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BECOMING A WOMAN IN A CONSUMER SOCIETY: *TANTE ROSA* AND "TO ROOM NINETEEN"

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyse two works of literature, "To Room Nineteen," by Doris Lessing, and *Tante Rosa*, by Sevgi Soysal; our objective is to read these texts as cases that illustrate the roles of ideal wifehood and motherhood, and to identify the role of the capitalist consumer culture in shaping these identities. Although they are the products of different cultures, the two texts have a lot in common: both were written in the same decade and both portray the social and economic conditions of the period. Besides, the texts depict the female protagonists' existence under the strain of consumerism as a form of struggle, because they feel they do not belong to the consumer culture which they have been born into. They search for meaning and identities other than those which are assigned by this culture of consumerism. Both texts portray the dilemmas and struggles of the authors, as well. The primary objective of this study is to identify the roles of the ideal wife and the ideal mother imposed by modern consumer culture. Taking these literary texts as cases in point, this study also attempts to find out how women try to cope with the strains of fulfilling these roles.

Keywords: Sevgi Soysal, Doris Lessing, *Tante Rosa*, "To Room Nineteen," consumer culture, woman, ideal wife, ideal mother

TÜKETİM TOPLUMUNDA KADIN OLMAK: *TANTE ROSA* VE "ON DOKUZUNCU ODAYA"

ÖZ: Bu çalışma, Doris Lessing'in "On Dokuzuncu Odaya" ve Sevgi Soysal'ın *Tante Rosa* adlı eserlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır; amacımız bu eserleri ideal eş ve annelik kimliklerini tanımlayan örnekler olarak ele alıp, kapitalist tüketim kültürünün bu kimlikleri şekillendirmedeki rolünü incelemektir. Eserler farklı kültürlerin ürünü olsa da pek çok ortak özelliğe sahiptir: her iki metin de aynı dönemde yazılmıştır ve her ikisi de dönemin toplumsal ve ekonomik koşullarını yansıtmaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, metinler kadın kahramanların

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varoluşlarını tüketim baskısı altında verilen bir mücadele olarak aktarmaktadır; zira kendilerini, içine doğdukları tüketim toplumuna ait hissetmemektedirler. Bu tüketim toplumunun kendilerine atfettikleri dışında, farklı kimlik ve anlamların arayışına girerler. Her iki eser aynı zamanda yazarlarının çıkmazlarını ve mücadelelerini de yansıtır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı söz konusu eserlerden yola çıkarak modern tüketim kültürünün dayattığı ideal eş ve ideal anne rollerini tanımlamaktır; çalışma buna ek olarak, eserler ışığında kadınların bu rolleri yerine getirmeleri konusundaki baskıya karşı hangi savunma mekanizmalarını geliştirdiklerini bulmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sevgi Soysal, Doris Lessing, *Tante Rosa*, "On Dokuzuncu Odaya," tüketim kültürü, kadın, ideal eş, ideal anne

1. Introduction

Modern consumer culture imposes various pressures on the individual, and gender roles are a particular instance. It attributes certain roles to men and women, and delineates these roles according to the needs of the culture of which they are members. In his discussion of the society's role in shaping individual identities, Durkheim states, "*One of the distinctive attributes of a woman today, that of gentleness, does not originally appear to have been characteristic of her.*"[1] Similarly, Giddens refers to the "*creation of the home*" and "*invention of motherhood*,"[2] and argues that "*[i]dealisation of the mother was one strand in the modern construction of motherhood.*"[3] Such identities become functional depending on the nature of the roles a subject assumes in a specific culture. From the perspective of women, consumer culture assigns particular meanings to the concepts of wife and mother, and constructs the notion of the ideal for each of these roles. The idealised roles assume different meanings in different contexts although they seemingly connote stable meanings.

This study aims to compare two works of literature; "To Room Nineteen,"[4] by Doris Lessing, and *Tante Rosa*,[5] by Sevgi Soysal. Our objective is to analyse these texts as cases which illustrate the roles of ideal wifehood and motherhood, and to identify the role of capitalist consumer culture in shaping these roles. Although they were written by female authors from different cultures (British and Turkish, respectively), the two texts have a lot in

[1] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, Trans. W. D. Halls, Macmillan, London, 1994, p. 19.
[2] Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Stanford UP, Stanford, 1992, p. 42.
[3] Anthony Giddens, ibid., p. 42.
[4] Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen", Gen. ed. M. H. Abrams, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, V. 2, 6th ed., Norton, New York, 1993.
[5] Sevgi Soysal, *Tante Rosa*, İletişim, İstanbul, 1993.

common. They were written in the same decade, and both portray the social and economic conditions of the period as well as the place of women in consumer culture. Both texts depict what Bordo describes as the feminine ideal of the 1950s and 1960s:

> *The 1950s and early 1960s … was a period of reassertion of domesticity and dependency as the feminine ideal…. The reigning ideology of femininity, so well described by Betty Friedan and perfectly captured in the movies and television shows of the era, was childlike, nonassertive, helpless without a man, 'content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home'*[6]

The idealisation of the roles of wifehood and motherhood indicates the commodification of these identities, because they emerge as concomitants of consumerism. The female protagonists of both texts are expected to fit in these roles. In order to be ideal wives and mothers, they have to be dedicated consumers and conform to the expectations of the market; they have to collect and consume household goods, buy a "*caravanserai*,"[7] meet the endless needs of the house, conform to the norms of beauty, and construct identities by means of this consumption, eventually turning themselves into commodities. Their boundaries of existence, therefore, are determined by societies which have adopted the values of consumerism. Fırat, Kutucuoğlu, Arıkan Saltık and Tunçel summarise the basic features of consumer culture as "*the transformation of needs to desires, utilitarian/hedonic needs-values, commodity fetishism, conspicuous leisure and consumption, cultural values, aestheticization, alienation, differentiation and speed.*"[8] These features along with their influence on individuals are portrayed through the protagonists of the two texts. They depict the existence of the protagonists as a form of struggle, because they feel they do not belong to the consumer culture which they have been born into. They search for meaning and identities other than those which are assigned by this culture of consumerism.

Besides the portrayal of the strain that consumer culture inposes on women in modern societies, both texts have several motifs and metaphors in common, as well. Focusing on these shared characteristics, themes, and metaphors, this study attempts to give an analysis of the texts written by the two female authors who came from different cultural and literary backgrounds. The primary objectives of this study, therefore, are to identify the roles of the ideal

[6] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, p. 170.
[7] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2302.
[8] Aytekin Fırat, Kemal Y. Kutucuoğlu, Işıl Arıkan Saltık and Özgür Tunçel, "Consumption, Consumer Culture and Consumer Society", *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, V. XIII, Issue 1, 2013, p. 189.

wife and ideal mother imposed by the modern culture, and to try to find out how modern consumer culture imposes the roles of ideal wifehood and motherhood on the subject. To accomplish this, we have chosen the two literary works as mediums which portray the roles in question.

The protagonist of "To Room Nineteen," Susan, is a woman who quits work when she gets married and becomes the mother of four children. She and her husband are perceived as the perfect couple, and initially she undertakes the role imposed by consumerist ideology willingly: "*Both Susan and Matthew had moments of thinking so, of looking in secret disbelief at this thing they had created: marriage, four children, big house, garden, charwomen, friends, cars.*"[9] Although she does not at first realise that she follows the patterns of behaviour set by consumer culture, she eventually finds herself enmeshed in it. Similarly, Soysal's novella takes as its subject Tante Rosa's growth in such a culture, and depicts her process of identity construction from childhood to old age. Rosa, who defines marriage as "*goods accumulated together*" ("*Evlilik birlikte edinilmiş eşyalardı*"),[10],[11] does eventually develop strategies for survival in this culture. These strategies, however, are rendered in an ironic tone since they are mostly self-annulling ones.

As texts written shortly before the emergence of second wave feminism, the two works reflect the *Zeitgeist*. Both texts portray the status of women in a society shaped by consumerism. They also depict the roles attributed to women along with the socio-economic context which has formed these roles. Both Susan and Rosa question the roles which consumer culture imposes on them from within this culture. Both characters strive to resist this constricting framework, and they try to undermine it. The outcome of their struggle, however, is not the same for the two characters. Whereas Rosa eventually develops strategies of resistance, Susan fails in her attempt. Rosa's strategies of resistance turn her into a parody of this constricting framework; Susan, on the other hand, tries to develop a passive form of resistance, and attempts to avoid being involved in this structure altogether. Both characters thus reveal the overarching nature of the culture in question. To understand these women, it is necessary to refer briefly to the women's liberation movement. Although feminist criticism is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to refer to the outstanding figures connected to second wave feminism, because the texts analysed in this study were written in the atmosphere which gave rise to this phase of the movement; also the female characters of both texts represent

[9] D. Lessing, ibid., pp. 2302-3.
[10] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 73.
[11] All translations from Turkish are by Ansı Sev Ateş.

attitudes and notions closely related to it. Writing about women, it is not possible or helpful to exclude the perspective of feminist inquiry while analysing these literary texts; therefore, this study aims to read them without either being confined to the discourse of feminism, or excluding it. In the below section we will briefly discuss the feminist movement to provide background information to understand the two literary works.

2. The History of Women's Struggle for Equality

When Mary Wollstonecraft wrote one of the most important early feminist treatises, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in 1792, she set the basic tenets of a movement which would take a more concrete form in the late 1800s. Women started to gain awareness of their rights in society and eventually began to address their problems, which culminated into a social movement. Today this struggle is usually separated into three phases as first, second, and third wave feminism.

Enfranchisement was the most important achievement of first wave feminism; yet it was only a step in women's struggle for rights and equality. Despite the enfranchisement, women were still not regarded as equals. One of the iconic figures that gave voice to the plight of women during this period was Simone de Beauvoir. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir published her ground-breaking study, *The Second Sex*, in which she discussed the arbitrary rules and institutions that attribute an inferior status to women, and identified the several ways in which women are represented as the other. In her oft-quoted statement, "*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,*"[12] she claims that the idea of womanhood is a social construct created and maintained by the whole patriarchal order. Simone de Beauvoir further asserts that certain roles are imposed on the female subject by this structure:

> *No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other.*[13]

Beauvoir maintains that woman is defined as an inferior being whose existence is contingent on that of man. Woman thus turns into a point of reference by means of which man constitutes his identity.

[12] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Trans. and Ed. Howard Madison Parshley, Jonathan Cape, London, 1956, p. 273.
[13] S. de Beauvoir, ibid., p. 273.

Beauvoir discusses the roles attributed to women as well as the institutions such as the family, education, and religion, which shape these roles. Among the most important of these is marriage and, by implication, the family. She emphasises the significance of marriage for the continuation of the present structure, and argues that "*[w]oman is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home - that is to say, to immanence.*"[14] She emphasises that the role of wifehood constitutes a constricting framework for women, and that there are no other choices offered to them. Beauvoir's work, which discusses the aspects of womanhood in a broad historical and social context, was a ground-breaking text since it raised consciousness and set the basic tenets of second wave feminism. It is no coincidence that the protagonists of the two texts analysed in this study experience and illustrate the existential struggle that Beauvoir extensively describes in her work.

3. Domestic Labour, Work Life, and the Female Subject

Although the experiences and struggles of women in history have not been uniform and homogeneous, there were critical moments that contributed to the progress of their cause. The 1960s were such a turning-point since this was the decade when gender roles began to be widely questioned. The birth control pill was eventually legalised in 1961 for married women in England, and in 1965 in the US. Likewise, abortion would become legal in England in 1967; and in 1973 in the US. As a result of these regulations, women started to gain rights which let them have a say about their body.

Despite these regulations, however, the conventional ideas about womanhood did not undergo a drastic change, because their roles were constantly defined and redefined by consumerist ideology, and the stereotypical roles attributed to them were even more accentuated within the confines of this system. The role of the middle-class housewife, for instance, was made marketable under the guise of professionalism. This restructuring of domestic labour is depicted by Whelehan as follows:

> *Domestic labour was construed in capitalist terms; the housewife of the 1950s and 1960s was constructed and mythologized as a competent businesswoman surrounded by a wealth of labour-saving devices, so that housewifery could be ideologically packaged as a skilled, highly technologized industry of its own.*[15]

These strategies both helped strengthen the stereotypical roles, and reinforced women's role as active subjects who perpetuated the culture of

[14] S. de Beauvoir, ibid., p. 419.
[15] Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism.'* Edinburgh UP, Edinburgh, 2005, p. 7.

consumerism. Despite the fact that the world of the wife was limited to the boundaries of the home, she was defined as the primary agent of consumer culture.

Those who had a career in the 1960s, on the other hand, were fewer in number, and what work life demanded from and offered to them was in conflict with the demands of domestic life. Therefore, they had trouble creating a balance between home and work. A great majority of them quit work when they had children. Besides, the workplace was still another domain where women had to struggle for equality. As Whelehan points out, "*[c]areer women who eschewed the path of maternity and matrimony confronted the inequalities of a labour market where they were neither properly paid for doing the same work as men nor rewarded with promotion to senior positions for showing equal competence*."[16] It was a consequence of such discrepancies that liberal feminists started protesting against the inequality in employment, and demanded "equal pay for equal work," trying to secure their rights in an increasingly competitive, consumeristic environment, and these demands eventually culminated into second wave feminism.

The works which this study attempts to analyse were written in this atmosphere of demand for change. Both "To Room Nineteen" and *Tante Rosa* reflect on the social and economic structure by portraying characters that try to construct lives independent of the values shaped by consumer capitalism. The protagonists of both texts reflect the struggles of individuals who try to attribute meaning to their existence from within the boundaries of consumer culture. In both texts, widely-shared, popularized convictions and prejudices initially shape the perspectives of the protagonists; in other words, it is the culture of consumerism which creates their identities and lives. It is again this culture that they react to and try to develop coping strategies against.

4. Women and Consumer Capitalism

Consumption of goods is the basic constituent of consumer capitalism, yet it is much more than a form of consumption driven by needs. In a consumerist culture, consumption becomes a language through which individuals participate in a specific system. Baudrillard defines this system as follows:

> *The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of differentiated goods and signs/objects today constitute our language, our code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses. Such is the structure of*

[16] I. Whelehan, ibid., p. 7.

consumption, its language [langue], by comparison with which individual needs and pleasures [jouissances] are merely speech effects.[17]

Baudrillard highlights the complex nature of the act of consumption, and delineates the overarching influence of the system of signs constructed by means of consumption. Women's relationship to this consumer culture is rather complex and has been examined from diverse perspectives. How women are situated in consumer society depends on a number of factors. What is noteworthy is that women have predominantly been perceived as the passive agents of the culture of consumption. As highlighted by de Grazia:

Feminist inquiry has identified commercial culture as an especially totalizing and exploitative force, to which women are more vulnerable than men because of their subordinate social, economic, and cultural position and because of the patriarchal nature of the organization and the semiotics of mass consumption.[18]

It may be inferred, therefore, that there are various issues at play, and women's situation cannot be evaluated in a vacuum. Gender is one of the significant factors that determine the role of the subject within consumer society. Yet, other factors also contribute to the process of locating subjects within this particular structure. Class, among others, is equally significant in the construction of the perception of women as passive agents of consumption.

In the 1960s, it was predominantly middle-class women who demanded and initiated change. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a deeply influential study which highlighted the link between the economic and social conditions and the restrictions imposed on the basis of sex:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night - she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question - 'Is this all?'[19]

[17] Jean Baudrillard, *The Culture of Consumption: Myths and Structures*, Trans. Chris Turner, Sage, London, 1998, p. 79-80.
[18] Victoria de Grazia, "Introduction", Eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p. 7.
[19] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Dell, New York, 1979, p. 11.

Although Friedan focused on the condition of the middle-class women in the United States, she delineated the lives of middle-class women in Western Europe, as well. As Friedan pointed out, limitations were what defined their lives. They were surrounded by the symbolic images of consumption, and their roles were made marketable and presented under the guise of the ideal. In a sense, they were confined to these idealised roles, and certain models of consumption shaped their lives.

The protagonists of the texts studied in this paper are also middle-class women, and both epitomise the situation of the female consumerist of the 1960s. The protagonist of "To Room Nineteen" is a woman whose life choices are determined by this environment. The story begins with the narrator's statement that the Rawlings' marriage has failed. In the first sentence the narrator announces, "*This is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: the Rawlings' marriage was grounded in intelligence.*"[20] The fact that the initial focus of the story is the failure of their marriage underscores the centrality of failure in an ironic and detached tone, a tone which shapes the reader's understanding of the whole text. Besides, the statement defines marriage as an area of competition which is evaluated either as success or failure; from the very beginning, marriage is portrayed as an area of contestation and a form of investment where several forces are at play. It may be argued that their marriage portrays the principles of McDonaldization, "*efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control,*"[21] at work. The attributes of economic relationships become the attributes of human relationships, too, and profit becomes the driving force.

In line with this definition of marriage, Susan is portrayed as a "calculating agent," trying to optimise her profit. The narrator states that "*[a] good many of their friends had married young, and now (they felt) probably regretted lost opportunities; while others, still unmarried, seemed to them arid, self-doubting, and likely to make desperate or romantic marriages.*"[22] Rather ironically, marriage is envisioned like an act of transaction; and the ideas of benefit and gain are conveyed along with a sense of forfeiture and loss. Marriage is thus defined in reference to the values of consumer capitalism. It is important to note that this failure is not defined in gendered terms; the narrator describes this failure as a shared experience of the wife and the husband.

[20] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2301.
[21] George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*: *Into the Digital Age*, Sage, 9th ed., Los Angeles, 2019, p. 20.
[22] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2301.

Tante Rosa, like "To Room Nineteen," begins with a chapter that announces failure: "*Tante Rosa could not become an equestrian performer*" ("*Tante Rosa at cambazı olamadı*").[23] The idea becomes a shared theme, and is accentuated throughout both texts. In *Tante Rosa*, the protagonist's aspirations and failures highlight the struggle that she faces. When she is eleven, Rosa sees an image showing Queen Victoria in cavalry uniform in a magazine titled *Sizlerle Başbaşa* [*Tête-à-tête with You*]. The caption under the photo describes the 18-year-old Victoria as a figure of authority, who, "*in a fashionable military hat, spurred boots, and a dress designed like a military uniform, [inspected the Household Cavalry Regiment and,] as always, won the hearts of her citizens and of the cavalry regiment.*" ("*Sayın kraliçe teftiş sırasında günün modası olan asker şapkası, mahmuzlu çizmeler ve üniforma biçimi elbisesiyle her zamanki gibi vatandaşlarının ve süvari birliğinin gönüllerini fethetti*").[24] The anachronistic image of young Victoria in a fashionable costume brings together several ideals in Rosa's imagination as it is the image of a powerful monarch, loved and supported by all. This image functions at several levels: It creates a role model for Rosa, and it suggests what it takes to be like this role model. These ideas are communicated through the elements of consumption presented in the image since consumer society constructs itself and formulates the identity of the subject through these images. As Hobsbawm puts it:

> *This fashion nevertheless recognized that the triumph of the mass market was, in some profound ways, based on satisfying the spiritual as well as the material needs of consumers, a fact of which advertising agencies had long been vaguely aware when they geared their campaigns to selling 'not the steak but the sizzle,' not soap but the dream of beauty, not tins of soup but family happiness.*[25]

The image is implicitly subverted, however, by the fact that the long-dead Queen is described using the military symbols of power which belong to a strictly male world; even more paradoxically, it is a female child, Rosa, who becomes the direct target of this image. Seemingly conflicting forces are brought together in this process of consumption; the image of the popular Queen depicted in a fashionable dress modelled on military uniform unites the power of the monarch with that of the military, and is presented to Rosa, who is led to believe that this power and popularity can in the future be achieved

[23] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 15.
[24] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 15.
[25] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, Abacus, London, 1995, p. 514.

by means of accumulation and consumption of the goods presented in the image.

The text thus emphasises the contrast between two different states, the imagined and the real, from the very beginning. Imagination runs parallel to reality throughout *Tante Rosa*, highlighting Rosa's failure or, rather, refusal, to grasp the reality at each stage of her life. Özdemir reads the novel as a parody of the *Bildungsroman*, and maintains that Rosa refuses to adhere to the values commonly adopted by other members of the society.[26] She becomes an outsider at every stage of her life because of her refusal to adopt these values. Her failure, however, does not reside only in her refusal of the norms. Her illusions created by this culture and her mostly conscious willingness to embrace these illusions also pave the way for this failure. She is encouraged by modern consumer culture to consume goods, and this culture presents the act of consumption as the precondition of constructing an identity. Just like that of Susan, her case may be defined as "*a failure in intelligence.*" In both instances, the protagonists are deluded by the illusions surrounding them.

In *Tante Rosa*, the most immediate symbol of the incongruity between Rosa's perspective and the reality is the magazine, *Sizlerle Başbaşa*. The magazine is a repository of stock characters and stories which either have a cathartic effect on the reader or feed their illusions. Itself an object of consumption, the magazine sells dreams which are in a constant state of deferral. The inexhaustible ideals of consumer culture are not attainable, but always insist on their possibility. In this sense, the magazine is a symbolic representation of the hegemony of consumerism, and portrays the multi-layered, complex nature of this culture. Karakaşlı argues that the magazine is a leitmotif that imposes unity on the loosely-structured text.[27] She also states that as a product of popular culture, the magazine shows how Rosa is conditioned by these representations.[28] She begins looking forward to experiencing what is represented as real in these popular publications and images, and she lives with these illusions during the first years of her life. She afterwards comes to realise the illusory nature of these ideals and feels deeply disappointed to see that the reality does not match the imaginary world created in *Sizlerle Başbaşa*. Although she initially tries to attain these ideals, she

[26] Ayşe Nur Özdemir, "Tersine Bir Bildungsroman: *Tante Rosa*", *Trakya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, V. 20, Issue 2, Dec., 2018, p. 502.
[27] Karin Karakaşlı, *Avangard ve Toplumdışı Roman Kadınları: Sevgi Soysal'ın Tante Rosa'sı ile Jean Rhys'in Günaydın Geceyarısı Romanının Karşılaştırmalı Okuması*, (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Yeditepe University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, MA Programme in Comparative Literature), İstanbul 2010, p. 82.
[28] K. Karakaşlı, ibid., p. 82.

recognises the impossibility of attaining them afterwards. She comes to understand the elusive nature of the ideals, and begins parodying them, both mocking and participating in the culture of consumerism.

Similarly, "To Room Nineteen" depicts a contrast between what is deemed to be the ideal of wifehood and the reality. What Susan expects to be and what is expected of her is being a successful wife. The narrator describes the beginning of her relationship with her husband as an ideal one: "*Not only they, but others, felt they were well matched.*"[29] Their marriage reinforces their popularity as it symbolises the ideal marriage. Indeed, they are considered to be an ideal couple by everyone around them "*because of their infallible sense for* choosing *right.*"[30] Marriage is primarily envisioned as a matter of choice from among various possibilities. The narrator initially appeals to the convictions of the reader through the assumption that making the right choice is the secret to a successful relationship, and the implication is that this conviction is shared by Susan, as well. Fromm defines such relationships as "*the love of exchange.*"[31] He emphasises that relationships, including those which are ostensibly based on love, are redefined within consumeristic terms: "*Love is often nothing but a favorable exchange between two people who get the most of what they can expect, considering their value on the personality market.*"[32] Susan's marriage is not an exception; it is envisioned as an act of exchange by not only society but also Susan.

Susan and her husband base their relationship on this tacit agreement, and they "*moved into a new flat in South Kensington on the clear understanding that when their marriage had settled down (a process they knew would not take long, and was in fact more a humorous concession to popular wisdom than what was due to themselves) they would buy a house and start a family*."[33] The fact that they appeal to "*popular wisdom*" in constructing their relationship implies that, in their married lives, they are going to continue participating in the culture that has initially shaped their choice of marriage. Besides, the houses they rent and buy symbolically represent the married couple's tendency to accumulate goods, and they stand for their relationship: the houses, along with luxury cars and furniture, become the prerequisite of not only founding a family but also building prestige. As Fromm states, "*Consuming is essentially the satisfaction of artificially stimulated phantasies,*

[29] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2301.
[30] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2302.
[31] Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, Routledge, London, 2008, p. 143.
[32] E. Fromm, ibid., p. 143.
[33] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2302.

a phantasy performance alienated from our concrete, real selves."[34] By consuming and accumulating goods, Susan and her husband become involved in such a performance, which indicates that they are agents of consumer society.

The incongruity between their expectations and the actuality is accentuated throughout the text by the early knowledge that their marriage has failed. The narrator states that when "*Susan became pregnant, she gave up her job, and they bought a house in Richmond.*"[35] The statement implies that the roles of wifehood and motherhood invalidate other identities, and Susan takes it for granted that she must leave her job. Weber draws attention to the representation of class ideology present in the story: "*In Lessing's 'To Room Nineteen', the narrator establishes a liberal-bourgeois, upper-middle-class ideology as the dominant one and, at the same time, expresses an ironic attitude towards it.*"[36] Not only Susan's life but also her identity are shaped by this class ideology. Similarly, Hochschild emphasises the connection between the notion of ideal motherhood and middle-class ideology, stating, "*When middle-class housewives raised children as an unpaid full-time role, the work was dignified by the aura of middle-classness.*"[37] Susan's case is not an exception. The role of the social class in shaping identities accentuates the fact that these identities are ideological constructs. As an upper-middle-class woman, she is initially willing to make concessions and embrace the identity of the ideal wife; her decision is parallel to the role that this ideology envisions for her.

Similarly, Rosa unknowingly adopts the class ideology imposed on her, which is symbolised in her self-image. Throughout her childhood she imagines herself as a princess, and she fosters this self-image even when she continues her education at a convent. The asceticism and self-denial encouraged by the nuns are undermined by Rosa, who outspokenly declares that she cannot deny her desires and sense of selfhood ("*Ben içimi öldüremem*").[38] This rejection of self-denial indicates the future struggles that await her, because Rosa refuses to forgo her unique sense of self.

[34] E. Fromm, ibid., p. 130.
[35] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2302.
[36] Jean Jacques Weber, "How Metaphor Leads Susan Rawlings into Suicide: A Cognitive-Linguistic Analysis of Doris Lessing's 'To Room Nineteen'", Eds. Peter Verdonk and Jean Jacques Weber, *Twentieth-Century Fiction: From Text to Context*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 37.
[37] Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value", Eds. Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens, *Global Capitalism*, The New Press, New York, 2000, p. 144.
[38] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 22.

Paradoxically, however, her self-image has already been constructed by the consumer culture she participates in. The fact that she imagines herself as a princess proves that her consciousness has been impregnated by the images in *Sizlerle Başbaşa*, a symbol which epitomises the mechanisms of consumerism. As Durkheim states, "*It is doubtless a self-evident truth that there is nothing in social life that is not in the consciousness of individuals. Yet everything to be found in the latter comes from society.*"[39] Both protagonists evidently base their perceptions of identity and their projections for the future on the overarching impositions framed by the culture and society to which they belong, and which positions them as consumers.

5. Disillusionment with Roles

Susan and Rosa come to understand the true nature of their roles after they get married. Rosa's disillusionment comes after she marries a man and realises the fact that the reality "*is in no way similar to the romances published in the magazine* Sizlerle Başbaşa" ("*hiçbir şeyin* Sizlerle Başbaşa *dergisindeki aşk romanlarında yazılanlara benzemediğini o kadar iyi, o kadar elle tutulur gibi anladı ki*").[40] Marriage for her means wearing a corset, roasting a duck and making an apple pie every Sunday, and sleeping with the man she does not love.[41] Her life is full of the artefacts of married life, which she grows weary of. She knows that she has in fact become another such artefact. Baudrillard describes the objectification of women in consumer culture focusing on the identification between woman and object:

> *Woman, whose fate lies with the paraphernalia (household objects), fulfils not only an economic function, but a prestige function, deriving from the aristocratic or bourgeois idleness of women who, by that idleness, attested to the prestige of their masters: the housewife does not produce; she does not show up in the nation's accounts; she is not recorded as a* productive force. *She is, in fact, fated to be of value as a* force of prestige, *by her official uselessness, by her status as a 'kept' slave. She remains an attribute, reigning over those secondary attributes, the household objects.*[42]

Although this study deals specifically with women's experience, it must be highlighted that men, also partaking in consumer society, are subjected to it, too. In this regard, Baudrillard emphasises the all-pervading nature of the culture of consumption. It is not only women but also men whose identity and existence are dominated by this culture:

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[39] E. Durkheim, ibid., p. 287.
[40] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 30.
[41] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 32.
[42] J. Baudrillard, ibid., p. 97.

> *[W]hat we are seeing very generally today is the* extension of the feminine model to the whole field of consumption. *What we have said of women in their relationship to prestige values, and of their 'proxy' status, goes, virtually and absolutely, for* Homo consumans *in general - men and women together.*[43]

It may be concluded, therefore, that although women experience the effects of consumer culture much more acutely than men, individual autonomy is at stake for both men and women.

The awareness Susan develops in her married life is again similar to Rosa's. Just like Rosa, Susan also comes to understand the objectification that her life entails. It must be highlighted, however, that although Susan experiences the effect of consumerism in her roles as a wife and mother more acutely, she is represented as a subject of this culture even before her marriage. Early in the story, she is described as one who "*had a talent for commercial drawing. She was humorous about the advertisements she was responsible for, but she did not feel strongly about them one way or the other*."[44] What is noteworthy is that, through her occupation, she actively participates in this culture of consumption. As Akgün states, "*Susan becomes a part of it by dedicating her creativity to the use of consumer culture, which is an extension of capitalism.*"[45] It may be inferred, therefore, that even before her marriage, Susan has been serving as an agent of consumer culture by preparing advertisements and promoting the sales of goods, which symbolically represent her active participation in it. Marriage, however, turns her into a passive agent of this culture, and she experiences the inhibiting effects of it more severely. Her existence comes to be shaped by the commodities of married life, and she exclusively depends on her husband for her livelihood. Her talent and creativity, however, become the reminders of her unfulfilled potential; moreover, they symbolically represent an alternative solution against the stultifying effects of consumerism. The text seems to suggest that it is only possible to overcome these effects by means of creativity, by participating in production and creating a unique language through production.

In the texts, the dynamics of marriage, just as the dynamics of other institutions, are formed by consumerist ideology. Victoria de Grazia posits that "*[a]s a central institution of civil society, [the family] is the site where resources derived from one form of power – purchasing power acquired and*

[43] J. Baudrillard, ibid., p. 98.
[44] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2302.
[45] Buket Akgün, "Doris Lessing'in 'To Room Nineteen' ('19 Numaralı Odaya') Öyküsünde Öznel Bireyselliğin Ölümü", *LITERA*, V. 23, Issue 1, 2012, p. 62.

expended in the market – are recombined to shape self-identities, sense of status, and demands for entitlement."[46] By implication, this all-encompassing power structure eventually turns those involved into commodities. Although Susan and Rosa do not recognise the workings of this mechanism at first, they eventually come to realise and refuse to be a part of it. Rather ironically, Susan arrives at the conclusion that "*[a] high price has to be paid for the happy marriage with the four healthy children in the large white gardened house.*"[47] The "*high price*" she refers to is a unique sense of self, which she is deprived of as a consequence of the all-pervading norms of the culture of consumption. The sentence reveals her awareness of her subjection. This is true also for Tante Rosa; just like Susan, she is also aware of it. In order to redeem their selfhood, both characters try to develop coping strategies, which are rendered through symbolic elements.

6. Coping Strategies

In both texts, resistance is conveyed primarily through metaphors of space and mobility. In her 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf observes that "*a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.*"[48] Woolf's remark works at literal as well as metaphorical levels; besides physical space, she also refers to ontological space. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Susan's disillusionment with her roles causes her to look for a place that is free from the constraints of the roles of the ideal wife and mother, which are shaped by middle-class consumerism. Her disappointment is deepened by her inability to talk to her husband and communicate her feelings. Moreover, when she learns about the infidelity of her husband, she perceives that even their relationship is disposable.

After a few failed attempts to have freedom in "*the large white gardened house*," Susan finds someone to substitute for her role as mother. To her surprise, the girl gets on well with the children:

> *The* au pair *girl, because of her own common sense, or (as Susan said to herself with her new inward shudder) because she had been* chosen *so well by Susan, was a success with everyone, the children liking her, Mrs Parkes forgetting almost at once that she was German, and Matthew finding her 'nice to have around the house.'*[49]

[46] V. de Grazia, ibid., p. 8.
[47] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2305.
[48] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Gen. ed. M. H. Abrams, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, V. 2, 6th ed., Norton, New York, 1993, p. 1927.
[49] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2315.

While Susan feels oppressed in her role, the girl is happy to assume it, because, unlike Susan, she is not expected to be an ideal mother. Therefore, her role is free from the constraints of Susan's "official" identity; in other words, it is free from the burden of the consumerist ideology.

Having thus delegated the roles of the wife and mother to other women, she secretly decides to rent a hotel room three times a week, where "*[s]he no longer was mistress of the big white house and garden, owning clothes suitable for this and that activity or occasion. She was Mrs. Jones, and she was alone, and she had no past and no future.*"[50] She stays at the same room, uses a pseudonym, and enjoys her loneliness. Her seclusion indicates that she does not assume the identity of the comfortable middle-class consumer, and no longer feels the burden of "*being Mrs Matthew Rawlings.*"[51] Ironically, however, in order to earn her freedom, she needs money. Because she has no income, she asks Matthew for it. When she asks for money she thinks, "*It was as if he were paying her…*paying her off - *yes, that was it.*"[52] Her interpretation of the situation highlights her alienation. "*Terror came back for a moment, when she understood this, but she stilled it; things had gone too far for that,*"[53] she thinks, trying to suppress her sense of having been entrapped. Although her impenetrable language leaves the reader in ambiguity, she makes it clear that she cannot go back to her prior state; she is willing to buy the brief moments of freedom even though she has to depend on her husband for that. What is unique about Room Nineteen is that it has enabled her to re-establish the link to her selfhood. This link, however, is destroyed when her husband learns about her secret. When her husband discovers her place of seclusion, she no longer feels free, as "*the peace of the room had gone,*"[54] Unable to express her need for a refuge, she goes there one last time and commits suicide. Her struggle against the constricting framework thus ends in failure.

It may be argued that the "*failure in intelligence*" the narrator alludes to at the beginning of the story refers not only to the failure of their marriage, but also to her failure in the struggle she has had against the structures of dominance and subordination. Early in the text Susan fleetingly expresses her concern for the "*storms of the world,*"[55] which were "*not too close - which is not to say they were selfishly felt.*"[56] This statement reveals the overarching

[50] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2317.
[51] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2317.
[52] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2317.
[53] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2317.
[54] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2319.
[55] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2303.
[56] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2303.

influence of the culture of consumption, and the alienation it leads to. Although she believes that she cares about other people, she has developed no connection to others or to her own self. Immediately after this statement she refers to her own life, and says, "*Everything was in order. Yes, things were under control*,"[57] as if trying to convince herself of the normality of her situation. Her suicide indicates that it has not been possible for her to be isolated from the all-encompassing roles imposed by consumer culture.

In Rosa's case, space and mobility take different forms, and her coping strategies differ accordingly. She constantly leaves places and people; in a sense, she consumes them. Unlike Susan, she is much more mobile and active, and she evades assuming the roles of the ideal wife and mother. However, her strategies seem to be paradoxical and irrational; as Özdemir highlights, her actions lack a rationale.[58] It may be argued that she uses the devices of the culture of consumerism and willingly participates in it to overcome the roles attached to it. She tries to resist the control exerted by this culture, constantly transforming herself, even though her efforts to cope with the norms of this culture eventually turn her into a parody of it. She embraces this state of commodification and also subverts it by turning herself into a caricature of the consumer.

After she leaves her first husband and children behind, she marries a violinist, and this is depicted as a happy relationship.[59] He is an artist, a fact which symbolises an antidote to commodification. Art, a product of human creativity, represents permanence against temporality, which is one of the defining characteristics of consumerism. During the war, she starts selling *Sizlerle Başbaşa*.[60] Ironically, she becomes the one who perpetuates consumerism. Still, it gives her independence; she is the one who earns money, and they live comfortably together.[61] She says that she loves her husband because he feeds her soul with art and philosophy.[62] Yet her happiness ends when her husband dies. His death marks another beginning for Rosa. Inspired by her husband's grave, she decides to start a business for the maintenance of graves. Although she cannot continue the business for long, she earns enough money to make a violin-shaped gravestone for her husband.[63] The irony in her choices is thus emphasised repeatedly throughout

[57] D. Lessing, ibid., p. 2303.
[58] A. N. Özdemir, ibid., p. 504.
[59] S. Soysal, ibid., pp. 37-8.
[60] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 35.
[61] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 35.
[62] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 38.
[63] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 41.

the text; her willingness to participate in consumer society runs against her awareness about it.

She encounters other people, travels to different places, and looks for a constant meaning against the illusory nature of consumption. The narrator says that "*Rosa believed that there would arrive a time when an apple would be a fruit, a father would be a father … a lie would be a lie … and a marriage would be a marriage*" ("*Bir elmanın meyve olduğu, bir babanın baba, … bir yalanın yalan olduğu … ve bir evliliğin bir evlilik olduğu, olacağı günler gelecekti, inanıyordu Tante Rosa*").[64] Her search for a stable meaning takes the form of hoarding at some point when she starts attending auctions, and buying and stocking everything she can. After a while, however, she realises that this cannot be a solution to the instability which she helplessly tries to overcome.

In contrast to the futility of her efforts, however, the text also presents an image of permanence: In the text, the narrator frequently refers to Rosa's watercolour wildflowers.[65] Although the image is not directly included in the plot, it is referred to several times in the text. Along with the magazine, it may be interpreted as another leitmotif which takes on a symbolic meaning. Whereas the magazine symbolises the transitory nature of things in the society of consumption, the watercolour painting, an element related to art, stands for what must be preserved. As Rosa consumes people and places, the painting fades; still, she keeps going back to it every time she fails.[66] The ambivalence in her attitude continues till the end. Towards the end of her life, she starts wearing bright clothes and excessive makeup.[67] She once again emphasises her status as an artefact, both expressing her awareness of and undermining the pervasive act of consumption. Even though she cannot escape being shaped by it, she subverts the roles of the ideal wife and mother by caricaturing them.

7. Conclusion

Literary texts may be read as mirrors to the cultures of which they are products. The literary works focused on in this study, *Tante Rosa* and "To Room Nineteen," function as such mirrors. As products of the tumultuous atmosphere of the 1960s, the texts share common characteristics and themes. Both texts depict the common existential struggle of the protagonists, which is dominated by the culture of consumerism. The texts are revealing also in

[64] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 47.
[65] S. Soysal, ibid., pp. 44-9.
[66] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 49.
[67] S. Soysal, ibid., p. 81.

the sense that they suggest the problems the authors encountered during their lifetime. Moreover, both texts reflect the *Zeitgeist*; as texts written during the era when capitalism and consumerism bloomed, they portray the individual's experience of consumer culture.

This study takes the link between consumer culture and women's roles of the ideal wife and ideal mother as its focus since the notion of the ideal betrays the prejudices and the ideology of capitalist consumerism. The works depict the social structure which imposes certain roles and identities on women; they also describe which strategies women develop in order to cope with this overarching structure. Therefore, the texts may be read as portrayals of the struggle of the female subject in consumer society. The protagonist of "To Room Nineteen," Susan, tries to isolate herself yet fails in her attempt to create a private space free from the images and ideas of the culture surrounding her. Tante Rosa, on the other hand, participates in this culture, consumes excessively and parodies consumerism by turning herself into an artefact. Both works thus reveal the pervasive nature of consumerism. However, they also seem to suggest that the characters' creative potential would enable them to resist the effacing nature of consumerism, and that individual creativity and art may be the antidotes to the effacing nature of the culture of consumption.

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