

**FAMILY DRAMAS AND THE LIMITS OF POLITICAL
SUBJECTIVITY IN POST-1980 COUP D'ÉTAT NOVELS**

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SUBJECTIVITY IN POST-1980 COUP D'ÉTAT NOVELS**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to investigate how political subjectivity is represented and problematised in post-1980 Turkish coup d'état novels by analysing Latife Tekin's *Gece Dersleri* (1986), Mine Söğüt's *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı* 1979 (2007), Aslı Biçen's *Tehdit Mektupları* (2011) and Ayfer Tunç's *Suzan Defter* (2011). Although there is a general conviction that the Turkish novel is depoliticised after September 12, these four novels can be classified as political novels, for they try to understand the construction and limits of political subjectivity before and after the coup. Reflecting the general disillusionment with ideologies after 1980, these novels regard fantasy and desire as essential components of political subjectivity and critically engage with ideologies. In doing so, they subvert the belief that political subjectivity stems from rational choices or conscious engagement with politics. Meanwhile, by building the collective trauma of the 1980 coup d'état into family dramas, not only do they endeavour to represent collective trauma through personal stories, but also show the way the personal and the political are implicated in each other. In this regard, the incorporation of the family institution into the narrative enables these novelists not only to show how political subjectivity is rooted in the family, but also to reflect on the role of gendered power relations in the construction and limits of it. Hence these novels shed light upon the unconscious of the political subject by examining political subjectivity within the context of the family institution.

ÖZET

1980 SONRASI DARBE ROMANLARINDA AİLE DRAMALARI VE SİYASAL ÖZNEİİĞİN SINIRLARI

ERAY KAAAN ERKOCA

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2022

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Anahtar Kelimeler: siyasi öznellik, aile dramaları, psikanalitik siyasal teori, 12 Eylül, darbe

Bu tez, 1980 sonrası Türk darbe romanlarında siyasi öznelliğın nasıl temsil edildiğini ve sorunsallaştırıldığını, Latife Tekin'in Gece Dersleri (1986), Mine Söğüt'ün Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979 (2007), Aslı Biçen'in Tehdit Mektupları (2011) ve Ayfer Tunç'un Suzan Defter (2011) romanları üzerinden araştırmayı hedeflemektedir. 12 Eylül sonrasında Türk romanının apolitize edildiğine dair genelgeçer bir yargı olsa da, bu dört roman darbe öncesinde ve sonrasında siyasi öznelliğın inşasını ve sınırlarını anlamaya çalışmaları bakımından siyasi romanlar olarak sınıflandırılabilirler. Bu romanlar, 1980'den sonra ideolojilere karşı duyulan genel hayal kırıklığını yansıtarak, fantazi ve arzuyu siyasi öznelliğın temel bileşenleri olarak görür ve ideolojilere eleştirel olarak yaklaşır. Bunu yaparak, siyasi öznelliğın rasyonel seçimlerden ya da siyasetle kurulan bilinçli bir ilişkiden kaynaklandığı inancını yıkarlar. Ayrıca, 1980 darbesinin kolektif travmasını aile dramaları içine çekerek, kolektif travmayı kişisel hikayelerle temsil etmeye çalışmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda kişisel ve siyasal olanın iç içe geçtiğini gösterirler. Bu bağlamda, aile kurumunun anlatıya dahil edilmesi, bu romancıların yalnızca siyasal öznelliğın ailede nasıl kök saldığını göstermelerine değil, aynı zamanda toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı iktidar ilişkilerinin siyasal öznelliğın inşasında ve sınırlarında oynadığı rol üzerine düşünmelerine imkan verir. Neticede, bu romanlar siyasi öznelliği aile kurumu bağlamında inceleyerek siyasal öznenin bilinç dışına ışık tutarlar.

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*To the memory of my mother, who once said: “If you study hard, I will live to 100
years old.”*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to explore the construction and limits of political subjectivity in post-1980 Turkish literature. After disbanding all political organisations, the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey hammered out a new philosophy of the individual and society in accordance with neoliberal values. Therefore, it can be considered as a threshold where a new kind of relationship between the individual and the collective develops. This new relationship is inevitably reflected in the arts and literature, which by nature register socio-political changes in society. These changes, implemented by force by the military regime at the beginning and later by a subtle ideological operation, have traumatic consequences both at the level of the individual and that of society. Insofar as the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d'état are concerned, not only the ways of doing politics but also the nature of political subjectivity inevitably changes. The arts and literature following the coup reflect on such changes in the realm of politics. This thesis endeavours to shed light upon that.¹

Although post-1980 Turkish literature is considered by many critics as being depoliticised by the military regime, I will try to illuminate the different strategies of September 12 novelists in dealing with politics and political subjectivity in the aftermath of the coup. Even though political subjectivities disintegrate in the face of the traumatic experience of the coup, I will show how the disintegration of political subjectivity does not necessarily amount to its demise. September 12 novelists seek to shed light upon the construction and limits of political subjectivity in order to make sense of the above-mentioned changes in the realm of politics. To that end, as a result of the feminist credo “The personal is political” that comes to the fore after 1980, they draw attention to the family, which regulates gendered power dynamics in society, and at the same time serves as a site where political subjectivity is constructed. All things considered, at the core of this thesis is the intricate link between the family and political subjectivity in post-1980 coup d'état novels.

¹All translations from Turkish into English are mine unless stated otherwise.

1.1 The Coup d'État Novel Genre and the Structure of the Turkish Novel

The coup d'état novel genre in Turkish literature was born in the aftermath of the military coups of May 27, 1960, March 12, 1971, and September 12, 1980. This genre, which has been once again brought to the public attention as a result of the recent coup d'état attempt of July 15, 2016, has influenced not only the subject matter, but also the ideological structure of the Turkish novel, which, until the 1950s, was characterised by a critical attitude towards the Westernisation movement (Moran 1983, 24). The Turkish novel in the early period of the Republic of Turkey was mostly engaged with the nationalist struggle of independence from colonial forces and Turkish people's living a split existence characterised by the East-West divide. Most authors of the novels of the 1920s and '30s were involved one way or another in the Turkish War of Independence and committed to the Kemalist principles of the newly-born nation state.

The socio-political changes during the transition period from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, and the cultural ideas which had been imported from the West and penetrating the Turkish intellectual life since the Tanzimat, a period of reforms beginning in 1839, were not fully processed by the authors of the novels of the 1920s and '30s. Therefore, there were conceptual confusions and ideological ambiguities in their novels. According to Murat Belge, they treated anti-imperialism as the same thing as anti-colonialism. Their take on the former was nothing but an uncritical adherence to a nationalist ideology which took the national bourgeoisie as a ruling class for granted. What had been seen and represented as "corruption", "perversion" and "immorality" were transformed into the hallmarks of "progress", "civilisation" and "modernity", once colonialism stopped to pose a threat (Belge 1998, 89). Thus anti-imperialism was one of the most important determinants of the moral code of the early Turkish novel. This moral message, as in Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's novels such as *Sodom ve Gomore* (1928) and *Kiralık Konak* (1922), was encoded in social and romantic relations of characters who served as symbols of clashing values (Belge 1998, 88). In both of Karaosmanoğlu's novels, Belge points out, the male protagonist is obligated to make a moral decision between his "nation" and his corrupted "femme fatale" lover who has romantic relations with imperialists or dandies (Belge 1998, 86-7).

After the military coup of May 27, 1960, with the relatively free development of socialist thought, the leftist movement entered the Turkish novel as a subject matter. Yet, according to Belge, the ambiguous status of the coup, which was defined as a

“military coup” by some and as a “progressive revolution” by others, led to different attitudes towards its representation in Turkish literature. Moreover, the fact that the May 27, 1960 events were written after the military memorandum of March 12, 1971, under the shadow of a state-led violence unleashed afterwards, prevented authors from developing accurate and deep analyses (Belge 1998, 95-7). Picking Samim Kocagöz’s novel *İzmir’in İçinde* (1973) as an illustrative example, Belge points to an ideological ambiguity in May 27 novels. The novel, Belge asserts, distinguishes between the national and the comprador bourgeoisie. The 1960 coup d’état eliminates Hidayet Beg, a member of the latter, while rewarding his virtuous brother, who is an honest national bourgeois man. This way, Kocagöz conceives of the coup as the restoration of the Kemalist principles which were betrayed by the Democrat Party, known to have had relations with Western imperialists. The male protagonist Emre, on the other hand, is ideologically positioned as a socialist, yet he is proud of his wife Gülseren, who has donated gold to the national treasury. Hence Kocagöz, Belge maintains, strives to build a bridge between socialism and Kemalism and, like the novels of the 1920s and ‘30s, takes the national bourgeoisie as a ruling class for granted (Belge 1998, 101).

The coup d’état novel genre was developed and became mature in the 1970s after the military memorandum of March 12, 1971. An extreme level of political violence, a distinct division between the oppressor and the oppressed and a group of radical revolutionary youth who were arrested and tortured were the main subject matter of March 12 novels. Berna Moran sees a continuity between March 12 Novels and the Anatolian novels written by authors such as Orhan Kemal, Fakir Baykurt and Kemal Binbaşar in terms of problematising the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. In March 12 novels, Moran maintains, exploited peasants whose resistance to injustice and rebellion against exploitation narrated in the Anatolian novels were replaced by exploited urban people, so were exploitative landlords by the capitalist bourgeoisie (Moran 1994, 11). These novels, mostly written by authors who were personally involved in the leftist movement and experienced the effects of the brutal police violence, described the defeat of the left in the aftermath of the 1971 military memorandum (Moran 1994, 14). Yet Çimen Günay-Erkol argues in her book *Broken Masculinities: Solitude, Alienation, and Frustration in Turkish Literature After 1970* that Moran, in his comparison between March 12 novels and the Anatolian novels, ignores that the former narrated an elite suffering and was engaged with petty-bourgeois intellectuals’ bearing witness to political oppression (Günay-Erkol 2021, 33). In March 12 novels, an analysis from the perspective of the working class was missing.

Most March 12 novels such as Füzünan’s *47’liler* (1974), Erdal Öz’s *Yaralımsın* (1974),

Sevgi Soysal's *Şafak* (1975) and Samim Kocagöz's *Tartışma* (1976) were considered by previous literary critics, namely Berna Moran, Murat Belge, Ömer Türkeş, Fethi Naci and Ahmet Oktay, as a quest to represent the events of March 12, 1971 as realistically as possible, hence as a form of testimony. For instance, Belge, setting realism as a criterion for literary criticism, expresses disdain for some March 12 novels, which idealised revolutionaries and perceived the working class as one homogeneous whole (Belge 1998; Çandar 2007, 184). Yet, according to Günay-Erkol, realism is not a valid point for the criticism of March 12 novels. Realistic testimony, she argues, is not more worthy than fictional testimony, for fact and fiction are complementary in historical knowledge production, and factually incorrect memories are not less important in understanding the "reality" (Günay-Erkol 2021, 34-45). Furthermore, Günay-Erkol, following the literary historian and critic Ömer Türkeş, draws attention to the selective approach in the classification of March 12 novels (Günay-Erkol 2021, 38). In addition to "realistic" representations of the events of March 12, 1971, some allegorical novels were written under the shadow of political oppression and social anxiety in the 1970s, albeit not classified by previous literary critics as March 12 novels. To prove Günay-Erkol's point, exemplary is Bilge Karasu's political allegory *Gece*, written in between 1975-76 and published in 1985. In terms of allegorically describing an oppressive environment and engaging with the limits of literary representation, *Gece* can be considered as a precursor of September 12 novels.

After the military coup of September 12, 1980, the coup d'état novel genre took a different direction from "realistic" March 12 novels. Not only did the 1980 coup d'état lead to an oppressive regime which caused the left to disintegrate outrageously, but also engineered, in accordance with newly dominant neoliberal principles, a society where individual desires gained prominence over collective hopes. The oppressive regime disbanded all mass organisations and prohibited any political activity. Thus society, Moran asserts, was de-politicised to the point at which ideologies were no longer considered valid (Moran 1994, 49). In the 1980s, the cultural critic Nurdan Gürbilek points out, concepts like "exploitation" and "labour" lost meaning and came to symbolise a vulgar and outdated leftism which should be immediately abandoned (Gürbilek 1992, 27). This meaning loss and change in the signifying chain inevitably triggered a transformation in artistic and literary representation. Authors who were disillusioned with "realistic" representations embarked on a quest to explore alternative narrative techniques. The post-1980 novels, with divergence from realism, non-linear narratives, and intersection of multiple themes, pointed to the limits of representation, and challenged realism's authority on historical knowledge production (Bayraktar 2004, 106-10).

1.2 Post-1980 Coup d'État Novels and the Experience of Trauma

Authors such as Latife Tekin, Ashı Biçen, Mine Söğüt, Feride Çiçekoğlu, Birgül Oğuz and Murat Uyurkulak, who endeavoured to explore the effects of the 1980 coup d'état, employed different literary techniques which were developed in the 1980s to represent political oppression and social anxiety. They were mostly engaged with the representation of the traumatic experiences caused by the 1980 coup d'état. According to Gürbilek, not only people who were involved in the leftist movement but also ordinary people who witnessed a series of violent events in the aftermath of the coup experienced a collective trauma (Gürbilek 1992, 10). The post-1980 coup d'état novels were and still are characterised by the register of this collective trauma, and some literary critics such as Sibel Irzık and Nilgün Bayraktar, having called our attention to these novels' engagement with individual and collective memory, analysed them in the light of the theory of trauma (Bayraktar 2004; Irzık 2019).

In the “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening” section of *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, and History*, Dori Laub argues that trauma arises “outside the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality, sequence, place, and time”, thus its reality eludes the subject (Felman and Laub M. D. 1992, 69). In a similar vein, Cathy Caruth suggests in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* that insofar as trauma, as Lacan asserts, paves the way for the breaking down of the signifying chain, the eruption of the Real and the disintegration of the self, it is beyond comprehension, therefore, representation (Caruth 1996, 6-18). In this regard, when March 12 novels were an endeavour to bear witness to political violence from the perspective of a particular ideology, September 12 novels mostly evoke a sense of the limits of witnessing felt by disintegrated selves. I do not try to say that the 1980 coup d'état was more traumatic, hence more unknowable and unrepresentable, than the 1971 military memorandum. Instead, the reason for the difference between the attitudes taken by March 12 and September 12 novelists towards bearing witness to political violence, I argue, lies in the fact that September 12 novelists lost the semiotic, ideological and practical paradigms by which the effects of the coup could be understood and represented. This paradigm shift should be sought after in the transformation of the Turkish society in the aftermath of the military coup of September 12, 1980, which led to a general disillusionment with grand narratives like Kemalism and Socialism, and to individualism's having come to the fore.

Unless the traumatic experiences caused by the 1980 coup d'état were knowable and representable, why did many authors write about the effects of the coup? Here we

have come to a point where literature and the arts provide us with tools to engage with individual and collective trauma. They hint at a possibility of mourning, that is “undoing the entrapment in a fate that cannot be known” (Felman and Laub M. D. 1992, 69). Telling and creating narratives, writes Laub, “entail a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim”. Similarly, “literature and the arts”, writes Gabriele Schwab in her book *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, “can become transformational objects in the sense that they endow trauma with a symbolic form of expression and thereby not only change its status but also make it indirectly accessible to others” (Schwab 2010, 8). Hence, by means of mourning and a transference between the writer and the reader, literature and the arts point to a possibility of working through or at least partially working through individual and collective trauma. Yet this is not the same thing as being able to “realistically” represent the traumatic events of the 1980 coup. Instead, literature and the arts enable us to investigate the ghost of the past, that is a “social figure” whose investigation “can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life”. In doing so, literature and the arts encourage us not to produce some “cold knowledge” of historical reality, but a particular kind of “transformative knowledge” of history and the subject (Gordon 1997, 8).

Moreover, worthy of note is that even second-generation authors such as Aslı Biçen and Birgül Oğuz wrote fiction to represent the effects of the 1980 coup d'état. The collective trauma caused by the coup seems to be haunting the second generation of the witnesses of these violent events as well. As a form of cultural trauma which shaped the identities of the first generation, traumatic experiences caused by the military intervention are still transforming the collective identities of the younger generation (Alexander 2004, 10). The experience of trauma consists, writes Caruth, “in an inherent latency within the experience itself” (Caruth 1996, 17). The transmission of trauma from one generation to another, seen from this perspective, is caused by the belatedness of traumatic experience. In relation to the transmission of trauma, Marianne Hirsh coins the term “postmemory” which “describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 2008, 103). “Perhaps it is only in subsequent generations”, writes Hirsch in her article “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory”, “that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation” (Hirsch 2001, 12). These memories in their own right are part of histor-

ical reality, and literature enables us not only to work through or at least partially work through the experience of trauma, but also to articulate these memories and shape historical reality. Some September 12 narratives like Murat Uyrkulak's *Tol* (2002) and Birgül Oğuz's *Hah* (2012) have dealt with the transmission of trauma from one generation to another, and the role of transgenerational memory in the experience of trauma and the construction of historical reality (Irzik 2019).

1.3 The Political Novel and Psychoanalysing Political Subjectivity

In a general view, the oppressive regime in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état, as discussed above, was held responsible for depoliticising the Turkish society. According to Moran, after the coup, the left was not in any position to produce an alternative to the capitalist mode of production and the market economy which were imposed and strengthened by the regime. Hence novelists found themselves in an ideological vacuum, and avoided social and political problems as a subject matter (Moran 1994, 50-1). Yet, in my opinion, Moran's elucidation of the de-politicisation of the Turkish society and of the Turkish novel amounts to a rather narrow view of politics. "A view of politics focused either on what may be command performances of consent or open rebellion", writes James C. Scott in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, "represents a far too narrow view of political life — especially under conditions of tyranny or near-tyranny in which much of the world lives" (Scott 1997, 20). In order to map a realm of political life, maintains Scott, one needs to pay close attention to disguised political acts and everyday forms of resistance.

Literature as a symbolic form of expression, I argue, provides us with a wide range of tools to engage with politics either in a disguised or an open way. In her book *Türk Romanında Yazar ve Başkalaşım*, Jale Parla picks Bilge Karasu's *Gece* (1985) and Peride Celal's *Kurtlar* (1990) as an illustrative example of political allegory and urban dystopia which were used by many authors to reformulate the political content of their novels in an environment of political oppression in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état (Parla 2011, 197-8). Thus, although the content and form of the Turkish novel changed to a considerable degree in the 1980s, it would be unfair to suggest that it avoided social and political problems. If the novel can be depoliticised, what is the political novel anyway? According to Belge, whether people are politically conscious or not, they perform a political function in society. Similarly, literature, the basic condition of which is to produce and re-produce the image of life, cannot

be apolitical (Belge 1998, 79). Thus Belge does not find the distinction between the political and the non-political novel meaningful. Yet, for practical and analytical purposes, Irving Howe, in his book *Politics and the Novel*, suggests the term the “political novel” as a shorthand to classify novels in which “political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting” (Howe 1957, 17). As distinct from the social novel, which presupposes social stability to be able to “realistically cut a slice of life”, maintains Howe, albeit being aware of the fact that it would often be impossible to make a clear-cut distinction, the political novel is engaged with the problematic aspects of society which penetrate the consciousness of the characters who either support or oppose the status quo from the perspective of a particular ideology (Howe 1957, 19). According to Howe, the political novel ideally reflects an internal tension between concrete human experiences which are sensuous, immediate and close, and ideology which is abstract, general and inclusive (Howe 1957, 20). A political novel, writes Howe, “can enrich our sense of human experience, while it can complicate and humanise our commitments” (Howe 1957, 22).

Following Howe, March 12 novels can be classified as political novels. Leftist ideology played a dominant role, and the politically charged atmosphere of the 1970s was the dominant setting in these novels. They were engaged with the dysfunctional workings of society and challenged the status quo. By problematising state-sanctioned torture against the members of leftist organisations, they sought to prove the guilt of the state, and the innocence of the accused (Belge 1998, 120). By focusing on the police’s extracting confessions by torture as a subject matter, they reflected an internal tension between traumatic human experiences and ideological commitments. In comparison, September 12 novels constitute complex and tricky examples of the political novel. The triumph of the market economy, the disillusionment with leftist politics and the lack of means to give meaning to the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d’état have led to the disintegration of coherent political subjectivities along the axis of individual desires in September 12 novels. Moreover, the fact that grand narratives such as Kemalism and socialism lost their power to hold different identities together paved the way for the return of the oppressed identities such as the Kurds, women and homosexuals from the margins of society to cultural realms into which political opposition slid as a result of state oppression (Gürbilek 2011, 80). Gürbilek considers the entry of the oppressed identities into cultural realms in the 1980s as a result of the market economy’s promise of freedom, which was at odds with the oppressive political environment in Turkey (Gürbilek 1992, 109-10). The fragmentation and pluralisation of culture, maintains Gürbilek, not only amount to an aestheticisation of everyday life, but also to a freedom to consume different iden-

tities in cultural realms (Gürbilek 1992, 110). Yet it would be unfair to suggest that the return of the oppressed identities in the arts and literature after the 1980 coup d'état was nothing but just a reflection of the market economy's cultural workings. In my opinion, there arose a new political potential in the transformation of the arts and literature in the 1980s. The pluralisation of identities paved the way for an enrichment of culture, history and politics. Thus, there is a new kind of politics in the post-1980 Turkish novels, for giving voice to the formerly silenced histories of the oppressed should be regarded as a political act in itself. Additionally, the endeavour to represent the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d'état might gain a political significance insofar as a kind of authority is exercised over the victimhood of the oppressed by means of the act of writing.

Furthermore, worthy of note is that the disintegration of political subjectivity in post-1980 Turkish novels is not tantamount to the demise of the political subject. Rather than taking political subjectivity for granted as a product of political consciousness, September 12 novels are mostly preoccupied with its construction and limits, for not only ways of doing politics, but also the nature of political subjectivity has changed after the 1980 coup d'état. In most September 12 novels, rationalism and conscious political engagement have lost power. Instead, desire and emotions have become the essence of and also the major force in limiting political subjectivity. To understand such a transformation caused by the socio-political atmosphere after the 1980 coup d'état, I argue that psychoanalytic political theory provides us with practical hermeneutical tools which are able to shed light upon the way the post-1980 explosion in individual desires and emotions, the pluralisation of identities, and the experience of trauma shaped and limited political subjectivities in an environment of political oppression.

To begin with, let me briefly address the relevance of psychoanalysis for the study of the social world and move on to discussing what I mean by political subjectivity in this thesis. Many critics see the psychoanalytic approach to the social world as reductionist. They criticise psychoanalysis for studying the social at the level of the individual. However, I argue that such a criticism ignores the collapse of the distinction of the subject and the object, that of the individual and the collective in Lacanian theory (Stavrakakis 1999, 41). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, since the entry into the realm of the symbolic constitutes the subject at the loss of *jouissance* as an effect of symbolic castration, the subject is structured around a split. The lacking subject attempts to eliminate lack by identifying with the Other [*L'Autre*], that is “the set of rules and hypotheses into which the subject is born” (Bailly 2009, 219). However, the Other is also lacking because the signified belongs to the realm of the real which resists symbolisation (Žižek 1989, 122). There is the non-overlapping of

signifier and signified and the signifier only produces an imaginary signified in the realm of the symbolic. Because of this constitutive lack of the signified, that is the lack in the Other, the identification with the Other is doomed to fail.

Fantasy, in this regard, masks the lack in the Other, and thereby creates an illusion in which the full subject (S) is promised to be constituted through the identification with the *objet petit a* (Stavrakakis 1999, 45-7), the object cause of desire. Desire arises as a consequence of such a fantasy. In his book *Lacan and the Political*, the political theorist Yannis Stavrakakis argues that fantasy and desire are essential components of political subjectivity, for every ideology is a fantasy-construct and makes reference to a “lost state of unity, harmony and fullness”, a pre-symbolic real which is mythological (Stavrakakis 1999, 52), and hence an attempt to eliminate the lack in the Other. The *jouissance* experienced by way of ideological fantasy keeps desire in existence and prevents identification from falling apart (Stavrakakis 2008, 1054). Yet ideological fantasy is not “an illusionary representation of reality” in the Marxian sense, instead it produces social reality (Žižek 1989, 15). “The function of ideology,” writes Žižek, “is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some, traumatic kernel” (Žižek 1989, 45). Hence, according to psychoanalytic political theory, insofar as the “priority of the ‘objective’ on the subjective” and “an anti-objectivist conception of social reality” (Stavrakakis 1999, 41) are concerned, the distinction of the subject and the object, that of the individual and the collective collapses. This dialectic between the subject and the object makes psychoanalysis relevant for the study of the social world.

In this regard, since the subject is obligated to identify with the Other in order to be constituted as the subject, “there is no formation of subjectivity without subordination”, writes Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* (Butler 1997, 7). Yet the lack in the Other gives the subject a possibility to review its identification with the Other. Therefore, the Other fails to fully determine the subject and paves the way for a space for freedom, even though the subject fears to set itself free at the cost of its subjectivity (Stavrakakis 2008, 1049). The lack in the Other gives rise to a potential resistance to the socio-symbolic order and is intimately related to the notion of “political subjectivity”, for it leads the subject to develop a particular relationship with the realm of the symbolic and its set of rules and hypotheses.

“The subject is conceived of as political in its very subjectivity”, writes Sadeq Rahimi in *Meaning, Madness and Political Subjectivity*, “both in the sense that it engages in an ongoing act of subjugating and conjugating the world into meaningful patterns and in the sense that the subject is continuously subjugated or conjugated by the

local meaning system” (Rahimi 2015, 8). Yet, since regarding the political subject as the same as the subject of language would amount to reducing everything to the realm of politics, and thereby to undermining the meaning of the political, I propose to conceive of the political subject as the subject of language, which has a particular relationship with the realm of the symbolic, which actively contests or defends the symbolic order, instead of taking it for granted. In this regard, Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis draw a distinction between “social subjectivity” and “political subjectivity”. The former is “connected to practices whose norms are taken for granted”. The latter, by contrast, is “connected to those practices in which these norms are actively contested or defended” (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008, 264-5). In my discussion of political subjectivity, I follow their conceptualisation to avoid reducing everything to the realm of politics.

All things considered, in most September 12 novels, as much as the engagement with the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d’état, which led to an encounter with the Real and the breaking down of the signifying chain, points to the limits of subjectivity, the disillusionment with deep-rooted ideologies draws attention to fantasies and desires as the source of political subjectivity. This, I strongly believe, would encourage us to study political subjectivity in September 12 novels from the perspective of psychoanalytic political theory. In this thesis, to elaborate upon the nature of political subjectivity in the Turkish novel after the 1980 coup d’état, I will endeavour to psychoanalyse the characters of the four September 12 novels, those of Latife Tekin’s *Gece Dersleri* (1986), Mine Söğüt’s *Şahbaz’ın Harikulâde Yılı 1979* (2007), Aslı Biçen’s *Tehdit Mektupları* (2011) and Ayfer Tunç’s *Suzan Defter* (2011). In doing so, I will throw light on how these authors make sense of the changing socio-political world and the relationship between the individual and the collective before and after 1980.

1.4 Individual Histories of Political Involvement and Family Relations

In March 12 novels like Erdal Öz’s *Yaralımsın* (1974), Çetin Altan’s *Bir Avuç Gökyüzü* (1974), Füzûzan’s *47’liler* (1974) and Sevgi Soysal’s *Şafak* (1975), Moran points out, characters were victimised and subjected to torture. They were passive victims of political violence, and their revolutionary pasts were mostly excluded from the narrative (Moran 1994, 14). In comparison, most September 12 novels, I argue, are engaged with individual histories of political involvement. Exemplary is Tekin’s *Gece Dersleri*, where the female protagonist reflects on her past involvement with

a leftist organisation. Another example is Biçen's *Tehdit Mektupları*, in which the reason for the male protagonist's imprisonment and his supposed political crimes are gradually revealed to the reader as in detective novels.

September 12 novels, as a consequence of turning away from ideologies, seek to explore the psychology of the political self. To this end, they incorporate the characters' individual histories of political involvement into the narrative. In doing so, they are able to delve into the depths of the characters' political psyches. Their aim is not to prove the innocence of the accused and heroise the leftist "sufferer" like March 12 novels (Belge 1998, 20). Instead, they are mostly preoccupied with "the self's radical ex-centricity to itself with which human is confronted" (Lacan 1977a, 171), especially when the subject is forced to face the Real of its desire, which is usually at odds with its conscious political commitments. Hence, the main character of September 12 novels is the divided self, which is not a revolutionary hero at all, for the left was not only defeated by an external enemy, but also divided and disintegrated within itself after the 1980 coup d'état. By exploring the psychology of the political self, I argue, September 12 novels aim to identify the cause of turning away from ideologies and to shed light upon how the post-1980 state ideology has operated at the level of fantasy and desire in order to produce conformity. This exploration, on the other hand, is not the only reason for dealing with the past more than before. The loss of hope for the future leads to talking more about the past. As the narrator of *Şahbaz'ın Harikulâde Yılı 1979* puts it, "She had never thought so much about the past before. When a life focused on thinking about the future suddenly stops... When it is stopped... The past has come out of all the molds it was stuck in. It has become free" (Söğüt 2018, 123).² Similarly, "Why my dear", asks Mukoşka in *Gece Dersleri*, "Do we have no future but our pasts? Neither of us have" (Tekin 1986, 75).³

In September 12 novels, not only the past of leftists, but also that of right-wing characters is included in the narrative, as in Söğüt's and Biçen's novels. The pasts of the characters are depicted as being filled with political activities, and even more, with family dramas, for the family serves as a site for the articulation of desire and the formation of subjectivity. The family is the site where the individual meets for the first time the Other, hence where the relationship between the subject and the object, between the individual and the collective develops. This relationship leads the individual to assure a place in the social world, and thereby to become a social or a political subject. Therefore, the essence of political subjectivity, I argue, should

²"Geçmiş zaman hakkında daha önce hiç bu kadar düşünmemişti. Geleceği düşünmeye odaklı bir hayat birdenbire durunca... durdurulunca... geçmiş içine sıkıştığı tüm kalıplardan dışarı çıktı. Özgürleşti."

³"Neden canım, geçmişimizden başka geleceğimiz yok? İkimizin de olmadı."

be sought after in the family where the subject comes to become a subject.

In the novels which I have chosen and happen to be by women writers, the incorporation of the family histories of the characters and family dramas into the narrative is a means to open a space for discussing the role of paternal authority and gendered power relations in the construction and limitation of social and political subjectivity. The coming together of the feminist credo “The personal is political” and the turning away from a vulgar leftism in Turkey after 1980, I argue, has been prompting women writers to mark family as the birthplace of individual and collective life. After all, the family as the smallest unit of society is one of the major regulators of gendered power dynamics which give shape to bigger socio-political structures. Narrating “disgraceful” family dramas, in this regard, has helped these women writers to render the symptom of the patriarchal order visible. This way, they have introduced gender and sexuality to the depiction of political life and subjectivities in the Turkish novel.

In *Gece Dersleri*, her mother not only offers Gülfidan a possible “first political position” by commanding her to leave her father’s house (55), but she also provides her with a mother’s tongue to resist the Name-of-the-Father. This mother’s tongue is the language of lullabies and epics against the language of men, which effaces the desire of the body (Gürbilek 1998; Parla 2011, 220). Her mother’s guilt, that of committing adultery, on the other hand, haunts her to the point where her political subjectivity is limited by the return of her initial sexual trauma. In *Tehdit Mektupları*, Cihan explains his avoidance of active political involvement with leftist politics as a possible effort not to disappoint his father. “Maybe I am just a coward,” he writes, “maybe it is because of unbelief, maybe I can’t do this to my dad” (Biçen 2011, 41).⁴ Similarly, his half sister Ülkü’s right-wing commitments stem from her desire to please her adoptive father. When she finds out that her birth father is someone else, she goes through an Oedipal stage. As a result, her political subjectivity is forced to face a threat of disintegration.

In *Şahbaz’ın Harikulâde Yılı 1979*, Şahin murders his father, who “mourns the death of a treacherous redhead” and “tramples on his masculinity” (Söğüt 2018, 32). He replaces his father with Brother Bekir and gets involved in right-wing politics. Similarly, Burak leaves his “immoral” mother to join the Commander’s men. In *Suzan Defter*, the female protagonist does not claim a political subjectivity. Her incestuous desire for her older brother, who rejects his father and gets involved in leftist politics, seems to shape her perspective on politics. Her older brother’s disillusionment with leftism and accumulating wealth after 1980 provoke a disappointment for her. After

⁴“Belki sadece korkağım, belki inançsızlık, belki babama bunu yapamam.”

the 1980 coup d'état, he begins to resemble his father, whose guilt derives from not only his illegal business, but also an act of adultery. Thus the identification with or the rejection of the mother or the father figure, the Oedipal complex, Oedipal fantasies, the conformance with or the rebellion against the Name-of-the-Father, parents who abandon their children, children who kill their parents, brotherhood and fratricide, betrayal of a sibling, adultery and incest are the subject matter of these novels. The overflow of family dramas in them, I argue, draws attention to the fact that the realm of politics is marked by gendered power dynamics constructed in the family setting.

If we accept that the nature of the political has changed after 1980, these four novels are all political novels which are set in a political milieu. While *Gece Dersleri* speaks from within the 1980s just after the 1980 coup d'état, the other three novels were written in the 2000s. They are all concerned with the representation of the traumatic experiences of the 1980s. For this purpose, they use different literary techniques and strategies. Tekin's *Gece Dersleri* is an example of disjointed narrative. Biçen's *Tehdit Mektupları* avoids a traditional narrative voice, instead uses letters, diaries and official documents. Söğüt's *Şahbaz'ın Harikulâde Yılı 1979* uses a Shehrazad-like narrator who embodies violence while multiplying subplots (Irzik 2014, 55). The novel also includes a section titled "Almanac 1979", which lists the "real" events of 1979. Finally, Tunç's *Suzan Defter* is written in a diary form from shifting subject positions. Although my main focus is not on the representation of the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d'état, I will constantly come back to it, for the experience of trauma has a great impact on subjectivity in these novels. There are characters who either actively participated in left or right-wing politics or lived away from it before 1980. Yet they all live under the shadow of political violence and suffer from a collective trauma. Because of the loss of hope for the future, the past haunts them. By means of telling and writing, not only do they face up to different forms of violence to which they have been subjected, but also confront their families and childhood memories to assert social and political identities. In this regard, these four novels shed light upon the way these identities are constructed in the family setting before and after 1980.

2. THE MOTHER'S DAUGHTER AND THE ESTRANGEMENT FROM LEFTISM IN *GECE DERSLERİ*

"We are probably the most 'mother's child' generation in the political movement. It is not a joke. Because the spirit that had surrounded us flew into the sky with a military intervention. We took refuge in the certainty of our mother's existence" — Latife Tekin (Özer 2020, 114)¹

2.1 Introduction

In an interview with the journalist and writer Pelin Özer, Latife Tekin states that the leftist movement before the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey "was a political movement controlled by men, and dominated by their power relations and passion for hierarchy". "We were very young," she maintains, "but we were beginning to become conscious of what prevented us from being equated with men in the same movement (Özer 2020, 114).

Tekin's third novel *Gece Dersleri* (1986) can be considered as the product of such a consciousness. In this novel, she looks at the leftist movement before the 1980 coup d'état from a critical perspective. Drawing on her experience in *İlerici Kadınlar Derneği* (Progressive Women's Organisation), she reflects on the oppressive environment of leftist organisations before 1980. The novel tells the story of a female militant's effort to represent her traumatic experiences in the women's branch of a leftist organisation. Disillusioned with leftist politics, which oppresses women, the

¹The term "mother's daughter" is borrowed from Jerry Aline Flieger's essay titled "The Female Subject: (What) Does Woman Want?" (Flieger 1990).

female protagonist Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr² longs to return home and to her mother. To resist the oppressive environment of the organisation, she searches for a new language, free from patriarchal logic.

Although *Gece Dersleri* can be regarded as the self-critique of the left after 1980, it received heated backlash from the leftist movement upon publication in 1986, a couple of years after the 1980 coup d'état. "Most critics read the novel as reaction against a particular form of leftist politics, alienated from the masses, authoritarian in its hierarchies and its repression of individuality," writes Sibel Irzik, "Some, like Yalçın Küçük, who included it in his list of '*küfür romanları*', the post-1980 novels of blasphemy against the left, have seen it as a condemnation of politics altogether" (Irzik 2007, 161).

Yet, in this chapter, I will argue that *Gece Dersleri* cannot be seen as an abandonment of politics altogether. Neither does it announce the death of the political subject in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey. Instead, the novel points at a different way of doing politics. This politics is not based on blind investment in a particular ideology, but draws on the contingency and heterogeneity of society. The female protagonist in *Gece Dersleri* is critical of the left's perception of the working class overlooking individual differences (Belge 1998, 243). Her ironic voice blows a strike against the ideological fantasy of leftism. Her speech is a feminine speech. As Hélène Cixous writes of 'woman', "her speech, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectified', generalised: she draws her story into history" (Cixous 1976, 881). By drawing her story into history, not only does she offer a new way of doing politics, but also endeavours to represent her individual and collective experience of trauma.

Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr draws the source of her political subjectivity from the mother figure. Her struggle is against the masculine symbolic. Hence her political subjectivity is based on feminism. Yet she does not repudiate class struggle as claimed by many left-leaning critics. She searches for a new language not only to express her female desire, but also to give voice to poor people who are silenced by the masculine symbolic. This new language does not derive from the father's law, but the mother's body. Therefore, in order to understand her political subjectivity, first and foremost, we should begin by shedding light upon her relationship with her mother.

²Her code name given by the leader of the left-wing organisation is Sekreter Rüzgâr, translatable as "Secretary Wind".

2.2 The Mother's Love Against the Father's Law

The mother-daughter relation plays a significant role in the construction and limits of Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr's subjectivity. Her initial sexual trauma, that of seeing her mother having an adulterous affair with a distant relative, haunts Gülfidan to the point at which her "self" faces a threat of disintegration. Her mother's guilt is that of committing adultery. She is punished by the father's law for going after love and exiled from her own house. Yet she refuses to abandon her established libidinal position and to give up her love-object. Her id hangs on to her attachment, and she is driven to introject the love-object, directing the feeling of hatred to her ego. This is the perfect illustration of what Freud describes as the state of melancholia (Freud 1917). The identification of the love-object with the ego leads to bitter self-reproach, and the melancholic mother derives masochistic pleasure from harming her own body, cutting her fingers and self-castration:

"I told them that my charcoal-black haired mother had cut and bled her fingers with a knife hundreds of times in a lifetime and wrapped the coloured print cloth pieces that she wore on one end of her teeth around her bleeding fingers" (Tekin 1986, 17).³

After being punished by the father's law, Gülfidan's mother refuses to talk and participate in the symbolic order. She "kills all her voices and buries them in her unknown graves" (44).⁴ Yet her daughter Gülfidan rescues her from a state of melancholia and total despair. Although Gülfidan feels anger, frustration and jealousy in the face of the bitter truth that her mother does not belong to her (Irzık 2004, 213), she keeps her mother's secret and shares her guilt. However, her secret is discovered when a love letter addressed to her mother is seized. She is punished by the father's law, beaten by her older sister, who internalised the Name-of-the-Father, and locked up in the back room of the house.

Gülfidan's complicity in her mother's crime creates a bond between them. Her mother does not see Gülfidan until she falls in love and shares her guilt with her. "Where have you been in me all this time, Gülfidan," her mother starts to speak for

³"Kömür karası saçlı annemin bir hayat boyu parmaklarını yüzlerce kez bıçakla kesip kanattığını, bir ucunu dişlerine taktığı renkli basma parçalarını kanayan parmaklarına ağlayarak sardığını anlattım."

⁴"Tüm seslerini öldürdü ve içinin bilinmedik mezarlarına gömdü."

the first time after being punished, “where, my daughter?” (Tekin 1986, 44).⁵ Her mother mourns her love and redirects her libido to a new love-object, that is her daughter. Her attachment to her daughter is a narcissistic attachment. According to Julia Kristeva, the mother’s love for her child is narcissistic. Her love for her child is a self-love, for she loves herself by identifying with her own mother’s love for her (Kristeva 1987, 26). The mother, continues Kristeva, accesses the Other [*l’Autre*], which goes beyond herself, not through the father’s law, but through the mother’s love. Knowing that the other [*l’autre*] comes out of herself, the mother does not need the masculine symbolic regulating the phallogocentric system to access the Other (Baraitser 2020, 116). This awareness points to a possibility of feminine resistance against the masculine symbolic.

Gülfidan’s mother provides her with a similar weapon, that of love, to resist the father’s law and set herself free by becoming “the desire-that-gives” and by “seeking the other in the other” (Cixous 1976, 893). “Find a boy with a girl’s heart and fall in love with him” she says (Tekin 1986, 70).⁶ By commanding Gülfidan to leave her father’s house and go after love, she offers her a possible “first political position”. Yet Gülfidan does not leave and assume her first political position. Instead, she puts on theatrical performances to entertain people at home. She exposes her body to the gaze of the Other. Her theatrical exposure aims at deriving pleasure from the realm of the symbolic. She desires to be the object of the Other’s desire. By allowing herself to be objectified in the realm of the symbolic, she experiences partial *jouissance*. Yet her experienced *jouissance* is different from her expected *jouissance* (Lacan 1998, 111). The lack is re-inscribed in her subjective economy as dissatisfaction (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008, 262). This dissatisfaction causes her anxiety and shame. She hides under a blanket and retreats into her mother’s womb and silence. Her inability to pass successfully through the Oedipal stage, get separated from her mother and realise her sex as female, striving to be the phallus leads to neurosis. She suffers from a case of hysteria. Her involvement with leftist politics is another attempt to enjoy the symbolic order, motivated by a desire to cover over the lack inscribed by symbolic castration. She comes out of hiding and burns the blanket in the sun. “From under the burnt rags,” she writes, “comes out a diamond who wants to dedicate its existence to the poor” (58).

In the first part titled “My private images are on me tonight [*Bu gece mahrem görüntülerim üstümde*]”, Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr narrates the story of her involvement with leftist politics:

⁵“Sen benim bunca zamandır neremdeydin, Gülfidan’, diye fısıldadı, ‘neremdeydin kızım?’”

⁶“Kız yürekli bir oğlan bul, âşık ol!”

“I, covered in bruises, hid in the snowy nights when my father went rabbit hunting by a tractor. I was lying down in the snow and breathing. When the horsemen came clattering at me, I started running towards the late September afternoons when my mother was picking fruit sprouts from our garden. By a river flowing red waters, that giant of a woman [*Bürümceklî devler karısı*] appeared before me. I crawled up to her and pressed my mouth to her breast laid on the floor. When my tongue got wet with her milk, I grabbed hold of her hair and climbed onto her lips in the sky. I realised that as soon as I swung on the branches of the pine trees sprouting from the roots of clouds, I would fall, break into pieces, scatter and disappear. I reached out with all my heart to the trembling vocal cords of forty women, saying “Something needs to be done, something needs to be done...” and putting the ring-like, ring-like fires around my neck, I was out of breath at the end of the sentence “Write my name in the organisation’s notebook” (18).⁷

Gülfidan’s unending quest to return to the pre-Oedipal stage, her desire to merge with the mother, not the real mother, but the lost mother is directly reflected in the story of her involvement with leftist politics. She strives to capture the mother’s body and drink milk from her breast. *Sevgili başkan* [Dear president or lover president], who is the leader of the organisation and symbolised as “that giant of a woman” [*Bürümceklî devler karısı*] in Gülfidan’s fairytale language, is her mother’s double [*semblable*]. Her libidinal attachment to *Sevgili başkan* is another attempt to capture the mother’s body and recover the lost, impossible *jouissance*. “How can you be sure,” asks *Sevgili başkan*, “that you were looking for a mother in me all those ten years?” (149)⁸ For Gülfidan, she is a “makeshift mother model”.

There is an organic relationship between Gülfidan’s involvement with leftist politics and her desire to capture the mother’s body, symbolised in the figure of *Sevgili başkan*. “She [my mother] was my only political star,” she says to *Sevgili başkan*, “She used to hold the end of the rope she tied around my wrists. If you hadn’t taken her place, I would’ve run away from the little night room” (149).⁹ Yet *Sevgili başkan*, who is her mother’s double, becomes the source of the uncanny [*das Unheimliche*] as

⁷“Yara bere içinde babamın traktörle tavşan avına çıktığı karlı gecelere saklandım. Karların üstünde büzülmüş soluklanırken atlılar tıkrıtlarla üstüme gelince, annemin bahçemizden meyve filizleri topladığı eylül ikindilerine doğru koşmaya başladım. Kırmızı sular akıtan bir ırmak kenarında Bürümceklî devler karısı karşıma çıktı. Sürünerek yanına yaklaşıp yerdeki memesine ağzımı dayadım. Dilim sütüyle ıslanınca saçlarından tuta tuta gökteki dudığına tırmandım. Bulut köklerinden fıskıran içde ağaçlarımın dallarında sallanınca düşüp parçalanacağımı, dağılıp kaybolacağımı anladım. Kırk kadının, “Bir şeyler yapmak lazım, bir şeyler yapmak lazım...” diye titreyen ses telerine tüm kalbimle uzandım ve halka gibi, halka gibi ateşleri boynuma takıp, “Dernek defterine beni de yazın!” cümlesinde soluklar içinde kaldım.”

⁸“O on yıl boyunca bende bir anne aradığından nasıl emin olabiliyorsun?”

⁹“O benim biricik politik yıldızım. Bileklerime bağladığı bir ipin ucunu elinde tutardı. Sen onun yerini almasaydın, küçük gece odasından kaçardım.”

well. In the figure of *Sevgili başkan* the repressed returns. The uncanny retroactively constructs and confers meaning on Gülfidan's repressed wishes. Her desire to return to the pre-Oedipal stage is vocalised by *Sevgili başkan*. "You're greedy for mirrors, girl," she scolds Gülfidan, "You will never prosper. They always hit your head with a mirror" (36).¹⁰

The mirror metaphor is worth paying attention to. According to Lacan, the mirror stage is the *sine qua non* of the formation of the ego. The infant has neither an independent existence nor an identity before the mirror stage. By seeing its ideal image, it feels jubilation. Yet its recognition of itself is a misrecognition [*méconnaissance*]. The wholeness of its ideal image does not fit its experience of its own body. Although it gains mastery over its image, it is not in full control of its body. It feels alienation (Lacan 1977a). In order to resolve its alienation, it enters the field of language, even though the symbolic order also fails to produce a cohesive identity. Gülfidan's inability to pass successfully through the Oedipal stage and internalise the Name-of-the-Father encourages her to re-try to resolve her alienation in the imaginary register. She desires to see her mother in the mirror and merge with the maternal body:

"She [my mother] was my mirror and the same as me. She was my splayfeet. My two hands with fingers as thin as sparrow nails. My shy neck always bent inwards. My nose that bore my Aunt Kamer's fingerprints. My sugar pink tongue. My stone-burnt, injured knees. She who was lying for a long time under the duvets in the back rooms was mine. She who woke up crying was mine" (Tekin 1986, 27).¹¹

Nevertheless, Gülfidan is doomed to fail to resolve her alienation in the imaginary register by merging with the imaginary maternal body, for the imaginary register is, in fact, the effect of the symbolic order, not the vice versa. The realm of the symbolic retroactively produces the imaginary register, and the desire to merge with the maternal body emerges as a cause of symbolic castration. The maternal body itself "which is signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification" (Butler 1993, 6). Thus there is no way out of the symbolic order, except for psychosis. Gülfidan's every attempt to resist the realm of the symbolic and merge with her

¹⁰"Bir ayna arsızısın sen kızım. Hayatta iflah olmazsın. Kafana hep aynayla vurmuşlar senin."

¹¹"O benim aynamdı ve aynımdı. O benim taraklı ayaklarımdı. Serçe tırnakları gibi ince parmaklı iki elimdi. Hep içeri bükük utangaçlı boynumdu. Kamer Halamın parmak izlerini taşıyan burnumdu. Şeker pembe dilimdi. Taş yanığı, yaralı dizlerimdi. Uzun uzun arka odalarda yorganların altında yatanımdı. Ağlayarak uyananımdı."

mother results in failure, for the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father would cost her her subjectivity. “The two of us,” she writes, “are an unfulfilled dream, mommy. . . I know I’ve been chasing this unfulfilled dream with raging ambition for years” (Tekin 1986, 177).¹² This dream is not only unfulfilled, but also invented when “she and her mother fall victim to the tale of *tepelek* [tepelek masalı]”, that is the father’s law. Gülfidan continues to chase her dream in the figure of *Sevgili başkan*, who serves as a partial fulfilment of her dream on the level of fantasy, hence as a support for her subjectivity.

Since her owning her mother’s guilt marks Gülfidan’s subjectivity, she also shares *Sevgili başkan*’s guilt, that of rebelling against the political order. After the 1980 coup d’état, Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr hides *Sevgili başkan* in her house. Thus she recreates a traumatic scene from her childhood by way of the repetition compulsion. She keeps *Sevgili başkan*’s secret just as she kept her mother’s. In her dreams, she also recreates the scene of guilt from her childhood. She dreams of her mother having an adulterous affair with her husband. “I should have guessed,” she writes, “that I would never get rid of the woman [my mother] as young as on her marriage certificate and wrapped in black tulle committed adultery with my husband in my dreams each night” (38).¹³ She shares her husband with her mother just as she shared her guilt in the past. In her dreams of adultery, she identifies with her husband’s desire, meaning that the object of her desire is her mother. Therefore, her dream reveals her incestuous desire. Since she assumes the masculine position and refuses to be the phallus, Gülfidan’s desire is also a homoerotic desire. Her sexual attachment to her mother, *Sevgili başkan*¹⁴ and her childhood friend Mukoşka reveals homoeroticism embedded in the text. According to Irzık, her homoerotic desire is a narcissistic return to herself (Irzık 2004, 222). Yet the fact that her mother dies and Mukoşka achieves a heterosexual marriage causes her anxiety.

There is, in fact, another dimension to Gülfidan’s attachment to the mother figure, which is worth paying attention to. Since all attachments entail the subject’s oscillation between love and hate, Gülfidan cannot help directing a feeling of hatred to her love-object. She unconsciously desires to hand over the guilty mother to the father’s law and thereby to enjoy the realm of the symbolic by internalising the Name-of-the-Father. In doing so, she would get rid of the “dead mother on the ceiling”, who prevents her from enjoying the symbolic order. “You’re tired of loving me,

¹²“İkimiz engel olunmuş bir rüyayız, anneciğim. . . yıllar ve yıllar boyu boğa gibi azgın bir hırsıyla bu engel olunmuş rüyayı kovaladığımı biliyorum.”

¹³“Evllenme cüzdanındaki fotoğrafı kadar genç, tüller içinde, son gecelerde kocamla zina halinde rüyama giren kadından kurtulamayacağımı tahmin etmeliydim.”

¹⁴“Sevgili” also means “lover” in Turkish.

cunt,” her dead mother scolds her, “you’d like to get rid of me” (117).¹⁵ At some point, she sees her mother with red wings sweeping the ashes. When she notices Gülfidan, she panics with the fear of the police. This incident hints at Gülfidan’s unconscious desire to get rid of the burden of her mother’s fundamental guilt. At another point, she yells at *Sevgili başkan* “filthy whistle-blower”. In order to ease her conscience, she denounces *Sevgili başkan* as a whistle-blower, even though she herself unconsciously desires to hand over *Sevgili başkan* to the Law. This reveals Gülfidan’s “mirrored reaction” to her ego-ideal, which causes a feeling of aggression. By her proximity to her mother, *Sevgili başkan* is also Gülfidan’s double, and serves as her ego-ideal, “from where she looks at herself” (Žižek 1989, 116). The ego-ideal points to the impossibility of coexistence. Therefore, you have to get rid of your ego-ideal (Lacan 1977b). In Lacan’s words, “the one you fight is the one you admire the most” (Lacan 1977b, 31). Gülfidan unconsciously desires to get rid of her ego-ideal, for the figure of *Sevgili başkan* criticises her for “watching the world in the mirror” and opposes her bodily desire and pregnancy, and thereby tries to prohibit Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr from accessing the Other through the mother’s love.

Let us return to Gülfidan’s efforts to enjoy the realm of the symbolic. After joining the organisation, she derives exhibitionistic pleasure from vividly portraying her private life to the female militants. “I brought a private image hidden in my memory into the sunlight,” she writes, “for I met the curious gazes of forty women” (Tekin 1986, 17).¹⁶ By exhibiting herself, she again aims to be the object of the Other’s gaze “to be able to reinstitute an identity” (Irzik 2004, 216), the way she did when she was a child. Yet she suffers from another attack of hysteria when she meets the male gaze and becomes the object of the male desire. After the 1980 coup d’état, the members of the organisation hold a meeting in her and her husband’s house. She is the only woman attending the meeting. She listens to a male unionist who she has learnt from her husband is the janitor of a branch in the South area. She feels the man’s gaze on her as he delivers his speech. She is startled and immediately taken to bed by her husband. She again hides under a blanket and yearns to return to her mother’s womb. Her dead mother comes by in a black car to haunt her and rebukes her desire to enjoy the symbolic order. “I knew what you did, cunt,” she scolds Gülfidan, “I always followed you” (Tekin 1986, 52).¹⁷

For Gülfidan, her joining the organisation and getting the code name “Sekreter

¹⁵“‘Beni,’ diyor, ‘sevmekten yoruldun kahpe, kurtulmak istiyorsun benden.’”

¹⁶“Belleğimde saklı duran mahrem bir görüntüyü kırk kadının merak dolu bakışlarına uğradığımdan güneş ışığına çıkardım.”

¹⁷“Ben senin ne yaptığını çok iyi biliyorum, kahpe, seni hep takip ettim.”

Rüzgâr” cause her life to go away for the second time.¹⁸ Although she seeks to enjoy the symbolic order, she finds herself trapped in the dungeon of Dev Sefid [Giant Sefid], “who is also male like King Kong” (31). Then how does Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr resist the masculine symbolic during her ten years in the organisation? She has already renounced her mother’s weapon, that of love. By being “a militant like a wind”, she has sacrificed love. “Love has rotten away while slamming factory doors” (72), she writes. In order to resist the father’s law by means of the mother’s love, she decides to give birth to a child who comes out of herself as the other. Gülfidan already had an abortion at the age of seventeen. This time she has no intention of having an abortion, even though the members of the organisation oppose her pregnancy.

Maternity, in Gülfidan’s fairytale language, is associated with the threshold where nature, that is the pre-symbolic, comes into prominence. “You told me,” she addresses her mother, “that I would spread from my insides the light of the stars, the leaves of the trees, the blue void that surrounds the world, and fill the seas in the hollows of the rocks with the blow of a divine wind” (71).¹⁹ To Gülfidan, the father’s law is restrictive and prohibiting, whereas the mother’s body is enriching and liberating. Thus her political subjectivity is not based on the acceptance of the father’s law, but the embrace of bodily desire and the plenitude associated with the maternal body.

2.3 The (Her)ethical Subject Against the Ideological Subject

In order to understand Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr’s political subjectivity, let us endeavour to shed light upon her tumultuous relationship with leftism, and move on to discussing her estrangement from the leftist organisation. I have already pointed to the fact that Gülfidan’s devotion to the organisation is built on maternal fantasy, symbolised in the figure of *Sevgili başkan*. Therefore, her political subjectivity is not based on overconscious political engagement. Neither does it stem from excessive ideological investment. On the contrary, Gülfidan does not blindly invest in leftist ideology. For her, leftism fails to sustain a consistent social reality, produce a life of wholeness and provide her with a solid identity. While her political subjectivity is intimately connected with the enjoyment she derives from the realm of the symbolic,

¹⁸The first time her life goes away is when she shares her mother’s guilt.

¹⁹“Yıldızların ışığını, ağaçların yapraklarını, dünyayı saran mavi boşluğu püskürteceğimi içimden, ilahî bir rüzgârın esişiyile kayaların oyuklarına denizleri dolduracağımı söyledin.”

part of the reason for her estrangement from leftist politics lies in the fact that she experiences *feminine jouissance*, which is different from the phallic mode of enjoyment.

According to Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, the subject's overinvestment in an ideology brings about a phallic mode of enjoyment. This mode of enjoyment aims to totalise and make a whole and is inclined to overlook contingency, whereas *feminine jouissance* embraces contingency and heterogeneity. To the extent that the subject derives *phallic jouissance* from ideology, it is an "ideological subject". By contrast, inasmuch as it engages with social reality by means of *feminine jouissance*, it is an "ethical subject" (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008, 265). Gülfidan's oversensitivity to the oppressive environment of the organisation, her tumultuous relationship with leftism and her reaction to the masculine symbolic qualify her as "an ethical subject". Moreover, insofar as her ethics does not "avoid the embarrassing and inevitable problematics of the *father's law*", it is what Kristeva describes as "herethics", that is a heretical and at the same time feminine ethics (Kristeva 1977, 185). This "herethics" is political to the extent that it challenges the masculine symbolic. Hence Gülfidan is a political subject; however, her political subjectivity is based on ethics, rather than ideology.

This (her)ethics points out the shortcomings of the symbolic and the limits of language. Gülfidan is "linguistically destabilised" (Bayraktar 2004, 120) and lacks the ability to think in abstract terms during her ten years in the organisation. She actively questions the master-signifier "class", which lays the foundation for leftism. The word "class" signifies "primary school desks" to her. "Maybe what we call class," she says to Mukoşka, "is to justify our wounds. Maybe it is a vain consolation for our suffering." (Tekin 1986, 163).²⁰ Gülfidan breaks the power of leftist ideology by confronting with the Real of leftism's desire (Žižek 1989, 48). She points to the way in which the word "class" is invested with unconscious desires and the fact that the leftist idea of the working class is completely different from workers. She draws attention to "the woman workers running after the baklava box before receiving the congratulatory message", the girls who sing cheesy songs on shifts and "the strikers selling cosmetics in suitcases to other strikers" (Tekin 1986, 89). However, when she speaks out against the leftist idea of the working class in a committee meeting, she receives backlash from the members of the organisation, who are ideological subjects to the extent that they are driven to resolve the inconsistency of leftist fantasy and make a whole out of differences. For them, everything that Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr presents as a weakness is actually something to be proud of. Although

²⁰"Yaralarımızı haklı çıkarmadır belki de sınıf dediğimiz şey. Boşuna bir avunmadır acılarımız adına."

baklava is a seducing dessert, their messages will be found to be more impressive. The girls who sing cheesy songs will eventually sing leftist anthems, and the strikers can buy cosmetics if they have money.

There is more to Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr's engagement with the word "class", which reflects her split existence. Although she "groans for the sake of her people", she hates her poverty and "glorious class". She does not want to become a worker in a yard factory. "...being a worker," she writes, "is not equal to my dreams. I chased the dream of seizing a daintier life than I was holding with my milky breath" (20).²¹ For her, poverty entails a constant re-inscription of lack, for "poor people are not able to take initiative" (167). Moreover, she feels as though she is being forced by the organisation to turn into "a hidden dragon in Gülfidan's image among people among whom she has grown up" (168). She experiences a split existence between Gülfidan, who "does not forget her people's attempts to murder her" (159), punishing her through the father's law, and Sekreter Rüzgâr, who wants to dedicate her existence to poor people. This split existence paves the way for her awareness of the unbridgeable gap between the working-class and leftist intellectuals and of the fact that the language of leftist ideology is different from that of the working-class. "Maybe there is no such word as class in our language," she says to Mukoška "maybe we're trying to express ourselves in another language" (163).²²

Furthermore, according to Gülfidan, the language of sciences, that of leftism "loots and erodes the words of the working class". "How my friends who dream about us were wrong," she writes, "They disarmed us with their devoted lives. They looted and eroded our words" (68).²³ Hence the working class is deprived of language. Poor people are silenced to the extent that they are not able to express themselves through the dominant language. This muteness brings people who are marginalised by the masculine symbolic together. In Tekin's own words: "In *Gece Dersleri*, both youth, poor people, children and women are mute" (Özer 2020, 119). They are castrated by the Name-of-the-Father like everybody else, yet more importantly, fantasy constantly fails to provide them with an illusion of being constituted as full subjects (S) (Stavrakakis 1999, 45-7), for they are not able to enjoy the masculine symbolic. They are confronted with lack in every form and doomed to silence.

This similarity between poor people and women is reflected in Gülfidan's relationship

²¹"... işçi olmak düşlerime denk değil. Süt kokulu soluğumla tuttuğumdan daha tazelik bir hayatı ele geçirme hayallerinin peşinden koştum."

²²"Sınıf, böyle bir sözcük yoktur da bizim dilimizde, belki de kendimizi bir başka dilde anlatmak için çırpınıp durmaktayız."

²³"Üstümüze düş kuran dostlarım nasıl da yanıldılar. Adanmış hayatlarıyla silahsız bıraktılar bizi. Sözcüklerimizi yağmalayıp yıpratıldılar."

with a mute worker. She watches a mute worker staging “a torture dance” in a factory cafeteria. This “torture dance” points out a possibility of representing the traumatic experience of the inscription of lack in the subject, that is the lack of women and of poor people. “The body,” writes Nilgün Bayraktar, “speaks of what the tongue cannot” (Bayraktar 2004, 127). The language of the body offers Gülfidan, whose (her)ethics prompts her to search for a new language to give voice to silenced people including herself, a means to resist the masculine symbolic:

“His body with eyes clouded by violence and shaking as if electrocuted was promising a brand new language. It was promising a completely different path to which I may bring myself when words become too heavy to lift like a stone” (Tekin 1986, 67).²⁴

Gülfidan is confronted more than ever with the limitations of language in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état, which strikes a serious blow against her “self”. The military coup of September 12, 1980 is experienced as a trauma leading to a gap in the realm of the symbolic. The traumatic kernel of the Real paves the way for the disintegration of Gülfidan / Sekreter Rüzgâr's self. Experiencing the traumatic event of the 1980 coup d'état, which wields an extreme level of political violence against the left, Gülfidan loses touch with reality. She states that her life goes away for the third time. These incidents of her life going away correspond to three experiences of trauma. The first experience is her initial sexual trauma, that of seeing her mother's illicit love affair and sharing her guilt. The second experience is her political trauma, that of joining the oppressive organisation. Finally, the third experience is the collective trauma of the 1980 coup d'état. Since the experience of trauma is characterised by “an inherent latency” (Caruth 1996, 17), Gülfidan's each experience of trauma retroactively triggers her previous experiences. That is why “her strange relationship with her mother” starts on the “twelfth morning of September” (Tekin 1986, 47). The dead mother returns from the grave and haunts Gülfidan. The return of the dead mother after the 1980 coup d'état points to the fact that individual and collective experiences of trauma are implicated in each other.

Gülfidan looks for alternative narrative techniques to represent the experience of trauma. She narrates the painful events following her mother's illicit love affair through political terminology and with a reference to torture scenes collectively

²⁴“Elektriğe verilmişçesine sarsılan bedeni, şiddetin bulandırdığı bakışlarıyla yepyeni bir dilin müjdecisi gibiydi. Sözcükler yerinden oynatılmayacak kadar ağır birer taş kesildiğinde, kendimi taşıyabileceğim bambaşka bir yolun habercisi...”

shared by the members of leftist organisations after the 1980 coup d'état (Bayraktar 2004, 126). She imagines her older sister as a head guard when she is locked up in the back room of the house. In this regard, a new kind of language is not only the product of Gülfidan's (her)ethics, which problematises the masculine symbolic and the limits of language, but also of her experiences of trauma. This new language through which she actively contests the symbolic order gives shape to her political subjectivity.

2.4 The (M)other Tongue and Hysterical Writing

Apart from the mother's love, Gülfidan resists the masculine symbolic by means of the (m)other tongue²⁵, that is "a 'fluid' language, free from phallic logic, characterised by openness rather than closure" (Flieger 1990, 58). This tongue is grounded on the maternal body, which is distinctly fluid, heterogeneous and self-sufficient (Irigaray 1985, 23-33). Since female genitalia, according to Luce Irigaray, are self-sufficient, woman is "other" in herself (Irigaray 1985, 28). She has access to the Other through her own body. Thus her language does not have to be a phallic language. The (m)other tongue represents the other of the masculine symbolic. The woman who speaks the (m)other tongue "sets off in all directions leaving 'him' unable to discern the coherence of any meaning" (Irigaray 1985, 29). She speaks of contradictory words, murmurs, whispers, and leaves sentences unfinished. She "breaks the code, shatters language and finds a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract" (Kristeva 1981, 24-5). She speaks of her desire and writes through her body. She produces her sext (Cixous 1976, 885).

Gülfidan discovers the (m)other tongue in "the fire path extending from her mouth to her left abdominal cavity" during her first time under the blanket (Irzık 2004, 215), when she retreats into her mother's womb and silence. Her body takes over her heart "with a wild ambition which demands victory", "picks her up and throws her into her world beyond" (Tekin 1986, 91). "My body," writes Gülfidan, "goes against my orders" (95).²⁶ She writes about and through her body. For instance, as Irzık points out, she narrates her experience of abortion at the age of seventeen through the language of the body (Irzık 2004, 215):

²⁵This term is borrowed from a collection of essays on psychoanalysis and feminism, and highlights the relationship between maternity and woman's language (Nelson Garner, Kahane, and Sprengnether 1985).

²⁶"Bedenim emirlerime karşı geliyor."

“The wind boiler got dirty. The glimmer of its bendable metal was smeared with the blood of the baby which was taken out with iron hooks. Sparks splashed onto the silk-soft blanket of eternity. The softness was pierced by smoky wounds as small as pinheads” (Tekin 1986, 76).²⁷

This (m)other tongue is produced and given shape by the “knowledge of life” [*hayat bilgisi*] passed on to Gülfidan by her mother. However, deciding to join the organisation and to enjoy the realm of the symbolic, she feels that her mother’s knowledge of life stemming from bodily desire is killed by the masculine symbolic, brutally murdered by theory books and the abstract language of the political. “By the age of eighteen,” she writes, “my knowledge of life was a dead monster” (58).²⁸ This dead monster, however, “rises from the grave and rushes over” Gülfidan. She endures the ten years in the organisation by “forcing her body to have a sexual love affair with the slogans” (94). She “carries her broken political time to the sounds of her body like the tinkle of an empty tin” (117). This (m)other tongue serves as a means to resist the masculine symbolic not only by “finding a specific discourse closer to the body”, but also breaking the chain of signification. For Gülfidan, the ten years in the organisation are “a grave of words: blood, red, violence, ambition, hail, my president, my cell, command, two ripped suet boats” (124), which do not have corresponding signifieds. She resists abstraction. “Storm,” she writes, “evoked no pain or joy apart from its dictionary meaning” (86).²⁹

Furthermore, Gülfidan’s (m)other tongue suspends the linear temporality associated with phallic logic. Her father’s time, that is the time of the Other, is symbolised as a genie of time emitting light like a ball. By contrast, she states that her mother’s language reflects the “consciousness of another time”. This another time is a “tedious repetition starting from a point, drawing a smooth curve, and returning to the timeline somewhere ahead” (147). “Her father’s lineage,” she writes to Mukoşka, “spread out of time, whereas her mother’s lineage spread through time” (148).³⁰ This is the language of her grandmother’s lullabies. This is the fairytale language of “broken stories bringing people to an inner time” (145). “Life,” she writes, “which seeps through her skin and gets tangled in her bones begins with the story of seven

²⁷“Kırlı kaldı rüzgâr kazanı, içinden demir çengellerle çekilip çıkarılan bebeğin kanı bulaştı, bükülebilir madeninin pırlıtısına. Kıvılcımlar sıçradı sonsuzluğun ipek yumuşaklığındaki örtüsüne. Yumuşaklık iğne başı kadar küçük dumanlı yaralarla delindi.”

²⁸“Ben on sekiz yaşındayken artık ölü bir canavardı hayat bilgim.”

²⁹“‘Fırtına’ sözlük karşılığının dışında hiçbir acıyı ya da sevinci çağrıştırmadı.”

³⁰“Babasının soyu soppu zamanın dışına, annesinin soyu soppuysa zamanın içine yayılmıştı.”

brothers who founded seven villages, told by her grandmother” (113).³¹ Her fairytale language, disjointed narrative, broken syntax, juxtaposition of different forms of writing and ironical voice serve as a means to resist the phallogocentric logic of language. She becomes the “fairytale writer of illegality”, who endeavours to close the gap between mother and daughter. Insofar as she stands up against the father’s law and resists separation from the mother enforced by the realm of the symbolic, she is a (her)ethical subject who writes about her own illegality.

The realm of the symbolic “represents the distance that comes between baby and mother” (Gürbilek 1998, 39). Gülfidan’s inner time does not fit the “form of a foreign language” associated with the Name-of-the-Father. By entering the masculine symbolic, she “acquires a fake personal history like a nylon flower” (47). Thus her language expresses her desire to return to the pre-Oedipal stage. She wants to return home through her own body. “I wanted to reach my primordial state of being by going back through my inner paths,” she writes, “I wanted to take myself back to before the world was founded without even telling myself” (Tekin 1986, 73).³² Her writing can be regarded as an effort to return home. As Irzık points out, she gives birth to her second child, that is *Gece Dersleri* (Irzık 2004, 221). Yet the (m)other tongue does not offer her freedom, for the maternal body, as discussed above, is the effect of the Name-of-the-Father, and the (m)other tongue is the by-product of a maternal fantasy retroactively constructed by symbolic castration. Therefore, Gülfidan is not able to constitute herself as a full subject (S). At the end, “. . . now I know,” she writes, “I’ve been dreaming of listening to my own hurt voice” (Tekin 1986, 189).³³ Lack is re-inscribed in her subjectivity and her “self” disintegrates to the point at which her constituting identities (Gülfidan/Sekreter Rüzgâr/Writer) are shattered.

Every time Gülfidan decides to enjoy the realm of the symbolic, she suffers from a case of hysteria. In this regard, her writing can be regarded as her last effort to enjoy the symbolic order. She experiences a “feminine *jouissance* of the Other” (Žižek 2002, 59), deriving pleasure from reporting on herself. Yet her experienced *jouissance* causes her anxiety. Her writing is a hysterical writing, a way of bursting into a “womanly crying jag” [*kadınca bir hıçkırık krizi*]. Like James Joyce’s writing according to Lacan, Gülfidan’s hysterical writing is her *sinthome*.³⁴ She speaks in somatic

³¹“Teninden süzülüp içine dolan ve kemiklerine dolanan hayat ninesinin ona anlattığı yedi köy kuran yedi kardeş hikâyesiyle başlar.”

³²“İçimin yollarından geri dönüp geçerek ulaşmak istiyordum ilk halime. Dünya kurulmadan önceye götürmek istiyordum kendimi, kendime bile haber vermeden.”

³³“ . . . kendi incinmiş sesimi dinlemeyi düşlediğimi biliyorum artık . . . ”

³⁴Lacan introduces *sinthome* as a fourth circle on the Borromean knot, holding together the Real, the

symptoms (Flieger 1990, 60). *Gece Dersleri* is her way of enjoying her *sinthome* to protect her subjectivity from destruction. Although her (m)other tongue is not able to offer her emancipation, instead a means of resistance against the masculine symbolic, meditating her relation to the Name-of-the-Father, her hysterical writing points to a possibility of overcoming the limits of phallic language and partially working through the experience of trauma.

Not only does Gülfidan's hysterical writing restore bodily desire to the realm of linguistic representation, but it also critically engages with ideological fantasies. Yet, by mocking leftists who "knock on doors, saying 'I've brought consciousness, open!'" (Tekin 1986, 155) or working-class people who steal solidarity money, she does not repudiate class struggle. Instead, her hysterical writing has a political significance to the extent that it articulates a new vision of class struggle on the symbolic level. This is a (her)ethical struggle, for heterogeneity is not reduced to an ideological wholeness from which the subject gets *phallic jouissance*. Gülfidan saves the word "*saya*" from the dictionary of dialects and restores other folk sayings and jokes to common language. She endeavours to give voice to people silenced by the masculine symbolic. Following Cixous, she prevents "the class struggle, or any other struggle for the liberation of a class or a people, from operating as a form of repression" (Cixous 1976, 882). In doing so, she enriches not only the realm of the symbolic, but also ways of doing politics.

Finally, Gülfidan's hysterical writing can be regarded as an effort to register, and thereby to exercise mastery over the experience of trauma. Gülfidan's body is the site of her traumatic experiences (Bayraktar 2004, 122). She gives a testimony of her traumatic experiences to "imaginary relations", "spirits" and the "gods of revolution" through the language of the body. Following Gabriele Schwab, her hysterical writing and her second child *Gece Dersleri* "endow trauma with a symbolic form of expression and thereby not only change its status but also make it indirectly accessible to others" (Schwab 2010, 8). Through such a symbolic form of expression based on the mother's body, she pushes the limits of representation. She mourns and partially works through her traumatic experiences.

Nonetheless, "the inner music of these confessions," writes Gülfidan at the end of *Gece Dersleri*, "didn't quite match the sound of these keys" (Tekin 1986, 189).³⁵ She decides to return home, to her mother, to her "ugly hand writing" (Gürbilek

Imaginary and the Symbolic. By acting upon the Real, it produces symptoms. Since it is closely connected with or, to put it better, is inscribed in the subject, the removal of *sinthome* would jeopardise the structure of the subject (Bailly 2009, 104-7). According to Lacan, by playing with words, writing in a nonsensical language, and thereby challenging the signifying chain, Joyce's writing, his enjoyment of his *sinthome*, prevents him from experiencing psychosis (Grigg 2008, 21).

³⁵"Bu itirafların iç müziği, bu tuşların sesine pek uygun düşmedi."

1998, 47). Yet neither does her hand writing match the music of her confessions, for returning home causes her to fear. As a result, she dreams of listening to her own hurt voice. She yearns for total silence away from her “friends’ heartbreaking images”. Thus she accepts the impossibility of representing the experience of trauma as it is. What is accessible to us is the impossibility of representation. Yet, by registering and sharing the unrepresentability of her traumatic experiences, Gülfidan enjoys her *sinthome*. In doing so, she saves her subjectivity from a definite demise.

3. THE ANATOMY OF EVIL AND THE VICISSITUDES OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY IN *SAHBAZ'IN HARIKULADE YILI 1979*

3.1 Introduction

Mine Söğüt's third novel *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (2007) endeavours to tell a “wonderful” tale which is difficult to tell, which consists of “unusualness, anarchy, breaking rules and rebellion” (Söğüt 2018, 73). This tale containing “words whose meanings overflow” deals with the experience of trauma before the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey and strives to represent what people have gone through in a fairy tale language or, to put it better, in a grotesque and a wicked language into which violence seeps. Trying to tell about the chaotic atmosphere before 1980, it delves into the human psyche and attempts to identify the source of evil. In the novel, the reason for the extreme level of evil lies in the hearts of men who are victims of masculine fantasy, of the families in which they grow up. As chaos feeds on the dysfunctional family institution and gains strength from the “monsters” it creates, the state tries to control family to plant conformance at micro scale. Hence the novel begins to focus on the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d'état by examining the anatomy of the evil which paves the way for it. This way, everything from family to the state, from ideologies to political subjectivities takes its share of the author's scalpel.

The main character of the novel is the amorphous, bird-like creature Şahbaz, who knows everything, who changes shape and seeps into the violent stories he narrates. Şahbaz keeps the woman who has been tortured to near death alive in the cellar of a police headquarter, in the unconscious of society, by feeding her fruits and telling her stories. The novel is divided into two parts. In the first part, Şahbaz tells the woman his “wonderful” stories which are independent, yet connected to each other. The second part titled “Almanac 1979” lists the “real” events of the year of

1979. Benefiting from the contrast in tone between the two parts, Şahbaz strives to represent the violence lurking outside. He subverts the meanings of words and vilifies political ideologies. Yet, inasmuch as the novel reflects the disillusionment with politics after the 1980 coup d'état and focuses on the question of what happens to political subjectivity in the face of trauma, it makes the reader ask whether something new can be created out of rebellion against everything.

3.2 The Primordial Femicide and Violence

Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979 begins with the story of a curse inflicted on a fairy tale village. The narrator tells the story in a once-upon-a-time structure. There is a drought-prone village where women die, men are devastated and babies fail to grow up. One day, a girl named Hacer strips naked in the village square and starts singing a song in an unknown foreign language. The villagers think that she is possessed and has gone crazy. Seeing his twin sister dancing with a stick in her hand and surrounded by dwarf jinns, Mustafa kills and cuts her into pieces in front of the whole village. This sacrificial ritual is followed by a period of fertility, abundance and prosperity blessed upon the village. Yet it does not take long for the villagers to realise that Hacer's murder at the hands of her twin brother has brought nothing but a curse for the village. The women of the village start giving birth to twins, and the drought comes back as soon as the fear felt about these strange births starts to dominate the life in the village. First, Mustafa, who dreams of singing his twin sister's song in his nightmares, leaves the village. Then, having killed their own twins, the villagers depart. Only two twin brothers survive these mass killings.

Years later, Melih and Salih are born in this village as the twin sons of one of these surviving brothers. The curse seems to be forgotten by the villagers until the village midwife has a dream about a bird-like creature, that is possibly Şahbaz, warning about the curse. She tells the villagers that in order to lift the curse, Melih and Salih should kill their older sister Ayşe, who has committed incest with their father. After a cleansing ritual performed by their mother in the middle of the night, they kill and cut their older sister into seven pieces and throw each piece in seven different wells with the help of their father. After this ritualised killing, their mother Gülbeyaz runs away with their uncle, and their father marries the village midwife's daughter. Following their father's remarriage, Melih and Salih are sent away by their father from the village to live with their mother and uncle. After a while, they return to the village to take revenge on their father, who has slept with their sister, the father

who is not subjected to the Law himself, who transgresses the taboo of incest. They kill their father and his wife. Later in his life, Melih starts to kill all the women who love Salih. Yet he puts the blame on Salih and institutionalises him in a mental hospital each time he commits femicide.

The “immoral” Hacer is a scape goat which holds the community together around the father’s law. There is, however, a strong indication that Mustafa, who establishes the father’s law in the community, is involved in incest with his sister. Therefore, the father’s law established after he kills his “immoral” sister is marked by a fundamental guilt, that of incest. Although Hacer is forgotten by the villagers, she uncannily returns from the collective unconscious in the form of the repetition of killing. Thus the primordial femicide, the killing of Hacer, serves as the source of different kinds of violence in the novel. The organic relationship between the subject matter of the novel, that of violence roaming Turkey before the 1980 coup d’état, and masculinity into which Melih and Salih are initiated is rooted in the primal act of killing. To elaborate upon what I mean by the primordial femicide, let me draw an analogy with Freud’s concept of “the primordial crime”, the killing of the father of the primal horde. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud points to the way the killing of the primal father, the father of the primal horde paves the way for the development of social and cultural institutions (Grigg 2008, 25). The death of the father of *jouissance* binds the sons to the Law. Through the symbolic debt caused by the sons’ fundamental guilt of killing the primal father, the sons identify with the symbolic father, that is, the dead father, according to Lacan (Grigg 2008, 30). This symbolic debt gives rise to the super-ego regulating the subject’s relationship with society, and the primal identification with the Name-of-the-Father leads to the development of social and cultural institutions.

Similar to the killing of the father of the primal horde, the primordial femicide lays the foundation for the patriarchal law which can only exist on the condition that femininity is killed, yet returns as a living dead and unites men around the threat of feminisation. Symbolisation, Žižek writes, is equal to “symbolic murder” (Žižek 2019), for the non-overlapping of signifier and signified strips the thing of its reality. Only through a rite of burying, a symbolic ritual, the dead is incorporated into the realm of the symbolic. Like the dead father symbolised as the agent of the Name-of-the-Father, femininity becomes part of the symbolic order by being designated as the other of the patriarchal law. Femininity keeps patriarchy alive by constantly posing a threat to it. Thus femininity is not only a crisis in the patriarchal law, but also a constitutive part of it. Insofar as the sons are positioned against symbolic femininity, that is the silenced and dead femininity, masculinity finds a meaning in the chain of signification and binds the sons together around the masculine symbolic,

for masculinity only signifies the other of femininity. Just as Abraham's sacrificing a ram instead of his son Isaac is necessary for the god's law to establish itself, the female who is not bound to the Law, who transgresses the taboo of incest, should be sacrificed in order that the patriarchal law exists. When Hacer is killed by Mustafa, masculinity and femininity which are also a set of twins get separated. Hence, in the novel, violence is depicted as the prerequisite of and integral to masculinity and the patriarchal law. Violence is by nature masculine. The symbolic violence embodied in language in the novel reflects a violence inherent to the masculine symbolic. The subjective violence performed by the characters and objective violence integral to the "'normal' state of things" (Žižek 2008, 2), to the realm of the symbolic, stem from masculinity rooted in the father's law. The symbolic order and the "'normal' state of things" are by nature violent to the point at which life, as Şahbaz says, "exists in order that evil proceeds" (Söğüt 2018, 90).¹

In the novel, violence is depicted as being performed by men and belonging to the masculine symbolic. It is women's fate to be killed at the hands of men. "The women he [Şahbaz] knows are miserable mothers. Someone's child is missing, someone's child is dead, someone's child is a murderer" (170).² Facing violence, the woman characters either become silent or go crazy. When Melih beats her to death, Semiha "seemed to say," the narrator narrates, "'Well kill me, then I'll go to the kitchen and heat the stuffed pepper dish'. She seemed to be waiting to die, to be killed as if accepting something ordinary" (70).³ She does not possess the symbolic means to make sense of violence and death. Similarly, Mehtap condones the beatings of the producer with whom she makes love. Haydar's mother goes crazy when her son is brutally murdered in front of her eyes. She refuses to see, hear and speak. The woman in the cellar of the Three-Door Inn has no voice. She goes into silence after being tortured.

Yet violence is traumatic not only for women, but also for men who do not get the expected *jouissance* from masculine fantasy. The father's law does not offer them a unique identity. They are inflicted with the curse of a split existence, that of having a twin of their own. Doubleness is a double-edged sword. The double [*semblable*] is the source of the uncanny [*das Unheimliche*], that of the return of the repressed. Melih sees in the mirror Salih, "who looks at him from his inside and purposely

¹"Belki yaşam, sadece kötülük yol alsın diye vardır."

²"Tanıdığı kadınların hepsi bedbaht anneler. Kiminin çocuğu kayıp, kiminin çocuğu ölü, kiminin çocuğu katil."

³"Peki öldür, sonra ben mutfağa gider, dolmanın altını yakarım' der gibiydi. Ölmeyi, öldürülmeyi, sıradan bir şeyi kabul edermişçesine, bekler gibiydi."

reminds him of what he longs to forget” (44)⁴, who is the mother’s son “trying to climb his mother’s body hanging from the ceiling” (212). By killing the mother figure, his older sister, Melih causes his mother to leave with his uncle. Although he is sent away to live with his mother, he knows that his mother no longer belongs to him. Salih reminds Melih of what he has repressed, that is his guilt of causing his mother to leave and his desire to capture the mother’s body. In order to enjoy his masculinity and assert a unique identity, he wants to “destroy his brother instead of killing him. He wanted to return to primordial times and bring out of the dark past the time when his twin did not exist” (131).⁵ However, “when Melih wants to kill Salih,” the narrator asks, “does he actually want to kill himself?” (132)⁶ The subject needs its other to be constituted as a subject. Mustafa keeps his twin sister alive by singing her song in his nightmares. He is “like a madman carrying his twin, whom he killed with his own hands”. He will “never be able to bury that body”. “Melih wants Salih to die. Yet he cannot kill him. The twin is equal to ‘I’. Killing one’s twin means killing oneself” (120).⁷ He does not kill Salih to be able to put the blame of his acts of killings stemming from his desire to affirm his fragile masculinity on his other and thereby to preserve his subjectivity.

Fragile masculinity, which is threatened by the return of the living dead, that of femininity, is in need of constant self-affirmation by repeating the act of violence. Melih’s repetition of his own killing of his older sister is an effort to reclaim his masculinity. It can be understood with reference to Freud’s notion of the “repetition compulsion”, which serves the subject to master the experience of trauma by taking on an active role (Freud 1961a, 10). When Melih kills his older sister, he does not know what he is doing. He is “too unconscious to stand up against his father and passionate enough to get carried away by the lust of a murder” (Sögüt 2018, 79).⁸ He gets *jouissance* from the father’s law. Yet insofar as lack is reinscribed in his subjectivity as dissatisfaction, his initiation into masculinity through violence is traumatic. He repeats his killings to master his experience of trauma, that of separating from his mother, and to affirm his masculinity.

When Melih and Salih kill their father and stepmother, they orphan Emine, who is

⁴“Kendi içinden ona bakan ve unutmak istediği bir sürü şeyi inadına ona hatırlatan.”

⁵“... kardeşini öldürmek değil, yok etmek istemişti. Geri dönmek, ilk zamanlara dönmek ve bir ikizinin hiç olmadığı zamanı karanlık geçmişten çıkarıp var etmek istemişti.”

⁶“... Melih Salih’i öldürmek isterken aslında kendini mi öldürmek ister...”

⁷“Melih, Salih ölsün ister. Ama onu asla öldüremez. İkiz bendir. İkizini öldürmek kendini öldürmek anlamına gelir.”

⁸“... babalarına karşı çıkamayacak kadar şuursuz, bir cinayetin şehvetine kapılabilecek kadar tutkuluydular.”

given to the orphanage after her parents' death. Years later, Emine escapes from the orphanage and moves to the city. She changes her name to Mehtap and starts singing in night clubs. One day, she runs into her unknown half brothers by chance on a street corner. She prevents Melih from killing his twin brother and takes both of them to her apartment where she takes care of Salih until he gets better. That night, Mehtap makes love to Melih and gets pregnant. Melih does not remember when he has seen a photo of his father, stepmother and half sister in Mehtap's apartment. "Did they make love after he had seen the photo," the narrator asks, "Did he see that photo after they had made love? Is it possible for him to remember?" (189)⁹ Melih fulfills his desire to capture the mother's body at the level of fantasy by sleeping with his half sister, but at the same time, he represses his guilt of transgressing the taboo of incest and eases his conscience by acting as if he does not know their kinship. At the end, to affirm his masculinity, he kills and cuts into pieces Mehtap, who sleeps with Salih after he has left, and who sings the "immoral" Hacer's song in her dreams.

In the novel, the systematic violence roaming Turkey like a rabies epidemic before the 1980 coup d'état is rooted in the primordial femicide, for political violence is depicted as being the by-product of masculinity. Insofar as the personal is treated as the political or vice versa, the dichotomy of private and public spheres is transcended in the novel. Violence stemming from "human" reasons takes on political significance, while political violence always has "human" reasons. "A small child cannot plant social hatred in his heart," says the narrator, "He wants to claim a personal hatred in the first place. This personal hatred is a sleepy snake hidden in the closest place, in the existence of his parents" (151).¹⁰ In the beginning of the novel, Şahin murders his father, who "mourns the death of a treacherous redhead" and "tramples on his masculinity" (32). "We said human not political, right?" asks the narrator, "Yes, Şahin killed his parents as a result of purely human weakness" (36).¹¹ After killing his parents, Şahin replaces his father with Brother Bekir and gets involved with right-wing politics. He joins Melih's organisation and changes his name to Kartal to escape the police. Similarly, Mehtap's son Burak develops an attachment to Brother Kartal after joining Melih's organisation. Therefore, right-wing politics and the identification with the father figure are intimately related in the novel.

⁹"Fotoğrafi gördükten sonra mı seviştiler, seviştikten sonra mı gördü o fotoğrafı? Hatırlaması mümkün mü?"

¹⁰"Küçük bir çocuk, toplumsal nefretler büyütmez yüreğinde. Önce kişisel bir nefreti sahiplenmek ister. Kişisel nefret en yakınında, anne babasının varlığına gizlenmiş uykulu bir yılan."

¹¹"Siyasi değil, insani demiştik değil mi? Evet, Şahin tamamen insani bir zafiyet sonucu öldürdü annesiyle babasını."

3.3 The Father Figure and The Fantasy of the Right and the Left

“At first, the child has to adjust to the structure of the authoritarian miniature state, the family,” writes Wilhelm Reich in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, “this makes it capable of later subordination to the general authoritarian system. The formation of the authoritarian structure takes place through the anchoring of sexual inhibition and sexual anxiety” (Reich 1946, 25). In *Şahbaz’ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*, family is portrayed as a dysfunctional institution. Şahbaz “makes all mothers abandon their children and all children kill their mothers” (Söğüt 2018, 132).¹² Fathers rape their own daughters, sons kill their own fathers. Hence there is a chaos at the family level. Family fails to hold the members of society together and as a result, chaos spreads throughout society. This dysfunctional family structure ends up with “a lot of children and youth trying to get to the same place by different routes” (122)¹³, children and youth who become political subjects. The conflict between right and left, “the relentless war between the ideal and the revolution” (122), paves the way for a chaos at the social level. The woman in the cellar of the Three-Door Inn asks whether the political chaos before the 1980 coup d’état is caused by the dysfunctional family structure, especially by the absence of the father figure:

“Sometimes I miss my father so much. Maybe things would have been different if he hadn’t died. Like my mother said. Was it really because my mother didn’t take care of us that my brother was lost, I was lost?.. Don’t children with living fathers disappear in custody? Like the boy I heard screaming last night. Doesn’t he have a father either? Didn’t his mother take care of him?” (51)¹⁴

Not only is the father supposed to make the child adjust to the system through the Law, but also the mother who internalises the Name-of-the-Father is responsible for maintaining order. “They [police] always ask while torturing us,” says the woman in the cellar, “Aren’t you ashamed to make your mother cry... don’t you pity

¹²“Bütün annelere çocuklarını terk ettiriyor. Bütün çocuklara annelerini öldürtüyor.”

¹³“Aynı yere bambaşka yollardan gitmek isteyen yığınla çocuk, yığınla genç.”

¹⁴“Bazen babamı çok özlüyorum. Belki ölmeseydi, her şey başka olurdu. Annemin dediği gibi. Sahi gerçekten annem bize sahip çıkmadığı için mi abim kayboldu, ben kayboldum?.. Babaları yaşayan çocuklar gözaltında kaybolmazlar mı gerçekten? Dün gece çığlıklarını duyduğum oğlan mesela. Onun da babası yok mu? Annesi sahip çıkmadı mı?”

on her... don't you know how much you upset her...'" (84).¹⁵ The state tries to control political dissent with the rhetoric of family values. Yet, inasmuch as the dysfunctional family creates chaos at the social level, chaos corrupts family to a greater extent. As a result, chaos enters a repetitive cycle. Moreover, to the extent that violence is traumatic not only for victims, but also for perpetrators, the acts of violence before the 1980 coup d'état are repeated by way of the repetition compulsion. In this regard, the time of the novel is cyclical. The first part of the novel is divided into twelve chapters. The year of 1979 is divided into twelve months. "... do you know I conceive of time as cyclical," the woman says to Şahbaz, "Like a clock... It starts... It circles back and starts again" (101).¹⁶ However, after the 1980 coup d'état, everything changes. "They [people] will calm down after a year," says the narrator, "Rebellion will be replaced by giving up. They'll be relieved when they give up. They will not be happier. Nothing will be fixed. Nothing will be better. But they'll be relieved" (181).¹⁷ The oppressive regime in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état disbands political organisations and prohibits political activities. Family and society are restructured to produce subordination to the system organised around neoliberal principles. Thus, worthy of note is that family order and the social system are mutually constitutive.

Yet let us go back to the year of 1979. If the dysfunctional family institution is not able to adjust the child to the system and paves the way for political dissent aiming at achieving a revolution, how is it possible to make sense of nationalistic movement, right-wing politics, which supports the system, before the 1980 coup d'état? As mentioned earlier, the identification with the father figure plays a constitutive role in right-wing politics in the novel. In order to understand the political subjectivities of the rightist characters, let us briefly touch upon the paternal function in psychoanalysis. There is the real father of the primal horde, "the guardian of enjoyment", who enjoys all women, the symbolic father designated as the Name-of-the-Father and "the imaginary father in his multiple representations: castrating father, tyrannical, weak, absent, lacking, too powerful, and so on" (Grigg 2008, 46). Şahin kills the castrating father who "tramples on his masculinity" and, after being baptised with Commander Melih in the glowing water of the Bosphorus, he identifies with the ideal father, the powerful father, Melih. Hence the killing of one of the figures of the imaginary father does not amount to a rebellion against the father's

¹⁵"Bize işkence yaparken sorarlar hep 'Annemi ağlatmaya utanmıyor musun... yazık değil mi kadına... onu ne kadar üzdüğünü bilmiyor musun...'"

¹⁶"... biliyor musun ben zamamı yuvarlak görürüm. Saat gibi... başlar... yuvarlağı çizer ve yeniden başlar."

¹⁷"... tam bir yıl sonra sakinleşecekler. İsyân yerini vazgeçişe bırakacak. Vazgeçince rahatlayacaklar. Daha mutlu olmayacaklar. Hiçbir şey düzelmeyecek. Hiçbir şey daha iyi olmayacak. Ama rahatlayacaklar."

law, for the agent of the Law is already the dead father, the symbolic father. Şahin “helped his brothers who serve the Commander. He wanted to be one of them” (Söğüt 2018, 99).¹⁸ Through violence, he is initiated into masculinity, and recognises himself as the other in the band of brothers. He even stops using the name his castrating father has given him. Şahin is transformed into Kartal.¹⁹ He grows up. Similarly, Burak replaces the absent father with the powerful father, Brother Kartal and enjoys his masculinity in Melih’s organisation.

Thus the identification with the father figure in the novel is based on the masculine fantasy which gives rise to the characters’ rightist political subjectivities. This masculine fantasy enables the characters to enjoy the realm of the symbolic on the condition that they get separated from the mother. While Şahin’s mother wishes she had never given birth to him, Burak’s "immoral" mother Mehtap does not belong to him. Şahin kills his mother just as he has killed his father. Similarly, one day Burak will want to kill Mehtap, “who looks with her blonde hair and wanting eyes more like a bitch than a mother” (165).²⁰ Hence maternal fantasy is replaced by paternal fantasy for the characters in the novel. The mother figure should be killed in order that Şahin and Burak are initiated into masculinity, even though Burak’s repressed desire to capture the mother’s body uncannily returns in a dream in which a snake, his double, talks about “drinking breast milk” (152).

Not only masculine fantasy, but also right-wing politics serves Şahin and Burak as a means to grow up and become men like the powerful figure of the imaginary father. In the epic recited by Kartal in Melih’s camp, the relationship between masculine fantasy and right-wing politics is illustrated. Masculinity is associated with separating from the mother, “breaking the cradle and becoming a brave man”:

“It took place in Altai, a child was born,
While being born, he was flooded with light.
Seven wolves flew, smelled and ran,
“Give us the child” they said, howled while getting excited.
His mother cried a lot, her heart got broken,
The child spoke out, healed her wounds.
He said: “Mother, don’t wail! Distract them but don’t cry!”
“Ask for seven-day postponement, secure the business!”
Seven days past, the mother went pale,

¹⁸“O da Komutan’a hizmet eden abilerine yardım etmişti. Onlardan biri olmak istemişti.”

¹⁹“Şahin” means “hawk”, while “Kartal” means “eagle” in Turkish.

²⁰“... sarı saçları ve her şeyi ister gibi bakan o bakışlarıyla bir anneden çok orospuya benziyor.”

The boy broke the cradle, became a brave man” (121).²¹

After breaking the cradle, Şahin gets sexual excitement and *jouissance* from holding a gun, a typical phallic object. He derives pleasure from right-wing politics and violence, directing his natural aggressiveness associated with the death drive, referred by Freud as Thanatos, against “treacherous” leftists, the “thieves” of the impossible *jouissance* (Žižek 1993). Yet one act of violence is followed by another as in the case of Melih, for the experienced *jouissance* causes dissatisfaction, and hence is traumatic for both characters. Both Şahin and Melih repeat the acts of violence in order to eventually get the impossible, lost *jouissance*. However, at the same time, they experience a sense of guilt caused by the tension between the ego and the super-ego. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud writes:

“His aggressiveness is introjected, internalised; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from that is, it is directed towards his own ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and which now, in the form of “conscience”, is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals. The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment” (Freud 1961b, 70).

Melih externalises his guilt and eases his conscience by blaming Salih. He fulfils the need for punishment by institutionalising his double in a mental hospital. Whereas, Şahin believes that he has killed his parents for the sake of the homeland. “He killed his parents,” the narrator says, “But he did it for his older brothers who are ready to give their lives to the homeland” (Söğüt 2018, 99).²² Şahin wraps up his personal hatred, “that sleepy snake hidden in the existence of his parents”, in the cloak of nationalism. Thus nationalist ideology serves him as a dream-like fantasy construct

²¹“Altay’da olmuş idi, bir çocuk doğmuş idi,
Dünyaya gelir iken, nurlara boğmuş idi.
Yedi kurtlar uçmuşlar, koku alıp koşmuşlar,
‘Çocuğu ver’ demişler, uluyarak coşmuşlar.
Annesi çok ağlamış, yüreğini dağlamış,
Çocuk da dile gelmiş, yarasını bağlamış.
Demiş: “Anne, sızlanma! Oyala da, ağlama!
‘Yedi gün mühlet iste, işi bağla sağlama!’
Yedi gün mühlet dolmuş, annenin benzi solmuş,
Oğlan beşiği kırmış, bir civan yiğit olmuş.”

²²Annesiyle babasını öldürmüştü. Ama vatan için canını vermeye hazır abileri için yapmıştı bunu.”

fulfilling his wish of having a clear conscience. For Burak, right-wing politics is also a fantasy providing him with the illusion of being constituted as a full subject (S). Before getting involved with Melih's organisation, he dreams of going to America. "To that hilly city of America. He will buy such a red car. But he won't let girls in his car. He won't let his mother either. He wants to travel alone. In a red sports car... in America... all by himself" (54).²³ He indulges in the fantasy of going away from his "immoral" mother and looking for phallus in the dreamland, America. The object of his desire is not women, but a red sports car, a typical symbol for phallus.

After joining Melih's organisation, Burak's fantasy, derived from the American films he has seen with his mother in the cinema, is replaced by a right-wing fantasy, as both are oriented towards the same goal, that of covering lack. In Melih's camp, he "prays five times a day and listens to the wonderful tales of steppes, horses, ancient wars. The fairy tales about those wonderful people who drink koumiss, ride horses and love their race very much. He wants his moustache to grow as soon as possible. Just like his brother Kartal... He will learn to ride a horse and use a gun" (88).²⁴ Instead of America, Burak starts fantasising about another dreamland, the homeland of Turks. "He no longer wants to run far away," the narrator says, "He is already far away. Far away from everything. In that ancient time when everyone was an epic hero" (88).²⁵ The time when everyone was an epic hero is the time of fullness, when everyone was a full subject (S). Therefore, his right-wing ideology makes reference to a "lost state of unity, harmony and fullness", a pre-symbolic real which is mythological (Stavrakakis 1999, 52).

What about leftist politics? Is leftism also a fantasy? Just as everything has a double, leftism is portrayed as the double of right-wing politics in the novel. "The Commander and the Communist Captain..." Şahbaz says to the woman in the cellar, "are sometimes the same person" (76).²⁶ The conflict between left and right is depicted in the novel as a kids' football game. "A blown-up soccer ball," narrates the narrator, "runs between the fussy feet like a blind lizard. Inside the goal post between the two stones on the right... inside the goal post between the two stones

²³"Amerika'nın o yokuşlu şehrine. Öyle kırmızı bir araba alacak. Ama arabasına kızları bindirmeyecek. Annesini de bindirmeyecek. Tek başına gezmek istiyor. Kırmızı spor bir arabayla... Amerika'da... tek başına."

²⁴"Beş vakit namaz kılıyor ve stepler, atlar, eski savaşlar hakkında harika masallar dinliyor. Kırmızı içip, at binen ve ırkını çok seven o harika insanlarla ilgili masallar. Bir an önce bıyıkları çıksın istiyor. Tıpkı Kartal Abisininki gibi... At binmeyi öğrenecek ve tabanca kullanmayı da."

²⁵"Artık uzaklara kaçmak istemiyor. Zaten çok uzakta. Her şeyden uzakta. İnsanların her birinin bir destan kahramanı olduğu o eski, çok eski zamanlarda..."

²⁶"... Komutan'la Komünist Kaptan... onlar da bazen aynı kişi olurlar."

on the left... one right, one left... one right... one left... right... left... left... left... right... goaaaal...” (107).²⁷ According to Şahbaz, left and right are the two politically opposed brothers who play a children’s game. “Years will pass,” he says, “the story of the politically opposed brothers who kill each other will be told by word of mouth” (107).²⁸ Hence not only right-wing politics, but also leftism is a fantasy-construct. Şahbaz confronts the woman with the Real of her desire which arises as the consequence of her leftist ideology:

“To dream the same dream... It sounds very good, doesn’t it? If everyone had the same dream, as if the dream could come true... I know you and your friends thought that you were dreaming the same dream. An incredible intoxication of faith. Look, that sounds good too. But if you think about it, you will realise that you’re chasing the impossible. After all, wasn’t it a total drunkenness? Drunks think that the world is spinning like crazy. In fact, they don’t feel that the world is spinning. They’re about to fall with uncontrolled swings. But they don’t know it. They experience a desperate joy that the world is spinning and they are high enough to feel it in their bones. An instant joy. A miserable joy that ends in disappointment” (128).²⁹

Like right-wing politics, leftism is a state of drunkenness, an illusion of being constituted as full subject (S). The subject derives a phallic mode of enjoyment, “an instant joy”, from its investment in leftist ideology (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008, 265). Ideology constructs its reality insofar as it does not know, but believes in “the spinning of the world”. It acts as if “the world is spinning.” It enjoys its faith. “Faith is omnipotent,” says Şahbaz, “and has the power to create as well as the power to destroy” (Söğüt 2018, 75).³⁰ Ideological fantasy creates social reality to the extent that it endeavours to eliminate the lack in the Other by producing imaginary signifieds such as “equality”. Therefore, borrowing from Jacques-Alain Miller, “reality

²⁷“Çoktan sönmüş patlak futbol topu, telaşlı ayakların arasında kör bir kertenkele gibi ilerliyor. Bir sağdaki iki taş arası kaleden içeri... bir soldaki iki taş arası kaleden içeri... bir sağdaki, bir soldaki... bir sağ... bir sol... sağ... sol... sol... sol... sağ... gooooool...”

²⁸“Aradan yıllar geçecek, birbirini öldüren karışık görüşlü öz kardeşlerin öyküleri kulaktan kulağa, dilden dile anlatılacak.”

²⁹“Aynı rüyayı görmek... Kulağa ne hoş geliyor değil mi? Eğer herkes aynı rüyayı görürse, sanki rüya gerçek olabilir gibi... Sen ve arkadaşların aynı rüyayı gördüğünüzü düşünüyordunuz, biliyorum. Müthiş bir inanç sarhoşluğu. Bak, bu da kulağa güzel geliyor. Ama biraz düşünürsen olmazın, olanaksızın peşinden koştuğunu sezeceksin. Eninde sonunda bir sarhoşluk değil miydi topyekûn yaşanan. Sarhoşlar, dünya çılgın gibi dönüyor sanırlar. Dünyanın döndüğünü falan hissettikleri yoktur aslında. Kontrolsüz salınımlarla düşmek üzeredirler. Ama bunu bilmez, dünya dönüyor ve ben bunu iliklerimde hissedecek kadar yükseldim diye biçare bir sevinç yaşarlar. Kısacık bir sevinç. Sonu hüsrana olan zavallı bir sevinç...”

³⁰“İnanç her şeye kadirdir. Her şeye... Var etme gücü de ondadır, yok etme gücü de.”

is fantasy” (Miller 1995, 12). Yet, even though the subject enjoys an ideological fantasy, ideology cannot provide it with the life of wholeness, for its expected *jouis-sance* is impossible, already lost. It is “chasing the impossible”, so its “miserable joy ends in disappointment”.

All things considered, both right-wing politics and leftism are depicted as the products of the realm of the symbolic, oriented towards the goal of alleviating the effects of symbolic castration. Then the question we should ask is whether resistance is rendered impossible in the novel. Does the novel have an apolitical inclination? Although it reflects the disillusionment with leftism after the 1980 coup d’état, its understanding of politics is hinted at in the woman’s words: “Is wish or reality more important? Is chasing a utopia a noble pursuit or a mindless obsession? When did dreaminess begin to be degraded? Yet everything starts with a dream. Then it’s time to make dreams come true” (Söğüt 2018, 150).³¹

The symbolic dimension of power is not only prohibitive, but also productive (Stavrakakis 1999, 33), producing a wish, a desire, the desiring subject. According to Foucault, what makes resistance possible when there is power is the productivity of the symbolic dimension of power (Foucault 1978, 95-6). Insofar as the desiring subject actively contests the symbolic order, it is a political subject. Since the novel rebels against everything from the family institution, in which the subject internalises the Name-of-the-Father, to the state, it would not be fair to suggest that it has an apolitical inclination. Although it reflects the disillusionment with ideologies, it is political to the extent that it challenges the symbolic order rather than taking it for granted. Therefore, inasmuch as desire gives rise to and has the potential to change social and cultural institutions, “everything starts with a dream and comes true”. Hence politics is inherent to the realm of the symbolic. The rejection of the symbolic order, the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, only results in psychosis, crying for mother like the mad man in the mental hospital or retreating into the mother’s womb and living in a tree trunk like the Communist Captain’s twin brother. Yet what if the subject experiences a trauma which paves the way for the collapse of the chain of signification, that of the realm of the symbolic. Is it possible to continue to desire and preserve its political subjectivity when it experiences a trauma caused by an extreme level of violence?

³¹“İstek mi önemlidir, gerçek mi? Bir ütopyanın peşinde koşmak soylu bir uğraş mıdır, akılsız bir saplantı mı? Hayalperestlik ne zaman aşağılanmaya başladı? Oysa hayal etmekle başlar her şey. Sonra hayalleri gerçekleştirmeye gelir sıra.”

3.4 Death-in-Life and Textualising Trauma

In *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*, the all-knowing creature Şahbaz embodies and incorporates violence into the text. He conceals the systematic violence in Turkey in the shadow of the 1980 coup d'état in family dramas which illuminate the way violence is rooted in the family. He jumps from story to story and changes shape from character to character. He tells about “the lives which the people mentioned as names in the newspapers leave”. He tells about the lives of the people mentioned in the second part of the novel, “Almanac 1979”. “What I am telling you about,” he says to the woman in the cellar, “are the friends and relatives of the people mentioned in the newspapers” (90).³² Although he says, “I have no witnesses to verify me” (14)³³, for only crows and plane trees can “imprison a terrible human history in memory” (34), he keeps the woman alive in order that she serves him as a witness. “You have captured me. . .” the woman says, “you have imprisoned my life, Şahbaz. Why?.. Not for me, but for yourself. . . To tell. . .” (60).³⁴ Thanks to the woman, Şahbaz's “own life gains meaning. Maybe everyone's life gets a meaning” (133).³⁵

The woman is condemned to silence, to a position of “death-in-life”, which entails “a traumatic foreclosure of mourning” (Schwab 2010, 15). “You know Şahbaz,” she says, “I am dead. In the silence of a dead person, in the stillness of a dead person, I've been lying here for who knows how long” (Söğüt 2018, 106).³⁶ She cannot go “where she is supposed to go even though she is dead” (112). Like Haydar, whose corpse cannot be buried by his mother, she remains unburied. She is a “living corpse”. Following Agamben, she is therefore the “complete witness” standing in the threshold between life and death (Agamben 1999, 47). Yet she “had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express” herself (Agamben 1999, 60). She does not hear the voices of the people who torture Zehra. “Maybe,” she says, “I am deaf to them” (Söğüt 2018, 124).³⁷ Having experienced the limits of pain, she no longer feels anything. “Like all my nerves have been

³²“Benim anlattıklarım, o gazetelerde isimleri geçen insanların dostları, yakınları, komşuları. . .”

³³“Beni doğrulayacak hiçbir tanığım yok.”

³⁴“Sen beni. . . benden öte canımı. . . tutsak aldın Şahbaz. Neden?.. Benim için değil, kendin için. . . Anlatmak için. . .”

³⁵“Onunla birlikte kendi yaşamı da bir anlam kazanıyor. Belki herkesin yaşamı bir anlam kazanıyor.”

³⁶“Biliyorsun Şahbaz, ben bir ölüyüm. Bir ölünün sessizliğinde, bir ölünün kıpırtısızlığında, burada, kim bilir ne zamandır yatıyorum.”

³⁷“Onlara sağır oldum belki de.”

cauterised,” she says, “there was neither pain nor horror that I could not imagine. Everything has started to feel normal” (171).³⁸ Hence she only bears witness to the impossibility of witnessing. Unable to symbolise or mourn her experience of trauma, she is condemned to repetition:

“I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost.
I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost.
I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost.
I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost.
I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost.
I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost.
I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost.
I am lost. I am lost. I am lost. I am lost” (89).³⁹

Having experienced an extreme level of violence which is beyond comprehension, beyond her senses, the woman’s subjectivity disintegrates. “Maybe,” she says, “I’m torn in two. I’m broken into pieces. I tore myself into pieces and threw away every piece of me elsewhere” (156).⁴⁰ Yet Şahbaz’s attempt to narrate the stories of violence, his repetition of violent events in different forms, keeps her alive, for textualising trauma “counters the work of death and breathes life back into the silences haunted by dead words” (Schwab 2010, 34). Although she says, “Tell me Şahbaz... tell me the story of Salih and Melih... tell me so I can forget my own story” (Söğüt 2018, 142)⁴¹, she remembers her own story, her own brother and mother, each time Şahbaz tells her another story of violence, for we are implicated in each other’s trauma and share the impossibility of representing it. Şahbaz can only tell his own story by “concealing it in the other people’s stories” (163). Through telling each other about our traumas, we “suffer together and learn to take pain for granted” (102).⁴² Yet insofar as we share our traumas, we also get stronger.

³⁸“Sanki tüm sinirlerimin ucu dağlanmış gibi, ne acı vardı, ne de aklımın almadığı korkunçluklar. Her şey normalmiş gibi gelmeye başlamıştı.”

³⁹“Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.
Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.
Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.
Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.
Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.
Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.
Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.
Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum. Kayboldum.”

⁴⁰“Belki de ikiye bölündüm ben. Parçalandım. Kendi kendimi parçaladım ve her parçamı başka yere attım.”

⁴¹“Anlat Şahbaz... Salih’le Melih’in hikâyesini anlat bana... anlat ki kendi hikâyemi tamamen unutayım.”

⁴²“Şimdilik hep birlikte acı çekeceğiz. Acıyı kanıksamayı öğreneceğiz.”

“Fate gets alarmed when injured people approach each other,” states the narrator, “It doesn’t want his secrets to come out. If people sense that what is happening to them is not so different from what has happened to others, they become stronger” (185).⁴³

Even though Şahbaz confesses he has lied at the end of the novel, as long as he incorporates trauma into the realm of the symbolic, “both woman and people outside live” (59). This way, the experience of trauma is partially worked through. Even though “all the words that have been said will be said again and again forever”, the subject gets entitled to choose “which word she will repeat” by “learning from the past” (196), by partially working through her experience of trauma. At the end of the year of 1979, after she has partially worked through her traumatic experience, the “living corpse”, who has not been able to die so far, can finally die and in the beak of a “giant bird” can go far away. Thus the novel serves as a belated symbolic ritual of burying the traumatic events of the 1980 coup d’état through the eyes of the 2000s.

Finally, I would like to raise the question of whether textualising and thereby working through the experience of trauma are of any significance for the realm of politics. In the novel, to the extent that we work through and partially understand our trauma, we are able to continue to live, to desire. By rendering visible the masculine fantasy that gives rise to the political violence and the collective experience of trauma in Turkey before 1980, the novel enables us to understand the reason for what we have been through so that, after mourning the past, we can desire a future. Moreover, by confronting us with the Real of our desire, the illegitimacy of the imaginary signifieds which our ideological fantasies provide us with, the novel encourages us to mourn our past identifications and redirect our libido to new love-objects. After the experience of trauma, only through the work of mourning, we can re-invest our libido in new political projects (Alcorn 2002, 118), a new politics which is critical of both right-wing politics and leftism.

⁴³“Yaralı insanlar birbirlerine yaklaştığı zaman, kader telaşlanır. Sırları ortaya çıksın istemez. Eğer insanlar başlarına gelenin başkalarının başına gelenlerden çok da farklı olmadığını sezerlerse güçlenirler.”

4. FAMILY SECRETS AND THE POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN IN *TEHDIT MEKTUPLARI*

4.1 Introduction

Aslı Biçen's third novel *Tehdit Mektupları* (2011) attempts to represent the personal and collective traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d'état in the form of a family drama. Being born in 1970, Biçen can be considered as a second-generation author who has not personally experienced the events before and after 1980, whose identity is instead shaped by a collective trauma transmitted from one generation to other. If we are to accept that "trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation" (Hirsch 2001, 12), the novel, being written in 2011, can be regarded as a belated effort to witness or to problematise witnessing the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d'état.

The novel tells the story of a family secret, that of a father's guilt which haunts him until the end of his life. In doing so, it reflects on how the father's sin, regardless of whether or not it is the father of the family or that of the state, affects children. As children's subjectivities are constructed in the family setting, their political subjectivities are responsive to their relationships with their fathers and mothers throughout their lives. Thus the personal and the political are depicted as being intimately connected in the novel. This chapter will endeavour to unravel this relationship while taking into account the different strategies of the novel to understand the political subject in the oppressive environment of the 1980s.

4.2 The Father's Sin and the Child's Fate

At the beginning of *Tehdit Mektupları* is a court record claiming that Bahattin Perver is murdered with rat poison by Ülkü Öncü, who prosecuted and imprisoned his son Cihan Perver, on political charges just before the 1980 coup d'état. During his beloved son's trial, Bahattin receives a letter from a sweetheart of his youth, Şeyda, who he mistakenly thought, as it turns out, had cheated on him. After learning from the letter that his daughter, whom he has never seen, serves as a prosecutor in his son's case, Bahattin decides to confront his long-lost daughter and confess to her that he is her birth father. Hoping that Ülkü can get her half brother cleared from the case, he shows her Cihan's letters to his girlfriend Hale, which prove that he has never been actively involved in any leftist organisation. He also warns Ülkü that her half brother has a heart condition and if he is locked up in prison for a crime that he never committed, he might not survive long. Nevertheless, Ülkü sentences Cihan to several years in prison for aiding and abetting the overthrowing of the constitutional order, for he was seen giving money to the leader of an organisation. Shortly after Cihan starts serving his sentence, he dies of heart failure as expected. Having lost his only son, Bahattin withdraws from life and withers away. In a letter addressed to his relative İsmet, he writes that he has been receiving a couple of threatening letters, possibly from Ülkü, who cannot absorb the fact that he is her birth father. After İsmet finds Bahattin's dead body in his house, Ülkü is arrested and prosecuted for homicide.

Yet the novel does not give a definite answer as to whether Ülkü has actually murdered his biological father Bahattin. Although all the evidence suggests otherwise, Ülkü claims in her defence that Bahattin must have committed suicide and put the blame on her to avenge his beloved son's tragic death. After losing his son, Bahattin calls Ülkü, saying that he has been receiving some threatening letters for a while. He invites her over to his house in order that she might help him deal with these letters. Feeling guilty about her half brother's untimely death, Ülkü accepts his invitation. On her way to his house, she receives another call from him, saying that rats have infested his house. He asks her to buy rat poison from the pharmacy. She claims that Bahattin must have broken into her house and written the threatening letters in question himself on her broken typewriter, which her mother had given her, and poisoned himself with the poison she had bought for him. Yet, despite her defence, Ülkü is found guilty and sentenced to death by the court.

There is no traditional narrator voice in the novel. We only have at our disposal Cihan's letters, Ülkü's diary and Bahattin's unsent letters to his imprisoned son

to solve the mystery of Bahattin's death. By leaving the difficult task of making a judgement to the reader, the novel points at the myth of the flawless and fair functioning of the justice system. Furthermore, it highlights the impossibility of representing the traumatic events of the 1980 coup d'état from an omnipresent perspective. Moving from a personal story, the novel endeavours to represent the collective trauma shared by all the members of society before and after the 1980 coup d'état. Hence politics gets pulled into a family drama, and the personal trauma becomes connected to a collective trauma, and vice versa. This family drama, another Turkish author Ayhan Geçgin writes, "becomes a metaphor for a historical event, that of September 12". He quotes from the introduction to the novel, saying: "children suffer from the sins of fathers, so do young people from those of the paternal state [*devlet baba*]" (Geçgin 2019). In this regard, the personal and the political are implicated in each other and the political is rooted in the smallest unit of society, that is the family. As Shulamith Firestone writes of "family" in *The Dialectic of Sex*, "the family contained within itself in embryo all the antagonisms that later develop on a wide scale within the society and the state" (Firestone 1970, 12). Thus, to understand the political, we should first pay attention to the family.

As a child, Bahattin causes his childhood friend Ahmet to be paralysed in an accident. Years later, seeing Şeyda with another man, who will turn out to be her cousin, he slaps her face and leaves her with rage. Being filled with the desire for revenge, he marries Ahmet's older sister Fatma. In doing so, not only does he take revenge on his "disloyal" girlfriend, but also eases his conscience. "If it weren't for that accident, if I didn't owe Ahmet, if it wasn't for my own resentment, my crazy desire for revenge," he writes in his unsent letters to Cihan, "I wouldn't have married your mother, and you wouldn't have been born either" (Biçen 2011, 108).¹ Bahattin shows sorrow for his wrongdoing in life. He is filled with remorse. Hence he is portrayed as a genuinely repentant figure. By giving voice to his feelings, the novel humanises the father figure, who is supposed to be a rule-maker and punishing. "Until I said 'yes'," he writes, "I didn't understand what yes means. Then suddenly I became a husband, a groom, and was expected to be a father" (106).² Thus the father figure is depicted as being equally subjected to the father's law. He is expected to "split a raw chicken's legs" in the nuptial chamber to "show his power, strike fear into his wife, and proclaim his kingdom" (107).³ Yet Bahattin refuses to

¹"O kaza olmasaydı, Ahmet'e vicdan borcum olmasaydı, kendi hıncım, intikam deliliğim olmasaydı annenle evlenmezdim, sen de doğmazdın."

²"Evet' diyene kadar evet ne manaya gelir anlamamıştım ben. Sonra birden koca oldum, damat oldum, baba olmam beklendi."

³"Damadın onun çiğ tavuğun bacaklarını ayırması gerekirdi. Gücünü gösterebilirsin, karısının içine korku salsın, krallığını ilan etsin diye herhalde."

touch the chicken. “As if I would have to accept everything that would spring out of it if I spread its legs,” he writes (107).⁴

Bahattin says that he has never loved his wife, neither has he ever wanted a child, to become a father. He forces his wife to abort her first child. Yet Fatma gives birth to Cihan during the time when he is in Germany looking for a job. “When I realised that there was no turning back, that I would never see Şeyda and be able to hold her in my arms again,” he writes to Cihan, “I fled to Germany. However, only when the news of your birth came, it seemed that everything was over... The anger I felt at that time was immense. For life, fate, everyone, you, maybe you the most” (116).⁵ He hates his son, for the son establishes a bond between the mother and the father, and binds the father to the family, to the woman he does not love. However, he starts loving him when the son needs his father the most, when Cihan burns with fever at the age of five. “That’s when I realised that I was a father,” he writes, “exactly five years after Fatma had known that she was a mother” (110).⁶ When he accepts his fatherhood, Cihan⁷ becomes his “universe”.

Therefore, the father’s love for the son is a narcissistic love, a conditional love. He does not love the son unconditionally like the mother. He takes little or no interest in his newborn son, yet later develops a libidinal attachment to him who is growing up to become the extension of his ego. As Erich Fromm writes of the difference between motherly and fatherly love in *The Art of Loving*:

“Motherly love is by its very nature unconditional. Mother loves the newborn infant because it is her child, not because the child has fulfilled any specific condition, or lived up to any specific expectation... Fatherly love is conditional love. Its principle is ‘I love you because you fulfil my expectations, because you do your duty, because you are like me’”(Fromm 1985, 32-4).

The father is the one who leads the child to the adult world, “who teaches the child, who shows him the road into the world” (Fromm 1985, 33). When Cihan is at the

⁴“Bacaklarımı ayırırsam içinden fıkkırarak her şeye eyvallah demem gerekecekti sanki.”

⁵“Ben artık bu işin dönüşü olmadığını, Şeyda’yı bir daha göremeyeceğimi, onu bir daha kollarıma alamayacağımı iyice anladığımda gitmiştim Almanya’ya, kaçmışım. Yine de senin doğduğun haberi gelince asıl o zaman her şey bitmiş gibi geldi... O sırada duyduğum öfkenin haddi hesabı yoktu. Hayata, kadere, bütün insanlara, sana, belki de en çok sana.”

⁶“Ben baba olduğumu ilk o zaman anladım çünkü, Fatma’nın anne olduğunu bilmesinden tam beş yıl sonra.”

⁷The name “Cihan” means “universe” in Turkish.

age of eight or nine, Bahattin makes him a slingshot. Yet, after knocking a bird out of the sky with the slingshot, he starts to cry over its death. “I was mad at you at that time,” Bahattin writes, ““You’re a man, do men cry over everything? If necessary, you will go hunting, you will also slaughter chickens” (Biçen 2011, 112).⁸ Even though Bahattin refused to split the chicken’s legs in the nuptial chamber, he becomes the agent of the Name-of-the-Father as soon as he has accepted his place as the father in the family. He becomes the one who passes on the father’s law to his son, and the child has to live up to his father’s expectations in order to secure his love.

Cihan feels responsible to his father. “. . . it’s almost like,” he writes to Hale, “you’re carrying someone who owns you so much on your back, even though he always thinks he’s carrying you. Because he will get hurt more when you get hurt, you always have to live cautiously, carefully, in a state of perpetual restraint” (18-9).⁹ Thus being loved puts Cihan under an obligation to his father. He explains his avoidance of active involvement with leftist politics as a possible effort not to disappoint him. “Maybe I am just a coward,” he says, “maybe it is because of unbelief, maybe I can’t do this to my dad” (41).¹⁰

Similarly, Ülkü tries to live up to her adoptive father’s expectations. She becomes a copy of her rightist father Ertuğrul Öncü, who teaches her “all our values” (73), who “forbids her to read things that are not in accordance with Turkish customs” (69), who says to her: “. . . since you’re Muslim, you should know your religion, my girl” (73).¹¹ Her mother, on the other hand, is symbolically dead just as Cihan’s mother passed away several years ago (Geçgin 2019). According to her diary, her mother has never loved her, for she reminds her of Bahattin, who left her after she became pregnant with Ülkü. Neither does Ülkü love her "immoral" mother, whose guilt is passed on to her, and makes her ask how to face her father. Her relationship with her parents, in this regard, is the perfect illustration of the Electra complex, which is the inverse of the Oedipus complex. Although the term “Electra complex” was never used by Freud but later developed by psychoanalysts who followed him, it proves effective in accounting for the little girl’s rivalry with her mother and affection for her father. Firestone explains the Electra complex as follows:

⁸“Ben o zaman sana kızmıştım, ‘Erkek adamsın, böyle her şeye ağlanır mı? İcabında ava da çıkacaksın, tavuk da keseceksin.’”

⁹“. . . seni bu kadar sahiplenen birini adeta taşıyor gibi oluyor insan, hep o seni taşıdığımı zannetse de. Sen zarar gördüğünde o senden daha çok zarar göreceği için hep temkinli, dikkatli yaşamak zorundasın, daimi bir itidal içinde.”

¹⁰“Belki sadece korkağım, belki inançsızlık, belki babama bunu yapamam.”

¹¹“. . . madem Müslüman’sın dinini bileceksin kızım.”

“The little girl, just like the little boy, begins with a fixation on the mother. Toward the age of five, when she discovers that she has no penis, she begins to feel castrated. To compensate, she tries to make an alliance with her father through seduction, thus developing a rivalry with, and subsequent hostility to, her mother. The superego develops in response to repression by the father: But because he is the object of her seduction, he does not repress her as he does his son, who is his sexual rival for the affection of the mother, and thus the young girl’s basic psychic organization differs from, is weaker than, that of her brother. A girl who persists in strongly identifying with her father is said to be retarded at the ‘clitoral’ stage of female sexuality, likely to be frigid or a lesbian” (Firestone 1970, 52).

Ülkü persists in identifying with her father. Therefore, she grows up to be frigid and distant, and is loved by her father as “my boy girl [*erkek kızım*]” (Biçen 2011, 85). By the time she is of marriageable age, she receives a marriage proposal from an older colleague who happens to be her father’s friend from the right-wing movement. Since her father cannot marry her, he wants her daughter to marry his double [*semblable*], and hence supports Ülkü’s marriage with Hilmi Bey. Albeit being symbolically dead, her mother, on the other hand, opposes the father’s authority, saying: “Don’t marry him, marry someone you love” (76).¹² In this sense, her mother offers her a possible way of resisting the father’s law. Nevertheless, “if my mother says that,” she writes, “it’s definitely wrong. She’s trying to make me do something wrong. I don’t listen to her” (76).¹³ For her, romantic love is “something men make up to fool stupid women” (90).¹⁴ Love only signifies the love of country, of the flag and of the family to her (74). She does not listen to her mother. “I will not be like my mother,” she says, “I don’t let her get in the way with my dad” (90).¹⁵ Wanting to please her father and secure his love, she says: “If my father sees fit, I don’t have a word” (75).¹⁶ She accepts Hilmi Bey’s proposal and gets engaged.

However, at the time when Bahattin reveals his true identity to Ülkü, her paternal fantasy is shattered. “. . . I lost my father and my whole family. Forever,” she says, “I lost my self-respect, my roots, my origin” (81).¹⁷ She wishes Bahattin and Cihan

¹²“Onunla evlenme, dedi. Sevdiğin biriyle evlen.”

¹³“Annem böyle diyorsa kesin yanlıştır zaten. Bana yanlış bir şey yaptırmaya çalışıyor. Onu dinlemem.”

¹⁴“Aşk böyle aptal kadınları kandırmak için erkeklerin uydurduğu bir şey.”

¹⁵“Annem gibi olmayacağım. Babamla aramı bozmasına izin vermeyeceğim.”

¹⁶“Babam uygun görmüşse bana söz düşmez.”

¹⁷“. . . ben babamı ve bütün ailemi kaybettim. Sonsuza kadar. Kendime saygımı, kökümü, kökenimi kay-

did not exist so that she could keep up her fantasy and preserve her subjectivity. “I wish Bahattin did not exist,” she writes, “I wish Cihan did not exist. I wish they were gone” (94).¹⁸ She causes her half brother to be convicted of a crime he did not commit, and thereby takes revenge on her biological father. Yet she has now to confront her conscience while going through another Oedipal stage. This leads her to suffer from a case of hysteria. At that time, she breaks off her engagement to Hilmi Bey, causing her adoptive father to have a stroke. Blaming herself for her beloved father’s illness and getting worse day by day, eventually she is institutionalised in a mental hospital.

Like Ülkü, Cihan pays for his father’s sins. After his verdict is read and he is imprisoned, he retreats into silence, and thereby refuses to participate in the realm of the symbolic, to enjoy the Name-of-the-Father. In doing so, he punishes his father, whose sin has caused him to be sentenced to several years in prison. Being filled with sorrow, “But you’re always silent,” his father writes to Cihan, “you’re always silent. You don’t even look at my face in court, at least you’re looking at my face on prison visits, but what a look. Like someone else, not even someone else, as if you weren’t human” (111).¹⁹

Cihan’s subjectivity disintegrates in the face of the experience of trauma. He no longer retains his humanity. It will not take long before he dies in prison anyway. Losing the extension of his ego, Bahattin dies too, regardless of whether or not he is murdered. Even before his physical death, he becomes a dead man. He lives in a house where “someone who is already dead but unable to leave the world lives” (131). “Even if it wasn’t with poison, I killed him,” states Ülkü in her defence, “To show me that, he didn’t go to the other world, instead waited, called me and showed me” (131).²⁰ In doing so, Bahattin symbolically kills his daughter. “I was dead too,” Ülkü continues, “and I was sitting with my father, and we didn’t have a word to say to each other” (132).²¹

In this regard, children die either a physical or a symbolic death at the hands of the father in the shadow of the 1980 coup d’état, no matter if he is the biological

bettim.”

¹⁸“Keşke Bahattin olmasa.
Keşke Cihan olmasa.
Keşke yok olsalar.”

¹⁹“Ama hep susuyorsun, hep susuyorsun. Mahkemede yüzüme bile bakmıyorsun, en azından görüşlerde yüzüme bakıyorsun ama o ne bakış. Başka birisi gibi, hatta başka birisi bile değil, insan değilmiş gibi.”

²⁰“Zehirle olmasa da onu ben öldürmüştüm işte. Bunu bana göstermek için öteki dünyaya gitmemiş, beklemiş, çağırılmış ve göstermişti.”

²¹“Ben de ölüydüm işte ve gerçek babamla karşı karşıya oturuyorduk ve birbirimize söyleyecek tek kelimemiz yoktu.”

father, the adoptive father, or the paternal state [*devlet baba*]. Even though the army seizes power by 1980, children continue to die. “How happy I was when the army seized power,” says Bahattin, “Has it been five months or six months? I said children won’t kill each other anymore. But children continue to die in other ways” (109).²² Hence the family serves as a metaphor for the state and is depicted as beset by politics in the novel. Through political violence, the paternal state establishes the father’s law at the level of society and punishes children who do not live up to its expectations. It also punishes the father figure who does not fulfil his duty to hold the family together, and thereby to impose order on society. Therefore, the 1980 coup d’état serves to recover the father’s authority in society.

4.3 The Ways and Fringes of Doing Politics

According to Nurdan Gürbilek, not only people who were involved in the leftist movement but also ordinary people who witnessed a series of violent events in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d’état experienced a collective trauma (Gürbilek 1992, 10). Similarly, regardless of whether or not people are actively involved in politics, everyone got a good share of it in the politically-charged atmosphere of the 1980s. Even though Cihan’s letters prove his “innocence”, that he has not gotten involved in any leftist organisation, politics seeps into his everyday language, and his sympathy for leftist ideas is clearly observable from his letters.

Cihan does not actively participate in politics, for he does not want to upset his father. Moreover, his letters add another dimension to his staying away from active politics. As psychoanalytic political theory explains, ideological identification presupposes a desire to access the Other [*l’Autre*] (Stavrakakis 1999). The subject identifies with a particular ideology to be constituted as the other [*l’autre*] among others, for “belonging to something,” as Cihan states, “How comfortable it is to feel part of something big” (Biçen 2011, 41).²³ Hence ideological identification derives from the subject’s self-insufficiency and subsequent desire to cover over lack. Yet, instead of ideological identification, Cihan accesses the Other through romantic love, a libidinal attachment to the other. In his letters, he narrates his love for Hale through political terminology: “If everyone was as self-sufficient as you, there would be no revolution. Organising with you is the hardest thing in the world. Although

²²“Halbuki nasıl da sevinmişim ordu yönetime el koyduğunda. Beş ay mı oldu, altı mı? Çocuklar birbirini öldürmeyecek artık, demiştim. Çocuklar başka başka şekillerde ölmeye devam ediyor ama.”

²³“Ait olmak. Kendini büyük bir şeyin parçası hissetmek, ne rahat.”

I'm the most disorganised man in the world, you are the only roof that I want to keep over my head" (19).²⁴ This way, not only does he express his feelings in political terms, but also subverts the meanings of ideological words through the use of irony.

Although Cihan stays away from active politics, he uses language as a weapon against the political order, just as his childhood friend Ali, who gets involved in a leftist organisation, makes himself a bulletproof vest out of books. He criticises the oppressive environment of the 1970s by adopting an ironical language. Through the use of irony, he expresses his contempt for the system and an extreme level of violence performed in Turkey:

“At the NMP [*Nationalist Movement Party*] Bursa congress, our Minister of Customs and Monopolies said: ‘We’re equipping and strengthening the state staff with talented people.’ God bless. Professor Hasan Tan, who votes for the use of psychology as a torture tool at international congresses, was one of these talented people, but dishonest revolutionaries did not allow him to seamlessly serve as president of the university. Out of the love of service, let’s say 300 or 400 workers were recruited, not shoddy ones, but commandos. So, we won’t have a problem with cleaning” (26).²⁵

Insofar as Cihan is critical of the political order, he is a political subject. Yet, since he avoids participating in the leftist movement, his political subjectivity is not based on open rebellion, but on discursive protest. After all, “we are not, in any case,” states James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, “reduced to waiting for open social protest to lift a veil of consent and quiescence” (Scott 1997, 20). Cihan lifts a veil of consent and challenges the system by using irony as a discursive “tactic”, which can “use, manipulate and divert” an authoritative space (de Certeau 1984, 29-30), that of the realm of the symbolic. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud regards humour as an “economy in expenditure on inhibition or suppression” from which the subject derives pleasure (Freud 1960, 119). Inasmuch as “relaxing such superegoic repression”, which maintains the social

²⁴“Bütün herkes senin kadar kendine yetse devrim mevrim olmazdı. Seninle örgütlenmek dünyanın en zor şeyi. Ben ki dünyanın en örgütsüz adamıyım başımı altına sokmak istediğim yegâne çatı sensin.”

²⁵“Gümrük ve Tekel Bakanımız MHP Bursa kongresinde, ‘devlet kadrolarını yetenekli kişilerle donatıyor ve güçlendiriyoruz,’ demiş. Allah razı olsun. Uluslararası kongrelerde psikolojinin işkence aracı olarak kullanılması için oy veren Prof. Dr. Hasan Tan da bu yetenekli kişilerdendi ama namussuz devrimciler adamın rahat rahat rektörlük yapmasına izin vermediler işte. Hizmet aşkıyla sen de 300 ben diyeyim 400 işçi aldı okula, hem öyle kıytırık işçi değil, hepsi komando. Temizlikten yana bir sorunumuz olmayacak yani.”

structure, amounts to “running riot” against the Name-of-the-Father (Eagleton 2019, 11), humour takes on political significance. It serves Cihan as a means of resistance, even though “it is a bit difficult to laugh in the environment where all lives are written like epics” (Biçen 2011, 53).

Furthermore, Cihan’s letters reveal his inclination to leftism, as he speaks of “the country’s destruction of what it sees as an obstacle to the life it envisions” (60), his desire to destroy the state (63) and his disdain for political torture. Yet, albeit being inclined to leftist ideas, his political subjectivity does not rest on a particular ideology, for he targets not only rightists, but also leftists through the use of irony. His girlfriend Hale is sent away by her wealthy father to study at a university in Paris, for she is “so daring as to pose a danger” to herself (27). Unlike Cihan, she is a communist, an international, “rich communist” (28). “When a person has a strong backing,” Cihan writes to her, “it’s definitely easier to change the world order. I think the first mistake of our revolutionaries is to try to organise workers. It’d be much more appropriate if they started with employers. It seems that only the children of employers become communists, probably during their student years” (28).²⁶ Similarly, after meeting Ali and being hugged by him, “He even hugged me this time,” he writes, “he smiled crookedly from the corner of his mouth. A move which does not fit his new revolutionary seriousness” (28).²⁷ “Of course, our Ali is a poor, local communist,” he continues, “Instead of chatting over coffee in Paris, he considers it his duty to duel in his country. Both serve the cause, after all” (30).²⁸ At another point, he criticises leftism more directly: “You see how people who talk about freedom decide who will date who, how people who talk about equality hold women back. Words seem to carry their intended meanings for a while until they are tested by time” (25).²⁹

Hence Cihan does not participate in the leftist movement not only because he does not want to upset his father unconsciously or he accesses the Other through romantic love instead of ideological identification, but also because he is consciously critical of the leftist way of doing politics, that of striving to “write an epic”, even though his

²⁶“İnsanın arkası kuvvetli olunca dünya düzenini değiştirmesi de daha kolay olur mutlaka. Bence bizim devrimcilerin en birinci hatası işçileri örgütlemeye çalışmaları. Olaya işverenlerden başlasalar çok daha isabetli olurdu. Görünen o ki işverenlerin sadece çocukları komünist oluyor, o da muhtemelen öğrencilik döneminde.”

²⁷“Hem bu sefer sarıldı bile, ağzının kenarından yamuk yamuk güldü. Yeni devrimci ciddiyetine yakışmayan bir hareket.”

²⁸“Tabii bizim Ali fakir, mahalli komünistlerden. Paris’te kahve sohbeti yerine, memleketinde duello yapmayı görev biliyor. İkisi de davaya hizmet neticede.”

²⁹“Özgürlükten dem vuranların kimin kiminle sevgili olacağına karar verdiğini görüyorsun, eşitlik diye or-talıkta gezinenlerin kadınları nasıl geri planda tuttuklarını. Kelimeler onlardan ümit ettiğimiz anlamları taşıyormuş gibi görünüyor bir müddet, zamanla sınanıncaya kadar.”

writing reveals his guilt of doing “nothing” unlike his childhood friend Ali. Although he claims a political subjectivity by way of discursive protest, by manipulating the realm of the symbolic, his political subjectivity is shattered by the time he is imprisoned. He loses his only means to resist, that of language. His experience of trauma paves the way for his subjective death, both symbolically and physically. His death is ironic to the point at which he fears to be tortured and killed, hence does not participate in the leftist movement, yet ends up as a political prisoner and dies in prison because his half sister Ülkü causes him to be imprisoned, saying: “What would happen if he [Bahattin] did not see his son for two or three years? He wasn’t able to make enough of a man out of him. He [Cihan] will come to his senses in prison, become a man and get out” (81).³⁰ It is not therefore the father, but the sister who imposes the Law. The sister who internalises the Name-of-the-Father punishes her “dissident” brother and enforces order.

In contrast to Cihan, Ülkü’s political subjectivity is based on an ideological identification with right-wing politics, stemming from her desire to please her adoptive father. While Cihan’s ethical subjectivity embraces contingency and heterogeneity, as he questions the meanings of words, Ülkü’s ideological subjectivity is oriented towards the goal of totalising and making a whole out of social reality (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008, 265), as she says: “There is only one truth. The man who is supposed to be hanged must be hanged. There is only one truth” (Biçen 2011, 88).³¹ She literally carries the Name-of-the-Father, for her subjectivity is marked by politics by the time her father gives her the name “Ülkü”.³² Thus, just as the limits of Cihan’s political subjectivity are determined in the family setting, Ülkü’s political subjectivity is constructed in and by the family.

Identifying with the father who is supposed to hold the family together, and thereby imposes order on society, Ülkü conceives of the family as the site for both the construction and the destruction of the social order. For her, “he who does not do good to his own mother and father does not do any good to anyone” (79)³³ and “such murderous fathers *like Bahattin* raise such traitors *like Cihan* (78, emphasis added).³⁴ At some point, she says: “Everyone is dying because of the chaos created by leftists. A person’s religion, nation and family should be strong. You must know

³⁰“İki-üç sene oğlunu görmese ne olacak? Kendi adam edememiş, hapiste akıllanır, adam olur da çıkar.”

³¹“Doğru tektir. Asılacak adam asılmalıdır. Doğru tektir.”

³²The name “Ülkü” means “ideal” in Turkish and has a connotation of achieving a right-wing ideological vision.

³³“Kendi anasına babasına hayrı olmayanın kimseye hayrı dokunmaz.”

³⁴“Böyle hainleri böyle katil ruhlu babalar yetiştiriyor demek.”

them, you must be sure of them. There shouldn't be chaos. When a man comes to you and says I am your father and you have a brother, chaos arises" (73).³⁵ Thus, to the extent that Ülkü's rightist subjectivity is based on her relationship with her father, she regards the political chaos before 1980 as the symptom of the dysfunctional family which the father was unable to hold together.

Nonetheless, insofar as Ülkü did not actually know her family and should not have been sure of it, her confrontation with her family secret is ironic. Through the use of such an irony, the novel further reveals the organic relationship between the family and politics. The truth about Ülkü's family challenges her political subjectivity, which is constructed in the family setting, and leads her to suffer from a case of hysteria. For the first time she opposes her adoptive father by not marrying his double. Yet, she also punishes her biological father, who causes her to lose the *jouissance* derived from her libidinal attachment to her adoptive father and his politics, saying: "All sins have a punishment" (83).³⁶ As her subjectivity is further shattered by a sense of guilt in the face of her part in Bahattin's symbolic and Cihan's physical deaths, writing serves her as a means to assert a positive identity.

4.4 Writing Diaries and Unsent Letters, and Asserting an Identity

When she learns the truth about her biological father, Ülkü starts to keep a diary in order to come to terms with her trauma. Following Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who write of "women's struggle to assert a positive identity" in *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, her writing amounts to reclaiming a self-mastery over the experience of trauma, and thereby to asserting a positive identity (Smith and Watson 1998, 7). Her traumatic confrontation with reality rips through her ideological identification and inscribes a sense of anxiety in her subjective economy. While doing so, it also triggers her repressed loathing for the expectations of the patriarchal order, which her right-wing ideology requires her to fulfil. Through writing, not only does she strive to defend her rightist identity against the traumatic truth about her family, but also to discharge and get over the anxiety she feels in the face of the expectations of the patriarchal society.

Ülkü's father advises her to respect her husband, do what he says, and never argue

³⁵"Solcuların çıkarttığı kargaşa yüzünden herkes ölüyor. İnsanın dini, milleti, ailesi sağlam olmalı. Onları bilmelisin, onlardan emin olmalısın. Kargaşa olmamalı. Adamın biri gelip ben senin babanım, bir de kardeşin var deyince kargaşa çıkıyor."

³⁶"Bütün günahların bir cezası vardır."

with him. Yet Hilmi Bey wants her to quit her job and become a housewife. “I don’t want to become a housewife,” she writes in her diary, “I like my job. I don’t want to be in a position where I expect my husband to take care of me, I didn’t like getting pocket money even from my father. My father calls me my boy girl. My boy girl” (Biçen 2011, 92).³⁷ While Ülkü struggles with both her father’s and his double’s expectations, her mother encourages her to go after love to resist the patriarchal order. However, being unable to act on her repressed desire for her colleague Hasan, and symbolise her traumatic experiences, she finds herself condemned to repetition: “But it is too late, too late, too late, too late for everything. For my mother, for Bahattin, for Cihan, for me. It has already been decided for all of us” (92).³⁸ Thus Ülkü’s writing cannot make her fully work through her experience of trauma. At the end of her defence, she states that she “has nothing living inside her, neither love nor faith” (131). Just as her subjectivity disintegrates, she gets the death penalty in court.

There is also another dimension to her writing which is worth mentioning. While Ülkü hides Cihan’s letters from the court, her diary is used as an evidence to prove her crime. For her, it is nothing but an invasion of privacy. “People write all kinds of emotions in their diaries as they experience them,” she states, “. . . the expressions in my diary should be read as instant emotions and not be taken literally” (129).³⁹ Even though the act of writing serves her as a means to assert an identity, it also puts her in a vulnerable position, for what she writes in her diary exposes her unconscious desires.

Through the juxtaposition of diaries, letters and court records, the novel undermines the reliability of any text. Following Lacan, just as “the unconscious is language, meaning that language is that which makes up the unconscious” (Fink 1995, 8), texts like diaries or letters produced by the subject of language reveal its unconscious. What they say should not be taken literally, for they have unconscious desires interwoven into their fabric. They are complex texts which inherently have many contradictions, gaps and silences, and only through an analysis similar to psychoanalysis, it is possible to illuminate them. This analysis requires the analyst to be open to contingency and difference. Yet, since oppressive regimes tend to totalise social reality, they take these texts literally as evidences for the “truth” as in Ülkü’s

³⁷“Evkadını olmak istemiyorum. İşimi seviyorum. Kocamın eline bakmak istemiyorum, babamdan bile harçlık almayı sevmezdim. Erkek kızım der babam bana, erkek kızım.”

³⁸“Ama çok geç, çok geç, çok geç, her şey için çok geç. Annem için, Bahattin için, Cihan için, benim için. Hepimiz için çoktan karar verilmiş.”

³⁹“İnsanlar günlüklerine türlü duygularını onları yaşadıkları anda yazarlar. . . günlüğümde bulunan ifadeler anlak duygular olarak okunmalı ve birebir alınmamalıdır.”

case. Moreover, the threatening letters which Ülkü allegedly sends to Bahattin also put into question the reliability of any text. In this regard, the novel renders visible not only the problem of representation, but also that of reliability. In doing so, it undermines the attempt to totalise and make a whole out of social reality. Hence its political position rests on the embrace of contingency and difference.

Similarly, Bahattin's unsent letters to Cihan are also used as evidences in court. He writes these letters not only to confess his guilt as a father and thereby to ease his conscience, but also to keep alive the extension of his ego, his son, who refuses to participate in the realm of the symbolic, and hence becomes symbolically dead. Therefore, writing serves Bahattin as a wish-fulfilment fantasy. Like Ülkü, he writes to assert a positive identity, that of a loving father. Yet, through the act of writing, he also realises what he has repressed. "I guess you realise some things when you write," he says, "what you can't even say to yourself" (Biçen 2011, 108).⁴⁰ Thus, as much as his confessions enable him to get *jouissance*, they cause anxiety, for they reveal the repressed. Nevertheless, he continues to write, for he is "afraid of keeping quiet again when Cihan comes back and everything is back to normal" (109, slightly altered). Only through the act of writing, he can partially represent and work through his own traumatic experiences and what he has repressed. There is, however, also an indication that he writes these letters retroactively to set a trap for his own daughter, just like he allegedly writes the threatening letters. In that case, through writing, that is, exercising power over the realm of the symbolic, not only does he present himself as a loving father in the eyes of the court, but also punishes his daughter, who costs him the extension of his ego, who refuses to submit to his will, and thereby challenges his authority. In doing so, he tries to re-establish his authority as the father.

All things considered, by revealing family secrets, *Tehdit Mektupları* points to the way the family is responsible for the tragic fate of children whose political identifications are built in the family setting. In doing so, not only does the novel critically engages with the notion of political subjectivity, but also problematises the family institution in which the mother's voice is unheard. Moreover, the novel draws a parallel between the guilt of the father at the level of family and that of the paternal state at the level of society. Yet, although the novel exposes the father's guilt, it does not hint at a possibility of resistance against the father figure. The fate of children seems to be pre-determined and inevitable after the 1980 coup d'état. Children are doomed to die at the hands of the father figure, even though they employ discursive tactics to manipulate the realm of the symbolic, and thereby to resist the state.

⁴⁰"İnsan bazı şeyleri sadece yazarken fark ediyor galiba, kendine bile söylemediği şeyleri"

Meanwhile, the novel draws attention to the limits of representing the traumatic experiences of the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey. As even court records seem to be written on Ülkü's broken typewriter, which types italic letters "P", the novel undermines the reliability of any text and testimony. As Ülkü writes in her diary, "Nowadays, no one can be trusted, no one, your child, your brother, your father" (82).⁴¹ Even though the linguistic representation of trauma is deemed untrustworthy in the novel, the act of writing points to a possibility of partially working through the experience of trauma and asserting a positive identity. Nevertheless, it also serves the father to enforce the Law and punish the child. Since what is heard at the end of the novel is the father's voice (Geçgin 2019), the realm of the symbolic is portrayed as belonging to the father. The father's law is all-encompassing, and children are subjected to it one way or another. Although the novel records children's untimely deaths, and thereby solicits an emotional engagement with them, it does not show them a way to live in an oppressive environment. Hence the political potential of the novel remains unfulfilled at the end.

⁴¹"Bu zamanda kimseye güvenilmez, kimseye, evladına, kardeşine, babana."

5. EXISTENTIAL DESPAIR AND LIVING ON THE MARGINS OF LIFE AFTER THE 1980 COUP DÉTAT IN *SUZAN DEFTER*

5.1 Introduction

Ayfer Tunç's fourth novel *Suzan Defter* (2011)¹ follows the two intertwined series of diary entries written by a melancholic man and a woman living in the shadow of the 1980 coup d'état. Ekmel lives his life, which he regards "as meaningful as straw", as a "spectator", a perpetual outsider, on the edge of the stage. Being disillusioned with life, he breaks up with his wife and quits his job as a lawyer. Confining himself to his deceased father's house, and thereby retreating into his mother's womb, he does nothing but watch life from the wide windows of his house. Derya, on the other hand, is reduced to being the "supporting actress" of her life's bitter drama. Having a love-hate relationship with the leading actress Suzan, who is the ex-girlfriend of her older brother's youth, and longing to steal the lead role from her, she lives a life which does not belong to her. As Ekmel and Derya meet and strike up an unusual friendship, they both realise that they need one and other to share their existential despairs, and thereby to assert an identity in a life which brings them nothing but sorrow.

One day, Ekmel decides to place an advertisement in a newspaper to find a buyer for his house. Only welcoming female clients, he immediately rejects those who do not fulfil his expectations. In time, we, as the readers of his diary, learn that he has no intention of selling his house, and leaving his mother's womb, but that he is looking for a companion, that of the opposite sex, to share the sorrows of life instead. Eventually, he finds what he is looking for in Derya, who visits his house without the intention of buying it. Introducing herself as Suzan to Ekmel, Derya / Suzan

¹Before being published as a novel, *Suzan Defter* was part of Tunç's collection of stories titled *Taş-Kağıt-Makas* (2003) published by Can Sanat Yayınları.

presents herself as the leading actress of a love tragedy, as the lifelong sufferer from the unfulfilled love of her youth. Being deeply touched by Derya / Suzan's sadness and melancholy, Ekmel offers to pay her to continue her companionship. Albeit refusing to receive money from him in exchange for her presence, Derya starts to visit Ekmel regularly. As they gradually begin to open up to one another, they start to understand the reasons why they are held back from living life.

By telling Ekmel and Derya's melancholic story, the novel delves into the depths of the human psyche shaped not only by individual wounds, but also by a collective trauma experienced in the shadow of a military intervention. Although September 12 only hovers over Ekmel and Derya like a ghost, its effects are depicted as being subtly interwoven into their psyches. The traumatic experience of the 1980 coup d'état, which aims at depoliticising society and imposing a new mode of living, gives rise to everything from their pervasive sense of purposelessness to Derya's once daring leftist older brother's newly acquired kitsch cultural habits such as going to a kebab shop as a family every Sunday. After 1980, with the establishment of a new paternal authority at the level of society, sons like Derya's older brother, who once opposed the father's law, start to identify with the father and become the agents of the Name-of-the-Father themselves. Similarly, daughters like Tülay are expected to assume their new roles as the mothers of the new consumer class. Since "the well-ordered family *is* the foundation of the well-ordered state" (Scott 1986, 1071), the 1980 coup d'état reconstructs the family in order to engineer a depoliticised society based on consumer culture.

Inasmuch as the reconstruction of the family after 1980 is concerned, the novel chronicles the emergence of the new "happy" family and the post-1980 transition from the state of opposition to that of conformity. At the same time, it renders visible the traumatic effects of the social change following the 1980 coup d'état on individuals. To understand this post-1980 transition, we should begin by paying attention to Ekmel's and Derya's relationships with their families of different socio-economic class backgrounds before and after 1980, for the family, as mentioned above, plays an important role in the reconstruction of society after the coup.

5.2 The Many Faces of Love and (Un)happy Families

Coming from an upper class family and growing up in Şişli, one of the old and rich districts of Istanbul, Ekmel moves into his deceased father's house after breaking up with his castrating wife, who reduces him to being "harmless liquid that takes

the shape of its container” (Tunç 2005, 18). Writing about his past marriage, he draws a parallel between his unhappy marriage and that of his father’s. His mother deprives his father of her love throughout her life, for she has been forced into a marriage which she did not want. She retreats into silence and constantly reminds her husband of her unhappiness and anger. By refusing to reciprocate his love and “make her house a home” (40), she resists the father’s law and her expected role in the patriarchal order. Being in need of his wife’s love to be recognised as someone who deserves to be loved, Ekmel’s father finds the cure in the love of other women. Cheating on his wife, he carelessly leaves traces to make her angry, and thereby to make her show love for him. Yet his wife never reacts to being cheated. In doing so, she refuses to recognise him and punishes him.

Similarly, Ekmel cheats on his wife, yet, unlike his father, he is careful not to leave any traces. He is afraid of “disturbing the order of his life which is as meaningful as straw” (84). Nevertheless, he is unable to maintain a long-lasting marriage. His childhood trauma haunts him to the point at which he repeats his father’s loveless, unhappy, upper class marriage as an effort to avoid what is unknown to him and to master his traumatic experience by way of repetition (Freud 1961a, 10). Being unable to grow up to become an appropriate husband and a father, he cannot find a place for himself in the “happy” family. He hates Sundays, for they remind him of upper class family life in which his background forces him to take part. Eventually, he returns to his “rebellious” mother, to her womb, even though he unconsciously desires to get rid of not only his father’s house, his traumatic past, but also his mother, who also deprives her children of her love.

Ekmel’s mother does not show affection to her sons, for they are reflections of her husband, whom she does not love. “It would be truthful to say that I didn’t know my mother’s bosom,” (Tunç 2005, 112)² writes Ekmel. As a result, he looks for the love of other women as a substitute for his mother’s love. Yet the love of other women does not alleviate his anxiety, for his expected *jouissance* is impossible (Lacan 1998, 111). The object of his desire is an object which has never existed. When his desire comes close to being satisfied, he feels dissatisfaction. “My desires lost meaning the moment I reached them,” he writes, “They became extinct before my conscience even got a chance to awaken” (Tunç 2005, 56).³ After persistently looking for love, he gives up. As Thanatos triumphs over Eros, he desires to return to an inorganic state and starts to wait for his death in his mother’s womb.

Having lost her mother at an early age, Derya grows up without her mother’s love

²“Annemin bağrını tanımadım desem yeridir.”

³“Arzularım, ulaştığım anda anlamını kaybediyor, vicdanımın uyanmasına bile fırsat vermeden sönüyordu.”

like Ekmel. Being engrossed in his casino business, her father is also absent from her life. Besides, he, as it turns out, has another family, a secret wife and a child. The absence of her parents leads Derya to direct her libido to her older brother, her father's double [*semblable*], the figure of the "good" and "morally superior" father. As a little girl, she identifies with the object of her older brother's desire. She desires to take his girlfriend Suzan's place by turning into her. Therefore, Suzan comes to become her ego-ideal with which she develops a typical love-hate relationship. She hates Suzan, for she "steals" her love-object from her. Yet, at the same time, she loves her because she loves her older brother as much as she does. She is her idealised image onto which she projects her desires.

Derya's older brother, on the other hand, has a tumultuous relationship with his father, who calls him a "communist bastard". His affiliation with leftist politics is the exemplary case of a typical Oedipal rivalry with the father figure. Hating his once working class father, who raises his social status by gaining money illegally, he joins a leftist organisation, and thereby opposes the father's law. Yet, after the 1980 coup d'état, he gets imprisoned. As the father's authority is restored to prominence at the level of society after the coup, he is estranged from leftism altogether. Instead, he longs to gain money and raise his social status just as his father did. After his father dies, he comes to identify with his dead father and becomes the father of the new "happy" family. He starts his own business and climbs the social ladder, and hence assumes a neoliberal, entrepreneurial subjectivity.

Just as Derya's older brother leaves his political past behind after the coup, he breaks up with Suzan, whose extreme level of love stained with a leftist past separates him from the bourgeois "reality", leading him to defy the society's expectation of a high-powered career and a "suitable" marriage, and therefore, preventing him from starting a new life. After he returns from abroad, he marries Tülay, a bourgeois woman. In doing so, he ends his "old fashioned love" with a bourgeois marriage, and thereby assures a "respectable" place in the social world (Swidler 2001, 112-3). Yet, more than Suzan, his sister Derya seems to feel betrayed. Being frustrated by her older brother's betrayal, she keeps her ego-ideal alive by impersonating Suzan and challenging her older brother and his wife with her memory at a restaurant table. Moreover, she confronts not only her older brother's law, but also the bourgeois love by marrying someone her older brother does not approve of. Yet she will not be able to resist the bourgeois love for long and keep an "old-fashioned love" alive after the 1980 coup d'état.

"There was no longer room for faith or love in the streets" (Tunç 2005, 116)⁴, Derya

⁴"Sokaklarda artık ne inanca ne de aşka yer vardı."

/ Suzan says to Ekmel. However, even though love is lost after the 1980 coup d'état, Derya strives to keep an "old fashioned love" alive by telling Suzan's tragic love story to Ekmel. In doing so, she copes with the traumatic effects of the social change following the 1980 coup d'état or, in other words, endeavours to master both her individual trauma regarding her incestuous desire for her older brother and the collective trauma of the coup. Meanwhile, she resists the society's expectation of a "suitable" marriage after she breaks up with Cihan. Her refusal to marry Tülay's brother Tuncay and thereby to assure a proper place in the social world takes on political significance. Since the coup eliminates any other political possibility, refusing to take part in the social order serves her as a means for resistance just as Ekmel's detachment from society serves him to resist the expectations of his class.

For Derya, love seems to be the only way to give meaning to life. Having already given up on love, Ekmel, on the other hand, regards love as destructive. After all, his father suffers from an unrequited love throughout his life. Meanwhile, he "grows in a womb which a love story, even a sinful love story, has not penetrated" (54; altered). For him, Derya / Suzan's tragic love has destroyed her by burning. Yet, "But I existed," she responds, "the ashes are proof of that" (104).⁵ Hence Derya / Suzan gives an answer to Ekmel's existential question, that of the meaning of life. Although he is not sure how, "life is to leave a mark," (46)⁶ Ekmel writes. According to Derya / Suzan, leaving a mark on life is possible by loving and being loved, and thereby by leaving a mark on someone's life. "Love," writes Ann Swidler in *Talk of Love*, "is the drama through which individuals find and define themselves" (Swidler 2001, 113). After the 1980 coup d'état removes an "ideal" love from life, by claiming ownership of Suzan's "old fashioned" love, Derya endeavours to find and define herself and give meaning to her life.

In this regard, the novel points at a possibility of sharing the sorrows of life and working through the experience of trauma through mutual love when Ekmel and Derya come together. "Sitting at home and waiting for stories from outside," Ekmel believes that "he can only reread his own story, which he is tired of remembering, when it comes together with the stories of others" (Tunç 2005, 34). Even though they are not able to fully represent to each other their traumatic experiences, Ekmel and Derya share the impossibility of "realistic" representation by telling each other the idealised version of their stories. Meanwhile, we, as the readers of their diaries, construct the "reality" by comparing their diary entries. Thus their encounter opens a space for representing the experience of trauma in a different way. Here, let

⁵"Ama vardım, kül bunun kanıtı."

⁶"Hayat bir iz bırakmaktır."

me draw a parallel between their encounter and that of the French woman and the Japanese man from Alain Resnais' cult film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959). Following Cathy Caruth, who writes of the latter in *Unclaimed Experience*, Ekmel's and Derya's "ability to speak and to listen in their passionate encounter", as in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, "does not rely, that is, on what they simply know of one another, but on what they do not fully know in their own traumatic pasts" (Caruth 1996, 56). Through telling, they seek to know of or, to put it better, to construct their pasts, and thereby to assert an identity.

Yet the promise of an "old fashioned love" remains unfulfilled at the end of the novel. After her older brother confronts her, Derya becomes ready to take the lead role in her life. Her genuine dramatic confrontation with her lost love-object encourages her to mourn her loss and move forward in life by redirecting her libido to a new love-object. She decides to take part in the social order, and thereby to get *jouissance* from the realm of the symbolic. She decides not to visit Ekmel anymore, but instead to find a proper place in the outside world which surrounds her. Being ready to forget her traumatic past, she surrenders to the "happy" family constructed in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état. She decides to love Tülay and her nephew and niece, to willingly go to a kebab shop with her family every Sunday, to help with housework, and to talk to Tülay about everyday problems. Meanwhile, after being left by Derya / Suzan, Ekmel stops writing, which he has started to defy death. Thus, unlike Derya, Ekmel does not achieve "salvation". The main idea of what he writes in the rest of his notebook is "to die: what a difficult experience you are..." (Tunç 2005, 126).⁷ Hence, at the end of the novel, nothing seems to stand against death but to take part in the social order. The novel fails to open a space for resistance and politics seems to be doomed to a definite demise. Instead, what the novel does is to shed light upon the way in which not only society but also individuals change after 1980.

5.3 After 1980: Neoliberal Fantasies and Kitsch Lives

As an allusion to the opening sentence of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Ekmel's older brother says: "The recipe for a happy family is more or less the same... but look at unhappy families. No two are alike" (28).⁸ The recipe for a happy family, as already

⁷"ölmek: sen ne zor bir tecrübeymişsin meğer..."

⁸"Mutlu ailenin tarifi üç aşağı beş yukarı aynıdır... ama bir de mutsuz ailelere bak, hiçbiri diğerine benzemez."

discussed in detail, is simple after 1980: a bourgeois love which leads to a suitable marriage, and hence has a happily-ever-after ending. Yet the 1980 coup d'état not only reconstructs the family, but also shapes every aspect of life in Turkey, from culture to business life. *Suzan DeFTER* depicts such post-1980 socio-cultural changes which upset the distinction of high and low culture. For instance, in the novel, a line of a poem where the Turkish poet Enis Batur says: "My own blindness awaits me in my sleep" (33)⁹ is followed by a line from a famous 1982 Turkish arabesque song by Ümit Besen called "Wedding Table".

Insofar as the post-1980 arabesque culture is concerned, the repressed provincial subculture of the oppressed, according to Nurdan Gürbilek, returns from the margins of society to a wider socio-cultural world after 1980 in Turkey (Gürbilek 1992, 106). Following Gürbilek, by aestheticising oppression, and thereby by dragging it from the realm of politics to that of culture (Gürbilek 2011, 80), Turkish arabesque serves as a means to discharge the general discomfort and discontent felt in the aftermath of the coup. In doing so, it supports the social order constructed by the oppressive regime. Nevertheless, after 1980, the castrating effects of the oppressive regime is effectively alleviated not only by the arabesque culture, but also by the fantasy of social mobility, which produces the subject that takes socially enforced neoliberal norms of behaviour for granted.

Following Lacanian theory, as any fantasy enables the subject to participate in the realm of the symbolic by masking the lack in the Other [*l'Autre*] (Stavrakakis 1999, 45-7), the fantasy of social mobility after 1980 eliminates the risk of opposition to the Name-of-the-Father by masking the lack in the socio-symbolic order, and thereby by keeping alive the promise of full enjoyment for the working class. Derya's father covers over his inherent lack which his class background makes him feel intensely by holding guns, a typical symbol for phallus, and by engaging in an illegal business, that of gambling. Her older brother, on the other hand, seeks to heal his masculinity crushed by the 1980 coup d'état by climbing the social ladder, which is rendered possible by the fantasy of social mobility after 1980, and by achieving a bourgeois marriage. Thus the social order after the coup offers the subject a sense of optimism which makes it seek happiness in the "comforts of the good-life genre", and thereby entices it into conventionality (Berlant 2011, 2). The 1980 coup d'état therefore suppresses political opposition not only by means of physical force, but also by producing new entrepreneurial desires and hence by operating at the level of fantasy.

In the novel, like the arabesque culture, the "good" life after 1980 is depicted as kitsch. These kitsch lives arise through the blurring of high and low culture. They

⁹"... uykumda beni kendi körlüğüm bekliyor."

resemble “odourless roses like crepe paper” (Tunç 2005, 121) or “bright, ostentatious pieces of furniture” without history (125). They are characterised by emerging fancy kebab shops where the new “happy” families, like that of Derya’s older brother, go every Sunday. This kitschness of all does not miss anything or anyone. Upon breaking up with Derya, Cihan looks like one of the famous actors of that period, Kartal Tibet. Even Ekmel, who hates cliché and arabesque statements, repeats a cliché saying to Derya / Suzan: “So, your youth was forbidden” (102)¹⁰, even though he prefers death to a kitsch family life, to a participation in the social order.

Although the novel depicts the kitschness of life as all pervasive and sentences politics to death, it does not celebrate the submission to the social order that it regards as inevitable after 1980. Following Laurent Berlant, who coins the term “cruel optimism”, Derya’s and her older brother’s optimism about assuring a “proper” place in the social world after 1980 is nothing but a cruel optimism, a desire which “is actually an obstacle to *their* flourishing” (Berlant 2011, 1). Derya wastes the promise of an “old fashioned love” when she decides to stop visiting Ekmel. Even though becoming Suzan does not bring her happiness, she knows that becoming Derya would also bring her to tears. Her older brother, on the other hand, has already given up “the light of his mirror”. He becomes “a mass of glass which reflects nothing” (Tunç 2005, 125). He strives to “hide his defeat from the rooms of his house”. Nevertheless, in doing so, even though the novel criticises the post-1980 social world, it fails to put any alternative up against it. As the only political move, it registers the symbolic death and the existential despair in the face of the 1980 coup d’état.

5.4 Writing to Defy Death and Leave a Mark on Life

Suffering from the traumatic experience of the 1980 coup d’état implicated in individual traumas, both Ekmel and Derya begin to write in order to defy a symbolic death. Ekmel makes a deal with death. He will surrender to death when his notebook is finished. Meanwhile, Derya starts keeping a diary to deal with her feelings, moreover, to forget her older brother. She keeps a diary for the first time during the Cyprus dispute in 1974, and for the second time after the 1980 coup d’état. “Two main themes,” she writes, “One, Dear Diary! We’re living in historical times!! The killer oligarchy took over the government!! Two, my older brother and Suzan will

¹⁰“Gençliğiniz haram olmuş desenize.”

meet secretly again” (111).¹¹ In this regard, the novel, like the rest of post-1980 Turkish novels, points at the way the personal and the political are intimately connected. The day Derya’s older brother and Suzan meet secretly is the day the 1980 coup d’état is orchestrated by the army. Derya endeavours to represent the collective trauma of the coup as embedded in her personal trauma. In the meantime, she tries to depict her personal trauma through a political terminology. Similarly, the day of the coup is the day Ekmel’s father dies. He experiences the loss of his father, who represents an “old fashioned love”, in the middle of the coup, which kills love altogether. This way, albeit being unable to penetrate his father’s upper class residence, the coup is depicted as affecting all classes of society one way or another. Even though Ekmel is hidden in his mother’s womb, he has to watch the bleak atmosphere in the aftermath of the coup from the wide windows of his house.

Derya starts keeping a diary for the third time after her older brother is imprisoned and finally for the fourth time just before she meets Ekmel. Just as Ekmel’s and Derya’s traumas are implicated in each other, their diaries are intertwined. Ekmel does not write his name in his notebook, in order not to reveal the identity of “the owner of a life which will disappear” (10). He wants to leave a mark behind, “a mark which will be forgotten as soon as his notes are read” (10). The desire to leave a mark on life keeps his subjectivity alive in his mother’s womb. Thus writing serves him to prolong life while resisting the social order. If she had not met Ekmel, Derya, on the other hand, would have written the same things in her diary, using inverted comma signs. Yet her encounter with Ekmel points at the possibility of a way out of repetition, albeit being a missed possibility.

At the end of the novel, after doing the only possible political thing to do in the aftermath of the coup, that is registering his symbolic death, Ekmel stops writing and surrenders to death. Derya, on the other hand, thinks about tearing up her diary until the words say nothing. Although she is ready to take the lead role in her life and take part in the social order, she dies a symbolic death like Ekmel, for “no one can prove that she is alive” (105; altered) after she tears up her diary and stops writing. Hence the novel tells the story of an inevitable defeat after 1980, a defeat at the hands of a new father figure, much stronger than before. In doing so, although it does not point to a possible way of resistance against the social order, it produces a particular kind of historical knowledge which enables us to investigate a “dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (Gordon 1997, 8). Maybe, only after understanding that dense site and our subjugation to the social order, our missed possibilities, we can find a way of resistance and restore our political subjectivities.

¹¹“İki ana tema: Bir, Sevgili günlük! Tarihi günler yaşıyoruz!! Katil oligarşi yönetime el koydu!! İki, abimle Suzan yine benden gizli buluşacaklar.”

6. CONCLUSION

Although the Turkish novel is allegedly depoliticised by the military regime in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état, September 12 novels show how literature engages with politics in an oppressive environment where old ways of doing politics are no longer possible. These novels explore the characters' psychologies in order to make sense of the construction and limits of political subjectivity in the shadow of the military intervention. In doing so, they investigate not only the political chaos that marked Turkey during the decade before 1980, but also the general disillusionment with ideologies and the estrangement from politics after the coup. Meanwhile, in contrast to ideological identification which aims at totalising social reality, they hint at alternative ways of doing politics based on contingency and heterogeneity. This politics derives its power from a critical engagement with the phallogentric logic of the socio-symbolic order and challenges ideologies as fantasies produced by the realm of the symbolic.

Being published in 1986, just after the 1980 coup d'état, *Gece Dersleri* can be regarded as the self-critique of the left. However, even though it critically engages with leftist politics before 1980, it still leans towards leftist ideals that were not completely outdated at that time, for it does not repudiate class struggle altogether. Being published in 2007, *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*, on the other hand, reflects the complete disillusionment with ideologies which already lost power after 1980. While the novel challenges everything from the family to the state, it also directs criticism at itself. The all-knowing writer figure Şahbaz is portrayed as lying, deceiving, feeding on the sorrows of people and, at the same time, suffering. Meanwhile, *Tehdit Mektupları* written in 2011 by a second-generation author who has not personally experienced the traumatic experience of the 1980 coup d'état shows how the father's law comes out triumphant after 1980, after years of struggle between the left and the right. As writing is depicted as untrustworthy in *Tehdit Mektupları*, the novel can be regarded as self-critical like *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*. Finally, as neoliberalism becomes well-established in Turkey in the 2000s,

Suzan Defter accounts for the estrangement from ideologies in the light of newly emerging neoliberal fantasies and entrepreneurial subjectivities after 1980. Since Ekmel and Derya / Suzan's diary entries are contradictory and expose the unreliability of language, the novel can also be considered as self-critical. Hence the subjectivity of the writer figure, like that of rightist and leftist characters, becomes open to criticism in these novels.

Since the subject is introduced to the Other [*l'Autre*] and internalises the rules and hypotheses of the symbolic order in the family setting, these four novels analyse the subject's political identification and its estrangement from politics within the context of the family in which its political subjectivity based on enjoyment instead of conscious engagement is constructed. In these novels, political resistance is conceived of as against the father figure, hence as between the oppressor and the oppressed. Moreover, the political chaos in Turkey before 1980 is depicted as inherent to the masculine symbolic, stemming from the father's law or his guilt, that of failing to hold the family together, and thereby of causing siblings to fall apart and die. In *Tehdit Mektupları*, children are doomed to die at the hands of the father, be that the birth father, the adoptive father or the paternal state [*devlet baba*]. Meanwhile, in *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*, sons identify with right-wing politics and perform violence to fulfil the masculine fantasy which the father's law imposes on them.

In these novels, the mother, on the other hand, is depicted as either silenced or dead, be that a physical or a symbolic death. However, worthy of note is that the mother is portrayed as having the potential to constitute the source of resistance against the father's law as well. In *Gece Dersleri*, the mother provides the female protagonist with a means to resist the father's law, that of love and, at the same time, that of the (m)other tongue. Similarly, in *Tehdit Mektupları*, the mother encourages the female protagonist, whose attempt to enjoy the father's order causes her anxiety, to go after love to resist the patriarchal order. The mother in *Suzan Defter*, on the other hand, refuses to reciprocate the father's love, and thereby to recognise the father's law. In the novel, the "genuine" love between Ekmel and Derya / Suzan hints at a possibility of withstanding the socio-symbolic order, albeit a missed possibility. In this regard, these novels by women writers introduce gendered power dynamics to the depiction of political life and place the source of resistance in the mother's love or the desire provoked by the mother's body.

Furthermore, since desire is the integral part of political subjectivity, the act of writing, towards which desire is directed after the subject abandons its libidinal and ideological position after the coup, serves as a means to keep political subjectivity alive in an oppressive environment. In these novels, whose titles or subtitles refer

to the act of recording by writing, the subject gets *jouissance* from the realm of the symbolic through writing. Even though open rebellion is no longer possible after the 1980 coup d'état, these novels show how the enjoyment derived from the realm of the symbolic by means of discursive protest gains political significance, for the act of writing is conceived of as the only possible way to resist the socio-symbolic order in the shadow of the military intervention. Hence, insofar as desire is directed towards writing, the act of writing saves the political subject from a definite demise in these novels.

Nevertheless, despite the implied ways of resistance, the traumatic experience of the 1980 coup d'état seems to eliminate the possibility of a victory against the father's law, for the military intervention is conceived of as the re-establishment of the father's authority and dignity at the level of society. Although the experience of trauma paves the way for the eruption of the Real, that is, the breaking down of the signifying chain, these novels endeavour to represent and work through trauma through the act of writing. To that end, they build the personal and collective trauma of the 1980 coup d'état into family dramas. In doing so, they show the way the personal and the political are implicated in each other. They account for the political through personal stories while narrating the personal through political terminology. This way, by transcending the dichotomy of the personal and the political, they enrich the realm of politics. At the same time, they endow the collective trauma of the 1980 coup d'état with an alternative form of expression.

Last but not least, the act of writing also serves the characters as a means to come to terms with their traumatic experiences and assert a positive identity in these novels. In doing so, even though writing points at a possibility of mourning the past and desiring a future, these novels depict it as a missed possibility. The hope for the future is portrayed as already lost. There is either death, physical or symbolic, or the obligation to take part in the social world re-engineered along neoliberal principles at the end of these novels. However, worthy of note is that as readers, here we are reading about and mourning the individual and collective past in our own terms. Like writing, reading, I argue, enables us to get *jouissance* from the realm of the symbolic. Thus the act of reading, like that of writing, keeps our individual and collective desires alive. Through emotional engagement, exploring the past and realising our missed possibilities, which post-1980 coup d'état literature enables, we can mourn the past and desire a future. The political potential of these novels lies here.

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