

## POLITICAL ERAS AND VARLIK

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For several reasons, it is not easy to examine and analyse a periodical, only ten years younger than the Turkish republic, through the political currents we have lived through.

First of all, reviewing, scanning, and making selections out of a magazine which has published its 1210<sup>th</sup> issue and then evaluating them with a critical eye involves temporal and physical difficulties. Resorting to libraries with severely limited working conditions aggravates the arduous task.

Secondly, despite occasionally using qualifiers like "nationalist-patriotic", despite trying to push artistic concerns to the background and to fill the resulting gap with articles on society and politics, or at least culture, *Varlık* has always been a journal of "culture and arts", and particularly of literature.

Its publisher *Yaşar Nabi Nayır* has preserved, accentuated and reinforced this attribute of the magazine.

As such, the significance of *Varlık* in Turkish cultural life does not stem from its "struggles" in the social and political plane. *Varlık's* strength comes from the new paths it has broken in the domain of literature and the resources it has provided to that domain.

On the other hand, *Varlık* cannot be said to have remained deaf and blind to developments in the social and political arenas. It has always viewed itself in the midst of things, perhaps somewhat due to the upbringing of its publisher. It has not refrained from criticising and discussing important events.

This might be the reason that *Varlık*, although not directly attempting to influence society and politics like the journal *Yön*, and

although it has not been a source of reference for sociological studies, it has always been evaluated and judged in “political” terms.

This tendency manifests itself in literature.

As it is known, *Varlık* is the periodical that initiated the literary school dubbed as the “*I. Yeni* (First New)” movement. However, the *First New* has not been considered a purely literary movement in some circles. Even though there is no doubt about its character, in the opinion of critics who go down to the circumstances and reasons that gave birth to this movement, *Varlık* has been the flag-bearer of the “official ideology”, and the *I. New* movement the artistic reflection of the same ideology. From this point of view *I. New* is also considered a literary movement that is developed, or at least nurtured by the dictatorial regime of İsmet İnönü (the second president of the Republic after Kemal Atatürk), the oppressive one party-one leader rule, to block social-realistic endeavours in the arts.

Socialists defending this opinion were later joined by others from various ideologies, and *Varlık* gradually became known and defined as “intertwined with the official ideology”.

One matter needs urgent explanation: “Official ideology” does not mean that *Varlık* has endorsed and/or has been supported by whatever ideology may have come to power in the country at a given time. No one has even come near to thinking that *Varlık* has ever changed its political stance according to prevailing currents in time and has fluctuated from one position to another. Therefore, the claim that *Varlık* had sided with the “official ideology” of a certain period neither elevates nor denigrates the publication.

In this assertion, “official ideology” means “Kemalist ideology”, and rightly so, because *Yaşar Nabi Nayır* has openly declared that he endorsed this political view everywhere and at every opportunity. He has supported “Kemalism” (i.e. the way of political thinking based on the basic principles set forth by Atatürk) without changing, or maybe feeling the need to change, the elements that comprise his view, and his general outlook.

From this perspective, *Yaşar Nabi Nayır* was a supporter of the CHP [Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-Republican People’s Party] and İnönü, the party’s second chairman after Atatürk.

Merely being a Kemalist or endorsing Atatürk’s ideas would not justify any condemnation; no one has ever attempted this anyway. However, the fact that Kemalism was gradually converted to İnönü-ism (who was at the time appointed by his party as the “Eternal Chief”), especially between 1938 (the year Atatürk died and İnönü was elected president) and 1950 (the year the CHP for the first time lost the elections to the opposition—the Democratic Party-DP), and the fact that this period was tainted with too much political oppression has incited indirect criticism against people who were sympathetic to the political ideas and practice of Atatürk and İnönü.

Analysing *Varlık* across political eras, this was my first point of consideration. To what extent has *Varlık*, especially with respect to the opinions it has expressed through its publisher (and editor in chief) *Yaşar Nabi Nayır*, has given credence to such claims?

To tell the truth, I found that *Varlık*’s attitude in this respect much more progressive than I expected.

*Yaşar Nabi* has not refrained from going overboard in defending the opinions and views that he was attached to, doubtlessly sincere and without any ulterior motives. With respect to the CHP government and the “chiefdom” of İnönü, he has even said that a multiparty democracy was not needed, and that the country would stumble in a democratic environment.

At a certain point in time, especially in the chaos of war, such opinions could have been expressed. However, *Yaşar Nabi* has stood by his views until the end. He seems to have accepted the change in power and the transition to democracy because he found it “inevitable”; his mind may have accepted it, but his heart may never have come to terms with it.

The attitude of the DP [Democratic Party] who gradually succumbed to corruption during its 10 year long government and the

deviant steps they took at the outset must have played a part in this. After having read all his articles, I would not hesitate to call Yaşar Nabi a moralist. I do not have the slightest doubt about his patriotism—something rarely remembered today, or if remembered, regarded as a needless concept—his nationalism, revolutionary attitude and personal integrity. It would have been natural for such a person to strongly oppose the abuse of political power in the hands of the governing party, and that is exactly what has happened.

Another issue that draws my attention in *Varlık* may very well become a separate subject to study: At least throughout Yaşar Nabi's life-time, which covers almost half a century of this journal's history, the issues discussed and the facts analysed have more-or-less remained the same. Concepts, contents, opinions were identical.

Being well aware that I am on dangerous ground, and keeping the person of Yaşar Nabi out of this, there is something I would like to point out: There is not much difference between his opinions and counterarguments as a Kemalist or even "Kemalist-idealist", and the language employed by those who were standard bearers of Kemalism and turned it into their ideological backbone (such as during the post September 12, 1980 military take-over period).

Both sides view and use Kemalism as a stagnant, stereotypical ideology, reduced to a few justifications for its existence. Efforts to take Kemalism a step forward, to redefine it with a contemporary content are sorely lacking; in fact, they never existed.

Yet, Yaşar Nabi's attitude on this issue is very much clearer: He has remained infinitely sensitive to even the smallest compromise with respect to, say, laicism, and has felt concern about the developments (maybe regressions) in this area. Moreover, he has never been afraid of speaking his mind openly.

Another thing I tried to do was to analyse some arguments about the *II. Yeni (Second New)* movement within the scope of *Varlık*. It is said that the *Second New* had emerged in another period of oppression, this time during the DP government. The movement's ex-

perimental nature and openness to formalism was associated with the inability of artists to express reality "directly". As such, this movement has occasionally been associated with *Varlık*, which had regressed and become introverted during DP administration. This was intriguing for me, as I studied the argumentation.

It is not without some surprise that I have found that none of the artists comprising the *Second New* movement have published any of their works which characterize this movement in *Varlık*. At the time, *Varlık* appears almost closed to these artists, apart from their early stages. Indeed, Yaşar Nabi has very remotely and superficially touched on the debates around this issue in a few articles he has written, and has declared that he found the "meaningful poem—meaningless poem" discussion meaningless.

Therefore, we can easily say that there is no overlapping between *Varlık* and the *Second New* movement.

Yet, there is another movement that *Varlık* has introduced to Turkish literature: Rural literature.

With an attitude that may be associated with his Kemalist sensitivities, Yaşar Nabi has fully supported the rural development and education "causes". He has called the establishment of Village Institutes as the "most important step of the revolution", and has embraced all village institute graduates. By opening up his magazine to them, he believed that he was fulfilling a revolutionary task.

I would like to point out one final interesting aspect of Yaşar Nabi: He has preferred to remain quiet with respect to what he himself has done.

The fact that poetry of the *First New* school have been published in this magazine since the late 1930s is indicative of a significant sensitivity, even in retrospect. However, Yaşar Nabi has never defended what he has done; he has not even discussed it. He has only said how much he loved Orhan Veli, Saif Faik, his friends Cahit Sıtkı and Ziya Osman in posthumous articles. He has mentioned their importance only in these kinds of texts. However, while these



men of letters were alive, he has never taken part in their discussions, or has attempted to write one line about how he was right in a given matter.

One final point: All this having been said, some might find it unjust to pass judgements about *Varlık* and Yaşar Nabi, especially from a political and social point of view. It might be considered wrong to judge a literary magazine in this respect.

This is impossible to agree with, because not only is *Varlık* at a point where it transcends itself in the context of sociology of art, but has also proven that it has had a social dimension during Yaşar Nabi's time.

What I want to do here is to show to what extent these two concepts complement each other, because one is an argument, the other a judgement.

Besides, it is impossible to isolate the journey of *Varlık* from that of the Republic.

### 1) The Republic, Kemalism and the Reforms

The first issue of *Varlık* (meaning: existence, presence) was published on 15 July 1933.

The first issue has a short article titled "Why is *Varlık* being published?", aiming to lay out the reasons for its existence where two of them stand out: *Varlık* will be an art magazine, but the motive for this bold move is apparent: "There is not a single true art magazine in the country." If the "Revolution is creating an existence out of nothing," the void in this area would have to be filled with another presence.

The reasons for the publication of *Varlık* do not end here: "After being entrusted with the sustenance of the Republic by its great founder, the Turkish youth will prove that a creative revolutionary generation also has a presence in the arts."<sup>1</sup>

In short, *Varlık* is a magazine for the arts, and conscious of its purpose. It does not say anything that overshoots this goal, and

does not presume destinations beyond its range. On the other hand, it associates its existence as an art magazine with the Turkish Republic, which at the time was celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It remains loyal to the principles and purposes of the "revolution", which it identifies itself with.

*Varlık* would preserve this attitude and predilection until the end.

What does *Varlık* make of these concepts, and what does it base them on?

Yaşar Nabi writes an editorial for the October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1933 issue of the magazine—special issue on the occasion of the spectacular 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Turkish Republic—where he explains his views: "in the last decade the Turkish people were in a struggle for civilisation, which makes the glory of all epic battles pale in comparison. This decade has seen the surge of a nation, said to be living in the stone age, to the forefront of civilised nations."<sup>2</sup>

As seen here, for Yaşar Nabi Nayır, the significance of the Republic lies in its success on the road to civilisation. For him the republican regime is intertwined with civilisation.

Repeatedly expressing his opinion on this subject whenever there is an occasion for it, he gradually comes to the point of identifying the concept of civilisation with Western civilisation.

In his opinion, the republic is a concept that directs us towards Western civilisation, thereby ensuring our salvation. He does not hold back his reaction to compromising the principle of reformism, one of the six "guiding principles" of the Republic (symbolized by the "six arrows" which is still the emblem of the CHP), and the commitment to the adoption of Western civilisation.

"No; not only must we remain committed to the path Atatürk discovered and laid out for us with his unequalled genius, but we must also—without going astray or losing faith—maintain our progress in the direction he pointed out to reach those goals he was not able to realise, though he had laid down the principles," he says,



expressing his discomfort with the debates over the principles of populism, etatism, reformism, and laicism, and says the following about these controversies which are still alive today: "While even the most fundamentally liberal countries are taking firm and comprehensive steps towards etatism after the war, we see that some of our intellectuals are trying to undermine etatism, claiming that the few erroneous steps taken at the beginning of etatist measures would provide enough justification for reverting from this path. *There are some who even want to sell state factories to capitalists at petty auctions. Setting up industrial enterprises under state ownership is being criticised like it was a deadly sin.*" [italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

Following his opinions about etatism, Nayır goes on to express his ideas about the other principles of the Republic: "Although there seems to be no overt attack against our principle of populism, those who would declare any move in favour of the masses as dangerous know how to go about their secret ways... We have not forgotten the outright mutiny of those who had their interests challenged by the Land Reform. We do not know what reasonable argument may be used to explain the dislike and disquiet towards the Village Institutes. We are not going to interpret reformism as something that requires an innovation in the affairs of the state and the nation every year. *It may be said that this principle means we shall not turn back on our way to progress* [italics mine]. This principle, again, regards getting stuck in an outmoded conservativeness as harmful, and has prevented objections to taking new steps forward whenever our national structure and state mechanism demands it."

Nayır reiterates that the summary of all these republican principles is "Westernism", and responds to an objection as follows: "To those who ask, 'There is no such thing as one Western ideology; which one are we going to adopt?' we can answer: 'None!' What we mean by West is a system of thought, a view of the world, and an approach to civilisation. Those who adopt this approach, the roots

of which lie in Ancient Greece, will be fully immune to any sort of imitation, let alone be involved in blind imitation themselves."<sup>3</sup>

With time, Nayır advances his ideas about Westernism. These advancements are not in leaps; they deepen inwards. Although the principles introduced by the Republic and adopted by him somewhat evolve in time, he never abandons them altogether. This applies with respect to the idea of Westernisation as well.

Nayır considers Westernisation in relation to "humanism" at first. He attempts to establish a disposition that was very popular in early republican times by coming to terms with it first.

This ideology, sometimes referred to as "neo-Hellenism", has been led by Yahya Kemal and to a greater extent by Yakup Kadri, and adopted as the "official" state ideology to a certain extent in the 40's. Also defined as humanism, this ideology was developed during Hasan Âli Yücel's office as the Minister of National Education. It was fortified by offering Greek and Latin courses in secondary schools and by the translation of Western classics into Turkish. It was surpassed in time.

By discussing a call made in the *Yücel* magazine, Nayır puts this opinion in his agenda. He posits this opinion, which may be considered "universalism" to a degree, as opposed to "localism". He takes folklore as the symbol of localism and explores which concept would be more conducive to 'quest' for the 'national spirit'. He says, "seeking the national spirit and prioritising folklore, the true property of the people, is highly needed," and adds that this will not suffice to produce a "modern" literature: "The old and primitive folk literature cannot be the foundation of, or an example for, our modern literature. I do not believe that wider coverage of studies pertaining to folklore in magazines will facilitate the contact of our people with literature."

Again, as the driving force of this development, Nayır points to the West: "We must know closely the mother that breastfed not only us, but also the foundation of modern culture. That mother is the

Greek and Latin heritage. There is no other path that will lead us to the target we seek." Yet, Nayır is realistic in this matter. He senses that palliative and hurried decisions will not resolve anything, and makes a recommendation: "The solution to this problem does not involve placing Latin and Greek courses on secondary school curricula, and such a measure will not help anything. Another method is translation, which is the most important."

In short, Nayır does not wish to analyse issues like populism or any other stance the Republic has assumed in cultural affairs without adopting a critical approach and making a realistic reasoning.

Although it may end up in opinions that we do not agree with, Nayır's approach is genuine.

As far as the public is concerned, Nayır is careful to stay away from populism. Moreover, he is always harsh towards those who adopt a pandering attitude towards the public to win them over.

He is very sensitive about religion.

According to him, Westernisation is only possible by liberation from the oppression of religion, and the thorough adoption and internalization of a secular mentality, as well as the application of secularism to the government structure.

He also wishes to avoid imitation when doing these. He recommends finding methods and approaches unique to us: "Once we adjust our way of thinking to the Western method, we will, first of all, stop being copycats. We will learn how to reason according to our own realities. If we are experiencing troubles today, it is because there are too many among us who imitate the West with an oriental mindset."<sup>5</sup>

So, what was to be done about this? "What we want is the adoption of the positive thinking system that began with Ancient Greece and is the norm across the entire Western world today. This means the adoption of a secular mindset that is beyond religious approaches. It also means libertarianism."

Though Nayır may sometimes take his sensitivity about this matter too far, that much of an excess by a person who has lived through a great revolution like the foundation of the Turkish Republic on the ruins of an empire should merit some understanding even when such sensitivity is incorporated into Nayır's judgement that "national enthusiasm should be kept alive". Nayır places special emphasis on the youth in this matter. He says that young people should protect themselves from all "alien ideologies", and that the family is just as important in this mission as national education. He looks up to the young generations as the greatest power behind Kemalism.<sup>6-7</sup>

In short, Nayır attempts to manifest his uncompromising attitude with respect to Kemalism and the principles of the Republic at every opportunity. Finding its essence in westernisation and modernisation, this approach is one great ideal that must be developed by the enlightened intellectuals of the society.

## 2) Democracy and Political Parties

Nayır has witnessed the establishment of the Turkish Republic. He knows well how this goal was achieved. Therefore, he feels openly disturbed when the principles of the Republic are questioned "at large". He believes that the Republic has been founded with methods unique to us. He frequently points out that the political structure of the Republic should not be judged in terms of the democratic attitudes and orientations of other nations. For him, the single party government of the CHP is correct. He does not view the authority of Atatürk as a dictatorship, but he frequently asserts—prior to 1950 as well as afterwards—that we need such an authority. He is pleased when İnönü is elected president after Atatürk's death, and attributes this to the confidence of the people in the authoritarian regime.

Nayır has written his article titled "Continuity As An Aspect of the Turkish Revolution"<sup>8</sup> after these occurrences. Many of the



opinions asserted in this article have changed over time. However, when his writing is read in its entirety, it is clear that he has remained true to their essence until the end.

Nayır begins with a definition of democracy: "What those who comment on the regime mean by democracy is, without a doubt, a multiparty parliamentary system. What we understand by democracy is government under a regime elected with the free will and the votes of the people, and headed by a chief relying on the full confidence of the public, with consideration of not a specific segment or class of society, but the true benefits and needs of the people in general, and with unwavering loyalty to the principles of the revolution, in an environment of peace and discipline—which is the absolute requirement for efficiency—provided by the governing authority."

Today, it is only natural for someone to find these opinions astonishing. However, they must be considered in terms of the circumstances prevailing at the time in which they were written. Needless to say, this will not justify the solutions that Nayır seemed to recommend, but facilitates the comprehension of these opinions.

It should be taken into account that these opinions were being voiced in an atmosphere of heavy oppression during the presidency of the "national chief" (İnönü). The most important reason Nayır and *Vartlık* were regarded as a person and as a journal sympathizing with the "official ideology" must have been such opinions and thoughts, and how they were advocated by the publisher of *Vartlık*.

Thus clarifies Nayır his opinions: "Total political freedom may be a desirable way of life for a society. However, it should not be forgotten that, in order for a nation to indulge itself in this luxurious ideal, the entire human race, of which that nation is but a small member, must be living under similarly ideal circumstances. Otherwise, this luxury will only cause lethargy, thus weakening the nation through endless disputes and controversies, and make it a target for the more greedy and ambitious."

There is no need to remind that these same opinions are being voiced by various political groups today. While such opinions may have been slightly more acceptable in the past, the practice of presenting them as loyalty to Kemalism and the state ideology must be surpassed today. It is also clear that they contradict the pluralism and Jacobinism of Kemalist thought, refuting, as they are, multiparty parliamentarianism, if not more: "Democracy as a multi-party regime requires peace and harmony throughout the world, and the universal application of the same political methods. Furthermore, a state that will indulge itself in the luxury of unlimited liberty must be a developed nation with enormous strength and wealth that will enable it to be self-sufficient, like the United States."<sup>8</sup> (For a current example of the same opinion, cf. Altan, Ahmet (1990): *Darbelerin Ekonomisi*, Afa Yay.)

Continuing to express these "striking" opinions, Nayır takes the achievements of the Republic as a measure: Since the Republic has managed to pull this country out of the Middle Ages and bring it closer to the modern West, why do we look for a new regime?

Moreover, Nayır reminds us that Atatürk was not a dictator: "The difference between the chief of state of a nation going through a revolution and a dictator is just as great as the difference between the concept of extreme democracy and our vision of democracy. *How can a chief who has won the support and trust of the entire nation be called a dictator?* [italics mine]"<sup>8</sup>

As evidence of his claim, Nayır cites an incident where Atatürk had *allowed to be asked* whether he was a dictator. (This example has been repeated in Turkish politics. To the crowds that chanted "We want freedom!", prime minister Adnan Menderes (DP; 1950-1960) responded: "Since you can say that, you *are* free!")

Yaşar Nabi elucidates further, and even questions the existence of parties. He says that the "present" social order renders them unnecessary, but before that, he claims that the Turkish political system in the late 30's is a democracy: "The current regime of Turkey

is completely democratic. *However, unlike other democracies, it does not have different parties. For a country where the entire nation is tightly united and in solidarity, a multi-party regime would only be a copycat. In a nation not divided by class distinction or conflict there would of course be no political parties* [italics mine]. In this regime, the highest political figure, the chief of state, is also the chief of the nation. He is the *holder of a natural authority* that stems from the full confidence and love of the people. This allows the concentration and centralisation of all powers needed to direct and administer the country, and prevents the dispersion of actions and energies required for the welfare and prosperity of the country, as well as the waste of time due to reservations, and allows for direction from a single center."<sup>8</sup>

Nayır goes further to say that the deputies of the people in the parliament are concerned only with their electorate; whereas, in the Turkish regime, members of parliament are representatives of the entire nation; and that is true populism.

In the end Yaşar Nabi ties the issue to the concept of the National Chief. He says that it was perfectly proper and fitting for İnönü to be elected president, and proclaimed the "eternal chief" of the party by the general assembly. He claims that it was the people who required this, out of necessity.

Meanwhile, Yaşar Nabi is also "sensitive" about liberties. "Freedom in our country is not and *could not have been* [italics mine] limitless." There are many ways of achieving this, but Nayır only mentions mass media: "If you do not want the radio and newspapers to become instruments of intervention in people's freedom, *you are required to limit freedoms* [italics mine]. It may seem a contradiction, but it is sheer reality: What is going to protect freedom is the very limitation imposed on it."

There is no need to remind that these are İnönü-ist opinions, and it is easy to realise that they are opinions brought forward for "legitimising" İnönü's one-man rule between 1938 and 1950.

Moreover, we can prove that these opinions do not coincide with Kemalism: Compared to Atatürk's vision of "problems caused by freedom of the press will again be resolved by freedom of the press", Nayır seems to be more royalist than the royalty itself.

In any case, I believe these opinions suffice to show Nayır's view of democracy, at least as manifested in his articles published in *Varlık* between 1938 and 1946. There is one thing I would like to add: Nothing in these statements makes it possible to defend them. They also breed a significant contradiction. As we have seen, Nayır starts from Ancient Greece and claims that he adopts the Western civilisation that has evolved from that point, while he rejects the installation of a pluralist parliamentary regime just because the circumstances of the country allegedly require so, and accentuates his preference for an authoritarian regime of "chiefdom". The West and a regime far from democracy should be difficult to imagine together.

It is unfortunately not possible to say that Nayır is genuine about democracy, particularly as far as Turkey is concerned. For him, the subsequent transition to multi-party democracy is not inevitable either. He does not view or present the implementation of this political system as something we ought to have done before, but as something we do because the world is headed "in that direction". At one point, he defines democracy as a "thing" we need to try because the circumstances force us to: "When democracy became *fashionable* [italics mine] throughout the world, *we made ourselves believe* [italics mine] in the necessity and importance of it, and adopted it heartily," he says, but continues complaining about democracy: "It did take too long for the opposition to demonstrate how they would act to implement the democracy they have been yearning for *with words that disclosed their idea of freedom* [italics mine]."<sup>9</sup> (...) Then, Nayır keeps referring to the "good old days": "The recent implementation of democracy in our country has been very discouraging,

*and made people yearn for the days of autocratic rule by visionary chiefs [italics mine]."*

Nayır feels the need to frequently remind readers that he is voicing these opinions to prevent the misapplication of democracy in the country. As one method of preventing parties from leading masses in the wrong direction through partisanship, he suggests intellectuals remain outside politics: "In countries like us where there is no democratic history or tradition, intellectuals must be very cautious and vigilant to ensure that parties do not become instruments of greed and malicious ambition. In such a country, the intellectuals should remain above the parties and monitor developments from the vantage point of national interests, and support this or that party to the extent that they serve the general well-being of the country, but never become loyal to any single party."

Nayır claims that a pluralist regime is "hazardous" because of "prevailing" circumstances. He is worried that parties other than CHP may, in their quest for votes, not uphold the principles of the Republic. He is worried about the fact that people may "wax eloquent" about republican principles: "Those who take advantage of the freedom of speech brought by the new wave of democracy acted to exploit, for their selfish interests, reactionary ideas they thought to be dormant among the masses."

Why is this so, and what needs to be done about these "unfortunate" developments?

Nayır makes a highly pragmatic diagnosis: Those over the age of 60 and even 70 are still in politics. They belong to pre-Republican generations and have not fully adopted the principles of the Republic. What's more, they lack a democratic "culture": "The reason for all these difficulties is the fact that those who dominate the political scene, whether in power or opposition, have spent their entire lives under semi-dictatorships [it is remarkable that Nayır now calls the political regime of Atatürk and İnönü "semi-dictatorships"], have not been brought up with a culture of democracy, and have not been

able to adapt to the ideas of freedom, despite benefiting from the fruits of the West (Nayır accuses others of a contradiction which I have pointed out for him earlier)."

The solution: Opening up more space for the youth in the political "arena": "Those who were born at the time when the Republic was founded are now twenty-five. We have a dynamic and dependable youth brought up with revolutionary principles in our schools for twenty-five years. When will the voice of this huge mass be heard in the rule of the country? When are we going to see them gain their rightful majority in party conventions, in the benches of the Parliament, and government seats?"<sup>12</sup>

These should not lead one to think that Nayır opposes the transition from a single-party era to a multiparty regime. On the contrary, Nayır makes various recommendations to ensure that this transition is handled smoothly and without turmoil. What he emphasizes most is a regulation of election laws.

During the single-party, one chief era of the CHP, elections were held by open vote and secret vote-counting. Elections were not under the supervision and guarantee of independent justice. What is more, justice could not have been considered independent at those times. Judges and public attorneys were "government clerks" appointed by the ministry, and they acted in accordance with party policy.

As a result, some claim that the 1946 elections actually had resulted in the triumph of DP, but CHP had managed to retain its power due to cheating at the ballot box. Subsequently, this outcome was to cause great dispute and distress.

The election law had been amended for the 1950 elections, President İnönü issuing a declaration that he would remain independent, and elections were held under judicial supervision.

During this phase, Nayır mentions in several articles that he wanted free elections. He even doesn't hesitate to condemn the

CHP for not taking the required steps due to the realization that they would lose the elections.<sup>13</sup>

### 3) Change of Power and Criticism of the New Government

The 1950 elections are held and CHP descends from power after reigning for 37 years.

The DP is in power now, and President İnönü has resigned from his office.

The new cabinet is formed by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. Celal Bayar (formerly prime minister under Atatürk during his final years) becomes President.

The country and nation are at the threshold of a new era. Everyone is curious to see what will happen.

It is virtually impossible to understand whether Nayır is happy or unhappy about these developments.

It is certain that he does not trust the new administration much. Although CHP may have had its wrongdoings and he may have pointed these out and criticised the party from time to time, he still believes that CHP should have remained in power.

For instance, he never mentions the state of the country, the economy and the social structure inherited by the new administration, whereas he immediately charges the new administration with a series of responsibilities and tasks, and titles his article, "We are waiting".<sup>14</sup>

Prior to that, the title of his first article about the new era, a title that will be repeated many times subsequently, was "Thank Goodness!"<sup>15</sup>

In this article, Nayır finds a way of "congratulating" İnönü. Although he is slightly critical of the occurrences prior to the election, he is nevertheless grateful to him: "The claims of the entire Turkish press, repeated almost every day for four years, has finally come true: Power has changed hands in the blink of an eye after a free election. Although it may have been somewhat late and with some difficulty,

we owe gratitude to the last chief of a closed era, İsmet İnönü, for saving the nation from endless electionary and legitimacy disputes, and having relinquished dictatorship with his own will."

On the day that a new party wins the elections, Nayır guides and makes recommendations to the losing party, and how he defines CHP when doing this is interesting: "In the light of this experience, we expect *our historical party* [italics mine] to take a lesson from its heavy defeat and pull itself together; it must unite around its flawless programme and cast the unfaithful out to become a truly unified party. The chances for an idealist opposition party to retake power in the upcoming elections are high."<sup>15</sup>

In his next article, Nayır explains why he said "Thank Goodness", and says that it had to do with the end of the election turmoil, because "it is not possible to cheer when a party whose objectives and programme is not finalised comes to power."<sup>14</sup> (In the introduction of his article about the 1960 military coup [which overthrew the DP government] Nayır will return to this "Thank Goodness", and say that he used that phrase to greet the new care-taker government for opening the gates to freedom and to celebrate the end of a dark era. More on this later.)

He then mentions what he expects from the new (DP) government. These have to do with public administration and expenses. It is interesting how he says nothing about republican principles at this stage. He concludes his article with an attitude that is slightly condescending: "We will applaud if and once they succeed."<sup>14</sup>

From that point onwards, Nayır becomes the watchdog and critic of the administration notwithstanding an occasional word of praise. He is unhappy with the actions of the government, frequently complaining that the public treasury is being ransacked. He reminds the readers that republican principles are being violated. He brings up the issue that Atatürk's revolutions are regressing, and wishes that people would discuss this.

He defines the administration as a "gold mine Mecca" for those wishing to reap some personal benefit. He points out that the government is losing control over the party. He is also concerned about the mounting tension between the government and the opposition, and while he suggests that DP should change its attitude, does not hesitate to draw attention to the fact that CHP had made the same mistakes.

Nayır analyses and criticises the government from various angles. However, two issues are very prominent: Religion and the village.

Nayır is overjoyed when Hasan Ali Yücel is appointed as the Minister of National Education. He defines him as a "gem" of the young generation. He then supports all his actions, counters his critics, in particular with respect to two projects that Yücel initiated: the establishment of Village Institutes, and the translation project.

On the other hand, Nayır has always known when to exercise discretion. For example, he remains completely silent about the controversial resignation of a man he has supported wholeheartedly. He writes not a single line either for or against Yücel.

Nevertheless, institutes and the translation effort have always been high on his agenda.

It may be said that, from 1950 onwards, the social issues *Varlık* and Nayır were concerned with have remained unchanged: Religion, villages, moral attitudes. Since he has always criticised the DP administration in this respect, his opinions about this era are better understood through his articles on these issues.

#### 4) Village Institutes and the "Cause of Villagers"

##### Land Reform

Nayır believes that dealing with village issues is a requirement of populism. Populism, of course, is one of the principles of Atatürk. He defines populism as follows: "Contrary to the restrictive definitions of some, populism is not merely 'equal treatment of people

from all classes'. This type of equality is one of the foremost guidelines in the constitution of every republic or monarchy that has adopted human rights. Populism as a principle, on the other hand, has a wider meaning: It is state-sponsored protection from exploitation of the large masses of poor people who had been downtrodden by various privileged classes for centuries."

According to Nayır, the precondition of saving the public, especially the peasants, from exploitation is land reform. The peasants must be saved from being dependent on the landlords, working on land they do not own for a meagre share of the crop. The liberation of peasants from this kind of slavery would in turn increase production and yields, and contribute to national development.

Therefore, Nayır is pleased that the Land Reform Law is brought to and adopted by the national assembly. He recalls Atatürk's declaration that "the peasant is the true master of the nation," and informs the readers that a giant step has been taken in the revolutionary process.

"The Land Law will mean the right to live and the true freedom of the Turkish peasant. This new reform movement is a masterpiece that will transform the landscape in this country very rapidly, and will be the best possible shortcut to contemporary civilisation and welfare."

Unfortunately, when Nayır does not see his expectations from the land reform fulfilled, he is disappointed. He voices his criticism by saying, "not only have they failed to make peasants land owners, but they have also been unable to solve the problem of paid agricultural labor in favour of the landless peasants."<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, what Nayır understands from the "cause of the villagers" is the education of the peasant.

He first mentions this matter in the 156<sup>th</sup> issue of *Varlık* on 30.12.1939, where he discusses the establishment of Village Institutes, which he considers a very important step. He quotes an announcement by the Ministry of Education, and says the following about the purposes of Village Institutes: "I have learned that

these institutes will bring up children in villages with more practical than theoretic knowledge, and will provide their graduates with teaching jobs in village schools as well as some land and a house in the same village. This way, the teacher will till his fields like other farmers, while educating the children in his school not to be high school candidates, but to be *enlightened and informed villagers* [italics mine].<sup>18</sup>

The project fails to maintain its initial momentum, and begins to slow down in time. The criticism is levelled at the structural properties of the project, and the money spent for it. It is said that no results have been obtained, or that at least the objectives have not been reached. Criticism mounts during the early DP government, and the institutes are finally abolished by a law; however, criticisms were being voiced within CHP itself during the last years of this party's government.

Village Institutes continues to be a topic of heated debate today. While one side claims this to be the most important attempt for rural development in republican history, the other side points out the ideological constraints of the project. According to this view, the purpose of the institutes was to keep villagers in their villages, prevent urbanisation, and restrict the accumulation of capital. Such developments would have a series of negative consequences: Peasants would not be converted into an industrial working class, and formation of social classes would be incomplete.

Those who defend Village Institutes have yet failed to come up with arguments to counter these claims. According to them, educating village children, or at least making them literate, was a very positive move, and the project would have succeeded if it was not interrupted.

I believe that some institutes like Hasanoğlan and Arifiye, inaugurated with much ado and enthusiasm in the first years of the project, did reach some expected and desired results, the most im-

portant of which are the "education" of children enrolled in the institute.

However, the main objective of the institutes was, beside education, creating a continuity that would involve the return of graduates to the village environment with the aim of educating the peasants there in turn, like Nayır mentions.

However, this objective was not achieved, even back then, which is one of the main reasons behind the criticism of Village Institutes. This outcome has several reasons that Nayır mentions in various articles. I will quote the most significant ones. The reason I will do this is to respond to those arguing that a project devised 50 years ago under the circumstances of that time can be still valid, and shed some light into the matter with evidence from the past.

According to Nayır, the main reason for the project's failure was the lack of "sympathy for and faith in" the project, and continues: "We did not make all our administrative apparatus serve and assist in this important cause."<sup>19</sup> Then, he makes a very good point by saying that just opening a school and appointing a teacher cannot simply be enough; "all administrative authorities should cooperate to sustain and develop this school, and intimidate any reactionary forces that may be acting against it."

What are the reactionary forces? Religion, of course, but even before that, according to his conviction, the villagers, the ignorant peasants themselves. "It is only natural that the school, which would save the village (from backwardness) should meet with strong resistance from the very same village."<sup>19</sup>

This resistance becomes manifest as follows: "Village schools in the relatively poor and backward regions of the country are almost inoperable. Villagers who have to work with their entire family to earn their sustenance under very difficult farming conditions do not want to take their children between 7 and 15 years of age from the fields and the herds to send them to school. They have not been educated about, and do not understand the benefits of schooling.

Under these circumstances, the village teacher has only one way of enforcing attendance: Bringing the families to court. Of course, this will cause the enmity of the entire village, beginning with the headman. If he chooses to let things pass, this time the inspector from the Ministry of Education will get him. This is the dilemma for many teachers we have sent to villages; they are frustrated, and doubtlessly very troubled.<sup>20</sup>

Even though I am well aware that this goes beyond the scope of an article titled "*Varlık* and Political Currents", I believe there is reason to deepen the discussion.

Nayır continues to list the problems village teachers face, and to accuse the government (DP) for these: "Neighbourhood schools still teaching the old alphabet (Arabic) are also on the rise in villages recently. Villagers are under the perverted influence of those who have a self-interest in the claim that religious education can only be given with the old alphabet."<sup>21</sup>

After this, Nayır explains his disappointment: "It will be childish to believe that the problems of the villages will be solved when a handful of children barely learn how to read and write at a school they seldom attend."<sup>22</sup> Nayır concludes his article thus: "If we do not keep the original promise of making village teachers the guides, trendsetters and leaders of the village, if we do not extend their authority and furnish them with strong sanctions they can use against the backward, therefore hostile, environment they are in, even a hundred years from now we will be condemned to the same backward image our villages present today."

Nayır associates problems in villages with the lack of interest shown by administrations in the villages and their inhabitants. Meanwhile, he mentions that the villagers habitually resist people who approach them (with the intention of affecting change).

This "image" is what will become the ever-recurring theme to be incorporated in the works of writers of Village Institute origin, to whom the pages of *Varlık* will be open from the 1950's onwards. As

part of his dedication to the cause, Nayır has supported this generation of writers, and they have dominated the pages of *Varlık* from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Nayır has disagreed with the DP administration's neglect of the village and the villagers until the end (1960), and has not held back his criticism, mild as it may be, of the government.

### 7) Religion - Communism

The one thing never tolerated by *Varlık* and Yaşar Nabi Nayır throughout the years are the compromises made in the area of religion and laicism. Nayır has repeated that he views laicism as the foundation of the Kemalist ideology and the principles of the Republic at every opportunity. Concessions in matters regarding laicism would lead the country back to the Dark Ages. The "ignorant masses" comprising the majority of the society have been left in the darkness caused by religion for centuries, and exploited by the clergy. This is supposed to be at the root of all backwardness we are experiencing.

In order to overcome this, an uncompromising dedication must permeate the entire society and government. This has been the result of Atatürk's reforms and the action of CHP governments. However, according to Nayır, the DP has based its political platform on some shallow ideas to collect votes, and has taken a dangerous turn in religious matters by going down this road. Among his objections are the reversion of the prayer call to Arabic, the inauguration of secondary level schools to raise *imams*, and the opportunity given to graduates of such schools to take up posts in public administration. It can be said that Nayır has associated the DP government with concessions in the area of religion and reactionary policies.

On this issue, Nayır attacks even the CHP: He fundamentally opposes Hamdullah Suphi's opinions about religious education, and argues that circumstances in the country are not yet ripe for religious education.

His opinion in this matter is remarkably interesting, even back in 1934: "Lack of control over the *vaaz* [sermons] delivered in mosques is a great danger. The first preventive measure to alleviate this hazard is to ensure that all imams deliver only the prescribed sermons prepared by the directorate of religious affairs, and establish a strong regulatory mechanism for this."<sup>24</sup>

For the reasons stated above, Nayır believes that no backward step taken in the area of religion can be hidden behind the concept of freedom of faith. He wants those making religion their primary cause to be "punished proportionately and to an extent that will set an example for others."

Some of Nayır's concerns about religion are associated with communism. He is afraid that wrong policies in religious affairs would "degenerate" the public. He claims that governments tied to religious faith would carry the society backwards, even to the extent of hindering economic development. Such an adversity would also pave the way for the advancement and acceptance of communism in a society. Therefore, he says, "on one pan of the scale there is communism, and on the other pan, bigotry." He says that concessions made to one will be exploited by the other.

On the other hand, Yaşar Nabi makes a strict distinction between "leftism" and "communism". Referring to an article by Necmettin Sadak in the newspaper *Akşam*, he says that the two concepts are very different, and should not be confused. Most importantly, Nayır makes the following assertion: "The Republic founded by Atatürk was, let's name it, a *leftist* [italics mine] regime in the strictest sense."<sup>25</sup>

Nayır elaborates his ideas and claims that the principles of the constitution and the ideals of Kemalism were "the outcome of a leftist view". "The revolutionist literature has always been nourished by anti-imperialism on one hand, and the struggle against internal exploitation in the hands of usurpers and clergy—which are part of the right wing in every country—on the other. Meanwhile, he re-

marks "democracy is a great ideal. However, we should remember that the axes of the bloodiest dictators are very often sharpened in a democratic atmosphere." Thus he cautions once more that democracy will provide grounds for the spread of "dangerous ideas" if not "kept in check" by certain mechanisms.

These opinions should not be found too much out of the ordinary. In fact, they have been part of the "official ideology" since the beginning. Turkish governments have always associated Kemalism with the left, claiming that the freedoms inherent in Kemalism are more advanced than those in the "most leftist of regimes". In other words, they have maintained that the freedoms enjoyed by the public, limited as they were by the laws in force, are adequate to the needs of the people.

I believe that the mindset summarized by the statement "if this country needs communism, *we* will be the ones to introduce it", results in this kind of an attitude which consciously hampers the inquiry into and suggestions of "more advanced" and "different" systems. This enables only a group of people integrated into the system to play "leftism" within a framework and to an extent defined by the political authority, and those who seek to step outside this framework are tagged with "extremism" and become subject to sanctions.

Nayır's article was written in 1946. This corresponds to a time when the left was under the most severe oppression in Turkey. Large-scale incarcerations and investigations were underway. I believe that Nayır had in mind the structure I described above when he made the following suggestion, more or less in line with the official ideology, towards the end of his article: "Let us set aside communism, which has evolved into a servant of the Slavic movement, and unite against it like we unite against fascism. However, let us avoid branding true patriots and nationalists who yearn for an advanced, *classless* [italics mine] welfare society as 'leftists', thus



turning them into outlaws, and let us remove the masks of those who do this.”

As such, Nayır makes the framework and the “dimensions” of the leftist movement very clear.

In an article written at about the same time, Nayır opposes a proposition for preventing and resisting communism: “We do not underrate the Soviet threat. We must keep this threat in consideration and take the necessary precautions to keep our country secure. What should these be? They say, ‘Let us promote our religion. Insert religion courses in school curricula. Appoint preachers who will guide the congregations in the mosques.’ No, sir! There can be no better way to throw this nation into the arms of communism and Russian imperialism. The greatest allies of communism are the rightists who are deaf and blind to all ideas of advancement.”<sup>26</sup>

In the meantime, Nayır opposes the attempt to revive the cultural accumulation of the past, and even belittles it: “*Alla turca* music, the tiresome *diwan* (Ottoman court) literature, traditional wrestling, camel fights... Lock the women up at home, not listen to classic music...”

Nayır does not want to take this path for the sake of “preventing communism”. But it should be remembered that elements against such cultural manifestations were also the cultural instruments of the CHP government in the 1940’s. The fundamental policy of the official version of Kemalism is to create a nation that is oriented towards the West in every meaning of the word, and has adopted its value judgements. Hence, Nayır reaches two conclusions at once.

In another article, he reverses the scenario: “There are some who claim that the recent reactionary propaganda in our country is orchestrated by Moscow. I cannot go that far, but I have absolutely no doubt that those efforts supposedly in the name of religion ultimately serve the interests of Moscow. Local communist ringleaders are very pleased with the recent course of events in our country. They may hope that once religion is severely devalued in the hands

of bigots and made the instrument of backwardness, intellectuals will strive to prevent it, and in their despair will commit the mistake of resorting to communism to hinder the dangerous growth of reactionary movements.”

In short, Nayır is fundamentally and totally against communism. He has a sense of “leftism”, clearly defined within the boundaries drawn by official ideology. Under the heavy pressure of the official ideology in the 1940’s, one could not have been expected to sympathize with “leftism”, in any case.

#### 8) Coup

Finally there is a military coup, the first in a series of such interventions in recent Turkish history. The armed forces seize power on the morning of May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1960 and take all MP’s and members of cabinet, as well as other officials, such as mayors, governors, chiefs of police, etc. belonging to or cooperating with the DP in custody. They are tried by a supreme court on the island of Yassıada, a naval base. While some politicians and bureaucrats are imprisoned, Adnan Menderes, the prime minister; Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, the minister of foreign affairs; and Hasan Polatkan, the finance minister, are found guilty (of attempting to abolish the constitution with the aim of forming a totalitarian regime, among other indictments) and sentenced to death. Though it is planned to set the overthrown President Celal Bayar—also sentenced to death but his sentence, due to old age, converted to a life term) free after three years, massive reaction postpones his release.

The National Unity Committee, formed by the leaders of the coup, gathers a constituent assembly, and initiates the writing of a new constitution, which then is adopted in a referendum.

Elections are held in 1961, which result in various coalitions. Meanwhile, the Justice Party (AP), which is accepted as more or less the successor of the DP, but with new cadres, is formed. Süley-

man Demirel is elected the president of the party, which achieves an electoral victory in 1965.

Nayır greets the new era with another article that is titled "Thank Goodness!" In the introduction he interestingly writes: "I quote these lines and the title of my article from my editorial in *Varlık* on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1950. I feel the need to say exactly the same things today. Think about the joy we had felt at that electoral victory! Think about the hopes that were kindled in us because of it!"

As I had said before, Nayır had not warmed up to the prospect of a multi party system. His attitude towards the electoral victory of the DP back then was not one of enthusiasm, but of a "wait and see" kind of cautiousness. He may have looked back in time and compared the two eras (CHP and DP) in the years that went by. His description of the CHP era as "dictatorship" may be associated with a conviction, possibly reached later, that the established system had to be transcended in the 1950's, but he clearly did not have this in mind then.

Nayır criticises the DP era in his article. He refers to his previous articles, and says that he had been expecting this to happen for a long time.

In his criticism, Nayır writes that he had approved of "not one single thing" done by the DP government. He says that not one positive result has been reached. Most important of all is the ensuing "moral crisis": "Our greatest loss was in the area of morality. We are condemned to suffer the consequences of the great moral crisis that erupted in our social constitution."<sup>28</sup>

Nayır describes the coup by the army as the "Second War of Independence". He says that the army made this move with the strength it derived from the principles of Atatürk. He goes back and emphasises that the former government "wantonly deceived" the country. He believes that such deception would not be allowed again.

Meanwhile, Nayır stops writing one year prior to the coup. He no longer writes editorials. The magazine is filled with the works of Village Institute graduates. There is no discussion even about general issues. The magazine is published with articles that are completely neutral.

Nayır mentions this in his second article. He says that he did not feel like writing. Then he repeats his motto: "Whatever we suffered was because of them! Whatever we still have to suffer will also be because of them!"<sup>29</sup> He goes on to speak candidly about something even the imagination of which may be astonishing today: "An unprecedented act like keeping the majority of a parliament incarcerated has been regarded as a proper measure by the entire nation. The bewilderment of some foreign sources that cannot come to terms with such an abnormality will subside when they find out about the circumstances we have had to live under. The abnormality of the present day owes to the now invisible conditions of the past."<sup>29</sup> Nayır adds that he does not have any ill feelings, but that whatever has happened should be a lesson.

He immediately gives advice to the new government. His first suggestion concerns education: "Cement factories (and the like) should have a secondary place on the agenda, and primary education, sorely neglected in the last decade, should take priority in government spending. A nationwide campaign for public education should begin and not only children, but adults who have remained illiterate should be pulled out of their ignorance as soon as possible. Liberation, true liberation at that, may only be achieved in this way."<sup>29</sup>

In his subsequent articles, he defends his past silence. He says that he restrained himself to save *Varlık* from being banned. He says this would have been a pyrrhic victory benefiting no one.

Later articles, put forward ideas about how the new constitution should be designed. He closely monitors developments. He is happy with the constituent assembly's work and the new con-

stitution. Yet, once more he is worried about the turn of events. He "partially" approves of the 1961-1965 period, when İnönü is appointed prime minister of care-taker government. His former concerns surface from 1965 onwards. His previous criticisms of the DP regime are now levelled at the AP government, and dwell on the same concepts.

He supports further awareness among the people, and a change of discourse in social issues. However, he makes no effort to change or go beyond his standpoint. He assumes he is charged with preserving the initial purpose of *Varlık*. *Varlık* is a literary magazine, and he wants it to stay that way. He also implies that he does feel close to some of the discourse and concepts (like Marxism) which are on the intellectuals' agenda.

Despite all, we must remember that Nayır acts as one with the intellectuals of the era when opposing the AP regime from the first day. He embraces principles like laicism, nationalisation of underground resources (like mines), and absolute (political and economic) independence, and does not compromise these principles when involved in debates about these.

During the six years until 1971, he continues his criticism of the AP governments, and adopts a neutral attitude towards the political developments that start with the March 12<sup>th</sup> memorandum by the military in 1971, because he believes that the situations he encountered in the past could not be "recreated" by anyone. Even the military coup of May 27<sup>th</sup> that he greeted with much enthusiasm has not fulfilled his expectations. He explains his reasons, points to circumstances, but cannot find anything to say about the public vote that brought AP to power. On the basis of his experiences, he thinks that after the March 12<sup>th</sup> memorandum things would not develop in the direction he had envisaged, and with a reformist understanding.

What he does afterwards is to monitor developments and express his criticisms.

The military intervention of March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1971 opened a new era in Turkey. The process that led to the republican modernisation was severely interrupted for the first time, which occurred in the form of an ideological divide between the army and the intellectuals. While civilian intellectuals had markedly Marxist-Kemalist tendencies, the army preferred a more conservative Kemalism. By the end of the 70's, the Cold War was clearly taking a turn in favour of the United States and the West; the Free World. In 1979, the great ascent of the left that began in 1959 collapsed. The capitalist West had once again triumphed over the left along the axis of liberalism and capitalism. This would have consequences in Turkey. The left element of Turkish modernisation, a *socialistic* project in essence, was being eliminated. The New Right approach that arose in Britain was to find its counterpart in Turkey in the first months of 1980. It was obvious that to implement such a model would be very difficult in a democratic environment. Moreover, the provocations of the Cold War had made Turkey a country where a dozen people were being murdered in the streets daily for the past five years. Seizing the opportunity created by this unbearable situation, the army once again grabbed power on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1980.

The coup was, in appearance, staged for the sake of Kemalism and intended to stop the bloodbath. However, it was immediately realised that its ulterior motive was to establish a deep-rooted social model that was conservative enough to contradict even the Turkish modernisation, and to transform the society within that model and in a given ideological mindset. After a junta regime that wreaked havoc across the country for three years, the party that came to power (the Homeland Party – ANAP) played along the same policies and attitudes. A new era had begun, the most important attribute of which was the move away from the conventional republican policies that had been followed for fifty years.

This era is also known across the world as the postmodern period. When the restructuring was finally complete in the early 1990s,

the founder and director of *Varlık*, Yaşar Nabi Nayır, was no longer among the living. He had passed away in 1981. This was an intriguing coincidence. Not only was one era drawing to its close, but also a great advocate of the era who had initiated and led one of the most significant cultural movements that shaped the society during that time period, passed away. Just by the sheer weight of these facts, one could have claimed that *Varlık* could not continue anymore. A brand new era and a brand new literature was on the rise. Some aspects of postmodern literature had almost naturally begun to emerge in Turkey during the severe political oppression of the early 1980's. Especially the magical realism of Latin American literatures was seized as a new opportunity for expression. Realism and social realism, which *Varlık* had endorsed for a very long time, were being cast out of literature. While the *Beyaz Kale* (White Castle) by Orhan Pamuk (later a Nobel laureate), was the harbinger of postmodern literature, his *Kara Kitap* (Black Book) was the epitome of postmodernism, and initiated a new trend not only in Turkey but across the world. This would continue with the new concepts that came with globalisation in the 1990's. Democracy was building a new socio-cultural approach based on pluralism, identity politics, and multiculturalism.

At a time when almost everything was being completely renewed, *Varlık* managed to keep pace thanks to its inherent renewability. After Yaşar Nabi's death, the editorial management of the magazine was passed on to the critic and literary historian Konur Ertop. After a year, the magazine was entrusted to Kemal Özer, a well-known poet of the 1940's generation. Özer's management ensured the continuity of the magazine. *Varlık* maintained its identity as a literary magazine during the decade from the early 1980's to the early 1990's. However, it is now rather difficult to say that the publication was in full resonance with the new elements that arose during the time. As a respected, noteworthy, and primarily literary

magazine, *Varlık*'s editorial management was finally taken over by Enver Ercan, a poet and editor of the young generation.

The 1990's was a hectic period for Turkey. For the first time, the people were faced with such a multitude of new concepts in a relatively short term. Great divides were being formed in politics, and the accumulation of postmodern cultural and political thought was received with great interest among intellectuals. Interest was shifting away from literature. This was also the consequence of the rapid development of the audio-visual media, popular culture, and the consumer society. It was necessary for a cultural medium to come out to analyse, critically interpret, and sometimes question this new state of affairs. Although usually expected from the more radical left circles, this approach could not be provided by them due to their dispersed state. In the end, *Varlık* became the most advanced magazine in this respect thanks to the great intuition of its editorial team in the face of new concepts and currents, and especially thanks to Ercan, who made an admirable effort to perceive, recognise, and understand the life around him.

Under Ercan's editorial management, *Varlık* was rapidly transformed into a cultural magazine—in the wider sense of the term—without detaching it from literature, if anything, by opening it up to the new generation. It became the primary reference for anyone that followed cultural developments and debates in Turkey in the 1990's. Not only cultural and abstract matters, but the transformation in the society and the world, and the entire intellectual accumulation resulting from that transformation were within the scope of *Varlık*. It is impossible to find a single issue that was on the public agenda and in the cultural consciousness, but overlooked by *Varlık*. Often, the opposite of this was true: *Varlık* was to cover many issues long before they became items on the cultural agenda.

As we near the end of the first decade in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even the new writers whose works had begun appearing in the pages of *Varlık* under Ercan's direction in the 1990's have reached the top

of their careers. The argument that *Vartlık* was a school initiated by Yaşar Nabi should not preclude the claim that it continues to be an intellectual school after his death. On the contrary, *Vartlık* after its founder's death has become a new, innovative school in its own right. With these properties as a cultural publication, and a history of 75 years, *Vartlık* stands out as a significant cultural node in today's world. There is no doubt that *Vartlık* is a cradle of culture that spawned and nurtured literary schools in Turkey. All that said, one inevitably wonders: How many magazines across the world have achieved what *Vartlık* has, given that it has never fallen into the trap of bigotry in any matter, always upheld democratic values and tolerance, maintained its freshness and flexibility throughout its journey, and was published in a country where cultural magazines are extremely difficult to upkeep?

The history of *Vartlık* makes it a cultural edifice of universal proportions.

#### Notes

- 1) *Vartlık*, issue 1,1933.
- 2) *Vartlık*, issue 8,1939.
- 3) *Vartlık*, issue 83,1946.
- 4) *Vartlık*, issue 163,1940.
- 5) *Vartlık*, issue 186,1947.
- 6) *Vartlık*, issue 168,1940.
- 7) *Vartlık*, issue 167,1940.
- 8) *Vartlık*, issue 133,1939.
- 9) *Vartlık*, issue 324,1947.
- 10) *Vartlık*, issue 341,1949.
- 11) *Vartlık*, issue 329,1947.
- 12) *Vartlık*, issue 366,1953.
- 13) *Vartlık*, issue 368,1953.
- 14) *Vartlık*, issue 348,1950.
- 15) *Vartlık*, issue 356,1950.
- 16) *Vartlık*, issue 358,1950.
- 17) *Vartlık*, issue 359,1950.
- 18) *Vartlık*, issue 278-279,1945.

- 19) *Vartlık*, issue 156,1939.
- 20) *Vartlık*, issue 339,1953.
- 21) *Vartlık*, issue 374,1951.
- 22) *Vartlık*, issue 341,1953.
- 23) *Vartlık*, issue 354,1949.
- 24) *Vartlık*, issue 355,1949.
- 25) *Vartlık*, issue 313,1946.
- 26) *Vartlık*, issue 318,1946.
- 27) *Vartlık*, issue 370,1951.
- 28) *Vartlık*, issue 614,1960.
- 29) *Vartlık*, issue 619,1960.
- 30) *Vartlık Almanac*, 1966.

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