



**TÜRK EDEBİYATINDA UNUTULAN SESLER:
12 EYLÜL 1980 ASKERİ DARBE SONRASI TÜRKİYE'DE
YAZILAN 'HAPİSHANE EDEBİYATI'NA ANALİTİK BAKIŞ***

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ÖZET

12 Eylül 1980 askeri darbesi sonrasında yazılan, darbeyi ve neticelerini konu alan 'hapishane edebiyatı', dönemin baskıcı zihniyetini anımsatması ve temsil etmesi sebebiyle edebiyat otoritelerince gözardı edilmiş, 80'li yılların kanonize olmuş edebi eserlerinin aksine tam anlamıyla edebi ürün olarak kabul görmemiştir. Bu sebeple eserler, edebi yönleri ve sanatsal kaliteleri ile incelenip değerlendirilmemiş; eleştirmenlerin duymak istemediği ortak bir sesi temsil etmeleri sebebiyle de dikkate değer görülmeyerek Türk edebiyat tarihi dışında tutulmuşlardır. Bu makale, 1980'li yıllar Türkiye'sinde mahkumlar tarafından kaleme alınmış; ancak dönemin yazılan diğer edebi eserleri arasında tam anlamıyla yer bulamamış ve kabul görmemiş romanlarına dikkat çekerek, hapishane edebiyatına yeni bir bakış açısı getirecek; bu eserlerin o dönemde neden geçerli bir edebiyat ürünü olarak kabul edilmediklerini inceleyerek 12 Eylül'ün içyüzünün anlaşılmasında oynadıkları rolü göstermeyi hedeflemektedir. Çalışma ilk olarak, 1970 ve 80'li yıllar Türkiye'sinin genel siyasi gelişmelerine ışık tutacak; ikinci olarak, 80'li yıllarda darbe sonrasında kaleme alınan hapishane edebiyatını genel hatlarıyla ele alarak okuyucuya sunacak; üçüncü aşama olarak, Belge Yayıncılık'tan çıkan ve cezaevlerindeki yazınsal direnişi simgeleyen Yeni Sesler Serisi'ni inceleyip 12 Eylül 1980 askeri darbesi sonrasında mahkum edilen insanların sesine kulak vermek suretiyle bu sesi gün yüzüne çıkarıp, bunun etki gücünü gösterecek; çalışma son olarak da, A. Kadir Konuk'un 'Çözülme' ve Hüseyin Şimşek'in 'Eylül Şifresi' romanlarını inceleyerek, bu eserlerle 12 Eylül döneminin edebi analizinin kısmen yapılmasını amaçlayacak ve bundan sonra dönemle alakalı yazılacak çalışmalara da zemin oluşturmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: hapishane edebiyatı, 12 Eylül, Türkiye, siyasi şiddet, askeri darbe

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**FORGOTTEN VOICES IN TURKISH LITERATURE:
AN ANALYSIS OF “PRISON LITERATURE” WRITTEN AFTER
THE SEPTEMBER 12TH 1980 MILITARY COUP D’ÉTAT IN
TURKEY**

ABSTRACT

Too often, the critical responses to September 12th literature ignore the significant body of ‘prison literature’ written during the rule of the military regime in 1980s Turkey because it is not deemed ‘literary’. This has happened on false grounds and on the assumptions of the ruling state elite. Prison literature written after the 1980 coup has been sidelined for literary exploration and analysis not on the grounds of the qualities of the writing itself, but because it is a collective voice that critics have been unwilling to listen to. This article makes the case that the novels, poems, and journals written by prisoners during the 1980s in Turkey have refugee status: they are exiled from the canonical literary works and their import goes unrecognised. For this purpose, I am going to introduce a new perspective on prison literature, analysing why it has been dismissed as a valid literary form and demonstrating areas where the works of prison literature provide insight into the study of September 12th. The article will firstly analyse the Turkish political environment of the 1970s and 80s and examine the ‘prison literature’ in the 80s Turkey; secondly, the work will broadly investigate the “New Voices Series” (Yeni Sesler Dizisi) by Belge Publications and show its impact in bringing to light the voices of those imprisoned following September 12th 1980 military coup d’état, before specifically focusing on two novels from the series, A. Kadir Konuk’s *The Severance* (Çözülme), and Hüseyin Şimşek’s *The September Code*. By doing so, I hope to make a start in bringing to light the importance of these novels and demonstrate what can be gleaned about the political atmosphere of the 1980s from the context of a literary analysis of September 12th, and make a case for their further and more detailed study.

Key Words: Prison literature, 12th September, Turkey, political violence, military coup

Introduction

Before examining prison literature specifically, this work will provide a brief account of the general political atmosphere of Turkey in the 70s and 80s, outlining the different issues that caused the coup d’état and the atmosphere in which these texts were written. Inevitably, there are multiple causes of the coup: domestic politics, the stalemate of the party system, increasing violence, the collapse of governmental authority, and the high rate of inflation. To see how these factors evolved and contributed to each other, it is necessary to examine the general characteristics of politics in Turkey throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s.

In the 1970s, Turkish politics was characterised by extreme fragmentation and polarization. As ideological positions became more entrenched, the party system inevitably splintered leaving no single party able to establish a majority government. Subsequently, Turkey witnessed successive

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minority and coalition governments.¹ The root of this division dates back to the 1961 Constitution which, according to Heper and Keyman, both re-institutionalized the state and expanded basic rights and liberties. It also made the free expression of ideologies on the left and the right possible for the first time in Turkish history. This engendered the gradual crystallization of class conflict (Heper&Keyman 1998: 264). By the end of the 1960s, politics had divided on an extreme ideological split between ultra-capitalists on the right and Marxists on the left. This division occurred in tandem with the rapid industrialisation² of Turkey (Ahmad 1993: 168), a process which typically provokes ideological conflict in developing countries (Altunışık&Tür 2004: 25).

Beyond industrialisation, the historian Ergüder argues that other factors also caused the profound factionalisation of Turkish politics through the late 1960s and 1970s (Ergüder 1980: 693). These factors include developments in socio-economic structure, urbanisation, the formation of new social strata such as the 'working class' and the 'entrepreneur class', increasing communications between urban areas and the countryside, the rising importance of religion and ethnicity in social and political status, violent political expression, and intensified ideological expression in print and broadcasting. The trend towards greater ideological polarization after the 1973 election occurred at three different levels: the level of the elites, the level of the mass electorate, and the level of government, in terms of opposition splits and patterns of coalition building (Sayan 1980: 628-29). The ideological splits within the mass electorate were a consequence of the propaganda used by the extreme left and right wing groups, as well as the antagonistic ideological exchange between party elites in the mass media. The increasing ideological divide between parties aggravated long-standing social divides based on religious and regional sympathies. This gave rise to two unstable coalitions of competing ideologies: pro-left/pro-laicist/pro-alevi versus anti-communist/pro-islam/pro-sunni. The progression of the electoral system from a simple plurality to proportional representation provided minority parties representation in parliament. Extreme voices drowned out moderate influences, with parties such as the Turkish Labour Party (TLP) in the 1960s, and the National Salvation Party (NSP) and the Nationalist Action Party (NAP) in the late 60s and 70s, gaining political traction.

Due to the complexity of the contributing factors, there is some academic disagreement over the causes and consequences of the shifts in electoral power during the period. Özbudun argues that a "detailed analysis of the changing electoral fortunes of the JP and the RPP suggests that such changes were not merely the result of the movements of the floating vote at the centre, but were associated with a major realignment in the mass coalitional bases of the major parties, a phenomenon most clearly visible in the big cities" (Özbudun 1980: 108). He concludes that socio-economic modernisation increases class-based political participation and decreases communal based politics, rendering the concepts of the 'centre' and the 'extreme' meaningless: political divisions, therefore, emerged both at the centre and at the periphery' (Özbudun 1980: 124). Kalaycıoğlu, meanwhile, rejects Özbudun's claim, and argues that Turkish political behaviour was shaped by realignment patterns observable in the development of industrial capitalism in western countries. It would be unrealistic, in his view, to expect functionalist divisions immediately to replace traditional alignment patterns, such as kinship, in a society still defined by a large rural population and a middle class still dependent on state intervention in the economy. He defines Turkey's political scene in the 1970s as having a neo-patriarchal socio-political structure (Kalaycıoğlu 2000: 393-7)

Lastly, Kemal Karpat sees urbanisation as the key factor in political polarisation: people who migrated from villages to the city struggled to adapt to city life because of low income and low educational levels. As a result, they were unable to achieve upward mobility which in turn led to social unrest (Karpat 1981: 18). Whilst economic development and the unequal distribution of income altered the traditional structures and old systems of values and beliefs, these factors also

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gave rise to extreme feelings of insecurity among the public body. This insecurity is reflected in the extreme adoption of political positions based on traditional religious and nationalist identities, which in turn led to the rise of right wing parties gaining traction. On the other hand, disputes over unequal distribution of income urged the mobilization of the leftist movement, and specifically those with Marxist ideologies.

In this atmosphere of social upheaval and political intransigence, Tachau and Heper attribute the military takeover in 1980 to several factors. They draw attention to the fragmentation of Turkish politics in the 1970s throughout key social sectors including the labour unions, the teaching community, and the civil bureaucracy. This, they argue, led to an increase in the amount and scale of the political violence committed between extreme militant and sectarian groups. At the same time, they argue that the economic climate, in which rampant inflation accompanied serial industrial slowdown, caused wages to collapse and widespread shortages. It was the combination of these factors that caused the military to see a system which was failing and one in which there had been a complete erosion of governmental authority (Tachau&Heper 1983: 25).

Özbudun accepts that there were multiple factors that led to the military takeover. However, he is much more insistent that the political violence and terrorism that directly preceded the coup was what caused military action (Ahmad 1999: 170-3), (Birand 1999: 132-3) Specifically, he argues that the incidence of political violence reflected a growing ideological polarization between the Nationalist Action Party (NAP) on the right, and the combination of many small radical groups on the left (Özbudun 2000: 35-6). In arguing that the 1973 election campaign and its aftermath caused an “increasing ideological polarization between the major parties” with the ideological distances between them becoming “exceptionally large by normal standards”, Özbudun shows that the major third party revolts preceding the elections (especially that of the NSP) revealed the incapacity of the creaking political system to deal with emergent political demands (Özbudun 1980: 108).

Özbudun sees street violence as a reflection of ideological polarization; others, however, point to the direct involvement, particularly by the Nationalist Action Party, in the occurrence of violence. Feroz Ahmad, for instance, shows that during the rule of the Nationalist Front government, the state was divided out between the parties who subsequently assigned ministries to their members to provide patronage for their support. The strong presence of the NAP in the cabinet helped legitimize the neo-fascist philosophy throughout the government. The NAP’s young militants, the Grey Wolves, saw themselves, therefore, as part of the state and operated with greater confidence in creating a climate of terror designed to intimidate their opponents (Ahmad 1993: 165-6). Ahmad argues that because of the state’s ‘approval’ of the Grey Wolves as a militant group, the left wing groups such as Dev-Sol and Dev-Yol could be categorized as ‘anti- state’. In the early 1970s, the left hoped to inspire revolution by galvanizing workers to rise with anti-western and anti-capitalist forces and participate in highly political terrorism such as the kidnapping of American soldiers. Once the Grey Wolves became a state-approved force, however, they used attacks on leftist groups to cause chaos and demoralization and inflame a climate in which a regime promising law and order would be welcomed by the masses (Ahmad 1993: 163-4).

In 1978, the formation of the Neo-Marxist Kurdish Workers Party (known as the PKK from its Kurdish initials) had a huge influence in convincing the bourgeoisie and Turkish nationalists of the threat that left wing groups posed. The PKK aimed to establish a socialist Kurdish state across the south east of Turkey. Whole neighbourhoods, particularly in poorer areas of Eastern Turkey, came under the control of the PKK which declared them ‘liberated areas’. Most famously, the small Black Sea town of Fatsa was taken over by a leftist group, with their mayor renouncing the rule of the Turkish government and declaring the town an independent Soviet

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Republic. These 'liberated' areas caused widespread outrage and so it was a popular policy when troops were sent to reclaim them.

In addition to this anti-leftist general mood, political violence took a new direction during the year leading up to the coup. Killings had occurred between rival leftist and rightist groups for a number of years. Directly prior to the coup, however, there were a number of assassinations of high-profile figures. In May 1980, the deputy chairman of the NAP was assassinated, as were former Prime Minister Nihat Erim and Kemal Türkler, former president of DISK (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions) the following July. Because it seemed that the political body was unable to control these killings, there was more public sympathy for a military takeover.

It is more or less impossible to say with any accuracy how many deaths were caused by political violence between 1970 and 1980, but it is widely agreed that the number is higher than 5000. Özbudun goes as far as to say that the number of casualties incurred between 1975 and 1980 are at least the "equivalent of Turkish losses in the War of Independence" (Özbudun 2000: 35). Justus Leicht, meanwhile, points to an article that appeared in the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on August 5th 1981 which argues that of the 5000 people killed between 1975 and 1980, more than two-thirds were victims of right-wing terror (Leicht 2000). In 1981, Turkish authorities accused the Grey Wolves of carrying out 694 murders in the six-year period between 1974 and 1980 (Johnman&Schmid 2005: 674). All of these accusations became the excuse for another devastating *coup d'état*, this time a direct military rule with tanks lining the streets of Ankara on September 12, 1980 (Zürcher 1998: 292).

The *coup d'état* on 12th September 1980 was the third and arguably the most influential military intervention into Turkish politics. The coup caused the total suppression of leftist groups and intellectuals, and the strengthening of the position of the National Security Council as a body for dealing with dissent. This entirely reshaped the conduct and discourse of Turkish politics and has made its discussion in the public discourse problematic. The process of democratization following the gradual withdrawal of military rule did not involve a period of questioning and the administration of justice as they did, at least to some extent, in countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Greece. For this reason, the gross human rights violations that occurred during the period have not been openly discussed, and the anti-democratic imprisonment and suppression of dissenters has not been exposed.

To understand the long term effects of the 1980 coup requires detailed research which does not fall within the remit of this article. However, a brief examination of some statistics should provide a brief idea of the devastating consequences of the coup. In the six weeks after the coup, 11,500 people were arrested by the state. This grew to 30,000 by the end of 1980, and 122,600 after one year of rule by the junta (Zürcher 1998: 407). Across the entire period of military rule, 650,000 citizens were detained and police files opened on over one and a half million people. Of the 210,000 political trials conducted during the military rule, 7000 were tried on death penalty charges. Of the 517 death sentences passed, 50 were executed, whilst 299 people died in prison. Outside of the prison system, 30,000 people were fired from the civil service, 14,000 people were stripped of their Turkish citizenship, 39 tonnes of books, magazines, and papers were destroyed, and 23,677 civil associations were closed down and banned (Binay 2006: 4).

With the military intervention, the competing factions viciously and passionately vying for political and social control were ruthlessly controlled by the military junta. However, this did not solve any problems; it simply repressed the competing ideologies with a hegemonic state authority. To analyse the effect this had on individuals and on the public body as a whole, it is necessary to hear from the prisoners directly affected by the rule of state authority. This is what makes an analysis of prison literature so necessary.

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An Overview of Prison Literature of 1980s Turkey

There exists a canonical body of texts which deal – either explicitly or implicitly – with the events of September 12th, and is referred to as ‘September 12th literature’. These are the works that were published by well-known publishing houses, had widespread distribution, and a readership with expectations of ‘literary’ works. The most prominent of these texts are *Üç Beş Kişi* (Curfew) and *Hayır* (No) by Adalet Ağaoğlu, *Gece* (Night) by Bilge Karasu, *Gece Dersleri* (Night Lessons) by Latife Tekin, and *Issızlığın Ortasında* (In the Middle of Desolation) by Mehmet Eroğlu. The works written in the prisons did not share the advantages of these texts in terms of financial and respectable support. Works written by prisoners had only two outlets, Belge Publications and Alan Publications, voluntary publishing houses that published the work of prisoners to give a voice to those who lacked it. The works were described as “prison literature” as a derogatory term: as Ragıp Zarakolu argues, it was as if “prisoners had no right to express themselves with literature” (Zarakolu 2007: 52-4). Because of its negative connotations, most leftist writers of the period were described as writing “prison literature”: Nazım Hikmet, Sabahattin Ali, Ahmed Arif and Orhan Kemal were all imprisoned during their lifetimes and some of their works described as prison literature.

The off-hand categorisation of “prison literature” as a form of literature to be dismissed was enabled by the censorship and oppression of magazines and articles producing reports and stories from within the prison, as well as the efforts of mainstream publications to marginalise oppositional literature and cast the prisoners as dangerous revolutionaries. There were magazines which documented and detailed the inhumane conditions of prisoners in state facilities such as Metris, Mamak and Diyarbakır (Özdoğan 2008: 62). These included *Yeni Gündem*, ³*Nokta* and *Milliyet Sanat* which published details of hunger strikes, torture, and prisoners’ rights. Those who read these publications could find out about conditions in prison, and petition for prisoners’ rights. Sometimes they had limited success: for instance, political prisoners did win the right to have access to pencils and paper (Ibid.: 63). However, because these publications were marginalised and their readership was small, most members of the public only received the state-controlled version of the conditions of prisons and the justification for imprisonment. The political prisoners of September 12th were, therefore, imprisoned not only by physical walls, but a barrier between their voices and the rest of society. As Şükrü Arın, a political prisoner, argues:

“As if we weren’t the inhabitants of the same place or the citizens of the same country. In my opinion, this is not a “demarcation” that September 12th has made possible but vice versa. This is what I mean by the disintegration of the civil society. The disappearance of the feeling of brotherhood and, even worse, the replacement of that feeling by a weird alienation, or xenophobia to be exact... We should, therefore, quash this feeling, this phobia, this mutual “disgust”, – let me select a more politically correct word – this “avoidance”. Think about the conditions of how we fail – especially these days – to relate to each other’s worries; completely, without disgust or avoidance... The “healing” of both our literature and politics depends on this” (Arın 2007: 8).

Arın demonstrates that the loss of brotherhood and solidarity is both caused by the fear of martial law and a perpetuation of that fear. Those who might have sympathised with the plight of political prisoners were fearful for their own lives and wanted to avoid imprisonment. Likewise, those who feared a return to the bloody street violence that preceded the coup were happy to suspend their imagination and sympathy in order to avoid a return to such violence. Thus, it was easy to dismiss and denigrate political prisoners as the physical manifestation of political violence: in other words to agree with the state’s assessment. In the years following the coup, it has been all too easy for critics and authors to also ignore the literature produced by these prisoners for the same reason. It is impossible, however, to gain an understanding of the political conditions of the

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1980s through literature whilst ignoring one side of the story. Literature is the meeting point of all voices, and the texts produced by prisoners during the 80s give insight into society and the lives of those dissenters who questioned the state view. Only by analysing the prison texts are we able to hear the voices of dissent and form a social history of the accused separate from the hegemonic assessment of these prisoners.

As I have said above, most critics of the literature of the period dismiss ‘prison literature’ outright. However, it should also be noted that even those who are sympathetic to the prisoners’ plight have evaluated ‘prison literature’ as too documentary and realistic to be classed as fiction. Even Argın argues that these works are important for their “historical value” rather than their “literary value”. He argues that these texts have “a dose of reality that literature cannot bear.” This is the reason the texts are “exiles from the land of literature” (Ibid.: 6). Although his analysis of prison literature is an important step in the unearthing of the voices of the political prisoners in the 1980s, I disagree with Şükrü Argın’s assessment of prison literature as I will explain below.

Inherent within Argın’s analysis is the view that reality is not within the purview of literature. By this argument, when literature relates trauma it cannot be fictitious because the texts become the reality of the trauma rather than a reflection of that trauma. Despite the restrictive setting within prison, the literature created in documenting the abuses of the state was an act of resistance and opposition, more lasting and historically potent than hunger strikes and death-fasts. Whilst it does document the reality of such physical acts of resistance and abuse, prison literature must be seen within the context of creating a possibility of resistance for the leftist activists. Sibel Irzik makes this point well in differentiating between ‘history’, written by the ‘victors’, and ‘memory’ which has an awareness of the constructedness of the past and can be used as “a means of enabling the silenced and oppressed to have a voice about that past” (Irizik 2007: 158). Treating ‘prison literature’ as historical texts dismisses them doubly, as it places them at odds with the historical ‘truths’ of the hegemonic state, and removes them of their cultural complexity. Seen as literary texts, however, they become locations where memories of trauma which can be both constructed and deconstructed, where ‘unrepresentability’ can be represented, where a sense of truth can emerge through fiction and the confession of fictionality, and where the constructions of a shared past and collectivity is both effected and problematized.

In 1985, the owners of Belge Publications, Ragıp Zarakolu and Ayşe Zarakolu, started publishing the series ‘New Voices’ (*Yeni Sesler*). This series was the first magazine to publish works of fiction by political prisoners of September 12th. The series ran from 1985 to 1991: its cessation coincided with the law on the execution of sentences resulting in the release of all September 12th prisoners. There is, due to oppression and censorship, no list that documents all the works published in the series, so many of the texts are now impossible to track down. However, from research carried out by Ragıp Zarakolu, we know certainly of thirty-six books published in the series (Zarakolu 2007: 52-4). Within these texts, only seven are novels: A. Kadir Konuk’s three novels *Gün Dirildi* – ‘The Day Renewed’, *Çözülme* – ‘The Severance’, and *Sıcak Bir Günün Şafağında* – ‘At the Dawn of a Warm Day’; Hüseyin Şimşek’s novels *Ayrımı Bol Bir Yol* – ‘A Road with Many Splits’ and *Eylül Şifresi* – ‘The September Code’; as well as Haydar Işık’s *Dersimli Memik Ağa* – ‘Memik Agha of Dersim’. Each of these novels deserves literary analysis to uncover the oppressed voices of September 12th. However, due to the limits of space, I will restrict my analysis in this article to *The Severance* by A. Kadir Konuk and *The September Code* by Hüseyin Şimşek. First however, it is important to note the importance of the Belge Publications in a broader historical context to see the atmosphere in which the novels were written and published.

Belge Publications and the New Voices Series

Ragıp Zarakolu explains the decision to publish the works of prisoners in an essay called *Thoughts on the New Voices Series*:

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“As we began the ‘New Voices’ series, we thought that there was a need to create the opportunity for the social tumult, striking events, tragedies and myths that Turkey underwent in the 1970s and 1980s, to be published. Naturally it was impossible to propose a difference between the inside and the outside, as we did it. However, a few products that leaned on this extraordinary period within the perspective of the system or with a schematic and lax approach have persuaded us to create opportunities for those who are ‘inside’ at this point. With a more or less ‘provocative’ intent, we initiated the ‘New Voices’ series. We were saying: In the last days, a wrong understanding of literature is in domination. Our country lived through the heaviest social depression and feuds of its history in the 70s and 80s. Some authors, who have not or could not experience the period either mentally or in reality, attempted to abuse the striking events and tragedies of those days. These shallow works which judged the incidents within the perspective of the system, using stock characters received great appraisal. This meant that those who were incapable of defending themselves inside were subjected to execution without judgment, in a concealed way...”

We wish to reply to such literature with a humble attempt and remain in solidarity with a different kind of “documentary literature”. For this reason, we are going to provide space for works which are expressed by those who have lived through the experiences and facts of the period. We believe that pure criticism is not adequate, and those who have lived through the period should retort with their own works. “Writing” also needs to be learnt. Sights and experiences should be registered, not only with analysis or research but with every tool, illustration, poetry, novel, story, play or motion picture. The creation of a “counter-history” demands products in these spaces. The prisons which have bestowed so many important authors to Turkish Literature seem to be continuing this tradition (Ibid.: 52-4).

Ragıp Zarakolu is unambiguous about the reactionary nature of the works in the series and highlights the importance of these works in juxtaposition with the works which characterise the revolutionaries as caricatures of violent revolutionaries.

New Voices was initially formed when Ayşe Zarakolu, who had been a prisoner but was released, said it was necessary to bring the plight of the prisoners of the September 12th coup d’état to light. Along with Ragıp Zarakolu, they started publishing the poems, short stories and novels of prisoners in ‘New Voices’. The series achieved national and international acclaim, and through the International PEN Writer’s Association, some works within this series were translated into foreign languages. Some writers also received support from this association as individuals. According to Ragıp Zarakolu, however, there was an intense opposition to their work, not least from within the literary community itself. Writers such as Adalet Ağaoğlu opposed prison literature and criticised both the “attempt to create a literature of prison” and the texts inherent dogmatism and political outlook (Ibid.: 52). To writers such as Ağaoğlu, it felt like prison literature was intruding into the space possessed by ‘genuine’ authors, substituting literary value for autobiographical realism.

The publishers, in a sense, pre-empted this criticism by publishing an introduction on the first page of each book in the series as a justification of the publication and a way of demonstrating why the books should be of interest in the contemporary intellectual environment:

“Some people who are not aware that they have been living in a country which has been transformed into an open prison, themselves being imprisoned in their own little worlds, not only failed to understand the importance and function of the “New Voices Series”, but also wanted to, especially for the last ten years, degrade this “resistance literature” products with the phrase “prison literature.” In fact, the “act” of writing was one of the important areas of “resistance” in our country. The “New Voices Series” has functioned well, in both the human rights struggle and in

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opening doors to new writers. Publishing houses which embraced our approach also opened their doors to new writers” (Keskin 1990: 1).

This passage clearly demonstrates the intended political function of the series: an attempt to make the general public aware of the literal violence in prisons, and the more figurative sense in which everybody in the country had become imprisoned. It is notable that there is an equal focus on the writers themselves and their texts. This is not the case with most ‘high’ literary publications where the text is of much more importance than the author. However, this series was keen to make people aware that the authors experienced September 12th, arrest, torture, and imprisonment first hand. This, the series editors argue, placed the New Voices series within the context of global ‘exile’ literature: taking as its example exile literature of Germany in the era of World War II, the editors hoped the series would provide solidarity with people who are in exile (Sefa 1990: 1).

This ‘global exile’ perspective can be seen within the authors of the New Voices themselves. Birol Keskin, for instance, wrote a collection of short stories called *Albatroslar* which narrated tales about life in Turkish prison and juxtaposed such stories with tales about the Holocaust depicting the horrors undergone by Jewish people in gas chambers. By writing about the Holocaust and its torture techniques, Keskin draws an analogy between the prisons of September 12th and the Nazi gas chambers of World War II: “Isn’t today’s world like a huge gas chamber?” (Keskin 1990: 34) By evaluating life both within and outside the prison in terms of global persecution, as well as using real prisoners of September 12th such as Ahu Tuğba and Turgut Özal in his stories, Keskin produces writing which is cathartic in that it contextualises suffering, whilst also projecting the horrors of the Turkish experience in terms which will be more readily understood by the general public, both inside and outside Turkey (Ibid.: 34).

Osman Akınhay, who was put in prison after the September 12th coup, examined the ‘New Voices’ series in *Birgün* and highlights the importance of this literary movement. The prisoners held in the coup started reading literary works about Turkey and world literature as a way to maintain a connection with the outside world: “I guess the most important ‘trauma’ was ‘the cause’ being over. The ‘vis-a-vis exposition’ of many persons to the coup, as you have expressed it. (Argin 2007: 14) The theme of connecting with the outside world runs through the New Voices series. Again, this is both a philosophical and political gesture – prisoners wanted to draw attention to their plight and change the system – as well as a practical concern. Many families were affected by having a father or mother in prison. Thus, writing became one of the only means of communication between families (Özdoğan 2008: 75). The letters sent home by prisoners also had the dual function of telling the outside world about conditions within the prison and introducing families to literature and fiction. This also has an effect on the fiction itself: stories were written in the form of letters. For instance, there was a child magazine composed of letters called “Letters to Alev,” (Ibid.: 76) which was written by Alev’s father and other people he knew within the prison.

The stated mission of the New Voice series was to document and bring to light the oppression of September 12th coup. As such, it constituted a documentary literature from within the state prisons. Its major contribution was its support of prison resistance and the focus on the imprisoned: the books became the only source of literature reminding people of the brutality of September 12th within a literary framework. They became an outlet for prisoners, allowing the possibility of expression and resistance beyond physical actions such as hunger strikes. Their position is best expressed by Şükrü Argin’s evaluation:

It serves no purpose to expect from those people of letters, who didn’t experience but only watched the events of that September as bystanders, to narrate September 12th. We have no choice but to wait for those who experienced all these events personally to ‘sink their hearts’ to the level

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of narrating to us what they have gone through. To do this, they need to find us worthy of hearing their stories.” (Argın 2007: 15)

Prison literature was created by the people who lived through September 12th, rather than those outside the prisons. It is possible, therefore, to say that September 12th created its own literary space within the prisons, which would not have been unearthed were it not for the work by the Belge publications in bringing it to public attention, to at least a small extent. Bearing in mind the context in which the works were created and published, and taking their status as ‘non-literary works’ as being based on political rather than literary judgement, I will now analyse two of the novels from the prison literature genre to demonstrate what can be gleaned about the political atmosphere of the 1980s from treating these works as literary texts.

The Severance and Demonstrations of Guilt

The Severance is A. Kadir Konuk’s second novel and it is the seventh book of the New Voices series. The main theme of the novel is the issue of torture and violence against the body committed in prison. The novel deals with both the physical and the psychological aspects of torture, demonstrating the severance of the mind from the body because of the horror of such pain. The book was extremely well received by foreign audiences and was translated into a number of languages, including Danish and Dutch (Konuk 1998: 1).

Like many works of prison literature, where the author is as significant as the text, *The Severance*, begins with biographical information about A. Kadir Konuk, explaining that he was part of the leftist political movement and that he was imprisoned by the junta and sentenced to death. Days before he was due to be executed, Konuk escaped prison with the help of a doctor and fled abroad. From the very opening, then, the tone of the work is established as part fiction, part documentary. This is reinforced by the description of Konuk as a writer who became an author because of the events of the coup: in other words, he was not a writer before being imprisoned. This places him at odds with the literary writers such as Adalet Ağaoğlu, Latife Tekin and Bilge Karasu who wrote about the coup, but were writers beforehand as well. The very act of writing, therefore, is established as being different for Konuk and writers like him from those considered ‘professional’.

Though he was not a professional writer prior to the coup, Konuk constructs a well organised novel written in an accomplished, brutally minimalist style, highlighting the fear and paranoia of the imprisoned man. At the heart of the novel is the guilt the protagonist feels: he wants to alleviate the pain of torture by confessing to his crimes and turning over his accomplices. This, in turn, leads to a more individual mental torture as he becomes racked with guilt at confessing to the state, and thus losing the struggle against authority. The epigraph which opens the novel summarises the tone of the prisoner who is condemned to either physical pain through torture or mental agony by betrayal:

People cannot win every fight in their life. In life, there are defeats, for whatever reason. The important thing is to learn from defeat, to eliminate the factors that might cause defeat before starting new fights. The biggest wound is not inflicted by any weapon. The biggest wound is the scar on your honour, caused by your weakness and cut by your own hand. This wound is hard to heal. But it is not impossible, as long as you try hard enough to heal your own wounds (Ibid.: 5).

The pressure here is exerted on the individual stuck between the wounds inflicted by torture and the alternative wound inflicted on an individual’s “honour” by weakness. The novel makes it clear that this pressure does not exist in isolation: it is assuredly influenced by time and place and makes it plain that the events of September 12th are destroying the world which depends on the freedom of the self in order to exist. At the same time, we see that part of the novel’s

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purpose is to soothe the conscience of the protagonist and author by asserting that such defeats of the body and mind are both inevitable and can be learnt from. In this way, we see the prison novels as being more cathartic than the novels by established literary figures that saw only the defeat.

The ‘severance’ in the title of the novel is the severance of mind and body induced by torture. Torture is presented as a sublime moment when the entire world – the human voice, the body, and language – all appear alien. Within such a moment, both consciousness and conscience are lost. This is crucial to the function of the narrative as it allows the author to present the brutality of torture and raise awareness of its use within prisons during the September 12th arrests, but also allows those subjected to torture to be forgiven for breaking under its pressure. It is in this sense that the wounds can be healed because the conscience cannot be guilty if it is not present at the crime.

In order to reach this point, however, the novel demonstrates that the protagonist must relive all the wounds in order to reclaim them from the torturer. The novel opens with the description of a car. The narrator emphasises that it is an ordinary car, the kind of car that can be seen anywhere. This has the effect of creating an inclusive tone and opening a discourse that can be understood by all members of society. However, at the same time, the focus on the ordinary car, the very fact of observing something so ordinary, has the effect of increasing the paranoia and emphasising the feeling that something terrible is going to happen. This is a feature of September 12th literature and can be observed across the whole course of Oğuz Atay’s *Waiting for the Fear* (Atay 2011). The fear is not induced by waiting for the unknown but knowing exactly, specifically what will happen. The night raids by the military and the police that occurred in the period following September 12th are all known facts in the novel. The nameless protagonist of the novel is aware of exactly what will happen to him: as he examines the ordinary car amidst a scene of an ordinary street, he juxtaposes this normality with the knowledge that soon he will be arrested, taken into custody and tortured. At this point, we learn the full significance of the “white coloured Renault”: it is the symbol of the plain-clothes policemen who, following the coup, would arrest dissidents. The protagonist knows that his turn is on its way, and the paranoia and fear caused by waiting for this event isolate and place him outside time, as if “tied in a knot” (Ibid.: 3-4).

The appearance of the car is so ordinary that arrest becomes part of the daily routine. Similarly, the protagonist is nameless, making his daily routine symbolic for all those in the same situation:

It was impossible for such a car in plain sight not to attract attention. But perhaps nobody noticed anyway. Nowadays, nobody wanted to get into trouble. Those who came forward as witnesses generally ended up as criminals. Even if they had beaten someone on the road, nobody would have approached them and broken up the fight. People had become alienated from each other. And as the days passed, they become more and more estranged (Ibid.: 13).

By the time the car finally arrives at the protagonist’s house, he is not trapped because the whole world and society has already become a trap. This desensitised society where all the individuals are alien to one another is also a feature of the September 12th novels by literary authors: Aysel, the protagonist of Adalet Ağaoğlu’s *Hayır* novel, complains of insensitivity within society. However, whilst Ağaoğlu scorns the people who refuse to recognise the abuses carried out by the state, the protagonist in *The Severance* shows the process which makes people become emotionally and politically numb. This is the advantage the prison authors have over the authors who wrote from outside the prison about September 12th: they have more direct experience of the coup and an insider’s perspective.

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The inevitability of the arrest and the protagonist's numbness to it is emphasised by how cool-headed he is. In fact, the protagonist is critical of police and their hot-headedness, feeling strengthened by his lack of feeling:

These men could not talk without shouting. Always riding roughshod over the others. Always swearing, being offensive. They thought of themselves as the strongest. The warmth of the guns at their waists made them greater bullies. They also took heart from the law they leaned on but constantly trampled. It was as if they were the ones who ruled the world. They were above everything. They were punishing me; therefore, they had to show me they were the king (Ibid.: 41-2).

The protagonist describes the police officers as if they were fairytale villains who take power from weapons, mocking their insistence on showing off their strength. It is only when he begins to question his own strength that the protagonist's confidence begins to collapse. In particular, he begins to question whether he will crumble and confess under torture. The form of the novel makes clear that in even asking the question, the eventual collapse of his resistance and consciousness is inevitable. Even as he tries to resist imprisonment and torture, we see that the protagonist is aware of the inevitability of his defeat:

Time and place aren't important with regards to inquisitors and their methods. They have always been the same. In fact, inquisition methods have improved. New forms have been added. More painful, more degrading. Inquisition is still the ultimate test for the prisoner. "To be or not to be" has not lost its meaning since the days of Shakespeare. Passing this test was what was important. There was only one thing he could do: silence his whole body. Desensitize every part to the smallest cell. To erase all feeling and withdraw to his shell. Not to show one smallest part. To live but not to be seen living. Above all: TO REMAIN SILENT. To remain silent like the dead in the grave (Ibid.: 48).

At first, the prisoner attempts to resist by staying in control of his mind and refusing to bend to the will of his captors. However, in the above passage, he places his plight in the context of both literary and historical torture: throughout all ages, torture has remained the same and its results will always break the participant. Therefore, the only available means of resistance becomes to desensitise completely or in other words, to die, as the final metaphor makes clear.

Part of the establishment of guilt in *The Severance* is the juxtaposition of torture scenes with scenes where the protagonist must face his friends and comrades. Directly following the scene where he first breaks down under torture, the protagonist is allowed to see his fiancée and another of his revolutionary comrades. The twin experience confuses his thoughts: at the same time as he renounces his deposition because it was made under torture, he also believes he has no right to exist amongst his former friends. The protagonist compares himself unfavourably to another unnamed character in the jail: this character has not confessed anything under torture and is thus a hero in the eyes of the protagonist. The relationship between the protagonist and this heroic character is crucial to the novel. When they are placed in the same ward, the protagonist seeks forgiveness from the prisoner who did not confess. Undoubtedly, it is his guilty conscience which attributes this ability to forgive to the other prisoner. It is symptomatic of the more optimistic mood of the prison novels, as compared to the novels written by literary 'outsiders', that it is through the agency of this character that the protagonist is able to re-enter society. The novel's optimistic ending – where the protagonist is forgiven by his fiancée and is able to be a part of society once more – was criticised by the high literary establishment for being an act of self-comfort and naivety. However, this process of undergoing trauma and wanting to be healed is poignant especially when taken in the context of the author's autobiographical background. We should not ignore the desire for

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forgiveness after torture as being a huge influence on those who suffered it as revealed in their texts.

Deciphering *The September Code* and Breaking the Silence

The author of *The September Code* Hüseyin Şimşek⁴ was imprisoned in 1981 directly after the coup and jailed for 111 days. Following this, he was jailed again in Metris Prison where he remained until 1985. Before the coup, he had been a journalist for several leftist magazines and newspapers including *Yeni Gündem*, *Nokta*, *2000'e Doğru*, *Özgür Gündem*, *Aydınlık*, *Aktüel*, and *Tempo*. Because of his connections, it is no surprise to learn that his first novel, *Ayrımı Bol Bir Yol* (The Road with Many Divisions)(Şimşek 1988) was the first novel published by New Voices. This novel focused on prison resistance and, in particular, a 31-month hunger strike which protested the abuse of political prisoners. Unlike Konuk, Şimşek uses a highly poeticised language to emphasise the abstract psychological nature of the tragedy and trauma of imprisonment and torture (Özdoğan 2008: 100).

The September Code (*Eylül Şifresi*) is Şimşek's second novel and it follows on from *The Severance* because it focuses on the life of revolutionaries outside the prisons after the coup. Like other September 12th novels, there is a focus on depicting the ways in which the coup has changed society. Şimşek's particular skill is the manner in which he juxtaposes the lives of his characters before the coup – through flashbacks and memories – with their lives following the intervention. As well as highlighting and emphasising the political and social implications of the coup, these flashbacks have the effect of fragmenting time and place, interrupting the plot and giving an impression of the trauma experienced by those who suffered following September 12th.

The September Code is distinct from other September 12th novels because of its distinctive use of historical reference. The novel opens with a series of snapshots relaying the political atmosphere of the 1980s in both local and global terms:

On the other hand, the psycho political son of the *Pasha* says “Intervention was obligatory”. Meaning the *Indian Cock* crows late and mistakenly. The lawyer from Yozgat shows evidence of the torture he suffered in the police station. The public prosecutor from Fethiye has caught husband-and-wife tourists stripped naked in the sea, continuing his fight against the “indecents”! While the tourist woman, who is a physiotherapist, is thrown into prison without any attention given to her nervous breakdown, her husband is still struggling not to lose his tongue. Amnesty is still on the agenda.

(...) according to one source, the bestseller of the September period's fifth year third week is an essay: “No more Hiroshimas.” In such a period the cunning politician gives advice: Politics is the enemy of justice (Şimşek 1991: 5).

This passage indicates the power of perspective: on the one hand, the state are trying to legitimise the coup and distance the public from politics but on the other the police are arresting ‘indecents’, thus subjecting the individual to political machinations. The narrator, therefore, asserts that politics in civil life is the enemy of justice. This becomes the major theme of the novel as Selim, a revolutionary leftist, falls in love with Meral, an apolitical and apathetic character who offers happiness to Selim but also an abandonment of his former political convictions.

The novel juxtaposes the revolution and love across two time spaces, pre-coup and post-coup. The novel thus reveals the changes in the politico-social world of Turkey brought about by the coup through minute focus on the lives of two young lovers. Meral and her parents represent the ‘ordinary person’, railed against by Ağaoğlu, whose language and attitude towards Selim and other prisoners support the claims of Sibel Irzik, and Şükrü Arın: namely, that September 12th created a divide between prisoners and the rest of society. Through inner monologues Saniye

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Hanım, Meral's mother, reveals she is disappointed to see Hale, a friend of Meral highly influenced by politics. According to Saniye, women should stay out of politics because it makes them "sinister". Likewise, she perceives politics as a "trouble" that children should be kept away from. It is significant that this happens as an inner monologue: it is doubly reflective of the nature of the petit bourgeois mentality shared by both Meral and her mother that their disapprovals should be made in their own heads, rather than being confrontational.

This mentality is a source of trouble for Selim. Whilst he is in love with Meral, he is disturbed by her lack of political drive. He criticises her for attending university – a right for which women fought – but now criticising female activists as "mannish" (Ibid.: 71) In contrast to the relationship with Meral, Selim also falls in love with Aygöl, a highly political activist who attracts Selim through political companionship and shared passion. The contradiction in Selim's love interests is important within the novel: on the one hand, Selim has a clear admiration for female activists and a genuine sympathy for the difficulties they face in being political; on the other, however, his constant comparison of the two women repeats and strengthens the viewpoint of the dominant patriarchy.

The importance of this contradiction is that it cannot be resolved. Unlike the previous novel, there is no happy ending because the conflicts and contradictions raised by the text, and by extension society, have not been resolved. In a postmodern scene towards the end of the novel, the narrator focuses on a woman who is reading a book on a train. She is a mother whose son is in prison and she is reading Selim and Aygöl's story. Whilst she is reading, a couple sit opposite to whom she recognizes as the characters from the book: "... The reality was not that she was reading a novel; what she thought she was reading was actually what she had lived!" (Ibid.: 171) The novel's denouement highlights this point in the form of a letter or a plea to the people of Istanbul:

Dear people of Istanbul! Seyit and Ayşen are in your city. In your district. In your neighbourhood or even in your street. For a long time, they've been engaged in multiplying themselves. And mixing with you... They were the missing link that emerged years ago and could never be filled. They have never forgotten their lives with you. They've always known it! If you ask, they can tell you what happened. And why they've never spoken before. Come closer, a couple more steps and your September ciphers will be revealed (Ibid.: 183)

This metatextual scene indicates the universality of the novel's message: the characters within the novel can be found everywhere. Whilst contradictions and problems remain, the most important act of resistance for a revolutionary is to help decipher the 'September Code' which is keeping people silent.

Conclusion

This article attempts to demonstrate that "prison literature" embodies the emergence and, indeed, survival of voices that challenge the norms of post-coup society. Literary figures who condemned the works of authors in prison did write novels about September 12th: however, these works were constructed from outside and thus, from the same perspective as the state. Prison literature represents a fresh assessment of the abuse carried out by the state during the rule of the Junta which is uninhibited by the silence which marks the works of 'literary' authors dealing with September 12th. The New Voices series should become the next important phase in Turkish literature's assessment of the 1980s coup as it offers the only chance to hear from the voices who actually suffered the consequences of political activism. To continue to ignore them, as the Turkish literary establishment has done to date, is to undermine both the freedom of literature and the freedom of the self.

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Notes:

1 After the 1973 elections, despite its electoral success (33% of the vote) the RPP failed to gain an overall majority in the assembly, and Ecevit formed a coalition government with Erbakan's Islamist National Salvation Party. After Ecevit's resignation in September 1974 in March 1975, four of the right wing parties formed a coalition under the leadership of Demirel, known as the first Nationalist Front government. In the 1977 elections the RPP won 41% of the votes but its 213 seats were still insufficient to form a single-party government. After Ecevit's minority government failed to get the vote of confidence, Demirel founded the second National Front government with the NSP and the NAP. The second National Front government ended in December 1977 to be followed by Ecevit's minority government. After losing ground to the JP in the by-elections, Ecevit resigned in October 1979, and Demirel founded a minority government in November.

2 Two incidents are specifically referred to for illustrating the development of working class politics. The first is a massive march in 1970 – known as the 15-16 June Incident – where industrial workers in the Istanbul-Izmit area joined to protest a new law regulating union organization and collective bargaining. The march, involving over 100,000 demonstrators, was the largest and most violent workers' protest in Turkish history. The second is the celebrations of May Day in 1976, to be publicly celebrated for the first time since 1924, which was organized by the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers (DISK) with participation of more than 100,000 people.

3 'Yeni Gündem' was a weekly journal.

4 For further information about Hüseyin Şimşek's life and the works, visit the website: <http://www.huseyin-simsek.com/tr/nav-top/biyogafi.html>.

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