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Derleme Makale / Review Article

REPRESENTATION OF CHINESE AMERICAN IDENTITY IN FAE MYENNE NG'S *BONE*

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Abstract

One of the major concerns of contemporary Chinese American fiction is to conceive the construction of Chinese American identity. Fae Myenne Ng's novel titled *Bone* contributes to the discussion of identity construction through major themes and metaphors. To illustrate the metaphors that are repeatedly used in the novel, in terms of identity construction, this article structures its theoretical framework on the concepts of "consent" and "descent" that were put forward by Werner Sollors. After the clarification of these theoretical concepts regarding their definitions, it will also be exemplified through different examples of how "paper identities", the importance of "consent" and "descent" in family and identity formation, and lastly the significance of the "bone" metaphor in the novel contributes to the representation of Chinese American identity.

Keywords: Identity, Consent, Descent, Family, Immigration

Fae Myenne Ng'in Bone (Kemik) Adlı Romanında Çinli Amerikan Kimliğinin Temsili

Öz

Çağdaş Çinli Amerikalı yazının ilgiyle üzerinde durduğu konulardan biri de Çinli Amerikalı kimlik inşasıdır. Fae Myenne Ng'in *Bone* (*Kemik*) adlı romanı da belli başlı temalar ve metaforlar aracılığı ile kimlik inşası konusuna katkıda bulunmaktadır. Kimlik oluşturma sürecinin nasıl tartışıldığını örneklendirmek üzere, bu makalenin teorik alt yapısı Werner Sollors tarafından ortaya konan "rıza" ve "soy" kavramları üzerine dayandırılacaktır. Teorik kavramların tanımlarının açıklanmasından sonra, "kâğıt kimlikler", "rıza" ve "soy" kavramlarının hem kimlik hem de aile oluşumuna katkıları ve son olarak "kemik"

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metaforunun Çinli Amerikalı kimlik inşasına nasıl katkı sağladıklarını irdelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, Rıza, Soy, Aile, Göç

Introduction

Bone, published in 1993, is Fae Myenne Ng's first piece of fiction, that is set in San Francisco's Chinatown and tells the story of a Chinese American family covering the story of two generations. The members of the older generation consist of Mah and Leon Leong, who immigrated separately to the United States many decades ago. The narration of the novel belongs to Leila, who is the daughter of Mah, a member of the younger generation, Mah's daughter Leila, has two stepsisters, Ona and Nina. At the exposition of the novel, Leila has just returned from a trip to New York, where she married her longtime boyfriend, Mason. She reveals that sometime in the past, Ona committed suicide by jumping off the thirteenth floor of one of the housing projects in Chinatown. In other words, "death" prevails all throughout the novel because of this incident, Leila finds narrating the series of events that took place among the family members. Leila and her family try to make sense of Ona's suicide, which has no apparent cause. The novel has an unconventional structure owing to being told in reverse chronological order. The narrative begins after Ona's suicide and works its way back until it reaches the crucial days immediately after and, finally, before this crucial act that devastates the Leong family. As Leila describes her world and her family history, she reveals the complicated lives led by Chinese immigrants that came to San Francisco. She also displays how the American-born younger generation evolves different attitudes than those of their parents toward their Chinese origins and American culture. The article intends to acknowledge how Chinese American identities are assembled by depicting historical facts such as "paper sons," structuring families either on consent or descent. Lastly, it will be affirmed that the usage of "bones" as a metaphor for descent is an indispensable part of Chinese American identity.

Historical Background

Chinese Americans are the leading group among the Asian race of immigrants in America (Hanna and Batalova); their arrival has significant contribution to the development of America as a nation. Though they have faced severe discrimination because of their race, Chinese Americans have done their best with their hard work to be accepted as Americans. However, the

racism that the first generation faced has continued in a different demeanor in the following generations. The American-born Chinese could not revise their racial features; that is why the Chinese Americans were total foreigners in the prospect of the white Americans.

Chinese immigrants have been neglected in American history as if they have had no influence on making America a developed nation. There is strong evidence to the contrary, however. For example, during the construction of railroads, the Chinese provided the major workforce. (Pandya) However, they were not invited to the opening ceremonies of the railroads. Their efforts have been omitted from history books and as a community, they have been neglected and left out of many of the protective shields that provided a sense of Americanness.

The drive for Leila's narrative suggests that Ona's suicide is the most traumatic incident that caused Leila to narrate this novel to the reader. Memories that had an impact on Ona's suicide uncover the secrets and family memories meanwhile also revealing the informal history of a Chinese American family, trying to adapt themselves from the Chinese culture to the American. The revelation of familial conflicts indicates the cultural clashes this Chinese American family has experienced in the zeitgeist of American culture during the late 20th century. Apparently, it seems as if the novel's primary concern is to question why Ona has committed suicide by the members of the Leong family. In addition to this fact, by focusing on the theme of death, the novel reveals the complex web of familial relations, the difficulties of constructing identities out of "paper," and exploring what it means to be a daughter in the Chinese American culture.

The concept of "paper-sons" emerged, after the Chinese Exclusion Act expired in 1892, Congress passed the Geary Act to suspend Chinese immigration for another ten years. According to this act, Chinese immigrants had to have their certificates of lawful residence. The critical factor about these acts is that they both excluded only the Chinese citizens suitable for manual labor. Merchants, teachers, and students were still eligible for entry, but their quota was limited. As a result, only a limited number of Chinese people were allowed to enter the United States. In addition, a court decision in this period known as the Toy Decision created tension in the diplomatic relations between the United States and China. According to this decision, "Chinese immigrants denied entry to the United States, even if they alleged American citizenship, could no longer gain access to the courts to appeal the decision" (Chang, 2003, p.141).

While the United States kept the number of Chinese immigrants flowing into the country very limited, a natural catastrophe changed the lives of Chinese immigrants. The San Francisco earthquake in 1906 resulted in the destruction of the city, including the major buildings, and the fire that broke out right after the earthquake burned down most of the official documents, including the birth and citizenship records of the immigrants. Since the official records were lost after this catastrophe, the Chinese immigrants had the right to claim U.S. citizenship since there was no record left to show where they were born. The Chinese immigrants also had the option of telling "the American authorities that his wife in China had given birth to a son, where in reality no child had been born, and then sell the legal paperwork of this fictitious son to a young man eager to migrate to the United States" (Chang, 2003, p.146). The chance for the Chinese immigrants to claim that they had fictitious sons in China led to the emergence of a term known as "paper sons."

However, the authorities soon became aware that they were being cheated. To prevent the cases of paper sons, the government held the Chinese in custody at immigration centers where they were interrogated. The American government took strong precautions to reduce the number of Chinese immigrants entering the country. Angel Island was set up to be used as a detention center to cross-examine immigrants and stop their flow into the country. The interrogations were so lengthy and detailed that the immigrants had to stay at Angel Island for days while they were asked many questions about their families, backgrounds, and relatives in China. To prevent the immigration of paper sons, the immigrants had to consistently answer the questions about their family tree, sometimes facing the same questions repeatedly.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article will focus on Werner Sollors' theory of ethnicity which concentrates on two crucial concepts which are "consent" and "descent." Sollors explains the importance of these concepts especially by referring to the fact that American society has been a mixed-race society since the beginning of colonial days. The main contradiction according to Sollors is that while America is a country established by the consent of individuals, descent is the norm that determines the foundation of families. The discourse in America about the formation of families is based exclusively on consent. However, in such a race-conscious society as America, descent is also the factor that directs the creation of families. Consent is valid when the parties of the relationship are both white whereas when a white person is

involved with a non-white to establish a family, the descent becomes of uttermost importance.

Werner Sollors' theory of ethnicity focuses primarily on the concepts of consent and descent. Sollors traces the origins of these concepts back to the roots of American history. The establishment of the United States as a new continent and its break from the traditions and rules of Europe made America a unique continent. What added to the uniqueness of this new nation was the fact that it was in search of new ideas, and new principles to guide it into the future. Therefore, it needed to break away from Europe and its hereditary values, such as old-world hierarchy, and propose another alternative to them. Thus, Europe and rootedness are symbolized by the concept of descent, and the core American values such as "the vision of a new people of diverse nativities united in the fair pursuit of happiness" (Sollors, 1986, p.4) are symbolized with consent. Sollors defines these concepts as follows: "Descent relations are those defined by anthropologists as relations of 'substance' (by blood or nature); consent relations describe those of 'law' or 'marriage'" (Sollors; 1986, p.6). Descent thus stands for stable concepts such as hereditary qualities and consent refers to "our abilities as mature free agents . . . to choose our spouses, our destinies and our political systems" (Sollors, 1986, p.6).

Sollors discusses the uniqueness of American society by comparing it to other mixed-race countries such as Cuba and Brazil. According to Sollors, what makes America different from other mixed-race nations is America's great emphasis on consent. Throughout history, there have been nations that have defined their greatness and power in terms of their single origin, being of one blood. In other words, the descent has been a source of pride for nations because it represents traditions, hereditary values, and a linear continuity of bloodline. However, such perspectives do not foresee the rise of mixed-race relationships and continue to believe in the purity of the assumed blood which stereotypically refers to whiteness. Meanwhile, consent relations inevitably move towards mixed-race relationships and while explaining his argument, Sollors differentiates between race and ethnicity; according to Sollors, race, "while sometimes facilitating external identification, is merely one aspect of ethnicity" (Sollors, 1986, p.36). In discussing a racially distinguishable group such as the Chinese in America, the nature of relations between race and ethnicity and consent and descent takes a particularly revealing meaning.

To illustrate the importance of consent and descent in American culture, Sollors refers to the term melting pot and Israel Zangwill's play titled *The Melting Pot*. Sollors states that "More than any social or political theory, the

rhetoric of Zangwill's play shaped American discourse on immigration and ethnicity." (Sollors, 1986, p.66). Sollors states that "On the level of characters, hardness is related to the past and the boundaries of *descent*: under the dispensation of 'hardness' people are defined by the call of the blood" (Sollors, 1986, p.69). From the way Zangwill structures his play he believes that "American ideals are not transmitted by descent but have to be embraced afresh, even if that requires opposing the actual descendants of American founding fathers" (Sollors, 1986, p.70).

Not surprisingly, in Zangwill's play, both protagonists who represent consent are white. If one of the lovers had been a non-white person, then this relationship would not have been idealized. The consent of individuals is only applicable to relationships in which both parties are white. What makes a relationship of consent problematic is when a white person is in a relationship with a person from a different race. The problem is that the "purity" of the white race falls into danger. It is debatable whether a piece of fiction depicting a love relationship between a white and non-white person would, "sacralize loving consent as the abolition of prejudices of descent" (Sollors, 1986, p.72) as in the case of the lovers in Zangwill's play. The phrase "melting pot" represents an idealized American nation living in peace with people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a matter of fact, in a mixed-race relationship when one of the individuals is white, this means that the idealistic, popular image of the "melting pot" is not what it seems to be.

Involuntary descent relations are associated with blood whereas consent relations are considered a matter of choice and are symbolized by sexual intercourse. In America, the importance attached to consent can be traced back to some of the founding texts of American civilization, for instance, "The Declaration of Independence." This document not only declares the independence of a nation but also announces the principles of the newly established nation. Among these principles "consent" holds a crucial place in the explanation of the power that people have in determining the future of their nation:

> *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. (Jefferson, 1776, p.129)*

Defining citizenship in terms of a social contract among consenting individuals, the "Declaration of Independence" identifies national identity with an order of law and consent. Ethnic identity, on the other hand, is related to blood, nature, and consent. "American identity may take the place of a relationship 'in law' (like 'husband, wife, step-, -in-law, etc.') and 'by blood' ('father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, etc.')" (Sollors, 1986, p.151). Horace Kallen explains "descent" as a stable and binding concept in his article titled "Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality." He states that "Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent: they cannot change their grandfathers" (Kallen, 1996, p.91). Kallen perceives "grandfathers" as representative of blood whereas "wives" are defined by law. American identity is often imagined as the act of making a conscious choice symbolized by consent, as love and marriage, and ethnicity as unchallengeable ancestry and descent. The clash between consent and descent increases as new immigrants arrive in the United States. With the arrival of new immigrants, the successors of the founding fathers were associated with lines of descent; whereas the newly arrived immigrants were with consent through which they would be a part of American society:

In the world of Zangwill's *Melting Pot*, the descent is secular and temporal, consent is sacred and eternal. It follows logically that the high priests of the cult of consent must be immigrants whose line of descent has been disrupted—like that of the first New England settlers, whose tradition of disruption and love is revitalized by the newcomers. . . . Immigrants could thus be portrayed as cultural newlyweds, more enthusiastically and loyally in love with the country of their choice than citizens-by-descent. (Sollors, 1896, p.74)

Sollors develops his argument by creating a parallelism between the concept of citizenship and a love relationship based on consent. For a relationship defined by consent, he uses the term romantic relationship in which he means that personal choice governs rather than descent. He further states that "the belief in romantic love as the basis for marriage is clearly a cultural norm in America" (Sollors; 1986, p.114). Consent-based relationships are not problematic as long as it is a white-white relationships. The examples that Sollors provide are not only between the people of the white race. Throughout American history, the relationship between a white and a non-white person has received societal approval as long as the white party, the privileged side approved it. However, if the white parents did not give their consent to a mixed-race relationship, then, that would be counted as a force of assimilation or stain the white race. Hence, the idea that America is based on the ideal of consent

and the free will of individuals proves to be no more than mere lip service. In practice, however, it is obvious that consent-based mixed-race relationships are the privilege of white people only.

In conclusion, Werner Sollors structures his theory of American ethnicity on the concepts of consent and descent. The establishment of the United States as a free country is based on the consent of the people as it has been stated in the Declaration of Independence. From Sollors' point of view, consent is a characteristic that makes America a unique nation among other mixed-race countries. The founding of America as a new nation was based on ideals such as freedom, opportunity, and a break from traditions. All these values demonstrate that the seeds of America are based on consent. However, the idea that America will be a melting-pot nation has not become proven in time. Consent relations describe relations of law or marriage, emphasizing the importance of personal choice, rebirth, and regeneration with romantic love and marriage. Descent relations derive from blood or nature, emphasizing the old world, place of birth, and heredity. Descent is stable and unchangeable.

Major Depictions of Chinese American Identity in *Bone*

To begin with the issue of "paper" identities, the father of this family, Leon Leong, is the character that is the most striking example of what it means to construct an identity for himself out of paper. Throughout the novel, the reader traces how difficult it is for a Chinese man to create a fictitious identity just out of lies. As Szmanko states, "…paper is a tool of searching for the truth, of commemoration, communication, and legitimization" (Szmanko, 2018, p.138). It is important to note that Leon is the character in the novel that intends to go back to China one day, and for this reason, he keeps a stack of money which he calls the "Going-Back to China fund" (Ng, 1993, p.6). Leon comes to America when he was fifteen years old, however, the paper documents state that he was eighteen years old at the year of his arrival. This is how Leon's paper identity was created on his way to America by a man whom he calls (Granpa Leon) You Thin. "On the long voyage they couched each other on their paper histories: Leon was the fourth son of a farmworker in the Sacramento valley, his mother had bound fee, her family was from Hoiping" (Ng, 1993, p.9).

This issue of a "paper" identity is so crucial that, through different instances, we find out that Leon struggles with being a paper son. For example, Leon consistently got his actual and paper birthdates mixed up; "he has never given the same birthdate twice. Oldtimer logic: If you don't tell the truth, you'll never be caught in a lie." (Ng, 1993, p.55). Aside from the fact that he had been lying for nearly fifty years, a confession of illegal entry would bring him

naturalization papers now, However, since Leon did not trust the government, he was caught in his lie "the laws that excluded him now held him captive" (Ng, 1993, p.57). Leon is a man who cannot throw away papers, any paper is precious to him, and his stepdaughter depicts him as a "collector" because he is a man who is looking for something that he can anchor to. From Leila, the narrator's point of view, her stepfather "was right to save everything. For a paper son, paper is blood. I am the stepdaughter of a paper son and I've inherited this whole suitcase of lies. All of it is mine. All I have are those memories, and I want to remember them all" (Ng, 1993, p.61).

When Leila advised Leon to get a social security number, the interviewer asked him why he has so many different dates of birth. "Did he have a passport? A birth certificate? A driver's license?" (Ng, 1993, p.56). As an official American citizen eligible for benefits, this request for proof of identity infuriates Leon, but not because he objects to the state-regulated procedures for legitimization. After all, he keeps a suitcase full of documents; he saves every letter and every certificate, admitting that "paper is more precious than blood" (Ng, 1993, p.9). Leon reacts angrily to the polite young man because the papers that allowed him into the United States have now been challenged despite strict immigration laws. As Leila observes, when the social security office does not accept Leon's application, "[i]t was as if all the years of work didn't count" (Ng, 1993, p.55). The "work" Leila refers to here is not only the wage labor from which Leon will now retire but the work he has put into constructing an authentic Chinese American identity." (Kim, 1999, p.43) As he cannot claim to have an authentic Chinese American identity, he blames America for making big promises and breaking every one of them.

> *Where was the good job he'd heard about as a young man? Where was the successful business? He'd kept his end of the bargain: he'd worked hard. Two jobs, three Day and night. Overtime. Assistant laundry presser. Prep cook. Busboy. Waiter. Porter. But where was his happiness? 'America,' he ranted, 'this lie of a country." (Ng, 1993, p.103).*

As Thomas Kim indicates in his article, "Leila and her stepfather Leon, in particular, must work within legal, political, and familial discourses to establish their identities, their 'ancestry,' and their cultural place in America, all of which are subject to contingency, and all of which are contested." (Kim, 1999, p.42). Consequently "paper" becomes a symbol of all the familial attachment that they can feel as a family. Although their relationship is not

biological “Paper allows Leila to map the grave of her grandfather and paper is her pass to the cemetery that is off-limits to strangers” (Szmanko, 2018, p.133). Aside from providing Leon a legal status in the United States, all the papers he has collected in time also make him remember who he really is in American society. For instance, he keeps all the documents showing that he has been rejected for various job opportunities in the United States. This consistent documentation of rejection also helps him remember his powerful state of endurance in times of difficulty.

Another crucial metaphor in the novel’s narration that emphasizes the need of an individual is the necessity of a family that they can anchor to. All the events, such as the investigation of Ona’s death, the breakup of the mother and father, and the other sister’s suffering masked by apparent indifference, are connected to the dichotomy between consent and descent, as Werner Sollors calls it. “The ruptures in the Leong family force the characters to contend with questions of moral and legal accountability, leading to critiques of their heritage and individual identities.” (Kim, 1999, p.42)

According to Sollors, the main contradiction is that while America is a country established by the consent of individuals, the descent is the norm that determines the foundation of families. The discourse in America about the formation of families is based exclusively on consent. Sollors defines these concepts as follows: “Descent relations are those defined by anthropologists as relations of ‘substance’ (by blood or nature); consent relations describe those of ‘law’ or ‘marriage’” (Sollors, 1986, p.6). Descent thus stands for stable concepts such as hereditary qualities, and consent refers to “our abilities as mature free agents . . . to choose our spouses, our destinies, and our political systems” (Sollors, 1986, p.6). In other words, the descent has been a source of pride for nations because it represents traditions, hereditary values, and a linear continuity of bloodline.

One of the reasons why the members of the Leong family are not able to construct their subjectivity in the American setting is also connected to these concepts. Although the Chinese heritage and traditions are heavily dependent upon descent, the composition of this family heavily relies on consent. For instance, although Leila’s biological father is not Leo, he is the first one that she wants to tell that she got married to a man named Mason. “He’s not my real father, but he’s the one who’s been there for me. Like he always told me, it’s time that makes a family, not just blood” (Ng, 1993, p.3). The clash between what it means to be a family connected by bloodline or descent is one of the main debates surrounding the family. Mah is a Chinese woman who puts

pressure on both of her daughters that they should celebrate their marriage with a Banquet, following the Chinese traditions and considering her daughter Nina as also a kind of failure because she is not married and had an abortion. While she oppresses her daughters for not being obedient to Chinese traditions, we cannot consider her a woman who is strongly submissive to her Chinese heritage. Her daughter Leila narrates, "She married my father for a thrill and Leon for convenience" (Ng,1993, p.12). Also, later in the novel, Leila states that Mah married Leon for the convenience of the green card, and Leon did not mind. Leila depicts the scene in which Mah tells her that she has decided to marry Leon: "'He'll make a suitable husband,' she said. 'One, he's got his papers; two, he works at sea. He'll be away a lot. It'll be just you and me. Like now. I won't have to work so hard; we can take it a little easier.'" (Ng, 1993, p.184).

In the marriage between Mah and Leon, there is no sense of romantic love, the beginning of their marriage seems more like a partnership rather than a marriage based on love. At the end of this conversation, Leila asks why she is getting married to Leon, and Mah answers "He asked me" (Ng, 1993, p.185), meaning that he was the first to propose so that it could have been somebody else that she married. Although Mah criticizes her daughters for not setting a proper example in the Chinese American community, she is also very far from setting a proper example for her daughters. At some point in the novel, Leila reveals how disappointed she is with her mother: "I wanted to say: I didn't marry in shame. I didn't marry like you. Your marriages are not my fault. Don't blame me" (Ng, 1993, p.23). Leila is a second-generation Chinese American, different from her mother's expectations, who wants to construct her marriage on consent. "I wanted a marriage of choice. I wanted this marriage to be for me" (Ng, 1993, p.18). Moreover, in a conversation between Nina and Leila, Nina advises that Leila should instantly marry Mason while in New York without informing the family members because she does not have to carry such an obligation. Consequently, the novel's narration contributes to the revolt against traditional expectations. Kim states in his article:

> *Flashbacks-within-flashbacks disturb the traditional marriage plot chronology of courtship-engagement-wedding so that Mason and Leila are not married, the reader always already knows that they are. The legal status of marriage is thus revealed to be a narrative/performative production." (Kim, 1999, p.54).*

Their parents' marriage "was a marriage of toil – of toiling together. The idea was that the next generation would marry for love" (Ng, 1996, p.33). Like Mah's reaction concerning marriage and following traditions, Leong's reaction to the relationship between her daughter Ona and his business partner's son Osvaldo is quite similar. He strongly opposes this relationship and even condemns her for not being her daughter anymore. The relationship between Ona and Osvaldo was also a relationship of consent. Therefore, Leon tells Ona to leave the house, and she prefers to stay with Osvaldo at that time. The main reason why Leong does not want her daughter to be with Osvaldo is that the business that they have established together has failed, and he is not able to claim his legal rights because there was no legal agreement on paper between the two parties.

The novel's last but most striking metaphor for revealing how Chinese American identities are constructed can be found in the grand metaphor of bone that gives the novel its title. In an interview with Ng, she comments on where this title comes from as follows:

> *Among the pioneer generation of Chinese immigrants, the worlds of work and family were separate. America was "work" and China was "home". The ritual of sending our ancestors' bones back home to China was one that moved me. … I thought bone was the best metaphor to speak about the enduring quality of the immigrant spirit. The book is called "Bone" to revere the old timers' tradition of sending their bones back to China. (Shaw, 1993, p.8)*

The word "bone" is embedded in the novel through its various representations. The most prominent is how the metaphor of bone is connected to the family's construction of an identity, a decent line that they can anchor to. Bone is the most obvious entity that makes the family members somehow hold on to each other: "Blood and bones. The oldtimers believed that the blood came from the mother and the bones from the father. (Ng, 1993, p.104). Even the word itself is enough for Leila to think of her memories, and she is also amazed by how many memories there can be in one word. The diversity of memories that she can remember starts when her mother cooks a pigeon that she and her sister have been looking after. In a very grotesque manner, after the kids are done eating, the mother preserves the bones for herself because she thinks that they are the most delicious part as she says, "Bones are sweeter than you know" (Ng, 1993, p.31)

A more crucial reason lies in the fact that from Leon's point of view, there is a bad spell over the family because he could not send Granpa Leong's bones back to China. He blames himself for the death of his daughter Ona and connects this issue of not being able to send back his bones with the suicide of Ona and all of the other failures he has gone through, such as losing his job and losing the partnership in the laundry business. He blames the bones for everything terrible that has happened: "The misplaced grave, the forgotten bones. Leon gave those power, believed they were the bad luck that stirred Ona's destiny. There was no way to talk about it." (Ng, 1993, p.88). Although they do not achieve to send back the bones to China, through Leila's narration, the family finds a symbol of descent that they can anchor to. As Szmanko states in her article:

> *In American ethnic literature, 'bone' often stands for the ethnic, cultural core, a kind of essence. Instead of focusing on the essentiality of 'bone,' Ng chooses to accentuate its spiritual, transcendent nature giving 'bone' a semblance of the 'oversoul' encompassing all immigrants. (Szmanko, 2018, p.138)*

Conclusion

Finally, through various examples from the novel, it has been revealed that bones are the grand metaphor that depicts a line of descent in Sollors's terminology, in which different generations of Chinese Americans that are not biologically connected try to create and preserve a line of descent. As such, bone as a hard, durable material stands in sharp contrast to paper, which is flimsy, immaterial, and easily destroyed, yet more prominent in gaining access to a new and foreign host culture. So, the two metaphors that run parallel throughout the novel underline the fact that cultural attachment is secured through flimsy paper whereas true, deep cultural belonging is established through hard, durable bones.

To conclude, this article attempted to investigate the process of identity construction mainly through three different metaphors of a Chinese American family as represented in Fae Myenne Ng's novel *Bone*. According to Gee, "Leila's character is such a dynamic example of hybridity in its resistance to stereotypes that it also helps us question fixed categories of cultural identity" (Gee, 2004, p.139). All in all, we may infer that the narration of Leila informs us of a Chinese American consciousness and to decipher the "meaning" or comprehend the dynamics of an ethnic space, as well as to examine identity

formation through the metaphor of paper, consent versus descent, and lastly bones.

Çıkar Çatışması Bildirimi: *Yazar, çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.*

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