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Ali Smith'in Sonbahar'ında
Yabancılaşma ve Ayrımcılık

Alienation and Segregation in Ali
Smith's Autumn

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ABSTRACT

Ali Smith's novel, *Autumn*, has a special status in terms of the date of its publication. The time of publication of *Autumn*, 2016, occurs almost at the same time with Brexit referendum with only three months difference. Based on the effects it constituted on society, Brexit became a cornerstone of literary evaluation. In the referendum held in 1975 on the continuation of the EU membership, while the majority voted for the continuation of the membership, a counter result was obtained in the referendum held in 2016. The desire to sever certain ties with Europe is the result of social and political change in the country. It is observed that the separatist and conservative wing gains strength, while the open-minded wing that favours the union weakens. Among the consequences of this situation, items such as polarization in the country and segregation of immigrants can be listed. The topics related to Brexit have been focused in literary studies. Eventually a trend called Brexit literature has started. Smith's *Autumn* is regarded as the first work of Brexit Literature. The novel is a versatile novel in terms of the subjects it covers. In addition to being a political novel, subjects such as immigration, love, art, alienation and exclusion also come to the fore. This study focuses on practices such as alienation and segregation in the novel.

Keywords: Brexit, Alienation, Segregation, Immigration

ÖZ

Ali Smith'in Sonbahar adlı romanı yayımlandığı tarih açısından ayrı bir önem içermektedir. Roman 2016 Ekim tarihinde piyasaya sürüldüğünde Brexit referandumunun üstünden henüz birkaç ay geçmiştir. Bu referandumu konu alan edebi yapıtların yayımlanması ile Brexit Edebiyatı diye adlandırılan bir akım meydana çıkar. Ali Smith'in bu romanı Brexit Edebiyatının ilk yapıtı olarak kabul görmektedir. Roman ele aldığı konular açısından çok yönlü bir romandır. Politik bir roman olmanın yanı sıra, göçmenlik, aşk, sanat, yabancılaşma ve dışlama gibi konular da ön plana çıkar. Bu çalışma romandaki yabancılaşma ve ayrımcılık gibi uygulamalar üzerinde durmaktadır. İngiltere üyeliğinin devamı konusunda 1975 yılında yapılan referandumda çoğunluk üyeliğinin devamı yönünde oy kullanırken, 2016 yılında yapılan referandumda üyelikten ayrılma yönünde bir sonuç çıkmıştır. Avrupa ile belli bağlarını koparmak isteği ülkedeki toplumsal ve siyasal değişimin sonucudur. Ayrılcılık ve tutucu kanadın güç kazanırken birlikten yana olan açık görüşlü kesimin zayıfladığı gözlemlenir. Bu durumun doğurduğu sonuçlar arasında ülkede kutuplaşma ve göçmenlerin dışlanması gibi maddeler sıralanabilir. Bu çalışma Brexit Edebiyatı bağlamında bu tür konulara değinmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Brexit, Yabancılaşma, Ayrımcılık, Göçmenlik

I. Introduction

The Scottish novelist Ali Smith is a versatile and prolific writer. Smith has written novels, short-stories, plays and non-fictions. She has been shortlisted for Man Booker Prize several times. *Autumn* is one of the novels that has been nominated for that prize. Although she did not receive the Booker prize, she has received many different awards such as Whitbread Novel of the Year, Sundial Scottish Arts Council Novel of the Year, etc. Smith rejoices to touch on life in her writing career. In her novel, *Autumn*, sore spots such as Brexit and immigrants plight are intermingled with ordinary characters' mundane daily routines. "The novel raises questions of citizenship and belonging, particularly in relation to immigration" (Morton; 2017: e-resource). It is a versatile novel that covers a lot of ground. One can take it from multiple perspectives such as a love, an aging, a politics, an art novel, etc. The long and the short of it Smith brings a broad range of topics together in this novel.

Ali Smith's *Autumn* is the first of a quartet. The sequence goes on as *Winter*, *Spring* and *Summer*. In fact in literature the autumn is mostly contextualized as a season of melancholy. The sky turns grey; the sunny and warm weathers fall away,

in other words autumn foreshadows the upcoming, harsh winter. Smith's *Autumn* seems to have a Brexit-induced melancholy tone as well. The very first sentence of *Autumn* is “It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times” (Smith, 2016: 3). This introductory sentence is an allusion to first sentences of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, though with a slight difference; Dickens brings into balance by defining the time with the adjectives best then worst. In this regard Smith's perception of the time seems to be gloomier when compared to Dickens. This perspective takes shape in the title of the novel.

II. Discussion

The time of the publication of a novel may matter due to the special occasions occurring therewithal. In this regard timing can play a role in making a novel the cornerstone of an era. In this respect the topics covered in a novel become more important due to the sensitivity of the time they are published. The time of publication of *Autumn*, 2016, occurs almost at the same time with Brexit referendum with only three months difference. It is evident that before the referendum the turmoil has been ignited in British society. This conflict resulted in polarization in the groups defending and opposing Brexit. This polarization and related political issues such as Brexit, the situation of immigrant are penetrated from the place to place in *Autumn*. With this aspect the novel earns a political identity. Pittel asserts that; “Ali Smith's *Autumn* and *Winter*, often hailed as the landmarks of Brexit fiction” (Pittel, 2018: 58). Based on the effects it constituted on society, Brexit became a cornerstone of literary evaluation. It seems unimaginable that a revolutionary event like Brexit would go unnoticed by literature. Brexit has been the subject of novels and poems in this context. Eventually a trend called Brexit literature has started. In some places this literature is abbreviated to Brexilit. Lyall asserts *Autumn* as the first great Brexit novel (2017: e-resource). Beyond any doubt *Autumn* is the pioneer of this movement.

The novel is set up around an unusual friendship starting between a girl, Elisabeth Demand, and an old man, Daniel Gluck. At the beginning of novel Daniel Gluck is in a coma and Elisabeth who is now a junior art lecturer at a London university pays visits to him at a residential care home. Their past memories are given through flashbacks. Elisabeth is raised by a single mother; Daniel Gluck is their old neighbour. When the single mother is busy Daniel takes care of Elisabeth. During the time they spent together, they talk about art, literature and life. At one time or another Daniel introduces the works of Pauline Boty, one of the founders or Pop art movement. Moreover she is the only female member of this movement in England at that time. Boty is a painter whose outstanding works consist of collages. She criticized the male-dominated life in her works. After her premature death her art was forgotten for several decades. Her ignored life and art was brought to light at 1990s. Smith's mentioning her art in the novel can be interpreted as a restoration of honour for a long forgotten woman's rightist. Daniel's imaginary portrayal of Boty's works inspires Elisabeth profoundly. Despite her supervisor's reluctance she insists to write her dissertation on Pauline Boty. “By using and not using Daniel's lessons, Elisabeth forged her own path to personal fulfilment despite the adversity of a hostile post-Brexit society” (Miller, 2019: 99). It can be suggested that Daniel's effect on Elisabeth's character formation is larger than her mother's effect. They do not have an ideal mother-daughter relation. The conflicts between them keep going until she

leaves for university. The conflict between mother and daughter is not the only conflict of novel. There are more serious disagreements and social segregation in the core of the novel.

Smith projects Brexit as a major matter of conflict for British society. The referendum mentioned in the novel is actually the second referendum ever held. The first referendum was conducted in 1975. At that time more than two-thirds vote were in support of continuation of membership to Europe Union. In the second referendum mentioned in the novel the result was exactly the opposite. The defenders of Brexit won the referendum by a small margin. It can be viewed clearly that the society's approach to union has changed during the past time. It evolved from an open society to a closed society. The conservatives no more believe that their future and success are in Europe. They desire to segregate England from the rest of continent. Although not the majority, there is a good bit of citizens who think the opposite. In this regard, it can be deduced that an almost half polarized society has emerged.

The polarization in the society has been poetically depicted in *Autumn*. Garcia states that; "*Autumn* is a very poetical book, not only by its argument and characters but also by the rhythm of some passages..."(2017: 2). The perception and conception of both sides as a result of this referendum were skilfully conveyed. Smith asserts that; "All across the country, there was misery and rejoicing. All across the country, what had happened whipped about by itself as if a live electric wire had snapped off a pylon in a storm and was whipping about in the air above the trees, the roofs, the traffic" (2016: 59). The tension the referendum caused is identified with an electric wire that whips here and there. Smith scrutinizes a divided society elaborately. While a part of the society believes that alienation from Europe is a quite false movement, the other part believes that it is a precisely correct selection.

Smith states that the infelicity reaches to such a phase the upset part of society starts to seek a solution. They do not desire to maintain lives in an intolerant society. In the referendum Ireland and Scotland voted in support of maintenance of being a part of Europe. In this regard some of the Brexit offenders start looking for the ways of moving to Scotland or getting Irish passports (Smith, 2016: 59). It is a striking example to portray the polarization in the society. The result has caused such displeasure that some people fall into despair and try to leave the country. At this part of the novel the results of referendum are eloquently depicted by Smith. As she states hostility has started to grow between the two groups of society. "All across the country, people threatened other people. All across the country, people told people to leave...All across the country, racist bile was general" (Smith, 2016: 60). Segregation reaches such a point that some members of group that thinks they are victorious in the referendum, dares to expel the members of the rival group from the country. People threaten other people because they think different from them. It is also stated that hate takes action from time to time. There is a reference to an assassination attempt to a woman member of parliament (Smith, 2016: 38). The MP who was on the way to deliver a speech against Brexit has been assassinated. This assassination is a striking example to understand the black-balling taking place between the opposition groups.

Hatred towards strangers begins to turn to racism. Smith states that xenophobic acts, such as drawing swastika graffiti, are practiced all across the

country (Smith, 2016: 60). It is stated that the fate of a nation has changed overnight. As a result of Brexit, one can speak of a serious split in the country. The isolation is expressed eloquently by Smith. "...a fence here, a wall there, a line drawn here, a line crossed there, a line you don't cross here, a line you better not cross there...a line you don't even know exists here, a whole new line of fire, line of battle, end of the line" (Smith, 2016: 61). As it is deduced from Smith's writing, isolation starts to exist not only against immigrants, but also within the society itself. It is clear that alienation is not a problem specific to a particular geographic region, ethnic origin, or community (Barlık, 2018: 280). It can be observed in all segments of society. The hate crimes are also committed through press publicly in some cases. "You lot are on the run and we're coming after you, a right-wing spokesman had shouted at a female MP on a panel on Radio 4..." (Smith, 2016: 197). As it is seen in this example a member of a group does not see any problem to threaten a political figure of the other group in press.

It is clear that the Brexit has caused a division throughout the country. As it can be deduced from *Autumn* that the majority of Brexit defenders show common characteristics, likewise offenders show common characteristics. Their attitudes are different from each other. It should be kept in mind that this is the case for general and there are exceptions to every rule. In this regard it can be suggested that the Brexit offenders seem to be more open-minded and more intellectual. On the other hand the Brexit defenders display a more aggressive and conservative behaviour. It is stated that, "Brexit is return of nationalistic and anti-intellectual populism" (Wally, 2018: 64). It is also clear that Smith's approach to the latter group is unfavourable. In this regard *Autumn* is also regarded as a protest novel by some scholars (Wally, 2018: 64). Smith wants to show that the country has become more uninhabitable by alienating itself from Europe.

Autumn represents several instances about the features and attitudes of some characters in the sense of their political preferences. One of the prominent characters to be analyzed is Daniel Gluck. Daniel symbolizes the wisdom in the novel. He himself is an immigrant who survived the holocaust. Therefore Daniel and his family are victims of discrimination. Daniel comes from an intellectual background. He talks about literary figures such as Keats, Sylvia Plath and he is also in arts. With his strong personality and intellectual capacity Daniel is more effective on Elisabeth's self-realization than her mother. Daniel has a crucial role on Elisabeth's frame of mind, conception of world, and choice of profession. Smith does not explicitly set forth the preferences of the characters in the context of Brexit referendum. From the course of the events and peculiarities of the characters, it becomes clear to identify the part they take place. In this regard it is hard to see any objection in illustrating Daniel as a Brexit offender. His life, character and intellectual background require him to move in this direction. In this sense it can be suggested that although not clearly stated in the novel, yet the open-minded characters appear to be against Brexit. Elisabeth Demand can be projected as a pupil of Daniel Gluck. That's why her approach to events is anticipated to be in the same direction as Daniel. Elisabeth's family name is Demand which is commented on by Daniel etymologically. Daniel asserts that the name should be "du monde" originally. It means citizen of the world in French. A citizen of the world will be "resisting the facile coding of identity in terms of national boundaries" (Pittel, 2018: 61). In the light of all these conditions,

it is expected that Elisabeth will also be anti-Brexit. Another character that draws attention at this point is Elisabeth's mother. She goes through an alteration. The conservative woman at the beginning turns into a human rights activist.

On the other hand the Brexit defender profile depicted in *Autumn* seems to be less intellectual. It can be deduced that they are poorly trained, intolerant, conservative and close-minded group. They do not see any harm in revealing their hateful thoughts and feelings towards opposite part. As instances, racist slogans on the walls and discriminatory attitudes toward Spanish tourists can be offered. Moreover this hostile attitude is put into practice when the occasion arises. As mentioned before a political figure is subjected to threat in a radio program. Or in another instance a member of the parliament is assassinated just because of her political views in support of maintenance of membership to Europe. "Such 'unculture', the novel suggests, is what's behind the aggressive mentality of distrust and hostility that sometimes leads to outbursts of hatred, such as habitual racism, anti-immigration campaigns..." (Wally, 2018: 61). While Brexit offenders defend their views more civilized, the other side takes a more aggressive attitude with the audacity of gaining the majority. Wallys asserts that Brexit is "...a return of nationalistic and anti-intellectual populism" (2018: 64). In this regard it can be alleged that the Brexit is a starting point for uncivilized attitudes in regard to some instances.

The issue of alienation becomes more relentless when it comes to immigrants. The significance of this situation is touched on in *Autumn* several times. The Brexit defenders, who strongly oppose their own people because of their opposition to Brexit, take a tougher stance when it comes to refugees. As Elisabeth walks through the insecure atmosphere of the village, she sees a cottage that has been painted go home in capital letters (Smith, 2016: 53). The catch phrase on the wall is attributed to immigrants. It is clear that their existence on the continent is not desired by a considerable part of the nation. Elisabeth hears a spokesperson comments about immigrants on radio at one occasion. He states that; "but it's not just that we've been rhetorically and practically encouraging the opposite of integration for immigrants to this country. It's that we've been rhetorically and practically encouraging ourselves not to integrate" (Smith, 2016: 111). The spokesperson criticizes the attitude towards immigrants. He asserts that their mistake as the nation was not trying to come to terms with the reality of the existence of immigrants in the country. This immigration problem has been discussed unilateral. Accepting their existence and adapting to this situation has not been addressed. However during the debate in the radio the other party in discussion opposes this idea in a cynical manner; "well, you would say that. Get over it. Grow up. Your time's over. Democracy. You lost" (Smith, 2016: 112). As it can be seen in this instance, while one side adopts a democratic attitude, the other side exhibits a non-compromised attitude.

The Brexit defenders take immigration as a serious problem, however; instead of generating a solution they merely express their discomfort about the immigrant existence. This attitude sometimes gains a xenophobic form. Any outsider is a potential threat according to this aggressive idea. Elisabeth thinks about a Spanish tourist couple who have been assaulted verbally at the taxi station; "The people behind them in the queue shouted at them. What they shouted at them was to go home. This isn't Europe, they shouted. Go back to Europe" (Smith, 2016: 130).

Not only are the immigrants from the third world countries, but also the tourists from Europe countries are not welcomed. In another instance Elisabeth hears a group of thugs singing; "First we'll get the Poles. And then we'll get the Muslims. Then we'll get the gypsos, then the gays" (Smith, 2016: 197). The conservatives, who see Brexit as a first step, seem to have plans for the future. Apparently leaving the European Union is not a satisfactory milestone for them. Because they believe that; "the real and disturbing cause of concern" (Smith, 2016: 198) is immigration.

There are some concepts and entities which are identified with the plight of immigrants. The alienation and fences are some of vocabularies to render status of immigrants. It is stated that immigrants are kept in high-security places to prevent them from interfering with the society. The general tendency of the society and politicians is that immigrants shall not interfere with the society. In this regard the new government cuts "their funding for the houses where the kids who arrive here as asylum seekers have been staying...the kids are now going to be dumped in the same high-security places they put everybody" (Smith, 2016: 224). As mentioned in the novel these places behind fences are like jails, with bars on their windows and not suitable for children at all (Smith, 2016: 225). It is understood that the places where the asylum seekers are held to prevent their interference in society, are not very humanitarian.

The fences are symbol of alienation and detachment. Fences have been mentioned in several parts of the novel, because fences are tools used to prevent coalescence. The fences are used to keep immigrants away from the rest of the society. In *Autumn* the character who rebels against this brutal practice is Elisabeth's mother. Elisabeth's mother's view of life is going through a process of change gradually. At the beginning she seems to exhibit a conservative presence. As time passes, she changes and becomes a more open-minded person. It can be stated that Smith tries to be more optimistic by giving such a character undergoing a radical change. The novel composes a sense that there is still hope for future. "...what Smith suggests we should do is embrace the inevitable forgetting and move on from the past" (Baučeková, 2018: 106). Elizabeth's mother takes action when she hears that the Minister for Refugees will be scrapped and the immigrant children will be sent back behind the fences. Her response to the fence is by; "bombarding that fence with people's histories and with the artefacts of less cruel and more philanthropic times" (Smith, 2016: 255). This kind of action will of course not solve the problem and will remain on a symbolic level. But it is an important reaction in terms of the messages it contains. The important point in saying that she will bombard the fences with the history of the people is the reference to history. If the xenophobic groups look back at the history of their country they will clearly see that their ancestors established colonies in many parts of the world and exploited those countries. Here the message of Elisabeth's mother is to motivate them to look back at history and make them to self-criticize.

III. Conclusion

Brexit causes major differences in different fields of life. The discontentedness can be observed in every layer of society. It has resulted in social disorganization. So Brexit can be identified with alienation and detachment. The nation is divided into two groups as Brexit defenders and offenders. It seems that the

conservative group show a tendency to detach itself from others. There are certain motivations to draw away from each other. The issue of immigrants is one of the strong sources of discomfort for the conservative people. They are strictly against their existence on the continent. In this regard they are quite reluctant to any kind of coalescence. They strongly believe that immigrants should be alienated from society. Therefore keeping them behind fences and bars is not a troublesome charge. For such reasons, they do not hesitate to detach from Europe. The outcome of Brexit referendum is a confirmation of their discomfort with the state of the country. In this situation brought by the conditions, they are eventually alienated from Europe. *Autumn's* approach of the subjects in question has led to the novel's inclusion in the category of Brexit literature. Within the context of the subjects it deals with, it is evident that the novel has an anti-Brexit stance. Considering the topics of *Autumn*, such as Brexit and immigrants, the impression is that the novel is a politics book. However, as mentioned previously the novel goes around many different themes. In addition to the cold side of politics, warm human relations are also present in the novel. In this regard, Ali Smith has successfully melted many different issues in a pot. Despite the pessimistic sentence at the very beginning of *Autumn* and bothersome issues, Smith does not spoil all the hopes. Despite every obstacle, there is a feeling that life will continue. The novel composes a sense that there is still hope for future.

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Çatışma beyanı: Makalenin yazarı bu çalışma ile ilgili taraf olabilecek herhangi bir kişi ya da finansal ilişkisi bulunmadığını dolayısıyla herhangi bir çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını beyan eder.

Destek ve teşekkür: Çalışmada herhangi bir kurum ya da kuruluştan destek alınmamıştır.