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Transforming Society with Islamist Tales: *Huzur Sokağı* as a Prototype of Salvation Novels

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Abstract
Şule Yüksel Şenler (1938-2019) is one of the leading figures of the Islamist literary scene in Turkey. Her novel entitled *Huzur Sokağı* was published in 1970, and received remarkable attention. It was filmed subsequently, and republished numerous times since then. Today, perceived as a milestone in the "salvation novels" *(hidayet romanları)* sub-genre, *Huzur Sokağı* well deserves to be called a "classic" with its constantly growing readership, and its 123^{th} edition being released recently. This paper analyzes the literary and ideological aspects of the novel, intending for a better understanding of salvation novels, as well as the cultural dimensions of the Islamist movement in Turkey. The ideal gender roles depicted in the novel are scrutinized, keeping in mind that Islamist movement positions women as symbolic bearers of faith. Furthermore, the construction of Islamic identity is examined, and it is observed that Islamist discourse is often based on the formulation of the self in opposition to the Westernized subject. The paper concludes that, dichotomies such as Islam versus West, traditional versus modern, unprogressive versus progressive are common tools employed to interpret Islamist texts, but these are inadequate to fully comprehend the complex nature of the issue.

Keywords: Turkish literature, Islamist literature, Salvation novels, Şule Yüksel Şenler, *Huzur Sokağı*

Introduction

In Turkey, one of the major themes occupying social and political agenda in the last few decades is definitely the Islamist movement. Reflections of this on the cultural sphere have always been present, although long regarded as a minor revolt by cultural elites. As of 1980s, the "return of the repressed" became much more visible. In the Turkish literary setting, this phenomenon generated a new sub-genre called "salvation novels" *(hidayet romanları)*; pioneering works include Hekimoğlu İsmail's *Minyeli Abdullah* published in 1967, Hüseyin Karatay's *Kıbrıslı*, and Şule Yüksel Şenler's

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Huzur Sokağı both published in 1970. These writers all have an attitude in common, which is their understanding of literature: That is, instead of engaging in literary pursuits; they rather perceive literature as a medium of propaganda. According to them, a novel is an educative and amendatory tool. The outcome aimed at is sometimes offering a mere invitation to salvation, but at times it is achieving the transmission of the Islamic faith.

In this paper, being aware of the risks of the tendency to generalize, Islam is not taken as a homogeneous category, but rather as a diverse, and dynamic phenomenon. As Islam has different interpretations and practices in different geographies, there can be various Islamist movements under the same conditions, like there can be various Islamist literary attitudes simultaneously, as in the case of Turkey. Avoiding a totalizing approach, it is preferred to focus on a single text here. My aim is three-fold: First, to position salvation novels in Turkish literary history; second, to analyze a classic text of the sub-genre; third, to provide a better understanding of Islamist movement of the last few decades in Turkey.

The main problematic of the Turkish novel until 1950s was Westernization according to Berna Moran, who was a prominent literary critic (Moran, 1998, 244). Especially in the *Tanzimat* period, social and historical changes undergone made Westernization the main theme discussed in the literary scene. The most characteristic feature of novels from that period is no doubt the problematization of "extreme / false Westernization", which should be regarded as part of a quest for identity. These novels were often based on a dualism, that is to say, there were two characters one of which represented the traditional Ottoman gentlemen, and the other represented *alafranga* dandies. Trying to achieve a balance between Ottoman and European antipodes of life styles, the authors made use of binary categories such as East-West, old-new, traditional-modern, *alaturka-alafranga*, etc. The relationship between the "self" and the "other" was represented by these dualisms, which continued in early Republican literature as well in terms of idealist-materialist, Istanbul-Beyoğlu, and teacher-hodja. Consequently, some canonical novels of the period critically portrayed certain religious practices and religious orders as abusing power and trust. In 1950s, a sub-genre named "village novel" *(köy romanı)* appeared as a result of the so-called "Village Institutes" *(Köy Enstitüleri)*. Being the basis for the rural development project of the period, Institutes were a group of co-educational, public, boarding schools that were operational between 1940 and 1954 in Turkey. Some of the graduates later became novelists and wrote about rural life, and depicted the struggle of idealist teachers in the name of peasants, against aghas *(ağa)*, sheiks *(şeyh)*, and preachers *(imam)*. Even though Turkish novel has not been a homogeneous entity, the

above discussion provides the general outlook of Turkish literature until the first half of the 20^{th} century. Even since the *Tanzimat* period, there always existed different literary streams seemingly uninterested in sociopolitical developments of their era, which rather pursued aesthetic concerns such as the movement called *Servet-i Fünun*. Similarly, there always existed novelists who adhered to their roots, traditions, and religion. Yet the emergence of Islamist literature at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s can be read as a revolt against established literary practices, as well as a reaction to the Republican ambitions of secularization and standardizing religion. Salvation novels are perceived as a new media to combat mainstream tendencies and to transform society according to Islamic principles by their authors.

Salvation Novels

The plot of salvation novels is basically about a clash of worldviews, namely between Islamic and Western worldviews which are represented by ideal Muslim characters, and corrupt Westernized characters. In that black and white picture, Islam is designated as the sole solution for the "perverseness" of modern society. Major characteristic of salvation novels is their didactic and sermonizing style. Texts are often full of tirades, and this feature reminds long and formal speeches in epic genre. Another similarity between the two genres is the frequency of miraculous events and great coincidences present. In salvation novels of the 1980s, characters are portrayed stereotypically without exception. Islamist characters, better called "heroes", are so idealized that they seem quite like caricatures lacking human attributes. They neither show indecision, nor inconsistency, being heroes embodying an ideology. Their counterparts, the immoral Westernized, are "antiheroes" lacking any virtue. They do not necessarily participate in cyclical journeys like in epic, but in the end they find the "righteous way" *(hidayet)* after being completely transformed. Novels always end up with antiheroes' achieving salvation by the help of heroes. By that, the authors' utopia regarding the transformation of society becomes evident. After a few decades from the emergence of salvation novels, narrative, technical, and aesthetic qualities of these texts are criticized by critics from all sides.

Despite the surge of salvation novels in the 1980s, no critical studies analyzing the cultural production of the Islamist movement has been made until recently. Firstly, Aynur İlyasoğlu's pioneering study *Veiled Identity: Identity Formation of Islamist Women*[1] was published in 1994, in a

[1]The original title of the book in Turkish is *Örtülü Kimlik: İslamcı Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşum Öğeleri* (İlyasoğlu,

chapter of which she analyzed the perception of gender roles in some Islamist literary texts. Secondly, Ahmet Sait Akçay, in his study entitled *Houris in the Mind: A Critical Approach to Islamist Populist Culture*[2] published in 2006, analyzed certain novels, popular music, and TV series produced by Islamist subjects in the 1970s and onwards. Akçay's book is the first study dedicated to the study of Islamist popular culture, covering a period of three decades. He not only conceptualized the idea of salvation as *hidayah*, which he perceives as a key concept in understanding Islamism in Turkey, but also offered a compact analysis on the sub-genre of salvation novels. In the foreword written in 2012 for the second edition of his book, Akçay referred to the sub-genre as "a form of political Islam" (Akçay, 2012, 12). Along the same line, he interpreted the Islamist literary production as a "counter cultural movement" which is remarkable in itself. However, his argument on salvation novels' being arisen in reaction to "village literature" is disputable, as it reflects a slightly reductionist approach. Although Akçay rightfully positioned both movements as the two antipodes of the same engaged literary practice, he overlooked the fact that Islamist counter movement has a long history extending beyond the Republican period. In short, *Houris in the Mind* is an important reference book, underlining the fact that salvation novels are mediums where "literature is instrumentalized while religion is reified" (Akçay, 2012, 12).

An academic and well qualified study is Kenan Çayır's *Islamic Literature in Contemporary Turkey: From Epic to Novel* published in 2007, which appeared in Turkish as well in 2008[3]. He focuses on two different periods in the production of Islamist fiction, namely salvation novels of the 1980s and "the self-critical and self-exposing novels" of the 1990s. Çayır argues that, the former "depicted Muslims as a solid and homogeneous collectivity and narrated the struggle and victory of Muslims against a 'decadent' secular order and its representatives", whereas the latter "portrayed Muslim agents with internal conflicts and contrasting desires, torn between their religious ideals and more worldly concerns in the face of modern urban relations" (Çayır, 2007, xxxi). This split, or rather transformation, is caused by inner dynamics of Turkish society in the last decades: Along with political success, Islamists found acceptance in the public sphere, which paved the way for the formation of an Islamist middle class. In the 1990s and 2000s, as the Islamist movement bifurcated, a new discourse had to be formed which is able to express the new Islamist identity construct of the period. This is how salvation novels became disfavored, and a search for new ways of expression

1994).

[2]The original title of the book in Turkish is *Bellekteki Huriler: İslamcı Popülist Kültüre Eleştirel Bakış* (İstanbul: Selis Kitaplar, 2006). The revised second edition of the book was published by Okur Kitaplığı in 2012.

[3]That book was published in Turkish as *Türkiye'de İslâmcılık ve İslâmi Edebiyat: Toplu Hidayet Söyleminden Yeni Bireysel Müslümanlıklara* (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008).

appeared. Çayır clarifies the distinction between two periods as follows:

> While the heroes of salvation novels lacked personal depth and their narratives received no dynamism from protagonists' internal conflict, the self-critical novels represented Muslim characters in the uncertainties of their daily lives, with doubts, insecurities, and conflicting desires their daily lives, with doubts, insecurities, and conflicting desires. (Çayır, 2007, 159)

Şenler, the author of the novel analyzed in this paper, is regarded as one of the leading figures of Islamist literary scene in Turkey. Starting her career in her early 20s as a journalist, she was faced with a lawsuit due to her articles in *Yeni İstiklal* newspaper. Şenler was even imprisoned for defamation for seven months; that is to say she was an active figure of the Islamist scene in 1960s and 1970s. Her "masterpiece" *Huzur Sokağı* was published in 1970, and received remarkable attention. It was filmed subsequently, and republished numerous times since then. The title of the book means "Serenity Street", and it is a mere description of the setting. The plot of this classic of salvation novels is set in a poor suburb of Istanbul, in a small street with shabby wooden houses (Şenler, 2003, 5). Religious residents of the street lead a steady life isolated from the surroundings, in such a way that "their good character is spread even to stray cats" (Şenler, 2003, 45). Only until an apartment block being built on a vacant lot around creates disquiet. As an anxiety of being despised or humiliated by the apartment dwellers spreads out in the street, the male protagonist Bilâl preaches at the mosque, and blesses the modest way of life there (Şenler, 2003, 58). While wooden houses in the street are full of "veiled ladies" *(örtülü hanımlar)*, the apartment building is home to "obscene women" *(açık saçık kadınlar)* (Şenler, 2003, 103). According to that distinction, a "lady" is an honorable wife in the private *harem*, whereas a "women" possesses a public sexuality. Fortunately, this contrast disappears automatically as all apartment dwellers convert to Islam. Feyzâ, the female protagonist, lives in the same street. As she falls in love with Bilâl, she starts questioning herself and gets veiled. Due to unfortunate coincidences they both get married with other people. While Bilâl's wife passes away, Feyzâ gets divorced and returns to the street. Throughout the novel, the reader witnesses Feyzâ's struggle in the society, and Bilâl's dedicated efforts to preach Islam.

Veiling and Hierarchy

Nilüfer Göle, in her study entitled *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*[4] states that contemporary Islamist movements can only be comprehended "in terms of their problematic relation to Western modernity" (Göle, 2007, 4). In this paper, I aim to present the fact that the problem emanates rather from the stance against Turkish modernization. According to Göle, who argues that Islamism is shaped by "a selective reconstruction of identity", "the questions of women, modesty, and sexuality are discerned and problematized by the contemporary Islamist movements more as a result of critical dependence on modernity rather than loyalty to Islamic religion" (Göle, 2007, 4). At that point, the distinction between headscarf *(başörtüsü)* and veiling *(türban)* is to be made. While headscarf is "confined within the boundaries of traditions, handed down from generation to generation and passively adopted by women", the contemporary form of veiling is "an active reappropriation by women that shifts from traditional to modern realms of life and conveys a political statement" (Göle, 2007, 4). *Türban*, which is a distinct form of veiling differing from traditional Islamic habits, became prevalent in early 1980s within urban educated circles. Göle relates this to modernity as follows:

> In sum, veiling of women is not a smooth, gradual, continuous process growing out of tradition. On the contrary, it is the outcome of a new interpretation of Islamic religion by the recently urbanized and educated social groups who have broken away from traditional popular interpretations and practices and politicized religion as an assertion of their collective identity against modernity. (Göle, 2007, 4)

It is a fact that Islamist movements have positioned women as bearers of faith in the last decades. In that context, veiling is perceived as a symbol of honor and morality. This peculiarity attributed to women and veiling is also apparent in salvation novels. For instance, in *Huzur Sokağı*, veiling and salat *(namaz)* appear as sole indicators of faith. Surprisingly enough, the word türban is not even mentioned once in the novel. Instead, Şenler prefers to use expressions such as "scarf" and "headscarf". This is actually because the term *turban* was not yet in usage prior to the publication of the novel in 1970. Yet, one does not come across any specific definition of veiling or a distinction made from traditional headscarf in the novel. On the other hand, Şenler who got veiled in 1965 was

[4] That book was initially published in Turkish as *Modern Mahrem: Medeniyet ve Örtünme* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1991).

quite a popular figure at that time, and she has even contributed to a new wave of veiled fashion called *sıkmabaş*, or alternatively with a reference to her first name *Şulebaş*.

Göle points out an important aspect of Islamic veiling, when mentioning that it intercepts "power relations between Islam and the West, modernity and tradition, secularism and religion, as well as between men and women themselves" (Göle, 2007, 1). At least taking *Huzur Sokağı* into consideration, while moral turpitude of men is rarely depicted in the novel, the matter is predominantly reflected by women. Besides, an obvious hierarchy between women is set up in terms of veiling and salat in the novel. The contrast between "faithful ladies" *(imanlı hanımlar)* and "faithless women" *(imansız kadınlar)* is highlighted by the emphasis on latter's sensual tendencies. Actually, *turban* itself creates an "inner" hierarchy within covered women. As Göle puts it, "[e]ducated lower- and middle-class women claim to know the 'true' Islam and hence differentiate themselves from traditional uneducated women" (Göle, 2007, 4). Apart from that hierarchy set between women, a split between different segments of the society is noteworthy as well. In opposition to Göle's statement mentioned above regarding the power relations, it is not possible to claim that the polarization depicted in the novel is due to dichotomies such as Islam and the West, or tradition and modernity. This is because peaceful and faithful residents of "Huzur Sokağı" do not seem to be in conflict with the West or modernity. If one is to determine a conflict, it can easily be observed that the problem is not externalized as the West or modernity. Moreover, the "enemy" is constructed internally: Muslims do not criticize the Westerners, but rather the Westernizers within the country.

Western References

Göle claims that "Muslims who assume the specificity of the Islamic worldview are the ones who are indeed in pursuit of Western modernism and who simultaneously criticize this modernity" (Göle, 2007, 111), which has explanatory value for the case of *Huzur Sokağı*. On the other hand, rejection of the means of modernity is definitely not the case. To exemplify that the West is not excluded in the novel, one may recall doctor Celil's education and residence in Europe (Şenler, 2003, 352), in addition to Bilâl's business trip to Switzerland (Şenler, 2003, 481). There are numerous "foreign" references which exist in the text: Bilâl thinks of a saying by Einstein (Şenler, 2003, 32), Necati recites a poem by Baudelaire (Şenler, 2003, 115), Bilâl wants to exclaim "I have found it" like Archimedes (Şenler, 2003, 212). As seen above, the perception of "foreign" includes only

Westerners. Unlike expectations, one does not come across any Islamic reference. For instance, Seval's Islamic mode of dressing is praised as follows: "She was as chic and modern as a European model" (Şenler, 2003, 128). Furthermore, there is a foreign couple who are depicted as being quite sympathetic. Once, Feyzâ is exposed to violence by her husband in the middle of a crowd in a "club", and there is only a German couple to help her (Şenler, 2003, 165). By that, Westerners are portrayed as possessing a humane attitude, while Westernized Turks are subhuman lacking dignity.

Throughout the novel, Westernized unbelievers —the secular Turks— are told to be inferior to Christians, since the latter respect their own religion, and do worship (Şenler, 2003, 70-160). This is in accordance with the above mentioned internalization of the enemy. Only once, the current situation is blamed on external forces: Feyzâ, after converting to Islam, talks to a "modern" *(asrî)* woman named Leyla residing in the apartment block, and tells her that the country is divided into three groups by internal and external impacts. These three groups are "irreligious minorities", "the ones who do not fulfill their religious obligations", and "the faithful ones" (Şenler, 2003, 179). This is a pitiful profile according to the mentality presented in the novel, which suggests that there can be no civilization without a religion. Curious enough, in this context the USA is mentioned as the "most civilized country" (Şenler, 2003, 180). Feyzâ comments on the national motto "In God We Trust", and says that Americans, "by printing God's name on currency and coins assert that they regard religion above everything else" (Şenler, 2003, 181). This naïve comment seems to disregard the very fact that the "trust" is in nothing but dollars, and instead perceives the USA example as a great combination of civilization and religion. On the contrary, according to the protagonist, "we" are brought up as "an irreligious, immoral and depersonalized generation despising our own sacred assets in the name of civilization and progressiveness" (Şenler, 2003, 183).

Education, Gender Roles and Islam

Huzur Sokağı aims at reflecting virtues of the Ottoman era, but the reader often comes across peculiarities reminding modern Istanbul. For instance, all women moving to the apartment are deeply affected by the good looking Bilâl, but they do not comprehend how "a cultured university student" (Şenler, 2003, 75) could perform salat. This is the reminiscent of a common reflex assigning backwardness and illiteracy to subjects embodying Islamic references. On the other hand, it is a fact that nowadays Islamism has an expanding sphere of influence on educated urban population. Proof positive of the transformation of Islamic sphere can be found in a meeting scene in the novel. Bilâl

takes his friend Necati, who is about to find the "righteous way", to a meeting. When people at the meeting introduce themselves to Necati, it appears that almost all of them are doctors, engineers, and architects (Şenler, 2003, 34). It seems like those favorite professions became prevalent in the community. Another striking fact is Bilâl's remarkable success after graduation which even appears in newspapers. Bilâl being introduced as a "certified chemical engineer, prestigious businessman, and one of the wealthy people" (Şenler, 2003, 192) makes the reader doubt the praise of modesty throughout the novel. No matter how the poverty of the street is glorified, it becomes evident with such details concerning the protagonist that there is a strong desire to overcome the modesty of the current situation, and a craving for richness, power and acceptance. In accordance with that, Feyzâ enrolls her daughter Hilal at a "modern elementary school" (Şenler, 2003, 269), which refers to the secular educational system. Feyzâ earns a living by tailoring veils at home, which shows the financial hardship that the family suffers. Despite that fact, Hilal's attending an overly emphasized "modern" school is presented as a natural outcome. In addition, at the school religious instruction is given by an "irreligious" teacher. When she states that the ones who believe in God are the uneducated people, the pupils altogether tell her that their fathers —but not mothers— are engineers, doctors, pharmacists, and architects (Şenler, 2003, 272). This is a sign of the urge to destroy the common belief relating religion to low educational attainment, which perceives religion as an outdated superstition. Besides Bilâl's widespread success and financial strength, pupils' emphasis on their fathers' piety despite their enviable professions is giving voice to the rage against equalizing Islamic thought with backwardness.

Göle, after evaluating the data obtained from in-depth interviews and group discussions organized within her research, concludes that "[v]eiling by young women cannot easily be explained either by its enforcement by male members of the family, the impact of rural traditionalism, or the effects of religious education" (Göle, 2007, 90). Most of the participants had secular high school education, and have started to veil of their own accord. Certainly, the research group consisting of ten "Islamic female students" indicates something, but it should not be regarded as the sheer representative of a broader social phenomenon. Consequently, it can be foreseen that these young women's interpretation of Islam differs to a great extent from that of their families, just like their counterparts in the fictive world. To exemplify that, Feyzâ's way of life which differs largely from her "modern" mother or from her "religious but traditional" nanny may be brought forward. She is depicted as an educated urban "lady" with questioning and investigating skills. As a result, Feyzâ represents the central and urban phase of Islam with her *turban* and *pardösü* instead of traditional headscarf

and ordinary clothes. *Pardösü* being a word used for overcoat in Turkish, ironically borrowed from French *pardessus*, signifies the hybrid nature of this very phase. At this point Göle's statement regarding veiled women not as "passive conveyors of the provincial traditional culture", but rather as "active and self-asserting women who seek opportunities in modernism" (Göle, 2007, 92) may be recalled. *Türban* is not a provincial but an urban phenomenon; therefore, the bearers are often educated, and ambitious to have prestigious positions in the society. This definitely contradicts their counterparts in the novel. Women depicted in *Huzur Sokağı* do not have professional goals; their will is limited to being educated mothers so that they can perform their Islamic duties, or helping other faithful ladies to facilitate their lives for instance by becoming a gynecologist.

Questioning how Islamic women legitimize entering the public sphere as followers of a belief confining women to the private sphere, Göle concludes that ultimate goal is serving the family by raising Muslim children properly (Göle, 2007, 99). In other words, women need to master life only because they do have a holy aim, which is the transmission of Islamic faith. In the meantime, Western women's individualism acquired by working is disapproved by the participants and they "regard their aspirations to work as an integral part of the collective Islamist movement and orient this toward the benefits of society" (Göle, 2007, 101). This approach gives the impression that women are in a sense excluded from society, at least their choices are limited in the name of the movement; but they seem to accept that as a necessity for the cause. By the same token, in fiction, it is not surprising that Bilâl wants to marry Feyzâ not only as an "eternal partner in life", but also as an "ideal companion in the cause" (Şenler, 2003, 235). The ideal companion's task in the name of Islam is clear: to raise children to perfection. In other words, an Islamic way of life together with children pursuing the same seems to be the sole "political" action proposal. Another example is Hilal, who has problem at school because she performs salat during breaks between classes. Her mother Feyzâ encourages Hilal by calling her "my little jihadist" (Şenler, 2003, 300) which prove that jihad implied here is limited to determination of practicing personal preferences. Another student named Seval, who used to be "modern" at the beginning of the novel, decides to quit university and starts preparing her dowry after converting to Islam. Although the university's being a "corrupt environment" (Şenler, 2003, 94) affects her decision, it is for sure that the act of being a morally upright and faithful housewife is glorified. So in the case of Seval, and in general, the only educational aim of women is to guide them to perform their duties as wives and mothers. "Settling down in an Islamic home" (Şenler, 2003, 241) being taken as a goal, major characteristics of the "imagined" children are described as such: Bilâl's son who is an elementary student has virtues such

as "maturity and understanding" (Şenler, 2003, 247). Feyzâ starts teaching her daughter Hilal about Islam at the age of three, and veils her so that she does not face difficulty in the future.

Examining the conflicting aspects of religious politics and Islamist communalism, Göle concludes that the former necessitates "public participation", whereas the latter "sanctions the individuation of women" (Göle, 2007, 3). This is a crucial distinction, since it implies the impossibility of being a jihadist *(mücahide)* and a faithful lady *(mümine)* at the same time. To put it another way, when women become politically active Islamists, they arise as individuals and women too. On the other hand, the utopian Islamic way of life demands them to be obedient and confined to home. There lies the contradiction, but in practice it is partially overcome. For instance, in *Huzur Sokağı*, women who are not engaged in political movements, who are just "faithful ladies" devoted to their families and consequently to Islam, do not perceive their status as subordinate. They rather think of their duties as an integral part of men's duties. Surely there is a difference between "obedient Muslim mothers" and "demanding jihadists", but there may be an intersection or transitivity between the two. The "golden age", era before the death of Prophet Mohammed *(asr-ı saadet)*, is often cited and presented for evidence, since reportedly at that time there were women actively engaged in education and commerce. The deadlock probably results from assuming Muslim women as a homogeneous and static category. Employing a more heterogeneous and dynamic set of concepts may lead to a more encompassing analysis.

Features of the Novel

Huzur Sokağı contains numerous disasters and extraordinary coincidences. For instance, following the death of his mother, Bilâl's wife and daughter pass away simultaneously; or as Feyzâ decides to get divorced, she learns that her parents and her brother have died in an accident. Some of the extraordinary coincidences are as follows: Feyzâ reads news regarding Bilâl on a paper bag made from a newspaper, Feyzâ and Bilâl meet at the same place after many years, Doctor Celil who wants to marry Feyzâ passes by as Feyzâ has an accident, Doctor Nusret who attends Feyzâ and her daughter at home and at the clinic turns out to be Bilâl's son, etc. A significant feature of the novel, which is a narrative strategy, should also be mentioned here: There are people living in the street who are informed about all events taking place around, and get the news across. After Feyzâ and Bilâl get married with other people and leave "Huzur Sokağı", they get information about each other by the help of these people who summarize the events. Since the narrative time of the novel is quite

long, these actors are like narrators helping the reader to follow the chronology. The novel starts when Bilâl is a student at the university. His marriage and the birth of his son is depicted in detail, afterwards the time sequence is lost. There are several passages where the reader suddenly realizes that five to ten years have passed.

At the beginning of the novel, Bilâl is introduced as a "neatly dressed, noble looking, beautiful, handsome, and decent young man" (Şenler, 2003, 8). This ideal picture lasts all through the novel, although he is surrounded by "a heap of devils in shape of woman" (Şenler, 2003, 21). The identifying features of these women are their "hysteric laughter", and the make-up on their face. Fortunately, Bilâl is brave enough to preserve himself from the evil of these "uncovered and mini-skirted bitches" (Şenler, 2003, 48), and to get married with another woman while being in love with Feyzâ. The image of a group of women, portrayed in a novel by a woman writer, is expressed by one of the characters as follows: "Womankind is devilish" (Şenler, 2003, 78). Needless to say, no religious women can be labeled so; only "modern" women are devils and they need to be rehabilitated by Muslim men (Şenler, 2003, 83). It is unclear though, why Bilâl does not do a good deed and marry Feyzâ to rehabilitate her in the name of Islam.

There is an interesting passage in the novel, which describes a university canteen as "Hollywood", "armageddon of disgrace", and "carnival stage" (Şenler, 2003, 16-17). According to the writer, this portrait results from "mannish women" and "womanish men": While women who wear trousers or have easy-going manners are regarded mannish, men who wear colorful and patterned shirts or have longer hair than usual are regarded womanish. Other than the interaction between female and male students, what disturbs the narrator most is coiffured hair, mini skirt, and legs without stockings. In the novel, women converting to Islam not only veil themselves, but also wear overcoats, plus thick and dark colored stockings. Accordingly, an "Islamic gentlewoman's identity" is composed of "a plain and elegant overcoat", "a headscarf which covers every single hair", and "thick stockings" (Şenler, 2003, 170). All these precautions aim at securing the invisibility of women in fiction, and also in reality. This gender construct marginalizes what Kemalist reforms have bestowed to Turkish women as early as 1920s, which concisely made them visible in the public sphere:

> The taking off of the veil by women (1924 onwards), the establishment of compensatory coeducation for girls and boys (1924), the granting of political rights such as eligibility for political offices, women's suffrage (1934), and, finally, the abolition of the "Sharia", the Islamic law, and the subsequent adoption of the Swiss Civil Code (1926) were all

> measures undertaken to guarantee the public visibility and citizenship of women in the new Turkish nation-state. (Göle, 2007, 14)

In *Huzur Sokağı*, women who are dressed obscenely are regarded as displaying themselves "like articles for sale" (Şenler, 2003, 49). The ideal lady that Bilâl dreams of is someone "loyal to the commands of Islam in her dressing, acts, and manners" (Şenler, 2003, 49). Another indication of religiousness is being without make-up. To dress like an unbeliever and to wear make-up is nothing but "giving women away to men's lust" (Şenler, 2003, 160). Most striking is the fact that this comment belongs to Feyzâ, a woman who blames her husband for her past way of life. According to her, it is not acceptable that a man let his wife —who is his honor— to dress obscenely. It seems like women are imagined as real "articles" that men should shape and display.

A journalist, Nuriye Akman, made an interview with Şenler in 2002 which was published in *Zaman* newspaper. There, Şenler states that if she had the chance to write *Huzur Sokağı* again after thirty years, she would have used a milder tone now. She obviously came to think that the novel has certain weaknesses: "Now, I would not depict our daughters who dress badly and misbehave as I once did. I find it slightly schematic" (Akman, 2002, 1). In this respect, Şenler appears much more tolerant more than 30 years after the first publication of her novel. From "devils" to "daughters", the heroines of famous university canteen scenes are now embraced by the author. After the heyday of *Huzur Sokağı*, now Şenler is careful about using a temperate language. In the above mentioned interview, the active figure of the Islamist scene in 1960s and 1970s states that there are certain professions Muslim women can learn, keeping in mind that husbands are obliged to look after their wives. Although Şenler accepts that it was never the case in her own life, she reminds Islamic interdictions about the subject in a determined way. All this undermines her ex-militant image, and directs the readers to believe that above all Şenler perceives the devotion of a woman to her family in order to pursue an Islamic way of life superior to any other role possible.

Ideological Background

The language employed in *Huzur Sokağı* is very simple; although sometimes verses of Koran are quoted, yet messages are straightforward for the common reader. The perceptive capacity of target reader is so underestimated that the plot is simplified, and the characters have no dimension at all. Ultimate symbols of religion are demoted to *turban* and salat, which finally proves that

Islam is assessed in terms of visual and formal practices. Therefore, the "righteous way" *(hidayet)* proposed in the novel is equalized to veiling and worshipping. That is in accordance with Şenler's mild attitude; there is no political agenda visible in the novel, or a social project of any kind. The protagonists are solely engaged with their own salvation. That surely does not mean they do not feel responsible from their surroundings. So they sometimes feel "appointed", and try to illuminate people around them, like in the scene where Bilâl preaches the children on the street about the sin of building a snowman (Şenler, 2003, 257). After that threatening warning, one of the children states that he will never ever make an image again, and Bilâl gives him "a precious fountain pen that he has brought from France" as a reward (Şenler, 2003, 257). In contradiction with this advice regarding images, there is often a pretty and smart young veiled girl on the covers of salvation novels.

In the novel, people who convert to Islam are depicted in detail. Apparently, the process they go through is considered to be the focal point of the text; therefore, written with didactic purposes. For instance, when "leftist and faithless" teachers realize that Ali performs salat, he defends himself by saying that actual "immorality centers" are cinemas, theatres, and cafes (Şenler, 2003, 110). Another example is Seval, who refuses to go to the hairdresser before her wedding due to Islamic consciousness she has developed. The narrator does not miss this opportunity to preach the readers about the inconvenience of women going to such places where men work (Şenler, 2003, 122). One other example that narrator emphasizes is Seval and Necati's wedding. By that occasion, why women and men must be separated at weddings is declared. In *Huzur Sokağı*, not only grief and sorrow is expressed with tears, but also gratitude and happiness results in crying. The ceremony at which guests cannot help weeping contains prayers and chants instead of "jazz and dance", at which especially army officers' and civil servants' wives react (Şenler, 2003, 118). The narrator pities these "miserable and absentminded people who perceive and present their backwardness and primitiveness as progressiveness and civilization" (Şenler, 2003, 119). The wedding is proposed as an alternative to Western style gatherings with "alcohol and dance where women and men are all together" (Şenler, 2003, 123). Another pedagogical feature visible in the novel is as follows: After a serious traffic accident Feyzâ lays in blood. Doctor Celil, who realizes that her headscarf was removed during first aid, gets very much annoyed about that. His sensitivity about this detail is exceedingly praised by the narrator (Şenler, 2003, 338). Doctor Celil, who does not look at the face of the injured, commands the nurses to cover her head with a clean cloth (Şenler, 2003, 339). A similar situation occurs towards the end of the novel when Feyzâ gets ill. Hilâl, obliged to take a

male doctor home, feels at ease to see that he first covers Feyzâ's body with a cloth and then examines her (Şenler, 2003, 429).

Unlike these detailed depictions of everyday life practices, people who convert to Islam decide to do so all of a sudden in the novel. Therefore, the readers are left uninformed about the factors underlying that will. Sometimes it is caused by the magic of a call to prayer *(ezan)*, sometimes the charm of idealized people like Bilâl and Feyzâ; but the process is never explained or analyzed. The first person to convert is Necati, a friend of Bilâl from university. After finding the "righteous way" he regularly goes to the mosque, and gathers with religious friends at home to perform the salat together with them (Şenler, 2003, 42). At that point, Göle's differentiation of political and cultural Islam might be helpful: Political Islam is a "revolutionary" movement aiming at struggle against Western world to defend Islamic identity. "It also gives priority to seizing power and defines 'change' as a 'top-to-bottom' process affecting the 'system' " (Göle, 2007, 109). On the other hand, cultural Islam, although inhering a political dimension, rather focuses on the individual instead of the state. "Furthermore, the primary aim is not the constitution of a new system but, rather, the enclosure and transformation of inner worlds" (Göle, 2007, 109). This analysis is in accordance with observations regarding the doctrine of the novel. The text does not indicate a political revival; it rather illustrates Islamic practices. Only at one point, the reader encounters the political will underlying the novel: Hilâl faces problems at school due to her headscarf. Then the narrator shifts from narrative time to real time, and feels the urge to explain the current situation according to latest regulations with a footnote (Şenler, 2003, 391).

Conclusion

Dichotomies such as Islam versus West, traditional versus modern, unprogressive versus progressive are common tools employed to explain Islamist texts, but these are inadequate to fully comprehend the complex nature of the issue. Therefore, Islamist movements should not be read as opponents of the "West", "modern", and "progressive". In this paper, an early example of salvation novels is analyzed with regard to the ideological background that cultivated the sub-genre itself. While doing that, the text is not regarded as the antithesis of modernity, but as a different conceptual framework to interpret and internalize it. By examining the literary and ideological aspects of *Huzur Sokağı*, the depiction of ideal gender roles and the construction of identity visible in this novel is discussed. Regarding the novel as a cultural artifact of the Islamist discourse in Turkey, it is argued

that Islamist identity is not defined against the West, but rather against the Westernized elite within the country.

As a concluding remark, the problematic attitude of assuming a homogeneous Islamist movement, identity and literature should be mentioned here. Considering this heterogeneity, writing back in the turn of the millennium, Göle determines three groups of people whom she addresses as "new Islamist actors" (Göle, 2000, 111) in *Hybrid Patterns: On Islam and Modernity*[5]. These are engineers, women, and intellectuals; all of whom undermine totalitarian tendencies of Islamism. It is open to discussion to consider these actors as libertarian after two decades. However, according to Göle, they all challenge Islamist movement; engineers in terms of rationalism, women in terms of individualism, and intellectuals in terms of critical thinking (Göle, 2000, 112). In this paper, unveiling a prototypic salvation novel written by a woman author, hopefully provided not only a better understanding of the fictional construction of Islamist identity, but also elucidated the cultural dimensions of the Islamist movement in Turkey: A country which was once illustrated by philosopher Sakallı Celâl as a ship sailing eastwards with those aboard running westwards.

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[5]The original title of the book in Turkish is *Melez Desenler: İslam ve Modernlik Üzerine*. (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000).