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REFLECTIONS OF POST-9/11 IN NİLÜFER KUYAŞ'S *SERBEST DÜŞÜŞ* (FREE FALL): TRAUMA AT THE CROSSROADS

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Abstract

Reflections and effects of September 11 attacks were not spread just throughout America. Flash news of the events was covered at the same time in America and in other countries and Turkey was one of these countries that witnessed the events live miles away. Regarding the aftermath, there are several books that deal with 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror written by Turkish scholars or politicians yet there are not many works of fiction written about that day in Turkish literature. Nilüfer Kuyaş's *Serbest Düşüş* is a good example among the few novels written after 9/11 and it contributes to the post-9/11 novel genre with the view of a Turkish author. Within the framework of post-9/11, this paper will analyse *Serbest Düşüş* through the aspects of cities, disasters and traumascapes.

Key Words: PTSD, Post-9/11 literature, Turkish literature

NİLÜFER KUYAŞ'IN SERBEST DÜŞÜŞ ROMANINDA 11 EYLÜL SONRASININ YANSIMASI: KAVŞAKTAKİ TRAVMA

Öz

11 Eylül saldırılarının yansımaları ve etkileri sadece Amerika'ya yayılmadı. Olayların flaş haberleri Amerika'da ve diğer ülkelerde aynı anda yer aldı ve Türkiye de olaylara kilometrelerce uzaktan canlı tanık olan ülkelerden biriydi. Sonrası ile ilgili olarak, Türk bilim adamları veya politikacılar tarafından 11 Eylül saldırıları ve teröre karşı savaş ile ilgili birçok kitap var, ancak o gün hakkında yazılmış çok fazla kurgu eseri yok. Nilüfer Kuyaş'ın *Serbest Düşüş*'ü, 11 Eylül'den sonra yazılan birkaç romandan güzel bir örnektir ve bir Türk yazarın gözünden 11 Eylül sonrası roman türüne katkı sağlar. Bu makale 11 Eylül sonrası çerçevesinde Serbest Düşüş'ü şehirler, afetler ve travma manzaraları üzerinden analiz edecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Travma sonrası stress bozukluğu, 11 Eylül sonrası edebiyatı, Türk edebiyatı

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1. INTRODUCTION

Loud noise, extremely thick dust, flames, smoke, and falling bodies were the first impressions of those in New York and Washington who lived through the attacks on September 11, 2001. Lots of people, whether eye-witnesses or those who watched the events on TV, were haunted by what they saw. There were also plane crashes at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania on the same day, yet the death toll was much higher in the Twin Towers in Manhattan than elsewhere, and that is why most media attention turned to NY. Regardless of their ethnic and national differences, the unity of the residents in New York on 9/11 left its mark on history. Among the several disciplines, literature reflects the aftermath situation not just in American but all over the world. Up to today, there are more than one hundred novels published post-9/11. Though not all of them directly deal with 9/11 attacks, they mostly mention about that day and its outcomes.

The atmosphere at the time of the attacks and their aftermath is captured by Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin:

> *The suddenness of our loss created a need to reach out, to talk and to pull together. Downtown we became part of a creative, public outpouring that was especially tangible at Union Square. […] Acts of public goodwill and kindness flourished. Even the poorest gave something. […] Greencard holders remarked how they felt "American" for the first time. This version of "we" — with millions of consolers —was genuine and true. (2002: 23)*

From this explanation, it is clear that people in New York were indeed attached to the Twin Towers, but it would be fair to say that the degree of this attachment increased after the unexpected destruction in New York City. In other words, before 9/11 this sense of attachment was felt particularly strong among those who identified themselves with New York City. While it is without doubt that the attacks shook the country economically, they acquired a primarily symbolic significance since the World Trade Center had been regarded as "the heart of the world financial system" (Norris, 2001). Its destruction produced a change in spatial awareness. The place, which was once important as means of power at the time of the Twin Towers, became a zone of remembrance and was immediately named Ground Zero. "On September 10th, this was 16 acres of real estate. A day later, it was sacred ground. Sacred to the people who were killed here" (Anderson, 2010: 180). The sight of the flattened Twin Towers doubtlessly affected the vast majority of people because they realized the extent to which 9/11 curtailed or changed many lives.

People who watched the demolition of the towers on television were not only viewers in America. Live coverage was also given by television channels worldwide, so that most of the planet's population was arguably following the momentous developments. To quote Smelser, "It was a trauma to be sure but a trauma with a rare historical twist" (Smelser, 2004: 268, 269). The event's historical importance resulted in wider attention than usual being focused on the USA as a whole. In the aftermath, though there were some controversies surrounding the question of how to classify the psychological outcome of the events, many decided on defining it as trauma:

> *The term "trauma" and its variants have been heavily employed since the 9/11 attack. The events themselves have been labelled "traumatic," and persons wounded by the attacks have been described as "traumatized" and as vulnerable to "retraumatization" should further calamities occur. Moreover, individuals who experienced a particular amalgam of reactions, including flashbacks, intrusive memories,*

numbing, and nightmares, frequently have been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder. (Seeley, 2008: 17)

It is an accepted fact that "being a witness to a distressing event can be traumatizing, even in the absence of direct threat to self" (Bracken, 2002: 48). In the case of the events of 9/11, regardless of whether one was personally involved in them or saw them on television, the feeling it gave was one of a total divorce from everyday reality and of fictitiousness since the explosions and process of destruction reminded most people of Hollywood films. It was inconceivable for a lot of people and that is why referring to it in terms of filmic representations helped them to understand the nature of the situation. Zizek explains this as "the rationale of the often-mentioned association of the attacks with Hollywood disaster movies: the unthinkable which happened as the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and that was the biggest surprise" (2002: 16). What the nation underwent resulted in difficulty for many people, as it was "unexpected, unpredicted, surprising, shocking, [and] repulsive" (Sztompka, 2000: 452). Several psychologists claimed that sorrow dominated the aftermath of the attacks and that "many thousands of people were traumatized, at all degrees of intensity and to degrees of transience or permanence" (Young-Bruehl, 2003: 55). A survey of the psychological studies produced in the aftermath of 9/11 suggests that the events will never be totally erased from the minds of many individuals and the nation, so seared into the memory is the downward spiral of momentous events involving the destruction of iconic buildings, massive loss of civilian life and the contrast of fanatic terrorism, courage and humanitarianism. On one exceptional day of a traumatic nature the ordinary daily anxieties of modern city life gave place to bigger problems. It has been argued that "after 9/11, New York was faced with the task of physical and psychical building. […] The absent presence of the Twin Towers foregrounded the extent to which cities are invisible – founded on the spaces between things, the spaces where things once were" (Jarvis, 2006: 54).

Yet, although 9/11 is a recent event, it is nevertheless still possible to comment on its traumatic effects in comparison to those of earlier historical examples such as the Great War, the Holocaust and The Vietnam War. Indeed, the approach of the American government, media, and US citizens to the event has mostly involved related 9/11 with past instances of trauma. For months after 9/11, as Brian Jarvis noted five years later, "the traumatic wounding that left New York […] was replayed in news reports, documentaries, films, video walls at globally broadcast concerts, photographs, paintings, graphic novels, street art and kitsch and memorabilia" (2006: 55). These efforts at contextualization may be seen as part of an attempt to come to terms with the extent of the emotional destruction in New York, which was evident in the widespread and multi-focused reflection of the sorrow that still lingers today.

The truth of the remark that "trauma affects more than the individual" (Antai-Otong, 2002: 205) is tested once again with the September 11 attacks. Though it is also possible for the individual to feel the necessity to be alone after a tragic event such as a major accident, disaster, or a shocking event, the opposite reaction may also be observed. That is, the person who is suffering, especially from grief at someone's loss, can seek to interact with companions with whom to share and endure pain and to find consolation. The American Psychiatric Association nevertheless identifies the September 11 attacks as a more recent category in trauma studies, describing them as "intentional violence that involves high numbers of injuries or casualties – but

does not occur in the context of war" (Briere and Scott, 2006: 5). It is also added that, by way of an unexpected beneficial side-effect, the attacks "stimulated a dramatic increase in North American Research on the effective short-term treatment of mass trauma" (Briere and Scott, 2006: 5).

The various events on 9/11 have turned out to be common grief in which almost every American citizen took part, at least in his or her imagination. Thus, the original sequence soon changed its profile to become almost exclusively New York's shared sorrow. Jack Saul writes that "much of the discourse in New York City at the time was focused on individual stress reactions and PTSD" (2013: 78). A year after the attacks, the atmosphere in downtown Manhattan was said to be that of a place with "spontaneous memorials and 'missing' notices replete with vital data and photographs [that] sprang up everywhere […] A whole part of Manhattan had been turned into a cemetery" (Hussyen, 2002: 9). The face of the city led not only New Yorkers but also Americans and even other countries to question the meaning of American space and place. Namely, it "irrevocably altered the spaces and consciousness of New York City […] disrupting everyday lives, place attachment, and place identity for thousands" (Low and Lawrence-Zuñiga, 2003: 37). Much was written about the tragedy in the economic or social press, while in the world of literature there emerged a genre called the post-9/11 novel (or post-9/11 fiction).

Turkey was one of the countries that saw the events unfold from afar as the events were covered in real time in America and other nations. In terms of the aftermath, while there are various books produced by Turkish intellectuals or politicians regarding the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror, there are few works of fiction about that day in Turkish literature. *Serbest Düşüş* by Nilüfer Kuyaş is one of the few novels produced after 9/11, and it contributes to the post-9/11 novel genre from the perspective of a Turkish author. This article will look at Serbest Düşüş through the post-9/11 perspective together with special importance on 9/11 literature and trauma.

2. *SERBEST DÜŞÜŞ*: THE BRIDGE IN WITNESSING THE EVENT FROM ISTANBUL AND NEW YORK

The novel is set in Istanbul and recounts in a mixed first and third-person narrative about the life of Şirin, who suffers from mid-life crisis, and it is intensified by her trauma due to a train accident as it re-emerges after encountering Bruno. It also provides a distinctive twist to the post-9/11 novel in many ways and offers an insight into how a massive cataclysm is witnessed from another country, in addition to the author's personal interpretation coloured by her awareness of Turkish cultural history with its heritage of Byzantine iconicity.[1] Hence, in *Serbest Düşüş*, Kuyaş considers and comments on 9/11, offering any foreign readers who know Turkish a vision of the event as seen from a city in another continent.

From its very first paragraph the novel guides the reader to its content and the genre to which it belongs: "A story brought us together. It was about survival. It was the story of how he survived,

[1] Istanbul owes its identity to this controversy ever since the city of Byzantium, founded by Greek colonists in the seventh century BC, was transformed into Constantinople by Constantine I (Çiçekoğlu, 2003: 42).

which aroused my interest, and I gravitated" (Kuyaş, 2013: 15).[2] Though it may appear that the protagonist merely aims to compare their respective ways of overcoming real or potential traumas, the love affair appears to develop without the protagonist being aware of it. Throughout the novel, the reader is reminded that upon the encounter with Bruno, Şirin is taken back to the traumatic moments of her life.

In the prologue of her 2003 collection *9/11 New York–Istanbul*, with a multi-faceted critical viewpoint, Çiçekoğlu concentrates on the scenic and spectacular side of the events as she draws attention to differences and similarities between the two cities (44). She states that

> *Istanbul and New York are among that rare breed of cities, which do not belong to any specific group of people who happen to live there at any particular bracket of time. This might be the reason for the similarity of the aura which both owe to their common character of being a port. But their differences outnumber their similarities. […] The main dissimilarity of Istanbul and New York is a visual derivative […]. Their images are different. New York is vertical and phallic, an iconic symbol of the modernist image of success. Istanbul, […] refuses to yield herself to any iconic image, sprawling between two continents and two seas. (45)*

However, despite the differences, the sharing of opinions and experiences on that spectacular day enables one to see how the incident is perceived from a city that was once home to world of icons.

Like the protagonist Şirin in *Serbest Düşüş*, Çiçekoğlu was also mesmerized by the tragic spectacle when she first saw the collapse of the Towers. Yet she also tells that she first thought it was just another scene from a Hollywood disaster movie, as if the calamity were something fairly trashy and unimportant suggesting her uncertainty about how to interpret the momentous and exceptional event that she was witnessing. In this respect, Çiçekoğlu's reaction resembles the nonplussed paralysis of Kuyaş's protagonist Şirin, as the novel contributes to the numerous depictions of 9/11 as perceived by a Turkish protagonist and an American who witnessed the events live in the north tower. While making the reader reconsider and visualize again what happened in the natural flow of the novel, the protagonist's attitude ensures that the reader is obliged to question him/herself "Where was I that day, what was I doing?" (Kuyaş, 2013: 47). Interestingly, Şirin's insistence on interrogating herself echoes an enduring nation-wide reality in America and at Kuyaş seems to be consciously reflecting the ongoing concerns of Americans who contribute to online 9/11 memorial forums.[3] She says,

> *Everyone wants to remember where they were when they are reminded of 9/11. Prettier things should have united humanity. While listening to Bruno, Şirin was thinking, where was I that day? Ten years ago, while Bruno was trying to go down the stairs, what was I doing? (47-48)*

Whether or not the author is aware of the presence of these websites, her reminder of a specific moment contributes to the novel's universal message. Questioning again where she was on that day on the very next page, the author retransmits the successive moments of shock one

[2] Translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

[3] See the names of the forums created: *Stories Archive.* (n.d.). Where Were You on 911? Retrieved 24 November 2021, from https://www.wherewereyouon911.com/stories/; Ashkenas, J., & Evans, T. (n.d.). *View Comments: Where Were You on Sept. 11*, 2001? Retrieved 24 November 2021, from https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/09/08/us/sept-11-reckoning/map911-browse.html

might feel upon hearing the news from afar and attempts to take the reader back to that cataclysmic day.

Şirin has confused thoughts and feelings upon watching the collapse of the Twin Towers. She witnesses the event thousands of miles away from where it takes place, yet the way she describes it is quite close to Bruno's. Like many commentators interviewed at the time, Bruno also stresses his first impressions on seeing the incredible visual effect and states that when they saw the giant plane passing it was "as if they were watching Godzilla" (Kuyaş, 2013: 15), thereby endorsing a comment by Brian Jarvis in 2006:

> *The sight of a plane crashing into the World Trade Center has frequently been described as cinematic spectacle. Victims and voyeurs, journalists and politicians, writers and critics have repeatedly framed the attack on New York as 'disaster film', or 'war film', or 'horror film'. (49)*

Şirin too concentrates on the filmic aspect of the collapse when telling of her very immediate perception of it. As it vacillates between 'reality and fiction',[4] the novel suggests that there is little or no difference between the perceptions of the real, first-person witness (who, if s/he survives, may nevertheless also be a victim to some extent), and those, of the person who watches it on-screen. The implication is that people's responses are universal whether events are experienced at first-hand or via a live broadcast.

Bruno, then, adds that the day of the attacks was "beyond words, an experience quite beyond language, a nameless thing" (Kuyaş, 2013: 44). By making Bruno describe his traumatic experience as something ineffable, the author also shows herself as conforming to what since September 11 has become the conventional way of representing people's reaction to the calamity, and Bruno continues as follows: "You want to stop and look. You want to stare without doing anything, mesmerized, staying put as if it were doomsday. No, really, it is something indescribable" (Kuyaş, 2013: 44). In his evocation of the seemingly interminable atmosphere, Bruno again uses common expressions, which the post-9/11 reader is mostly familiar with. And several pages later he still keeps the moments of the collapse clearly in mind, albeit in third-person narrative:

> *He sees scattered bodies when he goes to the Plaza floor, dead bodies, wounded bodies, burnt bodies, metal and glass pieces, [...]. 'I am tired of seeing', he said. [...] 'It was strange to get on the subway, on the bus. You want to talk to people about what happened [...]'. (110)*

The need to talk about the event is one of Bruno's most immediate reactions. His desire to tell what he went through in the towers shows the normal reaction after a disaster. Though he tries to stay calm and help other people in the tower, he comes to a point where he cannot endure it alone and needs to find urgent relief by talking to other witnesses and victims.

Kuyaş does not abstain from giving the details as seen through the eyes of a New-Yorker protagonist any more than Don Delillo does in the opening page of his widely-discussed novel, *Falling Man*:

[4] An article by Daniel Ziegart opens with an introduction highlighting that 'many of the initial 9/11 commentaries pointed to a shattered relationship between reality and fiction'. He adds that upon seeing the images of destruction, many people preferred to call them 'action-images' instead of seeing them 'as what they were' (2008).

> *It was not anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. […] They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars. (2007: 3)*[5]

The common element in the impressions shared by Şirin and Bruno with regard to what they claim to have seen and experienced either remotely or at first hand on 9/11 is an air of unreality and illusion.

While Şirin was neither a first-hand witness nor a resident in America at the time of the attacks, it is understood that she has felt sorrow similar to that of thousands of people who were directly involved. Additionally, she provides an outsider's view of the attacks, suggesting where the sympathies of an impartial observer lie. Yet in response to the question: 'In the novel, Şirin does not want to go to Ground Zero. What about you, have you been there?' If yes, could you please say what your impressions were?', Kuyaş replies:

> *No, I have not been to Ground Zero, I do not have a special reason to go there, either. Yet, the idea of a monument there is interesting, indeed. I believe in its symbolic meaning. But it should not be confused with sacredness, unfortunately people tend to do this. In my opinion, trauma spaces are not sacred. They are just important as a legacy. (Kuyaş, interviewed by Betül Ateşçi Koçak, 20 November 2014)*

Similarly, when Şirin visits her daughter Ela, who lives in New York, the latter suggests to her mother that they should visit the Ground Zero memorial together. However, Şirin rejects the idea of going there and tells Ela that she could go there alone if she wants to. This information is given in the novel via the third-person narrator:

> *Şirin did not go to Ground Zero; she indeed wanted but resisted. She did not want to see the place that captivated her, she became superstitious. Instead, she read Don Delillo's Falling Man, and she liked it a lot. (103)*

The things that Bruno has told her as well as Şirin's own fertile imagination together explain her reluctance to visit the place. In addition to the sorrow that she has felt for thousands of people victimized on Ground Zero, she ascribes special meaning to the site because of her love for Bruno, which makes the situation harder to confront.

The reference to Ground Zero appears in two opposite aspects for Şirin. Although she abstains from visiting it, the place has several connotations for her. Ground Zero holds several paradoxical implications for Şirin. When Ela tells her mother about her visit to Ground Zero, Şirin replies:

> *I have not seen it but I know so much about it that it is as if I had visited the place. People's belongings, a ring, a watch, an earring, […], a wallet, a purse, coins, burnt pieces of fabric, a shoe, broken glasses, they all lack meaning and yet we look for all the meaning there, I know my dear. It is a museum, a tomb, a monument and a sacred place. (166)*

Though Şirin thinks that Ground Zero encompasses several values, she does not want to go there because she is afraid that her love for Bruno, which she is trying to suppress, will emerge again if she sees the place. She is aware that there she will be unable to prevent herself from reimagining the moments of Bruno's struggle for survival as well as other people's suffering.

After the destruction of the Twin Towers, thousands if not millions of people wholeheartedly approved the idea of immediately calling the ruined epicentre of the attack Ground Zero,

[5] For some critics such as John Duvall, Delillo's novel "merely [shows] symptoms of an American literature that has retreated from politics into domesticity" (Duvall and Marzec, 2011: 384).

borrowing the term first used in a June 1946 U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey and in a report on Hiroshima published in the New York Times the following month (President's Secretary's File, Truman Papers). In her 2004 article about Ground Zero, Marita Sturken discusses the multitude of meanings with which the place is invested. Three years after the attacks, she opined that it would continue to acquire even more meaning. She states that there are various factors that have made it very important and that they are all closely interrelated:

> *In the months and years since September 2001, Ground Zero in lower Manhattan has become a site of destruction and reconstruction, of intense emotional and political investments, a highly over-determined space. It is a place inspired by local, national and global meanings, a neighbourhood, a commercial district, and a site of memory and mourning. (312)*

In the following years, as foreseen by Sturken, the place gained more significance, especially after the inauguration of the 9/11 Memorial on September 12, 2011, and the opening of the associated museum in May, 2014. Additionally, Ground Zero and the Memorial Museum are on the must-see lists posted on websites for visitors to New York,[6] and there are tours available for people who want to visit the site.[7] Furthermore, despite the controversial nature of the commercial activity,[8] the continuing sale of real or symbolically representative memorial souvenirs in the museum shop shows that there are still lots of people who want to keep the memory of September 11 alive as something special and sacred.

3. TRAUMATIC SPACES IN THE NOVEL

Offering a different approach to the definition of PTSD, Judith Greenberg suggests "that the first word of PTSD, post, encapsulates […] a belated response to an original experience, a temporal delay and a repeated return against one's will of an event, dream, hallucination or other image" (1998: 319). The unforeseeable resurrection and revisiting of tragic moments results in damage to the psyche of the sufferer over and above the original mental trauma. The inability to shake oneself out of these moments from the past can continue to affect the individual for a long time. Once the traumatic incident is involuntarily revived in the psyche, the individual tends to remain subjected to its domination for years. Together with the accompanying anguish at loss, the fear and terror evoked by a past experience can endure as if they were happening in the present. Trauma alters an individual's perception of time, destroying a person's ability to see either a carefree past or a positive/peaceful future. The traumatized victim enters a limbo-like state where his/her unclear and distorted conception of time before and after the catastrophe colours all anticipation of what lies ahead. In keeping with Greenberg's definition of PTSD, Şirin is drawn as a character suffering from a recalled trauma. The moments of the train accident (which occurred

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6 Guide, N. I. (2020, April 4). 9-11 Memorial and Museum | Visitor Guide, Reflecting Pools, Tickets. *NYC Insider Guide*. https://www.nycinsiderguide.com/ground-zero-memorial

7 See 9/11 Ground Zero Tour <http://911groundzero.com> [accessed 15 January 2015].

8 There has been controversy and anger regarding the souvenirs sold at the museum gift shop, especially on the part of bereaved families as they think the museum is different from the other museums owing to the remembrance of the people who died at Ground Zero. Abby Philip reports some of the objections as follows: '"They're down there selling bracelets; they're making money off my dead son," said Jim Riches, whose firefighter son, Jimmy, died at the World Trade Center on 9/11'; or, '"It's crass commercialism on a literally sacred site," Kurt Horning, whose son Matthew died on 9/11, said in a telephone interview Monday. "It's a burial ground. We don't think there should be those things offered on that spot"' (2014). Also, a part of the discussion was about some of the victims' families' protest 'against the storage of the remains of their loved ones inside the 9/11 Museum (Swaine, 2014).

one September several years previously) are still clear in her mind. Kuyaş refers to "the hours she spent in ruins, that desperate waiting; moaning, emergency shouts, pieces around, a broken hand, a heap of blood-soaked hair, a crushed head" (34). As the only survivor in the railway carriage, she still unwillingly keeps and relives in detail the bitter memories of that day. Throughout the book, the author frequently reminds the reader that Şirin's traumatic memories resurfaced after the coincidental encounter with Bruno.

The absence of clear information about the protagonist's life in the years between her accident and her meeting with Bruno suggests the importance that survivors unintentionally attach to sharing a common sense of togetherness post-disasters. Şirin says, "A story connected us. It was his story of survival. He would tell, I would listen" (Kuyaş, 2013: 17). Neither in their real conversations nor in imaginary ones does Bruno openly reveal any intention to talk about 9/11 or its aftermath, but he does not refuse to answer Şirin's questions, either. He says that on the day when the towers fell, he went to the Twin Towers for a job interview, as he wanted to move to New York to start living with his Turkish girlfriend, Ayça. Before the interview, he had arranged a meeting in the south tower with his friend Rajeev, who worked at a finance company. The first and enduring impression that the crashes made on him was that it was as if they were watching *Godzilla* (Kuyaş, 2013: 38) and both men soon learned that a second plane had also crashed into the other tower. Two major things about that day left their mark on Bruno: his friend Rajeev's telling him about the situation in and outside the north tower; and his friend's ultimate death. He tells Şirin about Rajeev's situation in his final hours and the things that Rajeev told him:

> *Rajeev turned with an extremely white face, he said that the plane had hit the other tower, an incomprehensible fire, I saw people leaning out of the window not to get burned, I saw people throwing themselves out of the window, a woman caught fire, he said, and he vomited into the nearest bin. (Kuyaş, 2013: 38)*

As this passage from the novel shows, traumatic flashbacks and other symptoms of the condition such as nightmares that are prompted by sympathetic reactions to an account of a fellow-victim's suffering are not confined to the protagonist, Şirin, but also feature in Kuyaş's treatment of Bruno.

Initially, Şirin's sympathetic listening is quite effective in narration because it helps the reader to understand her insistence on knowing about Bruno. It serves as a source to trigger Şirin's long-suppressed feelings. The listening process does not occur in the novel but it does in Şirin's mind as she imagines inner conversations that she holds with Bruno. The reader is openly informed about this fantasy: "Once, I also faced death, I wanted to compare. He would tell his account, I would listen" (Kuyaş, 2013: 44). From the very beginning of the novel, Şirin seems willing to get lost in a foreigner's trauma by listening to a story through which she enters a world that she has unwittingly concealed from herself and others. In her both imaginary and real conversations with Bruno, she grows aware of her own self as well as of the moments that caused her to suffer for a long time both physically and mentally. Bruno has thus re-awakened Şirin's buried memories, thereby leading her to question the importance of her own survival and to combine and compare it with that of others. Frequent repetitions suggest the female character's urge to listen to someone else's tragedy while at the same time it hints that the issue of death is unresolved. When combined with her urge to listen to someone else's tragedy, the female character's repeated

allusions to her own survival correspond to the observation by Cathy Caruth that, for the traumatized survivor, the issue of death is unresolved:

> *Focusing on survival, rather than on trauma puts the death back into the traumatic experience because survival suggests that there has been death, and the survivor therefore has had a death encounter, and the death encounter is central to his or her psychological experience. (2014: 3)*

It may take some time for the survivor to overcome the remnants of the shattering past moment. The traumatized individual, who is at times interrupted by the intrusion of the past, may sometimes suffer from a sense of displacement and of not knowing what time and place s/he is living in. Şirin's memories and feelings about September 11 have reinforced her interest in Bruno, making her all the more inquisitive about him as well as her own self. Despite the differences between these two, their sharing of similar moments of past suffering results in a better understanding of their experience. For Şirin especially, the retelling of trauma has become essential to the reestablishment of her own self, which is revealed at the end of the novel. Her intention of having a spiritual journey with Bruno is similar to that expressed in the dialogue of the listener and testifier recorded by the Yale Professor of Psychiatry, Dori Laub:

> *For this limited time, […] I'll be with you all the way, as much as I can. I want to go wherever you go, and I'll hold and protect you along this journey. Then, at the end of the journey, I shall leave you. (Felman and Laub, 1992: 70)*

By listening, Şirin's trauma is re-awakened as she identifies the incomprehensible moments of her own experience with Bruno's. Her dreams and nightmares appear rather unexpectedly in the novel, matching the mental processes of a person who has still not fully recovered from trauma. Reflecting the first-person narrator's idea, the third-person narrator confirms that:

> *She found herself on the train in her dream. The rescue team were trying to break though, she was hearing the noise of the saw; she saw everything from the carriage window, but they could not reach her, because she will be in an aquarium. (Kuyaş, 2013: 148)*

Regarding the dreams of a traumatized individual, Caruth agrees with Freud's theory about the bipartite nature of dreams. Their manifested content, remembered after we awaken, contrasts with their latent content, which we forget on waking and which Freud considers to be part of the unconscious. While generally agreeing with Freud's theories on the interpretation of the dreams of traumatized individuals, Caruth asserts the importance of recalling dreams upon awakening as she states:

> *It is the experience of waking into consciousness that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of trauma. […] It is not only the dream that surprises consciousness but, indeed the very waking itself that constitutes the surprise: the fact not only of the dream but having passed beyond it. (1996: 64)*

As Şirin tells herself that "disaster is something that cannot be fully perceived" (Kuyaş, 2013: 181), the ability to dream or to prevent nightmares is not in the hands of the individual, it is something difficult to control. Thus, Şirin's dreams recur when she least expects them: "She woke up with the train accident. It was a terrifying waking-up. She saw all the sharp edges of life" (Kuyaş, 2013: 80).

In spite of the fact that the word 'survival' mostly connotes relief and pleasantness, it also hints at deep psychological disturbance. Caruth evaluates this predicament asking "Is the trauma

the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" She then suggests that it is "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (1996: 7). The individual, unable to realize what has really happened, lacks any meaningful explanation of how s/he has been involved in the incident and managed to survive it. As the mind has no clear awareness of what happened, it does not stop asking questions on the subject, sometimes at inopportune or unexpected moments. Complex and ambiguous inner feelings that can disrupt the psyche may appear any time. The harmful aftershock of the catastrophe does not generally emerge right away but repeatedly appears in blurred images some time after the event since the individual suffers "the inherent latency within the experience itself" (Caruth, 1995: 8). Judith Herman stresses that this latency makes total recovery impossible:

> *Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate through the survivor's lifecycle. Issues that were sufficiently resolved at one stage of recovery may be reawakened as the survivor reaches new milestones in her development. (1992: 211)*

Şirin's case epitomizes Herman's definition of one of the features of trauma here. Unsurprisingly, Şirin's questions about survival in *Serbest Düşüş* generally appear after her mentioning the subject, which shows she is still in thrall to her traumatic past. The more she contemplates her past and present life, the more dominant the issue of survival becomes. This tendency in the novel again reveals that "trauma is not only an effect of destruction but also, […] an enigma of survival" (Caruth, 1996: 58). The mystery of staying alive constrains the mind since the individual can neither understand the accident nor how s/he survived it. Though the timespan of the catastrophe is generally quite short, the incidents that fit into it may be hard for the individual to perceive when it happens or very soon afterwards. The scenes of Şirin's own survival do not leave her at peace. She is instantly and at unexpected times interrupted by her own memories: "Southern France. Train debris. A broken hand. A bruised hand. Intolerable pain. The noise of the saw" (Kuyaş, 2013: 46). The survivor may spend a long time without consciously realizing what happened in the past but, as in the case of Şirin, painful memories can be revived by a stimulant. Felman explains that trauma "registers a belated impact […] it remains un-owned and unavailable to knowledge and to consciousness" (2002: 173). Suffering from a similar situation, Şirin has several questions in the novel regarding the notion of survival because after long years of PTSD, she sometimes questions the line between death and staying alive. In addition to the shock she experienced at the moment of the accident, getting out alive amounts to another shock, setting the survivor a mystery to solve; and the obligation to deal with two perplexing cases of shock is a burden for even a healthy individual to handle during and after the original disastrous incident. The reader gathers, both from the irregular flow of the novel and the ambiguous opinions in Şirin's mind that Şirin has not overcome the psychological devastation of the train accident that occurred several years previously.

Freud's analysis of the situation of the victim after train accidents leads Caruth to suggest that "the accident, as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility" (1996: 6). Şirin, who has been facing the severity of the accident, cannot initially digest the event in her mind and thus her own interpretation of what survival means

varies a lot. She thinks that survival is "something that changes one" (Kuyaş, 2013: 17), and after the accident she creates an "Other Woman" (Kuyaş, 2013: 25) image in her mind thinking that "pain has become her new identity" (Kuyaş, 2013: 25) It is also after the train accident that she says "surviving creates a second, hidden self in one. I know this" (Kuyaş, 2013: 63), and that she understands how much she loves her husband Ekrem (then her boyfriend).

Though not dealt with in any very detailed way, some other cases that are known worldwide and have had traumatic results (e.g. the Holocaust) are also addressed in the novel. The author implies that major cataclysms resulting in big death tolls and collective suffering have indeed features in common and thus she considers them along with the attacks of 9/11. Although Şirin keeps asking herself hypothetical questions such as, "How did it affect her to survive [the collapse of] the Twin towers? She wanted to open the hidden door in Bruno, but she kept silent. She understood that he kept himself closed because he survived with difficulty" (Kuyaş, 2013: 136). She also shows her concern for survivors in some other massive cataclysms: "Does one feel guilty at having survived, I asked, just like the Holocaust survivors?" (Kuyaş, 2013: 42). Şirin's comparison between the Holocaust and the September 11 attacks implies that she sees a certain degree of similarity between the two crimes against humanity despite their difference in scale.

For Jonathan Boulter, "a traumatized space is one continually marked by its relation to the disaster that preceded it and provided its foundations and ground" (2011: 10). As a survivor who frequently mentions stepping back from the brink of death, Şirin generally reflects an inescapable sense of void and incompleteness. She suffers from middle-age depression, questions her marriage, which she feels is unsatisfactory, worries about her children, and has hesitations about her plans for the rest of her currently lacklustre life. Sometimes even art does not make her feel happy. Her search for meaning in life presupposes the existence of something waiting to be discovered that will fill the void. She states several times that survival has changed her a lot and that knowing Bruno has transformed her life and ideas. She is sometimes aware of this overlap between the traumas caused by their very different experiences. In one of her inner monologues Şirin says that

> *the alienation of trauma is like being encrusted all around. With deep awareness, you get to set shallow relationships. A shallowness that becomes more attractive with the things that cannot be shared, like an eye-deceiving beach. Has she caught that merciless shallowness in Bruno? The feeling of giving up, breaking off everything at once. An overwhelming sense of devotion and an irresistible need for betrayal. (Kuyaş, 2013: 63)*

The reader finds Şirin questioning herself several times. Her inner conflict and helplessness to resolve her own life and memories of the train accident is a constantly recurring issue in her mind. She also explains her own survival case to Bruno and wants him to question it. She sometimes even forces him to remember again and again. By constantly questioning herself, she also wants the male character to remain continuously involved in the traumatic scenes, both in hers and his own. Şirin asks:

> *And you? After the Twin Towers, could you look at high buildings? Meanwhile she was thinking: I could not get on a train for a long time, even now, on the subway, a moment comes and I immediately get off no matter what the stop is.' […] No. The event did not alienate me from high buildings, said the man. On the*

contrary, it has turned out to be a source of melancholia. My passion for skyscrapers increased, I constantly go up and down in skyscrapers, [and] stay there. (Kuyaş, 2013: 62)

Contrary to Şirin's past experience and expectation, Bruno claims that he feels nothing to distance him from high buildings. Despite his inability to overcome a sense of guilt after losing his friend, he approaches high buildings in quite a heroic manner, having at least resolved this part of the survival issue.

Şirin does not stop questioning Bruno. She wants to discover more about him in order to make him become involved in traumas. This intention to make Bruno become more engaged in both his own and Şirin's trauma and several dualities is given via the third person narrator:

Şirin associates the feeling of melancholy that she had difficulty in confessing with the man she created in the narration. As he has faced death, he might find daily life incredible like me, she says. He might find it unreliable. He might find it dream-like. In this sense we resemble each other. (Kuyaş, 2013: 63)

It is a widely known fact that for people who suffer from trauma, everyday life may seem meaningless and risky as it may bring some other shocking cataclysm. Still coming to terms with the surprise of having survived, Şirin cannot properly place the present time in her life and reckons that it is the same for Bruno. She imagines his inner life and tries to suppose what his problems and pains must be. She clearly announces that she has time-related problems and lets Bruno feel the same way in her thoughts:

He also has a side that is outside time. Şirin is like that, she wants to live outside time, and draw beyond history, so great an effect has the train accident had on her. Or maybe she was already that way inclined and became ever increasingly so. (Kuyaş, 2013: 63)

As seen from the frequent repetition of similar feelings, Şirin is frequently reminded of what she has been through.

Interestingly, Şirin is sometimes aware of the outcomes of her traumatic experience but the fact that they are fluctuating may result in certain feelings of giving everything away without looking back. She says:

All traumas alienate you from other people. Your feelings become estranged from you as you grow alienated. Did she feel that aloofness in the person she called Bruno? The impression of breaking up everything anytime. The reality that our deepest feelings cannot be shared. This was the charm of two solitudes. (Kuyaş, 2013: 69)

References to the fact that Şirin has not found anyone closer to her feelings up until Bruno enters her life are repeated in many ways in the early stages of the novel. The complexity of her mind owing to her traumatic experience has ruined several moments in her life, sometimes making her unaware of what is really happening in it, which is also very appropriate in the novel with its frequent switches of narrator, changes in the flow of narrative time and shifts of location.

However, Şirin's habit of combining tragic experiences, alienation and repetitions of traumatic episodes does not last forever. The reader is earlier warned that Şirin will realize that her love and desire for Bruno will come to an end: "After realizing everything has ended on September 11, Şirin wanders around in delusions in the city" (Kuyaş, 2013: 66). But soon on the same page, the narrative digresses as it returns to treating the experience of survival:

Life does not flash before your eyes when you are about to die said Bruno; on the contrary, there appears a sphere, every bit of which you can touch at the same time, but there are also voids, gaps in it, you see. […] Şirin is surprised about the similarity of the description. She also felt she had been in a similar bubble when she was in the wreckage. (Kuyaş, 2013: 66)

Owing to the sudden and incoherent change of the narration the reader may not be totally aware that there will eventually be an end to Şirin's love for Bruno and to her desire to know more about his traumatic story. However, whether or not it is surprising, there comes a moment when Şirin certainly frees herself from adding Bruno to her life and desires. This development is stated in the novel as follows:

An unfinished story looks like a demolished building. The woman tries to understand the dimensions of the wreckage she is in, she looks around, it is just like resolving the fiction of a story (like trying to sort fact from fiction), the woman thought. […] She needs to find an ending. (Kuyaş, 2013: 175)

After this realization or awakening, Şirin becomes more involved with art, meets her close friends and tries to spend more time with her husband. We are told that "the story ends with destruction and rebirth. […] And trauma is slightly relieved" (Kuyaş, 2013: 217). Also, the author, in order to show that things have changed for Şirin after a certain point, mentions her ex-lover's name as B. instead of Bruno.[9] The change in the protagonist's attitude is underscored by an agreement of Şirin and Laura, one of her close friends, on the situation post-9/11:

They remembered how they met on September 11, 2001, yet both women say the same thing – Americans do not want to think and talk about September 11 anymore, the war changed everything, the situation is different now. We are in an economic crisis. People are hurt differently now. (Kuyaş, 2013: 181)

Hearing about the recent situation in America from her friend, Şirin feels that her pain is dissipated along with her interest in Bruno. Thus, throughout the end of the novel, the narrative grows less complicated.

There is also another event that has led Şirin to concentrate on her life and aims. The tragic earthquake in 2011 in Van[10] has made Şirin think less about her own traumas and worries and inclined her to help other people. At this point Kuyaş ensures that Şirin reacted to her country's cataclysm much as Bruno did to 9/11 insofar as the earthquake "responded the necessity of a disaster in her. […] It saved Şirin from herself (her problems), it gave her a reason" (Kuyaş, 2013: 198). She feels that, for her, "there started a new life beyond Ground Zero" (Kuyaş, 2013: 200). Seeing that there are people who are really in need of help is like an awakening for Şirin. She has not totally erased Bruno from her mind, but has now clarified her awareness of what she likes and wants in her life. Yet, the author prefers to show Şirin's conclusions through her son Rüstem, who is also a type of a hero for her and who says:

I no longer have any more fetishist respect, any admiration for constructions called buildings. It was indeed shattered on September 11, faded after Fukushima, and was totally worn away after Van earthquake. […] Everything is destined to collapse and to be built again. (Kuyaş, 2013: 222)

Şirin accepts her son's words as her cure and tries to keep the passion in her life. Şirin's healing is like Bruno's conclusion after 9/11. Just as Bruno's ideas about his own life revives after

[9] On pages 184, 206, 214, and 229 there is just B. instead of Bruno.

[10] On October 23, 2011, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.2 hit a city called Van in the eastern part of Turkey. It lasted twenty-five minutes leaving nearly 1,000 deaths and hundreds of injured people.

the disaster, the same happens to Şirin. Becoming a volunteer to help people in the Van earthquake awakens her desire to see other survivors and she is revived by the reality of her participation in the aid mission. That is, solidarity and helping out other people has made the beginning of her healing.

4. CONLCUSION

This paper presents a broad overview of how the September 11 attacks were seen and portrayed differently in two different countries: the U.S. and Turkey. In her novel *Serbest Düşüş*, Nilüfer Kuyaş, who is one of Turkey's postmodern authors, has charted the course of a protracted trauma that includes 9/11 among other cataclysms. By creating her protagonist Şirin, Kuyaş tries to show how 9/11 is perceived by Turks, and with the character Bruno, she emphasises the difference between American and Turkish reactions to the September 11 attacks. Mostly within the context of individual trauma, the novel presents how one's trauma can intersect with someone else's upon an encounter. In other words, the novel suggests that one's trauma can reappear upon an interaction with someone else with a traumatic background. Lastly, as the analysis of traumascapes are also analysed throughout the characters from different cities, this study also draws attention to the importance of city life within the historic and iconic background in addition to the contribution of different perspectives.

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