



**CULTURAL MEMORY OF THE 1970S TURKEY
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF STATE
OPPRESSION ON THE IMPRISONED INDIVIDUAL IN
THE MARCH 12TH NOVEL 'BÜYÜK GÖZALTI'**

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ABSTRACT

The 'March 12th novels' is a retroactive umbrella term used to describe the works of fiction written between 1971 and 1980 which take as their inspiration the events surrounding the coup d'état; the military takeover, the battle between revolutionary left wing activists and nationalists, and the political and social fallout of the intervention. Çetin Altan's first novel, *Büyük Gözaltı* (Great Surveillance), is very much a work which reflects the reality of its era, or at least reality as experienced by its author and many on the political left in Turkey after the March 12th military intervention in 1971. The novel plays a significant role in the collective memory of this turbulent period of recent Turkish history, when left-leaning academics, writers, journalists, politicians, university students and activists suffered persecution at the hands of the state, with thousands being imprisoned and tortured. This article, with particular reference to the philosophical and social theories of Michel Foucault on the nature of punishment and power relations, aims to analyse the effect of an overwhelming state power on the imprisoned protagonist of the novel and the way in which he responds by internalising state power, becoming his own interrogator and accuser. Moving beyond concepts of guilt and innocence, the psychological reaction of the protagonist to his position within this unbalanced power structure and the symptoms of its surrealist consequences are the primary focus of this article.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Turkey, Çetin Altan, 12th March Military Intervention, Power, Pain, Prison, 12th March Novels*

**1970'LI YILLAR TÜRKİYE'SİNİN KÜLTÜREL HAFIZASI
12 MART ROMANI 'BÜYÜK GÖZALTI'NDA DEVLET
BASKISININ MAHKÛM BİREY ÜZERİNDE BELİREN
PSİKOLOJİK ETKİLERİ**

ÖZET

12 Mart 1971 askeri müdahalesinin öncesi ve sonrasında yaşananları ele alarak, 1980'e kadar olan zaman diliminde, aşırı sağ ve

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sol görüşlü aktivistlerin birbirleriyle ve devletin güvenlik güçleriyle olan kavgalarını ele alan, 1970'ler Türkiye'sinin bilinmeyen yanlarına edebi bir perspektiften bakıp, bu olaylara etkili bir dille ayna tutmaya çalışan eserlere genel bir ifadeyle '12 Mart Romanları' denmektedir. Çetin Altan'ın ilk romanı olan *Büyük Gözaltı*, Türkiye'de 12 Mart 1971 askeri müdahalesi sonrası, yazarın kendisi de dahil olmak üzere birçok sol görüşlü entellektüelin tecrübe ettiği döneme dair acı gerçekleri yansıtır. Roman, 1970 yıllar Türkiye'sinde, askeri müdahale sonrasında sol eğilimli yüzlerce, binlerce akademisyen, yazar, gazeteci, siyasetçi, üniversite öğrencisi ve aktivistin mahkum olduğu, zulme ve işkenceye maruz kaldığı bir dönemin kültürel hafızasını kaydetmesi yönüyle önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu makale *Büyük Gözaltı* romanında, Michael Foucault'un felsefi ve sosyoloji teorileriyle açıkladığı güç ile ceza ilişkisini, totaliter bir yapıya sahip iktidarın aşırı gücünün, romanın tutuklu kahramanı üzerinde oluşturduğu psikolojik etkileri, bu güç karşısındaki direnç girişimi ve bir süre sonra maruz kaldığı bu güce boyun eğmek zorunda kalarak kendi kendisinin sorgulayıcısı ve suçlayıcısı olma sürecinin sürrealist açıdan incelemektedir. Çalışmada, kahramanın suçluluk veya masumiyetinin sorgulanmasından ziyade, orantısız güç denkleminde muktedir olanın gücü karşısında kendi zayıf konumuna karşı göstermiş olduğu psikolojik reaksiyonun sürreal sonuçları ve belirtileri ele alınır.

Key Words: *Türkiye, Çetin Altan, 12 Mart Askeri Müdahalesi, Güç, İzdrap, Hapishane, 12 Mart Romanları.*

Introduction

In Turkish literature, the early novelists were mainly products of a mobile and educated urban class in the Tanzimat period. Proficient in Western languages and familiar with European culture and political thought, they felt it necessary to adopt Western ideas in order to reform the crumbling Ottoman Empire. For these writers, the novel seemed the obvious literary medium through which to analyse and criticise the state of Ottoman society and to broadcast their ideas for reform.¹ Ever since then, the development of Turkish novel has been profoundly influenced by the relationship between this educated urban elite and the presiding political authorities. Before the outbreak of the First World War, the key events which shaped the Turkish novel were also the key political events which shaped the rise of Turkey as a nation: the political reform movement of the 1870s; the subsequent rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II. which began in 1876; the Young Turk movement of the early twentieth-century which overthrew the Sultan in 1908; and, more generally, the rapidly escalating power of Turkish nationalism as the primary intellectual focus. Each of these political changes informed not only the subject matter, but also the realist techniques of the early novelists, who in many cases were both active against as well as victims of the increasingly oppressive rule of the fading Ottoman Empire.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk² founded the Turkish nationalist movement in the wake of WWI and many writers became part of the new Republican elite, a coalition of army officers,

¹ Robert P. Finn, *The Early Turkish Novel 1872 – 1900*, The Isis Press, Istanbul 1975, s. 11.

²He was the founder of modern Turkey. For more, see Dankwart A. Rustow, "Atatürk as an Institution Builder," in *Atatürk Founder of a Modern State*, ed. Ali Kazancigil & Ergun Özbudun, C. Hurst & Co Ltd, London 2006, s. 57-79. Lord Kinross, *Atatürk*, Morrison and Gibb Ltd, London 1964. Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*, John Murray Ltd., London 1999.

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intellectuals, professionals, and government officials who joined forces to drive for a secular republic. One of the biggest challenges facing this movement was replacing the traditional Islamic consciousness with a wide-ranging secular, nationalist, and republican mindset and novelists soon became a crucial part of this process, spreading the new ideology to the furthest reaches of the nation. The only legal organ for political mobilisation was the Republican People's Party (RPP; *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*),³ the single vehicle responsible for enacting the new ruling elite's programme for political and social reform. As the novels, short stories and poetry of the time demonstrates, however, it was the intellectual movement who had to reach out to the mass populace, speaking with and for the peasant population in rural Anatolia and, ultimately, making the forging of a new secular republic from the ashes of the six hundred-year old Ottoman Empire possible.

As early as the 1920s, disenchantment with one-party rule under the RPP, and especially its heavy-handed repression of dissent, led to the rise of an intellectual counter-elite, a group of writers and activists who voiced stringently socialist criticism of contemporary society through books, periodicals, demonstrations, committees, and, eventually, through political parties. The one-party state clearly tolerated very little dissent either inside or outside the RPP⁴ and the government sought to suppress any movement based on worker-peasant class solidarity for fear it would compete with the primacy of Turkish national identity: at the time, in fact, 'Turkish' was the only officially sanctioned ethnic identity for Kurds, Arabs, and other traditionally Muslim non-Turkish sections of society. The counter-elite stressed worker-peasant class union, however, bringing into their works the problems both of the rural Anatolian peasantry and the growing numbers of urban poor who had migrated to the cities from the countryside. Because of this, the intellectual left endured increasingly brutal government repression, particularly post-WWII, as the Turkish leaders sought to align themselves with the United States. Though one-party rule ended, the oppression of the left⁵ continued with the victory of Adnan Menderes's Democrat Party (DP; *Demokrat Parti*) in 1950 as Turkey became increasingly Westernised, sending troops to the Korean War, joining NATO, and becoming a founding member of CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation).⁶

Menderes' DP won three national elections in the 1950s, whilst the RPP became the principal party of opposition. Menderes presented himself as both a populist and a traditionalist, building his support base from small business men and the rural population, two groups that felt bypassed by the RPP. Menderes constantly antagonised the Republican elite by rolling back institutions and programmes of secular reform, whilst weakening the position of the civil service and the military, along with any other factions closely aligned to the RPP and its objectives.⁷ Despite his victories in the polls, Menderes in paranoiac fashion, resented criticism by his political opponents. In a fateful move, he attempted to stifle all dissent by setting up a parliamentary

³ Feroz Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye 1945-1980*, Hil Yayınları, İstanbul 1994, s. 15.

⁴ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, I. B. Tauris, London, s. 184-86.

⁵ In this work, I use George S. Harris's definition of "the left" in reference to those organisations and ideals which developed in Turkey after the origin of European Socialist and Communist models which later included Trotskyite, Maoist, and Third World variants. These groups perceived themselves to be "the left" in Turkey and the nomenclature is appropriate. My frequent use of the term "intellectual left" refers specifically to the writers, artists, and thinkers who advanced left-wing ideas through their works, whether or not they were active in defined political movements. George Harris, "The Left in Turkey," *Problem of Communism*, S. 29, July-August 1980, s. 27-28.

⁶ E. J. Zürcher, *Age*, s. 245-48.

⁷ F. Ahmad, *Age*, s. 106.

commission to investigate and shut down the RPP. As a result of this, on 27 May 1960, the military, supported by the old Republican elite, overthrew the Menderes government.⁸

The modernisation of Turkey and the emergence of the Turkish novel have, since the new social direction of the late Ottoman era and throughout the Republican period, been firmly driven by European ideals. This was hugely problematic as the newly formed nation struggled to maintain the differences between itself and the West. Most significantly, Turkey's acceptance of democracy was far more fraught than in other Western states. After adopting a truly democratic regime in 1950, within a very short space of time, the Turkish political system was overthrown four times by the military in 1960,⁹ 1971,¹⁰ 1980¹¹ and 1997.¹²

Of the four, the March Twelfth intervention in 1971 stands out in terms of its political, social, and literary impact, as well as its complexity and its role as the tipping point between the coups of 27 May 1960 and 12 September 1980. Unlike the coups of 1960 and 1980, and, in fact, unlike most coups, the March Twelfth overthrow was not directed at the government. It did not cause the parliament to be dissolved, nor outlaw the governing party. Politicians were not banned from politics, nor did they face criminal charges. The real objective of the coup was to act against the left-wing opposition and the words of one of the architects of the coup, General Faruk Gürler, to the president, "Mr Demirel, we did not do this against you,"¹³ were not as hollow as they may seem. Because of this uniqueness, the March Twelfth intervention has ever since been the subject of much study by writers, historians, and jurists.

After the 1961 coup, the DP was outlawed and the Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and the Minister of Financial Affairs, Hasan Polatkan were executed on 16-17th September 1961 for their 'misuse' of power and abrogation of the constitution.¹⁴ In the aftermath of the coup, the Turkish nation found itself in the middle of a cycle of political reforms. With the introduction of the new constitution in 1961, political freedoms were extended and Turkists, Islamists, and Socialists formed individual political parties. These new political parties in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*TBMM*)¹⁵ were diverse both in their interests and priorities which produced a fertile environment from which a fruitful parliamentary democracy could develop. Literature too, during the 1960s, enjoyed a relatively tolerant political atmosphere, free to focus explicitly on class issues, injustice and poverty. Mainstream literary interest concentrated on social themes, illustrating the widening gap between the top and bottom ends of society and casting a critical eye upon the conflicts of the urban persona and the bourgeois individual. The internal migration to the big cities and the ensuing problems of cultural compatibility also became popular literary themes, as the rise of interest in socialism ushered in more politically engaged writing which was highly conscious of class struggle and had a distinctly critical voice. Writers were among the foremost political actors of these turbulent years, prominent figures in the anti-American riots that intensified throughout the 1960s and in the establishment of civil organisations and political parties. In the aftermath of the 1960 coup, several well-established writers were associated with the rising political left, contributing to the formation of political parties such as *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (Worker's Party of Turkey) and the creation of a trade union

⁸ Ergun Özbudun, "Turkey: Crisis, Interruptions and Re-Equilibrations", ed. Juan J. Linz Larry Diamond, Seymour Martin Lipset, **Democracy in Developing Countries Asia**, S. 6, Lynne Rienner, London 1989, s. 201.

⁹ Davut Dursun, **27 Mayıs Darbesi**, Şehir Yayınları, İstanbul 2001.

¹⁰ F. Ahmad, **Age.**, s. 277-79.

¹¹ E. J. Zürcher, **Age.**, s. 292-300.

¹² Andrew Mango, **The Turks Today**, John Murray Publishers, London 2004, s. 96-98.

¹³ Reported by a senator to a journalist. See **Cumhuriyet Newspaper**, 19 March 1971.

¹⁴ Zürcher, **Age.**, s. 261.

¹⁵ TBMM: The Turkish Grand National Assembly.

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embracing class struggle, the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers' Unions (DİSK; *Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*). As a result of the changes made by writers on the political scene, TİP was able, in 1965, to access parliament and became a formidable opposition despite the limited number of seats it obtained in the elections. It could be argued that the liberal reforms introduced by the military in 1961, not only created the conditions for leftist, destabilising forces to flourish, but also led directly to the further intervention in 1971 against such forces.

The March Twelfth military intervention in 1971 had an enormous impact on writers and their works and introduced a completely new politically charged discourse in literature which attempted to dissect the main powers behind the coup d'état. The 'March Twelfth novel' became the overarching term to describe the works of left-wing writers which responded to the aftermath of the coup. The overthrow changed the Turkish left's perception of Turkey and of itself, significantly ending the sixty-year period in the novel's development, a period marked chiefly by a tendency towards socialist realism. A hallmark of post-coup writing was the widening of the geographical scope of the novel, moving from the confines of heavily Westernised upper-middle class Istanbul families to include rural Anatolian society, as well as migrant labour in urban centres. At the same time, however, the novel narrowed its social focus to the small sector of the university-educated political left. This focus was not so much on the lifestyle of this group as on its plight under what it considered to be state oppression, using testimonial accounts to highlight the human element of the political upheaval.

The majority of the novels dealing with the period were knee-jerk reactions, written by people who witnessed the intervention first-hand and who were traumatised by the retraction of civil rights and political freedom.¹⁶ The state, meant to serve the people, became instead a means of accumulating power for the influential. The well-known novelists of the time were greatly influenced by the 1968 left-wing student movements in Europe and were sympathetic to the socialist idealists and organisations which were struggling to recover from damage done by the military coup.¹⁷ Writers such as Füzünan, Adalet Ağaoglu, Sevgi Soysal, Ayla Kutlu, Çetin Altan, Erdal Öz, Pınar Kür, Samim Kocagöz, Oğuz Atay, Atilla İlhan and Vedat Türkalı described in various fashions the political polarisation of Turkish society, the socio-political alteration of the 1970s, and the repressive measures of the military regime. Their fiction, taken together, vividly traces the physical and mental demolition of the left-wing identity after the youth movement failed to succeed against the military coup. Though the March Twelfth novels are generally left-wing, challenging the legitimacy of the traditionally right-of-centre state orthodoxy, there were some novels which project the right-wing counter argument. Writers such as Emine Işınsoy, Tarık Buğra and Sevinç Çokum published works which challenged the perception of witnesses and called into question the status of victims, whilst broadly defending the role of the state and the right wing youth.

The suffering of young revolutionaries in prison and the pain of the torture they endured is the dominant theme of the March Twelfth novels. Ahmet Kekeç¹⁸ argues for close analysis of the March Twelfth novels which suggest that the young rebels were defeated due to a basic lack of public support. In his article, he argues that the March Twelfth novels do not specifically question the motives of the rebellious youth, but rather highlight the defiant psyche in the face of capture.¹⁹ In other words, he contends, post-coup literature does not deal with youthful ideals as much as sheer defiance in defeat.

¹⁶ Ahmet Kekeç, "Darbeler Ve Romanlar," *Hece; Türk Romanı Özel Sayısı*, S. 6, 2002, s. 65-67.

¹⁷ A. Ömer Türkeş, "Romanda 12 Mart Suretleri Ve 68 Kuşağı," *Birikim*, S. 132, 2000, s. 80-85.

¹⁸ Ahmet Kekeç is a writer and columnist.

¹⁹ A. Kekeç, *Agm.*, s. 88.

Murat Belge,²⁰ meanwhile, views March Twelfth fiction as an exploration of provocation, torture, and life imprisonment and approaches the novels through a novel-novelist-public triangle. At a time when many people were imprisoned, Belge sees an inevitable metaphorical distinction between those 'inside' and those 'outside'. If those 'inside' are the imprisoned revolutionaries and those 'outside' are the public, then the novelists, for Belge, become responsible for telling the latter about the former. In order to do this, the public needed to be metaphorically close to those inside the prisons and caught up in the revolutionary fervour. Belge, who understands the impossibility of writing a 'true' representation of the period from a left-wing perspective, does not presume the innocence of revolutionaries, and is ultimately torn in his sympathy, questioning whether it was the law itself at fault or whether those responsible for justice were unjust towards the revolutionaries.²¹ He cautions against 'defending the offence', as it could result in far more serious allegations, and argues that, whilst the inhumane methods used by the oppressive regime on 12th March and afterwards can be useful in demonstrating actual abuses of power, when used as the starting point for any novel will inevitably cloud the novelist's objectivity. He concludes simply that artistic experience is insufficient when struggling to complete theoretical knowledge.²²

Fethi Naci²³ approaches the March Twelfth novels from a distinctly political perspective, engaging with the real life problems faced by writers but highlighting the difficulty of realistically representing their traumatic experiences in novels.²⁴ Naci demonstrates that the novelists place their political view directly into their novels, rather than discussing them verbally,²⁵ and emphasises the authenticity and honesty of the March Twelfth novels. The vivid descriptions and close attention to detail in the novels belies any charge of false sincerity and has ultimately led to their continued success. For Naci, the March Twelfth novels provide the starting point for any novel writer since; though he is not entirely prescriptive about the progressive of the Turkish novel, he is a firm advocate further expansion of the genre to include broader experiences and greater digression. He holds the view that the inclusion of new challenges and more diverse characters will increase the novel's sophistication, forcing the form to embrace modernity. Post-March 12th, Naci argues, any novelist writing from a social perspective must learn from the writers after 1971, gather masses of relevant information about Turkey's history, about the socio-economic climate, about socialism, and about youth culture. On the last point he is particularly insistent: any novelist writing about youth culture should know as much about it as the young people in question.²⁶

Ahmet Oktay²⁷ is another critic who approaches the Twelfth March novels from a decidedly political standpoint. He draws much attention to the intolerant, aggressive attitudes that left-wing writers had towards people with different ideals, arguing that this deliberate provocation is directly correlated with the novels' popularity.²⁸ Ahmet Türkeş²⁹ meanwhile analyses the March Twelfth novels in a broader context, separating the leftist ideology produced by the March Twelfth novels from traditional socialist fiction and tracing the influence of the March Twelfth novels specifically beyond the coup of 1980.³⁰ Berna Moran³¹ approaches March Twelfth fiction from a

²⁰ Murat Belge is one of Turkey's most important left-liberal intellectuals. He is also an academic, writer, translator, literary critic, columnist, civil rights activist and occasional tour guide.

²¹ Murat Belge, *Edebiyat Üstüne Yazılar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, s. 127-34.

²² M. Belge, *Age.*, s. 114-35.

²³ Fethi Naci is a literary critic, intellectual and writer.

²⁴ Fethi Naci, *Türkiye'de Roman Ve Toplumsal Değişme*, Gerçek Yayınevi, İstanbul 1981, s. 416.

²⁵ F. Naci, *Age.*, s. 364-66.

²⁶ F. Naci, *Age.*, s. 417.

²⁷ Ahmet Oktay is poet, journalist and writer.

²⁸ Ahmet Oktay, *Türkiye'de Popüler Kültür*, Everest Yayınları, İstanbul 2002, s. 242.

²⁹ Ahmet Türkeş is journalist, literary critic and writer.

³⁰ A. Ö. Türkeş, *Agm.*, s. 80-85.

³¹ Berna Moran is one of the well known literary critics in Turkey.

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social perspective, focusing on the working classes. Their steady migration towards the big cities not only caused huge cultural compatibility issues, but also increased their literary relevance with the ongoing struggle between the workers and the bourgeoisie becoming a common theme.³²

Lastly, Çimen Günay makes a passionate argument for the radical revision of the negative and, often, hostile critical approach to March 12th novels. Through her examination of gender roles within the March 12th novels she argues that the corpus magnifies the complex relationship of individuals within a distinctly patriarchal power structure which sheds light on the immediate past of the Turkish nation as a whole. The crises of post-1968 radicalism are depicted in her analysis as crises of gender: "a masculinity that strives for change, encountered a rival masculinity that upholds traditions and resists change."³³

As works of fiction, they do not depict real historical events and have often been largely dismissed by critics as politically charged leftist discourse; nevertheless, what this group of novels embodies is the collective cultural memory of the relationship between the Turkish state and its citizens during this period. As Vincent Engel argues, the most harrowing and traumatic events experienced by a society are "unimaginable, incommunicable, and unspeakable" and yet societies, just like individuals, need to be able to narrativise the memories of such events in order to be able to live with them.³⁴ While many, particularly Maurice Halbwachs in *La Mémoire Collective*³⁵, have theorised that writing destroys memory because it freezes the otherwise dynamic and unfixed nature of remembrance, critical awareness of the function of writing, and especially fiction, in cultural memory is gaining ground. While memoir necessarily excludes the memories of others, fiction has no responsibility to tell the truth and for this reason can articulate things which could never be included in autobiography. It is a paradox of fiction that, because it does not have to depict actual events, it can reveal fundamental truths about reality, while leaving the get-out clause that 'it is only fiction'.³⁶ To the reader, fiction gives vicarious access to the inner world of characters as they experiences the events and upheavals of a particular period in history. Readers become party to the reality of the characters, experience their feelings and suffer alongside them. The creation of fictional characters, plots and narrators, located in different times and spaces can help break down the barriers which hinder the process of relating and communicating traumatic events. Furthermore, the fact that fiction does not have to depict historical truth means that it can evoke what would otherwise never be said and delve into the uncertainties of the past.³⁷

The principal focus of this article, Çetin Altan's first novel, *Büyük Gözaltı*,³⁸ a unique left-wing novel, which plays a significant role in the search for collective memory of the events following the 1971 intervention, paved the way for the post-coup writing style. *Büyük Gözaltı* is one of the most surreal of the March 12th novels, this work reveals the effects inflicted on the psychological processes of a single anonymous individual by the overwhelming, absolute power of the state which has imprisoned him. In an act of resistance produced by the power structure in which he finds himself, the protagonist internalises state power, playing the role of his own interrogators and inventing his own guilt. This article will make use of Foucault's philosophical

³² Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış 3*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2004, s. 16.

³³ Çimen Günay, *Cold War Masculinities in Turkish Literature: A Survey of March 12th Novels*, Leiden University Press, Leiden 2009.

³⁴ Francois-Xavier Lavenne, "Fiction, Between Inner Life and Collective Memory. A Methodological Relection," *The New Arcadia*, S. 3, 2005, s.1-4.

³⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, PUF, Paris, 1950, Chapter 1.

³⁶ Francois-Xavier Lavenne, *Agm.*, s. 8.

³⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Çeviren: Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago University Press, Chicago 2004, s. 559 - 60.

³⁸ Çetin Altan, *Büyük Gözaltı*, Bilgi Yayınevi, İstanbul 1974.

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and social theories to explore the way in which Altan represents the psychological consequences of state oppression and torture on the conscious and unconscious mind of the individual, analysing the symbiotic relationship between overwhelming state power and the resistance it generates which is ultimately internalised within the protagonist. I will also look at the way in which the anonymity of the protagonist lends a universality to its exploration of power structures, which means that the conclusions of the novel can be applied to all those who are the subjects of totalitarian states.

Theoretical Foundation of the Article

Büyük Gözaltı does not explicitly address the historical events of the 1971 intervention or its aftermath. The symbolism and abstract narrative employed by Altan is not simply a way of avoiding direct criticism of the contemporary political regime and its acts of oppression; rather, modernist and postmodernist elements in his work display a rejection of the ‘grand narratives’ found in historical novels, while Altan uses the consciousness of his characters to address the political issues of the time. Instead of using historical narrative to describe events as they happened, he employs the psychological turmoil of his characters and the difficulties they have in addressing ‘self’ to mirror the troubles and political oppression following the 1971 military intervention. Mechanisms of state power and their effects on individuals are laid bare in the consciousness of Altan’s protagonist, a product of the necessarily mutual relationship between the powerful and the powerless. In analysing this relationship, I will make use of Foucault’s theory that ‘power produces its own resistance’.³⁹

The use of political surrealism within *Büyük Gözaltı* narrows the perspective of its narrative, allowing much greater focus on the psychological effects of oppression; while it responds to a specific set of events taking place within 1970s Turkey, Altan’s narrative examines the political and social issues raised by removing them from the historical moment itself. In this way the work has a great deal in common with the writings of twentieth-century European authors such as Solzhenitsyn, Orwell and Kafka. When Alexander Solzhenitsyn addresses the effects of Stalinist oppression in his 1962 novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, for example, his narrative takes on the perspective of a single prisoner during a single day of his life in a forced labour camp. The lack of significant events during this one day means that Solzhenitsyn is able to concentrate on the psychological response of the protagonist to these events, leaving it up to the reader to interpret this as a wider indictment of the horrors of Stalinist oppression.

What sets *Büyük Gözaltı*, and other March 12th novels of a similar vein, such as Erdal Öz’s *Yaralımsın*, apart from the works of the above-mentioned authors is their repeated exploration of both power and pain. Although official denied at the time, physical and psychological torture played a significant role in the state-led oppression following the 1971 intervention. In his description of methods of ‘clean’ torture around the world, *Torture and Democracy*, Darius Rejali indicates 1971 as the year in which “[Turkish] Interrogators turned to electrocution”.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Altan and Öz do not foreground torture in their works simply to attest to the common use of state-sanctioned violence against left-wing prisoners. These novels use physical and psychological torture carried out by the state in order to reveal the deficiencies and abuses of military government and to examine how far the state can weaken its own laws during a Schmittian ‘state of exception’, in the course of which, as Agamben puts it, “the fundamental human rights of citizens can be diminished, or the state can rationalise official illegalities such as torture under arrest or detention without a court trial, by alleging the liability of the state and the need to safeguard order.”⁴¹ The use of torture is therefore legitimised by the threat which the protagonist is

³⁹ Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage, New York, 1975, s. 97.

⁴⁰ Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007, s. 181.

⁴¹ Agamben Giorgio, *State of Exception*, Otonom Publishing House, İstanbul, 2005, s. 40.

alleged to pose to the state. This legitimisation lends the state an inherent power to inflict physical and psychological pain and allows it to assert its absolute authority over the individual. Altan and Öz's protagonists internalise state power, with the result that the opposition existing externally between oppressor and oppressed is played out internally, with both roles taken on by the individual's consciousness.

In analysing *Büyük Gözaltı*, I will draw particularly on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), which describes the shift in the Western penal system from cruel and 'inhumane' forms of punishment three hundred years ago to the modern systems of imprisonment in place today. Foucault asserts that this constituted a movement from punishment inflicted on the body of a prisoner to punishment inflicted on the mind. He claims that, rather than being more humane than public execution, imprisonment in fact makes the prisoner intensely aware of his place within an overwhelming power structure based on an excess of power and a total lack of power. At one end of this structure is the 'sovereign', with the power to punish, and at the other is the 'condemned man', who must encode his own lack of power, and it is through this process that he creates a non-corporeal entity which Foucault names a 'soul'. This is not the 'soul' of Christian theology, born into sin; rather it is "born out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint"⁴² and as such it cannot be either innocent or guilty because it is produced by the institutional discourse of punishment. Time and again in Altan's novel, the state imposes itself onto the soul of the protagonist, for whom the state becomes overwhelmingly powerful, effectively destroying the concept of his own identity, subjective reality and even time and space. His corporeal imprisonment increasingly leads the protagonist's non-corporeal soul to accept the logic of this power structure; internalising state power is the only way in which his existence be encoded.

While the protagonist in *Büyük Gözaltı* is a condemned man facing the sovereign authority of the state, I will argue that he is neither innocent nor guilty and that traditional notions of innocence and guilt are irrelevant in the work. What Altan actually depicts is the psychological processes of a single individual subject to the control of a state authority endowed with an absolute right to observe, punish and judge. While persecution and prison were very real threats for left-leaning activists, intellectuals and writers during this period (indeed Altan was imprisoned following the military intervention), this psychological exploration broadens the scope of analysis beyond the experience of leftists imprisoned following the 1971 intervention in Turkey: it allows us to observe the consciousness of any individual subject to a statist authority and who may be accused, condemned and punished as a result of their position of powerlessness within a power structure.

The Imposition of the State Legitimacy over the Individual

Çetin Altan⁴³ who is a hugely important literary figure of the time, not least because as a politician and journalist, as well as a novelist, he strikes a crucial balance between realism and fiction. His first work *Büyük Gözaltı*, after the intervention, was published in 1972 by *Bilgi*

⁴² Michael Foucault, *Age*, s. 29.

⁴³ Çetin Altan was born in Istanbul in 1927. Having graduated from Galatasaray High School, he went on to achieve a BA in Law from Ankara University. Preferring to become a journalist rather than a lawyer, Altan started his career writing for *Ulus* before accepting an offer by Abdi İpekçi's 1959 to move to the daily *Milliyet*. During his working life, he wrote for a number of different Turkish newspapers, including *Akşam*, *Hürriyet*, *Güneş* and *Sabah* before returning to *Milliyet*. Between 1965 and 1969, Çetin Altan also served as a member of parliament for the Workers Party of Turkey (Turkish: *Türkiye İşçi Partisi*). His articles have led to his being prosecuted over 300 times, arrested three times and convicted twice. In addition to making a name for himself as a newspaper columnist, Altan also writes plays and has written the following novels: *Büyük Gözaltı* (Great Surveillance, 1972), *Bir Avuç Gökyüzü* (A Handful of Sky, 1974), *Viski* (Whiskey, 1975), *Küçük Bahçe* (The Small Garden, 1978).

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Yayınevi, just a year after the military staged its coup on March 12th 1971. It is worth noting that, at a time when leftists were still commonly being persecuted in Turkey, the novel won the distinguished Orhan Kemal Novel Award (*Orhan Kemal Armağanı*) in 1973. Although the oppression of left-leaning intellectuals and activists had diminished somewhat since the intervention, when *Büyük Gözaltı* was awarded this prestigious prize, its author was in prison once more. Once it reached its fifth edition in Turkey, the work was translated into French and published by the renowned publishing house, Flammarion.⁴⁴

The fact that, at a time when state power was still extremely strong, a book as clearly anti-state as *Büyük Gözaltı* should be published and receive literary accolades serves as a real life example of what is depicted in the fiction of the March twelfth novelists: as Foucault's assessment of power structure argues, absolute power creates its own resistance.⁴⁵

In its use of an anonymous first person narrator and protagonist, *Büyük Gözaltı* conforms with one of the standard features of surrealist political writing. Just like Öz in his 1975 novel *Yaralımsın*, Altan avoids creating a single character affected by the cruelty and suppression which followed the coup of 1971 and gives his protagonist an anonymity which lends a degree of universality to the work. What we do learn of the protagonist is that he is a middle-aged intellectual, imprisoned in the wake of the intervention. What neither the reader nor the protagonist himself knows is exactly why he has been incarcerated; although he asks numerous times what crime he is supposed to have committed, the only answer the protagonist receives from his captors is that he knows very well what he has done and that he should confess his crime. This corresponds directly with Foucault's assessment of the nineteenth century European system of punishment, which no longer judged the crimes but the soul of a criminal. In this way, the protagonist adopts the role of his own interrogator, desperately trawling through his memories and examining his past to identify what crime could have seen him thrown in jail. Altan manages to avoid direct political discussion at this point, however, by introducing the first twenty years of the protagonist's life in a number of flashbacks.

The reader discovers that the protagonist's parents both came from immigrant families fleeing from the Balkans to Turkey in the 1890s and who were fully exposed to Westernisation during the internal upheavals experienced in early twentieth-century Turkey. His father was a dedicated Kemalist bureaucrat whose mother was a traditional Muslim woman, widowed when the protagonist's father was only ten years old. Meanwhile the protagonist's maternal grandfather received his education in Germany and served in the German armed forces before returning to Turkey and becoming a Kemalist like his son-in-law. The way in which Altan eschews any kind of historical detail with regard to the subsequent twenty years of the protagonist's life is typical of the universalising nature found in the surrealist March Twelfth novels. Altan ensures that the protagonist can only be interpreted as being a victim of the 'sledgehammer operation' by the implications of context. This means that political persecution he experiences, and experienced by left-leaning intellectuals and activists after the 1971 military intervention, becomes pertinent to the entirety of humanity. Rather than analysing the moral implications of political activity on both the left and right during this period of instability, something Altan deliberately avoids, *Büyük Gözaltı* explores the idea of guilt and its abstract nature. It is his imprisonment and the methods used to constrain him which define the protagonist's guilt and this guilt becomes an integral part of his self-definition, penetrating his thoughts and memories.⁴⁶ Guilt becomes a symptom of state power

⁴⁴ Çetin Altan, *Etroite Surveillance*, Flammarion, Paris, 1975.

⁴⁵ Michael Foucault, *Age*, 25-30.

⁴⁶ Michael Foucault, *Age*, s. 76.

for the protagonist; it internalises political oppression within him and leads the protagonist to interrogate and accuse himself.

The protagonist's self-examination, in search of the crime he is told he has committed, is the principal theme of the work and serves to confirm the theory proposed by Foucault that the prisoner creates the notion of his own guilt as a result of the mechanisms of imprisonment.⁴⁷ By delving into the memories of his distant past, the protagonist unearths various 'guilty' actions he once committed as a child, including knocking lamps over, dropping books and masturbation. For each of these 'guilty' episodes, the protagonist undergoes surreal interrogation, carried out by captors who treat his actions as though they were the gravest of crimes. As the novel ends, the prisoner is finally presented with what is supposed to be physical evidence of his misdeeds, in the form of a cocoon produced from the protagonist's pocket by a guard. On seeing this he understands the crime he committed, namely killing the silkworm which had occupied the cocoon, with the result that a "new cloth could never be woven". The surreal nature of this crime exposes the goal of the penal system, *i.e.* not to punish particular acts of criminality but to force the individual to confess to something. Foucault's observation that the prisoner is 'cured' by participating in his own sentence is particularly apt here.⁴⁸ Altan uses the dead silkworm as a way of presenting the wider process of torture, where intellectual freedom and the future have been eradicated by the state, just as the possibility of creating 'new cloth' from the silkworm's silk has been extinguished by its death. The mechanisms of power bring the protagonist to condemn himself and invent his own guilt. In a similar way to Winston in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, who "loved Big Brother, the prisoner is utterly subjugated by the state because he acknowledges its arbitrary symbolism."⁴⁹

The effect exerted by state power on the consciousness of the protagonist is evident from the very beginning of the novel; the interrogation of the prisoner becomes apparent to the reader not through direct questioning by his captors, but through the prisoner himself. This creates a situation where the interrogators, through which state power is expressed, cannot be separated from the protagonist and the incarcerated consciousness of the prisoner becomes its own interrogator:

I just don't know why they want to know who I killed. I'm forty-four years old. Over forty years have passed since my first crime. Perhaps they still want to know about that.⁵⁰

It is indicative of the internalisation of state power that the protagonist and the journeys he makes into his past within the narrative are the creations of state power itself; the prisoner is the "element of its articulation."⁵¹ It is through his current situation as a prisoner of the state that the protagonist interprets his memories and this is what lies behind the stream-of-consciousness narrative used to depict the recollections of his youth and the 'guilty' acts he committed. Various suppressed memories converge into a symbolic representation of the protagonist's childhood. An example of this is the only time the protagonist ever remembers seeing any kind of intimacy or affection between his parents:

Later on that night, before I woke up, the bogeyman was about to attack me in my dreams. Then I saw Mum. Dad was sat on the edge of the bed and had taken off his nightshirt. Mum was kneeling on the floor doing something with his penis. Perhaps

⁴⁷ Michael Foucault, *Age.*, s. 45.

⁴⁸ Michael Foucault, *Age.*, s. 22.

⁴⁹ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Penguin Books, London, 2003.

⁵⁰ Çetin Altan, *Büyük Gözaltı*, s. 6.

⁵¹ Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Writings*, Pantheon, New York, 1980, s. 98.

her wedding dress was still on. I shut my eyes again and had them eaten by the bogeyman. That was my first murder.⁵²

This is a prime example of the way in which power can both create and destroy. The protagonist commands the bogeyman to kill his parents as an act of control in order to subvert his own oppression by the state: this is the only way he is able to codify his own powerlessness.⁵³ It is possible to interpret this episode as a Freudian ‘primal scene’ in which the protagonist kills his mother just as she loses her innocence, represented by the “wedding dress”; however, viewed from the broader perspective of the structure of power, this scene serves to represent the mechanism by which power is productive. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault claims that the role of repression is overly exaggerated by Freud because power cannot be a strong force if it is only used to repress.⁵⁴ Rather, he proposes that it is principally the notion of sado-masochism which explains the derivation of pleasure from experiences of displeasure, due to the existence of inequality, subordination, humiliation, and pain which are implied by the concept of power. In the aforementioned scene we see the protagonist reacting to the state power that “questions, monitors, watches, [and] spies” alongside its necessary counterpart, the power that manifests itself in “the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting.”⁵⁵ Thus the protagonist succeeds in subverting his oppression by converting it into surreal recollections of destructive acts committed against his family, which assumes the same role as the state.

The surrealist nature of *Büyük Gözaltı* arises from the symbiotic relationship between power and resistance: Altan is able to show the power of the state through the individual it has produced. The walls of his prison, his captors and the methods of torture described in the work are all products of the protagonist’s own consciousness. The power structure leads him to imagine acts of resistance against it and cause him to assume the role of his own accuser and prosecutor. This resistance is demonstrated in the conversation between the protagonist and his grandfather, Pasha Baba, who also becomes one of his interrogators. The protagonist has no power to escape the questioning of his grandfather/interrogator but resists through his inability to answer them. In both cases the punishment for his resistance is the same:

The next day, after lunch, the test began. Pasha Baba had his glasses on, sat me down next to him, and asked:

“Two times two?”

“Two times two, two times twooo...four.”

“Three times two?”

“Three times two, three times twooo...”

No answer was forthcoming.

“Four times five...?”

“Four times five, four times fiiiive...”

He shouted into my ear:

“Didn’t I tell you to learn the multiplication tables?”

⁵² Çetin Altan, *Age.*, s. 8.

⁵³ Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Writings*, s. 58.

⁵⁴ Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vintage, London, 1990, s. 59.

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, s. 45.

He took me by my arm off to the room where I slept:

"You won't come out of here until you learn them," he said.

He locked the door on me.

Perhaps I'm still in that room. Aren't the lame old man and the burly guard across the room still asking me some odd multiplication table?

"Two times two, four..."

"No, five..."

"No, three..."

"Two times two, yes. Yes, I killed the man with this pistol."

The lame man said, "Yeah, you killed me alright."

"That means you accept it?" the burly man asked.

"I do..."

"Why did you kill him then?"

What an idiotic question. Why did Sadakat show me the bogeyman? Why did Mum clean the toilet drain with my cloth toy horse? Why would Dad smoke his water pipe for so long?

"So I didn't have to learn the multiplication tables," I said.

I really didn't learn the multiplication tables. Pasha Baba locked me in that room. I am still in that room. That room that I can't get away from, those rooms that I can't get away from: they are all the same room.⁵⁶

The room in which the prisoner finds himself is both his childhood bedroom and a prison cell at the same time, while the description of both cell and bedroom call to mind the conditions of solitary confinement imposed on certain prisoners within the American penal system. Isolation of this nature is supposed to rehabilitate convicts, not through common law, but by forcing the prisoner to face and examine his own conscience, the ultimate aim being a process of self-enlightenment.⁵⁷ Foucault asserts that an individual confined alone within a cell is delivered into his own charge and submerges himself in his own conscience. Surrounded by the silence of isolation, he examines and interrogates his conscience, experiencing within him the stirring of the same moral feeling which can never be entirely extinguished in a person. Rather than fear of punishment or a respect for the rule of law, what truly motivates the prisoner is the working of the conscience itself.⁵⁸ The protagonist has come to acknowledge his imprisonment as the permanent condition of his life and the room acts as a symbol of this realisation. This is demonstrated in the scene where an official comes to the prisoner's cell and gives him an order for his release: "It is clear that there are no grounds for an investigation to be made concerning..."⁵⁹ Altan creates a sharp contrast between the protagonist's realist description of the way in which he packs his

⁵⁶ Çetin Altan, *Age*, s. 59-60.

⁵⁷ Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, s. 238.

⁵⁸ Michael Foucault, *Age*, s.238.

⁵⁹ Çetin Altan, *Age*, s. 133.

belongings, puts on his shoes and lights a cigarette, all in preparation for his departure, and the abrupt return to surrealism as he realises that he will never leave the prison:

I was going to be set free from the prison.

A loud laugh burst from outside the window. The trees below the pane were laughing, great guffaws slowly shaking its branches.

“Were you ever free outside the prison?”

What would that mean?

Had I ever been free, even once?

When you were on the phone, weren't you in jail? Wasn't someone in the kitchen, in your room, on the balcony, pricking up his ears, listening in? Wouldn't you look subtly to the left and right? Wouldn't you lower your voice when you were speaking?”⁶⁰

The questions continue endlessly, as if from Furies in Hell.

“Were you ever free outside the prison? Even in a darkened room with your lips together, wasn't somebody always watching you? Weren't you always watching yourself?”

Hah hah hah hah hah...⁶¹

The laughter and the voices of the ‘Furies in Hell’ emanate from the protagonist himself. As the protagonist shows the document to the guard, the sadistic amusement of his tormentors merges into his own laughter and within the same sentence he observes a change in his own voice: “Amidst the laughter, I show him the paper and all of a sudden my voice becomes forceful.” He comes to the realisation that the two voices which narrated the events were in reality both his own: he is his own prosecution and defence, both normalised power and resistance. Foucault regards this as the ultimate quandary for the imprisoned man who has gained power through subjugation:

The man described for us who we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of subjugation much more profound than himself. A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body [...] The soul is the prison of the body.⁶²

When the protagonist says ‘Had I ever been free?’ he demonstrates that he recognises and understands the separation of the physical body from the ‘soul’ or ‘conscience’ that Foucault describes as being created, surveilled and disciplined by state power. We can also draw a significant parallel between the paranoia exhibited by the protagonist in this scene, with his concerns about his phone being tapped, lowering his voice and being observed at all times during his everyday life, and the reality of the intrusion and persecution faced by left wing activists and intellectuals in Turkey during this period; after the March twelfth coup, covert surveillance, spying and deception were an on-going threat.

Towards the end of the novel, the protagonist finds that the individual guards keeping him prisoner and the people he has mistreated or hurt in the past all begin to “combine to become a

⁶⁰ Çetin Altan, *Age*, s. 134-35.

⁶¹ Çetin Altan, *Age*, s. 135-36.

⁶² Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, s. 38.

scratchy record” and his memories of different events start to merge together. The woman with whom the protagonist has a sexual encounter, for example, now gains the face of a different person from a separate incident. What he describes as the ‘scratchy record’ is a concept he derives from flashing quickly through the description of twelve characters, previously unmentioned, within just two pages. By this stage the habitual routine of the narrative – accusation, denial, punishment – has become little more than a tiring process of recurring monotony. For the protagonist, the mere act of remembering his former existence fills him with bitterness at the fact that he had to live for other people and that he had to endure their values being forced upon him as he played the role of ‘boy’ and ‘good citizen’. For this reason, he regards his past with hostility and resentment. The theme of the ‘scratchy record’ returns five pages before the novel comes to a close and announces the arrival of a ‘sneaky-faced guard’:

“I woke up in the morning. I wanted tea. The sneaky faced guard brought the tea. I wanted to get my share of praise for last night’s visit.

“Last night someone very important came to see me,” I said.

He paid no attention.

“We talked for two hours,” I said.

It was as if he couldn’t hear me.

“In any case, an answer to my petition is coming today,” I said.

His lips stirred, a mumbling came from his mouth.

“They won’t ever take you out.”

“Well, the paper in my hand...”

“The paper said that it was necessary for you to be released and you signed the paper. According to your dossier, you’re no longer here. Your dossier is closed.”

“Whaaaa, what will happen?”

“You can never get out.”

A boiling rage swelled inside me.

“How come, why, what right?” I was shouting.

The guards had come in.

The sneaky faced man pulled a cocoon from out of his pocket. A tiny, whitish, somewhat yellow cocoon...

“Who killed the thing inside here?” he asked me.

They had finally unravelled the big secret I had kept hidden.

I had killed the silk worm, inside its cocoon.

A new cloth can never be woven. There’s nothing I can do about it.⁶³

⁶³ Çetin Altan, *Age.*, s. 251-52.

By the end of the novel, the protagonist realises that he must accept his absolute imprisonment: “You can never get out”. The destruction of the silkworm acts as a metaphor for the protagonist’s own ultimate defeat but the act of acknowledging his powerlessness proves cathartic for him as he succeeds in eluding his self-reckoning; he escapes the dissonant ‘scratchy record’ of merged voices but this also means he has to surrender his ability to think, question and resist those who oppress him.

As the most surreal of the March 12th novels, *Büyük Gözaltı* is not explicit in its condemnation of the state and it avoids praising left-leaning prisoners or making them out to be martyrs. What the novel succeeds in doing is to show the effect an overwhelmingly powerful state will have on its subjects and the kind of individuals it will produce. In creating individuals who then resist state power, the state manages to justify the existence of that same power.⁶⁴

Conclusion

In his use of claustrophobic surrealism and abstract narrative in *Büyük Gözaltı*, Altan attempts to reproduce what it means to be the subject of state oppression, exploring the deep psychological scarring effected by state-led persecution. By turning to the philosophical and political theories of such luminaries as Foucault, Freud and Schmitt, who provide comprehensive analyses of the psychological effects of imprisonment on the human mind and unconscious, I have been better able to explore the abstract symbolism of this particular work and the conclusions it draws regarding the nature of existence within a framework of totalitarian power. The work of these theorists has aided me in identifying the creation of resistance by the power structure within the novel. Altan’s work goes far beyond simple condemnation of physical and psychological torture or arbitrary incarceration at the hands of an autocratic regime; what we find in *Büyük Gözaltı* is a thorough exploration of the numerous methods and mechanisms by which power maintains control over the individual through surveillance and punishment. The protagonist’s status as a prisoner under constant supervision removes the possibility of political debate within the work. For this reason he becomes preoccupied with the validity of such abstract concepts as self-definition and memory, and in turn this pushes him to internalise the interrogation and surveillance imposed on him by state power.

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⁶⁴ Agamben Giorgio, **Age**, s. 42.

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