O zaman korkuyoruz; olduğumuz yerde imdat arar gibi sağa sola bakıyoruz. Sonra tekrar başlıyoruz, gene tabaka tabaka soyunuyoruz, tırnaklarımızla derimizi yüzer gibi bir şeyler daha atıyoruz...Fakat olmuyor. Bize lazım olan, gömlek değiştirmek değil, içten değişmektir...Bütün cemiyet hayatı zihniyet etrafında döner. İnsanı yenibaştan, yeni esaslarla kurmamız lazım; yeni kıymetlerle yaşayan bir insan. Halbuki bu imkansız."

individuals by every civilization and passed over from father to son as a social instinct. It was very hard to change it. Whereas if it stayed as it were, it would come across us again in every step by taking thousands of figures. That's why Sabri Hoca was in flopping in the despair caused by these considerations. (Tanpınar, 1988, p. 98)²

Despite the fact that Ottoman civilization is disintegrated, its values which are described as “zihniyet” (mentality) are what prevent the total transformation of the Ottoman individuals into westernized subjects for Tanpınar. Moreover this mentality is culturally inherited by the coming generations and it is never lost at all although the Ottoman civilization is already destabilized. Since he is aware of the fact that the Ottoman civilization together with its destabilized mentality will continue to be embodied in the next generations, Sabri Hoca as a Young Turk who has the political desire to westernize and modernize the Ottoman people feels hopeless. It cannot be argued that this feeling of despair was shared by the Young Turks in reality. Young Turks were inspired with the promises of modernity that progress and modernization were inevitably achieved. However Tanpınar reflects his own comprehension of the Westernization project which was deployed by the Young Turks in the words of Sabri Hoca and in this way the author provides a criticism of the revolutionary and elitist project of modernization of the Young Turks. Since this project was also appropriated by the Republican elites it seems possible to say that Tanpınar doubts about the success of the revolutionary and elitist project of the Republican regime in changing the existing civilization and its identity. What is doubted about is the complete transformation of the Oriental/Ottoman subject into a western one. This point will be further elaborated in the analysis of the final scene of *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*.

Sahnenin Dışındakiler

In his novel *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*, Tanpınar narrates the story of a group of people living in a “mahalle” (neighborhood) of Istanbul prior to and during the occupation of Istanbul in 1920. The residents of this neighborhood and the people they know are described to be in a situation of incompleteness and lack of identity. Sabiha who is the main character of

² This quotation is translated from the original text by the author. The original quotation is as such: “Hakikatte bir türlü atlayamadığı bir eşğin üstünde kararsız ve biçare, ne geriye, ne ileriye kımıldamadan kalmıştı... Cemiyetin kaderini yapan her türlü geçici şartlar aşılabilir, çok derinde, aşılması imkansız bir duvar vardı. Bu her medeniyetin fertlere miras gibi aşıladığı, içtimai bir insiyak halinde babadan oğula süregelen zihniyetti. Onu değiştirmek çok güçtü. Halbuki o olduğu gibi kaldıkça her adımda binbir şekle bürünerek gene karşımıza çıkacaktı. İşte Sabri Hoca, bu düşüncelerin verdiği ümitsizlik içinde çırpınıyordu.”

the novel questions this psychological situation of her and the people around her even in her early childhood. Tanpınar provides his analyses of these people of Istanbul through Sabiha.

The feeling of incompleteness or lack which is inherent in the residents of Istanbul is derived from the catastrophic loss of the Ottoman civilization according to Tanpınar. As it is also discussed in *Mahur Beste*, former integrity of the individual is lost by the dissolution of the Ottoman civilization. In this respect the identity of the individual is disintegrated as a result of dissolution of the civilization which had provided the values and thus integrity to the individuals of that society. Sabiha is conscious of herself and the incompleteness of her identity. In the novel she also represents the people of the Ottoman society in the wake of the dissolution of the Ottoman civilization.

Tanpınar creates the feeling of loss of a civilization in the reader as he describes the chaos and catastrophe lived in the capital city of Istanbul under occupation of Allied forces and also of various immigrants coming from foreign countries. The rise of social degeneration goes hand in hand with the political turmoil of the empire. Istanbul became a city of entertainment by the enormous number of people coming from a variety of countries into the city and a new bourgeois class was engendered by war-profiteering while many upper class people were devastated economically by the war conditions and lost their social status.

Throughout the novel Sabiha is looking for ways to solve this psychological impasse within which she is entrapped. She wants to meet every new person moving to or visiting the neighborhood in order to find an answer to her questions: “Why are we like this? Why do we have this problem of disintegrity? And who are we?” Sabiha is in search for the reasons of the loss of integrity which is shared by all the people around her but she wants to have an integrated, complete identity which differs from that fragmented one of the people around her. She always states her desire to leave the neighborhood and to find herself, her identity. She says that despite the fact that she loves them, she wants to become herself, that is to say to have a uniform and unique identity of hers. “Do you think I do not love these people? I also love them as you do, but I want to be myself, to be something...” (Tanpınar, 1990, p. 71)³ However immediately after that statement, she argues that it is impossible for her to leave that place and fulfill her desire to attain that identity since she was very much the same with the people of that neighborhood. “I cannot be anything. We look like each other so much...One

³ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: “Ben bu insanları sevmiyorum mu sanıyorsun? Ben de senin kadar seviyorum, ama kendim olmak istiyorum, bir şey olmak...”

cannot easily get rid of these streets. They are our destiny. We are going to look like each other.” (Tanpınar, 1990, p. 71)⁴

Tanpınar refers to the idea that he has also mentioned in *Mahur Beste* in these sentences of Sabiha. The resident of the neighborhood here signifies the individual who is a part of the Ottoman civilization and society. The individual will never be able get out of his identity which is essentially established by this Ottoman civilization. He/she can never desert the streets of this neighborhood which means that the individual of this Ottoman/Oriental civilization can never totally change his identity.

Sabiha also represents the Ottoman civilization in the novel and this civilization is described as such: “flopping in its own contradictions, never tasted the thing called rest one in a lifetime.” (Tanpınar, 1990, p. 82)⁵ Kudret Bey who adores the West and its civilization is desperately in love with Sabiha but nevertheless he accepts to meet a European woman who is suggested to be his wife by a matchmaker. Kudret Bey thinks that as men they are incomplete because of the lack of women who would direct them, give order into their lives. In this respect, woman is a metaphor of the civilization which provides order and stability for the individuals and their identities. As Kudret Bey puts it, “Our greatest deficit is woman, did you get it my dear, woman, the torch that illuminates the life road to man, the divine mate! Our sole mate, the creature that holds our hand in the austere roads of the ideal, that will make us walk effortlessly!” (Tanpınar, 1990, p. 87).⁶ However contemporary men of Ottoman society are bereft of women as such according to him: “Our predecessors were not like this. Our mothers, grandmothers, their mothers, grandmothers were the helpers of men. We are alone now. All alone!” (Tanpınar, 1990, p. 88).⁷

Tanpınar speaks through Kudret Bey and states that Ottoman civilization in the past was able to provide the values to stabilize the identities of the individuals but the dissolution of this civilization resulted in the fragmentation and instability of identity. Hence although Kudret Bey is desperately in love with Sabiha, that is to say the Ottoman civilization, he does

⁴ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: “Hiç bir şey olamam. O kadar hepimiz birbirimize benziyoruz ki... Bu sokaklardan insan kolay kolay kurtulmaz. Onlar bizim kaderimiz... Hepimiz birbirimize benzeyeceğiz.”

⁵ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: “kendi tezdaları içinde çırpınan, sükun denen şeyi ömründe bir kere olsun tatmamış.”

⁶ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: “En büyük eksiğimiz kadındır, anladın mı azizim, kadın, hayat yolunu erkek için aydınlatan meşale, ilahi yardımcımız! Tek yardımcımız, idealin çetin yollarında ellerimizden tutacak, bizi zahmetsizce yolumuzda yürütecek mahluk!”

⁷ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: “Eskiler böyle değildi. Annelerimiz, büyükannelerimiz, onların anneleri, büyükanneleri erkeğin yardımcısıydılar. Biz yalnızız şimdi. Yapayalnız!”

not want to marry her because of the fact that he knows that Sabiha is full of inconsistencies, instabilities from which he escapes.

Kudret Bey praises the European woman and Europe before he meets her with these words: “Europe, Cemal Bey, Europe is home. It is orderliness, comfort. You will see how much everything will change. It is not easy, this is the European woman! A European woman at home” (Tanpınar, 1990, p. 84).⁸ Kudret Bey who is the representative of those seeking solutions for the identity problem of the Ottoman society in modernization and indeed in westernization associates Europe with “home” meaning that European civilization is considered to solve this instability and fragmentation found in the identities of Ottoman people. Similar to Kudret Bey who seeks to find order and peace in his life by marrying the European woman, the westernists believe that they will be able to solve the question of identity with the endorsement of the values of European civilization.

However the meeting of Kudret Bey with the European woman turns out to be a severe disappointment. Kudret Bey becomes shocked as he meets a German governess (mürebbiye) instead of an Italian or French woman who is the embodiment of all the Enlightenment values according to him. It can be argued that Tanpınar pictures here the situation of westernists who faced with an impasse as they were trying to adopt the European civilization. The westernists had the desire to become westernized subjects by endorsing the Enlightenment values of the European civilization. However in the end they found themselves to be associated with another kind of European civilization which was constituted by the German authoritarianism. All in all Kudret Bey flirts with this woman because of his loneliness although he does not really like her.

Cemal who is the narrator of the novel and childhood friend of Sabiha has always been in love with her. Cemal moves to Anatolia with his family and leaves Sabiha because of the fact that Sabiha tells him that she would never be with him but marry another man. Six years later in 1920 he returns back to find her and looks for her everywhere but he cannot find her. Although he learns that she has got married, he continues to look for her. Cemal’s quest for Sabiha is one of the central themes of the novel. He becomes more and more alienated to himself, the people around him and the National Liberation War that takes place in Anatolia.

⁸ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: “Avrupa, Cemal Bey, Avrupa evdir. İntizamdır, rahattır. Göreceksin her şey ne kadar değişecek. Kolay değil, Avrupa’lı kadın bu! Evin içinde Avrupa’lı kadın bir sihirbaz değneğine benzer; her şey değişir ve birden güzelleşir!”

He does not even give importance to the nationalist struggle that is organized by his close friends in Istanbul. All that matters for him is finding Sabiha but the people around him in the circle of the nationalist struggle do not leave him alone so he can look for her or think for her. Hence his feeling of alienation increases each day as he fails to find Sabiha. The intense feelings of alienation towards himself and the loss of Sabiha makes Cemal feel the never ending desire to escape and even contemplating suicide.

This feeling of lack and loss that is inherent in Cemal throughout the novel symbolizes the feeling of incompleteness and instability shared by the Ottoman citizens in the wake of the disintegration of the Ottoman civilization. Cemal's never ending quest for Sabiha represents the identity crisis Ottoman people experience. Although Sabiha is married and thus lost forever to him, Cemal looks for her. This also signifies the unending desire for the lost integrity of the self despite the fact that he knows that recovery of integrity is impossible.

The novel ends with the scene in which Sabiha becomes an actress in theatre. A few times in various parts of the novel she asks Cemal these questions: "How do actors pretend to be someone else? Is it possible to leave yourself and become totally someone else in theatric performances? It is meaningful to analyze the final part of the novel with Tanpınar's thoughts given in one of the conversations in *Mahur Beste*. In a conversation with Sabri Hoca and İsmail Molla, we hear the voice of Tanpınar in the words of İsmail Molla. Tanpınar or İsmail Molla states as such:

The things that we glorify as east, muslim and this and that are forms which we create with our lives...European invention also enters into it but its view stands as our own...The ramadan also holds our imprint at Şehzadebaşı...Religion, belief, all take forms and changes in this life. As I listened to the eulogies being sung in the minarets, I even considered that the prophet was different from ours. Think of for once, the Muhammed in Yunus or Şeyh Galip...Our spirituality, gloriousness belong to us. In order to call the prophet as 'my master' and adress him with this wording, it is required to be born as a Turkish speaker, and then to be born into our Turkish language, to be accustomed to our furnishings and morality...You say the east is dead. It sounds like a certain Ahmet agha is dead. It is my two hands, two feet. Besides I love it. I do not want it to be dead, but let it die; someone will come to its place. Anyway what is east? A word...Let the words die. The thing that needs to live indeed does not die. That is our life, it changes. It creates as it changes. (Tanpınar, 1988, pp. 109-111)⁹

⁹ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: "Şark, müslümanlık, şu bu diye tebcil ettiğimiz şeyler, bu toprakta kendi hayatımızla yarattığımız şekillerdir...İçine Frenk icadı da girer fakat manzarası bizim kalır... ramazanda, Şehzadebaşı'nda bizim damgamızı taşır...Din, akide, hepsi bu hayatta şekil alıyor, değişiyor. Arabistan'da ramazan geceleri minarelerde söylenen naatları dinlerken Peygamber'in bile bizimkinden ayrı

Tanpınar illustrates his understanding of civilization as performances of the people (halk). According to him performances of the people change the nature of even the most alien or foreign cultural traditions and make them authentic and original pieces of the civilization/culture of the society. In this respect the performances of different characters on the stage by Sabiha will always reflect her identity. Sabiha or the Ottoman people will always have to imitate different identities in order to end the instability and incompleteness of their identities which is a result of the dissolution of the Ottoman civilization. Hence the gap of identity is constantly tried to be fulfilled with the pretensions, imitations of “others.” Neither the other characters in the novel nor Sabiha are able to reach the fully integrated and unique identity of themselves. However whatever they imitate or pretend to be will always be marked and transformed by their previous identities/mentalities which are left from the Ottoman civilization.

Differences of Tanpınar and Republican Authors/Elites

After the National Liberation War and establishment of the Republican regime by 1927, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk started to spend all his energy to the “cultural revolution.” Atatürk and the Republican elites believed that the Republican revolution would always face with the threat of abolishment if its modern and democratic values were not inculcated by the masses. Therefore the Republican revolution can be considered as a cultural revolution which was targeted defending the newly established Republican regime through the transformation of the existing values, traditions and cultural institutions with their political organizations prevalent among the people.

Cultural Revolution which commenced by the mid 1920s was based on three fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic, that is to say *nationalism*, *secularism* and *populism*. Nationalism aimed at constitution of a culturally homogeneous body of citizens. These modern citizens who were endowed with national consciousness were expected to participate in democratic regime as in European democracies. Cultural revolution’s main objective was to establish modern citizen with a national identity and to abolish the mentality

olduğunu sandım. Düşün bir kere, Yunus’ta yahut Şeyh Galip’teki Muhammed’i...Bizim ruhaniyetimiz, nuraniyetimiz bize aittir. Peygambere böyle “efendim” diye ve bu tefrişatle hitap edebilmek için evvela Türkçe konuşur doğmak, ve sonra bizim Türkçemizin içinde doğmak, bizim teşrifat ve adabımızdan geçmek lazımdır... Şark öldü, diyorsun. Ahmet Ağa öldü gibi bir şey bu. O benim iki elim, iki ayağımdır. Sonra severim de. İstemem ama, varsın ölsün; yerine elbet biri gelir. Zaten Şark nedir? Bir kelime...Kelimeler varsın, ölsün. Asıl yaşaması lazım gelen ölmez. O bizim hayatımızdır, o değişir. Değiştikçe de yaratır.

of subjects of empire prevailing in the people of the country. The modern citizen who was educated in western style of education system would also become critical of religious dogmas. Secularism was characteristic element of the cultural revolution. For the Republican elites, the fundamental threat against the newly established Republic and its socio-cultural institutions was religious dogmatism. Hence rational individuals with critical thinking were to be achieved with the cultural revolution. The State's control over religion was therefore a part of this principle of secularism in Turkey. Populism was a means of securing social unity. According to populism, Turkish society was to be composed not of classes but of individuals assembled in occupational groups dependent of each other. Hence the objective of the Republican cultural revolution was to create a united society without classes and privileges. The People's Party was considered to be "the synthesis of the people", the sole representative of all these groups, uniting link among them. All in all the ultimate purpose of the reforms was the modernization of society by establishing rational, secular, modern citizens with national consciousness.

Tanpınar significantly differs from the Republican elites and authors in terms of the ideas on the adoption of a western civilization and identity. For him despite revolutionary reforms of the Republican regime, Ottoman subjects would never attain to have a fully western identity. All the performances of western identity by the people would always end up in the different reproductions of the Ottoman/Oriental identity.

This does not mean that Tanpınar considers that the revolutions and political changes are totally worthless and ineffective. Indeed he appreciates any change in the society which comes as a result of an evolutionary process. Tanpınar is just critical of the belief shared by many Republican authors and elites that the revolutions held by the elite would immediately transform the society and modernize its identity. This is where Tanpınar differs from the Republican elites and authors. In *Mahur Beste* Tanpınar states this point:

You want the transformation that is brought by a social struggle. That is not something that happens whenever you want...Moreover the social enlightenment which is brought by this transformation does what you want. The concept of right in society changes, the struggle starts. However this is something to happen in time, step by step. (Tanpınar, 1988, p. 113)¹⁰

¹⁰ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: "Sen, içtimai bir mücadelenin getireceği değişikliği istiyorsun. Bu, istediğin zaman olacak şey değildir. Ona varabilmek için aradan bir sürü perdenin, engelin kalkması lazım...Sonra bu değişimin getireceği halk tenevvürü senin istediğini yapar. Halktaki hak fikri değişir, mücadele başlar. Fakat bu zamanla, merhalelerle olacak şeydir."

However in one of his short stories, *Teslim* Tanpınar questions the success of the revolutions for modernization that took place since the II. Constitutional Regime or Young Turk period and states that revolutions did not appeal to the people much: “Emin said to himself: ‘Ayten...Aysel...’ he repeted. All these revolutions, burdens, hopes served in the last instance for changing a few new male and female names. Similar to what happened in the Constitutional period...” (Tanpınar, 1988, p. 212) ¹¹

In addition Tanpınar seems to share the idea with most of the Republican elites and authors that the National Liberation War is a zero-point or the new beginning point in the history of the people. Indeed in the description of Ankara in his book, *Beş Şehir* (1945), it is clear that he respects Mustafa Kemal and praises the National Liberation War. However in his definition of the historical sites of Ankara he gives us the feeling that as if there is not much left from the past to Ankara but all that fulfills the city is the epic time of the National Liberation War and the presence of the Turkish hero, Atatürk.

As we climb up to here, which civilizations and ages we go back to? But no, Ankara does not let this kind of a historical dream. Here only a single incident, a single time period, a single man dominates the imagination. This city has given itself to him so much that it becomes his own. The Hittite lion, Roman column, the stone left from Bizantine’s basilica, the war between Timurlenk and Yıldırım, all take you in the end to the healing pains and hard days of the twenty years before and make you face with the great issues that are the natural results of it. This is so much like this that, it can be said that, Ankara, has gone through the National liberation War years by lighting its whole past. (Tanpınar, 1998, p. 205) ¹²

Despite the fact that Tanpınar says that Ankara or the Republican regime has burned its entire history, he does not believe that the regime would achieve that. Since for Tanpınar

¹¹ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: ‘Emin içinden: “Ayten... Aysel...” diye tekrarlardı. Bütün bu inkılaplar, zahmetler, ümitler, sonunda birkaç yeni erkek veya kadın isminin değişmesine yaramıştı. Tıpkı Meşrutiyet senelerinde olduğu gibi...’

¹² The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: “Buraya çıkarken gördüklerimizle hangi medeniyetlere, hangi çağlara gitmeyiz? Fakat hayır, Ankara bu cinsten tarihi bir hülyaya kolay kolay imkan vermiyor. Burada tek bir vak’a, tek bir zaman, tek bir adam muhayyileye hükmediyor. Bu şehir kendisini o kadar ona vermiş ve onun olmuş. Eti arslanı, Roma sütunu, Bizans bazilikasından kalma taş, Timurlenk ve Yıldırım muharebesi, hepsi sizi dönüp dolaşıp yirmi yıl evvelin çetin günlerine ve şifalı ağrılarına götürüyor, onun tabii neticesi olan büyük meselelerle karşılaştırıyor. Bu o kadar böyle ki, Ankara, istiklal mücadelesi yıllarından bütün mazesini yakarak çıkmış denebilir.”

the past, traditions and the mentality of the previous civilizations do continue in our time, we can argue that what he means by the success of the Republican regime is the partial ability to make one forget the past by the epic of the National Liberation War only in the city of Ankara which is so much associated with the liberation and the Republican regime. Indeed in general burning of the past is only fiction according to Tanpınar:

And we were lighting. We were lighting incessantly all the accumulation of the forty five years in orderly fashion...Probably we both believed that fire would remove everything, clear the life and renew it...At least I got rid of a tale. Fire does not remove anything. It does not clean anything. It just destroys the material. (Tanpınar, 1990, p. 304)¹³

For Tanpınar although the material part of the Ottoman civilization was burned in the fire of the National Liberation War -that is to say the political and economic institutions of the Ottoman Empire were abolished- its civilization would continue in people's mentalities.

In contrast to most of the intellectuals in the early Republican period Tanpınar does not propose a coherent project or idea as an answer to the question of "who are we?" The ideas of past, tradition and civilization are ambivalent in his narrativization of them and the reader cannot find a concrete solution to the question of identity in his novels, *Huzur*, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* and *Mahur Beste*. Indeed it seems that Tanpınar is very much aware of the fact that full-identification or totality of identity is impossible and identity is just a lack by its nature.

Moreover it seems that the reason why Tanpınar does not answer the questions of identity and the ways to fulfill this gap is that he knows "past is a lost country", that is to say the retrieval of the Ottoman civilization and its culture is impossible. What is left to the characters in his novels and short stories is the eternal and undefeated feeling of loss and lack. The material remnants of this civilization are depicted and praised in Tanpınar's depictions of the city of Istanbul and of the classical Turkish music especially in his books *Beş Şehir* and *Huzur* respectively. However it is continuously acknowledged that the mental or cultural leftovers or ruins of the Ottoman civilization can not help the people to build an integrated and full identity.

¹³ The translation is mine. The original quotation is as such: "Ve yakıyorduk. Durmadan kırk beş senenin biriktirdiği her şeyi muntazam hareketlerle yakıyorduk...Galiba ikimiz de ateşin her şeyi ortadan kaldıracağına, hayatı temizleyeceğine, yenileştireceğine inanıyorduk... Hiç olmazsa bir masaldan kurtuldum. Ateş hiç bir şeyi ortadan kaldırmıyor. Hiç bir şeyi temizlemiyor. Sadece maddeyi yok ediyor."

Tanpınar and Poststructuralist Thinkers

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's conceptualization of identity moves beyond his time and catches the intellectual expertise of the contemporary poststructuralist thinkers. In this respect he was very ahead of the authors or intellectuals writing on nation and its identity in his time in Turkey. In 1990s the truthfulness of Tanpınar's analyses was also acknowledged by many intellectuals and modernist authors in Turkey such as the famous Turkish author and the Nobel prize winner, Orhan Pamuk. Pamuk has many times stated in his interviews that he was inspired most from Tanpınar among all the Turkish authors.

A closer look into the poststructuralist theories would help us to better understand the issue of identity and thus appreciate Tanpınar's works. Poststructuralist theories of discourse invite us to think of identity as a sign or process of signification which is subject to constant transformation. Laclau, Mouffe, Derrida, Hall and Bhabha can be named among the leading contemporary poststructuralist thinkers who have illustrated in their works the unstable, shifting and heterogeneous nature of identity in general and national identity in particular.

Poststructuralist thinkers and especially discourse theorists assert that there is no definition of society which reveals the essence of the society and its identity. Discourse theorists indicate the discursive character of any identity and argue that there is no identity formed outside discourse. This basic assumption leads them to argue for the primary lack/gap that is inherent in the discursive representation and hence constitution of any identity such as that of society and the subject. For them there is no essential meaning or identity nor definition of the subject and society before their discursive representation. In this respect no representation of the society is able to represent the society in full terms. Moreover any particular signifier of identity which tries to represent the society fully always leaves out various identities of the society as unrepresented. Therefore full representation of the society as a totality in the discursive field is never possible due to the primary lack – in the representation and thus constitution – of the society.

Due to the failure in total representation of society, there is no closure of meaning in the definition of society. As any signifier of the society fails to represent the society in full terms, the failure in representation of the “unrepresented” identities of society triggers new signifiers/definitions of the society as a totality. Therefore the failure in the representation of this originary lack/gap provides at the same time particular means/signifiers to represent the society as a totality. The discourse theorists invite us to consider any collectivity as an

impossible ideal of closure and fullness which is required for the organization and constitution of that collectivity. As Laclau (Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000, p.8) puts it,

Although the fullness and universality of society is unachievable, its need does not disappear: it will always show itself through the presence of its absence. In other words, even if the full closure of the social is not realisable in any actual society, the idea of closure and fullness still functions as an (impossible) ideal. Societies are thus organised and centred on the basis of such (impossible) ideals.

Although Tanpınar's novels can be depicted as the search for an answer to the uneasy ontological question of "who am I?," this question of the individual's identity is formulated by Tanpınar as the question of "who are we?" Similar to the poststructuralist analysis of identity, for Tanpınar the identity of the individual is very much related to the identity of the society. As it is stated for many times in the discussions above, Tanpınar acknowledges that the former integrity of the Ottoman individual is lost by the dissolution of the Ottoman civilization and this resulted in the feeling of lack and loss in the individual which is transferred to the next generations as social inheritance.

The Republican authors and elites believed that this lack or gap in identity would be fulfilled with the westernist ideology of nationalism. In contrast Tanpınar knows that the loss of a civilization opens up such a wide gap in a nation's identity that the fulfillment of this gap by any ideology is an illusion.

According to his argumentation on identity, Tanpınar refuses the Republican thinker's idea that Ottoman civilization is gone forever by the Republican reforms and that the people of Turkey can be totally transformed into western subjects. This reminds us the relationship between the concepts of pedagogical and performative in Bhabha's theory of culture and identity (1990).

In his poststructuralist account of nation and national identity, Homi Bhabha (1990) suggests to us to think of nation and national identity as signs or processes of signification which are open to contestation and re-definition by the members of local communities whose cultural identities are not represented by the signs of nation and national identity given by the pedagogical narratives of the discourse of nationalism. For Bhabha, the pedagogical narratives are the stories provided by the nationalist discourse about the national history, myths, memories and common ancestry which have the function of inculcating the national

identity into the body of citizens. Bhabha argues that the pedagogical narratives of the nationalist discourse are repeated by the citizens as they try to identify with the national identity. However the citizens never repeat or narrate the pedagogical story exactly as its original. The repetitions of the pedagogical narratives are never exactly similar to the original story because of the fact that they are copies of the original stories but not the originals themselves. There is always a difference included in the copy. Bhabha calls the different renarrations of the pedagogical narratives by the citizens as “performative narratives” or “performance” (1990). Similar to Homi Bhabha, Tanpınar incessantly emphasizes in his literary works that the Republican and nationalist pedagogy is always transcended and transformed by the performances of the people in their everyday lives.

All in all, the similarity between the conceptualizations of Tanpınar and poststructuralist thinkers is based on their employment of the conceptual framework derived from structuralist psychoanalysis. They have all studied well and employed theories of Freud and his disciples. The poststructuralist concepts of lack, loss, desire, escape, incompleteness, and fulfillment are all the derivatives of the Freudian psychoanalysis.

In conclusion, closer analysis of the literary works of the great Turkish author Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar provides us invaluable tools to rethink on the nature of individual identity in general and the Turkish national identity in particular. Tanpınar stands as an intellectual beyond time as he reveals the unstable nature of identity and as an impressive author by making the readers sense the characters’ feelings of disintegrity and incompleteness with his mastery on Turkish prose. As Orhan Pamuk mentions, the problematic nature of Turkish national identity still haunts Turkish subjects after many decades of the Turkish Cultural Revolution. In this respect Tanpınar offers contemporary Turkish society a deeper apprehension of its identity and the conditions of its possibility, that is to say the Turkish modernization process. All in all what makes him a great author beyond time is his ingenuity of uniting intellectual expertise with literary mastery.

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