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Turkish Figure in The Short Stories of Naguib Mahfouz

Necib Mahfuz'un Kısa Öykülerinde Türk Figürü

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Abstract

In this article, the Turkish figure has been investigated in the three stories of Naguib Mahfouz. These stories are *Yaqaza al-mūmyā*, *al-Zayf* and the *'Abeth aristocracy*. Naguib Mahfouz published his first collection of short stories, *Hams al-Junūn*, in 1938. The three stories that are the subject of this study are included in this book. Presumably, he wrote these stories at a time when the civilization of the pharaohs was influential on the intelligentsia in society. During this period, the interest and deep appreciation of many intellectuals for the period of the Pharaohs increased due to the influence of nationalist movements. In these stories, Turkish characters are presented as people having villainous tendencies. According to Naguib Mahfouz, aristocracy is the leading factor that causes the deterioration of society. The aristocracy that exploits society and despises them is narrated through the Turkish family. Turks are shown as foreign admirers who live in isolation from their own culture and religion. There were no stories in which the Turkish figure was seen as a dominant character in the later story books. This situation is probably due to the fact that the Turks did not hold important state positions in Egypt after the first quarter of the 20th century. As a result, their influence in the society has decreased.

Keywords: Naguib Mahfouz, Short Storie, Turkish, Figure.

Öz

Bu makalede Necib Mahfuz'un üç öyküsünde Türk figürü incelenmektedir. Bu öyküler Yakazatu'l-mumya, ez-Zeyf ve abes aristokrasidir. Necib Mahfuz ilk öykü kitabı olan Hemsu'l-cunūn'u 1938'de yayınlamıştır. Bu çalışmaya konu olan üç öyküde bu kitapta yer almaktadır. Muhtemelen mahfuz bu öyküleri, firavunlar medeniyetinin toplumdaki aydınlar üzerinde etkili olduğu dönemde yazmıştır. Bu dönemde birçok aydının milliyetçilik akımlarının etkisiyle Firavunlar dönemine olan ilgisi ve sevgisi artmıştır. Bu öykülerde Türk Karakterler kötü özelliklere sahip insanlar olarak sunulur. Necib Mahfuz'a göre toplumun bozulmasına neden olan unsurların başında aristokrasi gelmektedir. Toplumunu sömüren onları hor gören aristokrasi, Türk ailesi üzerinden anlatılmıştır. Türkler kendi kültürlerinden ve dinlerinden uzak toplumdaki kopuk olarak yaşayan, yabancı hayranı kişiler olarak sunulmuştur. Mahfuz'un daha sonra yayınladığı öykü koleksiyonlarında baskın bir Türk figürüne rastlanamamıştır. Bu durum da muhtemelen 20. Yüzyılın ilk çeyreğinden sonra Mısırda Türklerin önemli devlet görevlerinde bulunmamasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Bunun sonucu olarak da toplumdaki nüfuzları azalmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Necib Mahfuz, Kısa Öykü, Türk, Figür.



Introduction

The purpose of the discussion in this study is to describe and interpret how are the characteristics of Turkish characters in Naguib Mahfouz's stories and what kind of perception is created about them in the stories. From this point of view, the following story collections of Naguib Mahfouz were examined: *Hams al-Junūn*¹, *Dunyā Allāh*², *Khammāra al-Qit al-Aswad*³, *Ra'aytu fīmā yarā al-nāim*⁴, *Sabāh al-ward*⁵, *al-Fajr al-Kāzib*⁶, *Sadā al-Nisyān*⁷, *Futuwwa al-Atūf*⁸. Firstly, the Turkish figure in Mahfouz's novels will be briefly examined, and then the Turkish figure will be analyzed within the framework of three identified stories.

1. Turkish Figure In Necib Mahfouz's Novels

In this section, within the framework of the studies reached on the subject, Turkish perception in Naguib Mahfouz's novels will be briefly mentioned. After Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the *nahda/yaqaza* (*awekining*) movement started here. Some Egyptian intellectuals billed the backwardness of the people of the country to the Ottomans and therefore to the Turks.⁹ As a result of this movement, students have been sent to Europe. These students, who returned to their country, took their places in the intellectual layer in Egypt. In some of the works of these people, the Turks started to appear as *the other* in time. With the beginning of reading hieroglyphs, the Egyptians realized that they are descendants of the great ancient civilization. This situation partially weakened the Islamic brotherhood bond between Egyptians and Turks. Intellectuals began to question the Turkish presence in Egypt. It is started to be expressed that the Turks' cruelty, their exploitation of Egypt and that they did not really bring anything to the people of the country.¹⁰

As will be mentioned later, it is thought that Naguib Mahfouz also agreed with these opinions for a while. Mahfouz's novel *al-Sarāb* has been handled mostly in terms of psychological elements it contains.¹¹ Some researchers have said that the main character in the novel has the *Oedipus* complex. Others contested this, claiming that the novel revolves around the *Orest* complex.¹² Between the lines of these discussions, the image of the Turkish

¹ Naguib Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn* (Coiro: Maktaba Misr, 1979).

² Naguib Mahfouz, *Dunyā Allāh* (Coiro: Dār al-Shurūq, 2007).

³ Naguib Mahfouz, *Khammāra al-Qit al-Aswad* (Coiro: Dār al-Shurūq, 2007).

⁴ Naguib Mahfouz, *Ra'aytu fīmā yarā al-nāim* (Coiro: Maktaba Misr, 1987).

⁵ Naguib Mahfouz, *Sabāh al-ward* (Coiro: Dār al-Shurūq, 2007).

⁶ Naguib Mahfouz, *al-Fajr al-Kāzib* (Coiro: Dār al-Shurūq, 2006).

⁷ Naguib Mahfouz, *Sadā al-Nisyān* (Coiro: Dār al-Shurūq, 2007).

⁸ Naguib Mahfouz, *Futuwwa al-Atūf* (Coiro: Dār al-Shurūq, 2007).

⁹ Şükran Fazlıoğlu, *Arap Romanında Türkler* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2006), 87.

¹⁰ Fazlıoğlu, *Arap Romanında Türkler*, 286-287.

¹¹ J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 300.

¹² Mamdouh Farrā] al-Nābī, "al-Taharrur min sulta al-Umm fī rivaya al-Sarāb", *Naguib Mahfouz min al-Jamaliya ilā Nobel* (Coiro: al-Hay'a al-Āmma li Misr, 2012), 31.

people is also included. For example, in his article en-Nabi, emphasizes that Naguib Mahfouz included the collapse of the aristocratic class. The deterioration of this social class is explained through the example of the Turkish family. Mahfouz touched upon the situation of the oppressed people in his earlier novels, *Qahira al-Jadida*, *Khan el-Khalili* and *Zukāk al-Midaq*. In these novels, the poor class is exposed to many material, spiritual and physical tortures of the aristocracy. In the novel *al-Sarāb*, he shows the aristocracy as the reason why the people are in this situation.¹³

In the novel *al-Sarāb*, the Ru'be Lāz family represents the aristocracy. The main character of the novel, Kāmil Ru'be Lāz, is a shy and introvert person who cannot communicate with other people. He cannot be successful in his education life from childhood to university. He overcame the obstacles he encountered thanks to his grandfather Ru'be Lāz. The events he experienced in his education life made him even more introverted. His mother has absolute control in every aspect of Kāmil life. He does not have any friendships he can maintain. His mother is his unique confidant and friend.¹⁴ She always advises his son not to leave her.¹⁵ However, he finishes high school at the age of 25. He enters law school but cannot continue his education.¹⁶

Grandfather Ru'be Lāz is a retired soldier. He is respected in society. However, he takes care of all the affairs of his family and especially his grandson Kāmil thanks to the people he knows in the bureaucracy. When Kāmil fails to attend university, his grandfather uses his influence to put him in a government job. Grandfather is presented as a nightlife person who is addicted to drinking and gambling. That is why he will lose everything he has over time. Even the family's nickname, lāzoglu (son of lāz), would be a mockery. One of his classmates asks to Kāmil, what is lāzoglu? Is it a noun or a verb? All his friends laugh at this situation. As can be seen, the Turkish figure that Mahfouz draws in this novel contains quite negative elements. In Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy* novels, the Turkish figure seems to have more positive characteristics. While Turks are mentioned more in the first book, they are not mentioned much in the other two novels. The Turkish family, who lends a helping hand to its surroundings, has positive characteristics. A perception of personality with noble, gentle and benevolent characteristics has been created for the Turks. However, it is also included in the novels that Turks are proud and stubborn people who are proud of their past.¹⁷

¹³ al-Nābī, "al-Taharrur min sulta al-umm fi rivaya al-Sarāb", 32.

¹⁴ Naguib Mahfouz, *al-Sarāb* (Coiro: Dār al-Shurūq, 2007), 77.

¹⁵ Mahfouz, *al-Sarāb*, 21.

¹⁶ Mahfouz, *al-Sarāb*, 89.

¹⁷ Fatoş Işıl Britten, "Necib Mahfuz'un Kahire Üçlemesinde Türk İmgeleri", *Mavi Atlas* 9/1 (2021), 130.



2. Turkish Figure in Naguib Mahfouz's Short Stories

In this section, three stories of Naguib Mahfouz will be examined. The Turkish characters, their characteristics and the perception about them in the story will be tried to be determined. In the stories in the *Hams al-Junūn* book, where this story takes place, almost completely standard Arabic is used. The Egyptian dialect is used very rarely. In cases where the dialect was used, the words used were appropriate to the social status of the character in the story.¹⁸ Dialect usage was not encountered in the three stories to be discussed.

A. Yaqaza al-mūmyā (Awakening of the Mummy)

This story is a narrative that contains surreal elements. At what time and place the events took place is not clearly stated in the story. However, the mummy in the story is an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh. The tomb of this Egyptian king, named Hor Awibre, was discovered in 1894 in Dashur, 40 km from Cairo. Based on this, it can be said that the story takes place in Cairo in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Ibrahim Pasha, the main character of the story, is highly respected in political and aristocratic circles. He is one of the wealthiest people in Egypt. The people around him describe Ibrahim Pasha saying that he has the characteristics of three different people. The author introduces the pasha as a person of Turkish origin, whose homeland is Egypt and whose heart and mind are French. He is France's biggest friend in the east. He sees France as his second homeland. Whether they live in France or Egypt, all of his friends are Frenches. He and those around him are rational people. They are respected people who are highbrowed and interested in arts. The story is told by Dorian, an ancient Egyptian professor. Professor Dorian and Pasha's mutual friends often go to the Pasha's palace. The guests are hosted in the large hall of the Pasha, which resembles a museum. In this hall, there are paintings and sculptures from the best examples of fine arts. The author describes this hall as follows: The artworks collected in the hall seem to commemorate the eternal genius of the Pharaohs and salute them, because the artifacts from the Pharaohs shine like stars despite all the years that have passed. This hall is fully furnished in French style. Meals are from French cuisine. The spoken language is French.¹⁹ Pasha once said that if he had to leave this hall, he would give it to France. In addition, there are some rumors in the newspapers claiming that the Pasha smuggled historical artifacts and sold them to the Frenches. He thinks the Egyptians will not appreciate such things. According to him, Egyptians are only farmers (fallāh son of fallāh). His attitude towards the Egyptians also appears in his refusal of a doctor who wanted to marry his daughter. Although the doctor is a talented doctor who has earned the rank of "Bek", he is turned back simply because he is an Egyptian. Professor Dorian wants to object to these thoughts of the Pasha, but the pasha but the pasha shuts him up and says: "You show pity on the Egyptians, who were

¹⁸ Musa Yıldız, *Nacib Mahfuz (Hayatı, Eserleri ve Kısa Hikayeleri)* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Sos. Bil. Enst., Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 1992), 52.

¹⁹ Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 78-79.

the descendants of the pharaohs, for devoting your life to the ancient history of Egypt. The two peoples are very different from each other. Remember that the Egyptians are the people of bean (fūl). They are pets. These people are inherently inferior".²⁰

The main part of the story begins with the arrival of a person named Sheikh Jadallah to Pasha one day. This person is a holy man who is loved and respected by society. He tells the Pasha that he saw a treasure in the courtyard of the palace in his dream. He asks Pasha for permission to dig there. Pasha is not someone to allow such a thing. Never believes in superstitions. However, he allows both for the Sheikh's pleading and for having some fun. The digging continues for a while. Meanwhile, there is a noise in the garden. An Egyptian from the Said region (Saīdī) attempts to steal the pasha's dog's food. Pasha's men catch the thief. The dog is considered as a member of the family so that it has even caretakers and servants. It goes through a veterinary check every month. It is fed with milk meat and broth every day. The thief says he hasn't eaten meat since the feast of the sacrifice (Eid al-Adhā). Despite this, he is punished thoroughly by the Pasha's men. It is seen that there is an old grave in the excavation area in the evening. This situation shocked Professor Dorian. From the inscriptions on the wall, the symbols on the sarcophagus and the statues in the room, it is understood that the tomb belongs to the Pharaoh Hor Awibre. Then a surreal event takes place. The mummy starts moving slowly. After a short while, he jumps out of the coffin with a graceful movement and stands in front of the coffin. Because of fear, everyone there remained motionless. The interesting aspect of this situation is that there is a serious similarity between the face of the mummy and the face of the thief who wanted to steal the dog's food.²¹

Mummy calls out to Pasha with a majestic and frightening voice tone of kings: "Even with my soul bound by the chains of eternity, I have never seen anything strange like this. I could not come to you because my life was over by Osiris's decree. But you came to me with your own feet ... O idiot! Isn't it enough for you to steal my kids? Now you're trying to steal my grave. Speak, o slave. Why aren't you talking? Aren't you my slave Shanaq? Don't you remember when I brought you here after a victory in the north? No matter how much you deny! Your white skin indicates that you are a slave. What are these funny clothes you are wearing? What is cheating on you? What happened to this world? Honorable people have fallen into disgrace and the mob has become masters. O slave how did you own this palace? How is it that my children work as servants? What happened to traditions and customs? What kind of comedy is this? How could you be so bold with my kids? You

²⁰ Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 81, 84.

²¹ Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 81-84.



beat him and ordered his brothers to beat him. How do Egypt's children go hungry? Shame on you!". The pasha's heart cannot stand this and dies.²²

These words that the pharaoh said carry important clues about both Mahfouz's love for the Ancient Egyptian Civilization and the Turkish perception he created in the story. Pharaoh sees the Egyptians as the true sons of this land. Can't understand the changed order. The fact that the thief, who looks like a pharaoh, is from the Said region, implies that the real Egyptians that are not spoiled or mixed with other races are Saidians. It is understood that Naguib Mahfouz wrote this story in a process in which he adopted the pharaonic view that emerged as a result of nationalism movements. It is known that he wrote his historical novels during this period and under the influence of these views.²³ The story collection of *Hams al-Junūn* was published before his historical novels (1938). Mahfouz says that his mother caused him to love the Pharaohs period. His mother, who is a very literate person, made him meet the ancient Egyptian civilization.²⁴ Pharaoh Emphasizes that Pasha is a slave in several places. There is a reference here that there is a similarity between Turks and Jews. As if Turks see themselves as the superior race, just like the Jews. They exploit Egypt and cause the Egyptians to starve.

The pasha character in the story draws a very negative Turkish image. Pasha is a devoted French fan who breaks with his own culture. He despises the Egyptians and does not consider them human beings. Although he admires the civilization established by the ancient Egyptians, he uses their grandchildren as servants. He considers his dog much more valuable than them. Mahfouz wants to show the value of the Egyptians through the ancient Egyptian civilization to the children of Egypt. He wants to explain that those who exploit them today are actually the slaves of their grandfathers. In the historical novels he wrote, tries to reveal the heroes who will realize this and start a revolution.²⁵

B. al-Zayf (Fake Lover)

No information is given about the time and place of the story. However, if it is considered that the Turks still have important roles in society, this story must be taking place in the early 1900s. The main character of the story is a woman. The author does not mention this person's name throughout the story. He mentions about her as a lady or a woman. She is a charming woman in forties. She is of Turkish origin but has become an Egyptian. Her husband Ali Asim Pasha passed away and left her a large fortune. Ali Asim Pasha is one of the distinguished statesmen and held important positions. The lady is

²² Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 91, 92.

²³ Musa Yıldız, *Necib Mahfuz'un Sembolik Romanları* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Sos. Bil. Enst, Doktora Tezi, 1998), 32; Brugman, *Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, 296.

²⁴ Kazım Ürün, *Çağdaş Mısır Romanında Necib Mahfuz ve Toplumcu Gerçekçi Romanları* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Sos. Bil. Enst., Doktora Tezi, 1994), 55.

²⁵ al-Nābī, "al-Taharrur min sulta al-umm fi rivaya al-Sarāb", 22.

amused by the work of wealthy widows in aristocratic circles. Lady takes over her days with what rich widows do. A rivalry begins with the wife of İbrahim Rushdy Pasha who is a widow like her. Both of them live in the same neighborhood. This woman is no less than her. Her beauty and richness are spoken by the high society. Both of them live in a big palace. They compete in buying the latest model cars and beautiful clothes. When either of them does a charity event, the other immediately does a similar activity. They are mentioned in newspapers and magazines. They both have close friends from noble families. It is rumored that the wife of İbrahim Rushdy Pasha had a love affair with a famous musician. Asim Pasha's widow, when she hears this, decides that she should also have a love affair with a respectable person in the society. She wants her secret lover to be the famous Egyptian poet Muhammad Nouredine. But she made a mistake and confused one of the theater audiences with the poet Muhammed Nouredine. There is a serious similarity between this person and the poet. Lady send someone and invite the man to her lodge. The man realizes he is the wrong person, but he wants to seize this opportunity and does not reveal the situation. Thus, a relationship begins between them. The lady invites Ali Jabr, whom she thinks is a poet, to her palace.²⁶ When Ali Jabr comes to the palace at the appointment time, he encounters a surprise. The lady also invited her friends to brag. In this meeting it is not understood that Ali Jabr is a fake poet. The relationship continues in this way for a short time. One day, the lady meets Ali Jabr while leaving the theater with her friends. He introduced him to his friends as the famous poet Muhammad Nouredine. But some of his friends realize that he is not Muhammad Nouredine. The lady had a serious disappointment and got into a funny situation in front of her friends. The story ends like this.²⁷ The Turkish family is depicted very badly in the story. The rich widow does some nice things for the benefit of society, but she does it to appear in newspapers and magazines and to be praised. She is a woman who is cut off from Islamic traditions, away from society and the culture she lives in. Her lifestyle shows that her good deeds are also futile. The aristocratic Turkish family is shown as the example and the cause of the deterioration and corruption in society.

C. 'Abeth aristocracy (The Fun of Aristocracy)

There is not any clue about the time and place of this story. However, since the general frame of the story is similar to the previous two stories, it can be inferred that it takes place at the same time and place. There is also no clear information that the character is Turkish.

²⁶ Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 12-16.

²⁷ Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 22-25.



However, the names of the personalities indicate that they are of Turkish origin. For example, İnci is a name used in Turks. In addition, these families are from the upper strata.

Hāmid İrfān and İnci Hanim prepared a birthday party for their little children. All of the guests are distinguished people. Music, lights, decorations were prepared very carefully. Women is the first of the topics discussed among the guests. The author compares talking about women to “the light, which the butterfly cannot help but turn around”. There are heated debates around this topic. One talks about the subject of how to choose a chaste woman, another tells stories of love adventures set in different cities around the world. Young people, on the other hand, entered into a secret competition to find the ugliest woman of the party.²⁸ While the party continues, Professor Muhammad Jalāl convinces his friend Tāhā Arif 's wife Huda Hanim to go up to the third floor. The two lovers start spending time anxiously. However, after a short while, footsteps are heard. They realize that the people are approaching the room and they move into a dark corner. Those who come are a couple in forbidden love just like them. They sit on the sofa where they just sat. When the couple starts talking, they realize that the arrivals are Tahā Arif and his own wife, Safiya. However, she has fallen into a very bad position. There is nothing he can do. Together with Huda, they wait for them to come out. Then they leave the room. Professor Jalāl goes to the garden to get over the shock of the incident. He starts thinking by getting angry with himself. Later, he notices that the jacket he wears is a little longer. When he puts his hand in the pocket of the jacket, finds visiting cards of his friend Tāhā. The jacket he is wearing belongs to him, and his jacket is probably on Tāhā.²⁹

The topics spoken at the party reveal the intellectual level and moral understanding of the distinguished guests. The distorted relationship between the two couples, which is the main theme of the story, needs no explanation.³⁰ In this story, the collapse and deterioration of the upper layer is described in the example of the Turkish family, who have moved away from their own culture and understanding of morality. The Turkish family in this story represents a highly moral degradation.

Conclusion

The Turkish figure had a very negative impression in the stories of Naguib Mahfouz. Pasha, the main character in the first story, is a French fan. He doesn't like Egyptians at all, sees them as half-beast creatures. The only thing they can do is farming. Although he glorified ancient Egyptian civilization, he was a person who humiliated the Egyptians who were their descendants. He was even accused of selling their own historical artifacts to the French. He is a proud, stubborn person who does not care about anyone. In fact, it has a

²⁸ Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 272.

²⁹ Mahfouz, *Hams al-Junūn*, 275-277.

³⁰ Hüseyin Yazıcı, *The Short Story In Arabic Literature* (Coiro: General Egytian Book Organization, 2004), 42.

character that exploits and oppresses the Egyptian people. It is emphasized in the story that he must be a slave, and the Egyptians must be masters. It is thought that Naguib Mahfouz wrote this story while he was under the influence of nationalist movements.

In the other two stories, the Turkish family is depicted very badly. The rich widow does some nice attitudes for the benefit of society, but she misuses them in order to appear in newspapers and magazines and to be praised. She is a woman who is cut off from Islamic traditions, away from society and the culture she lives in. Her lifestyle shows that her good deeds are also futile. The aristocratic Turkish family is shown as the example and the cause of the deterioration and corruption in society. The distorted relationships experienced, the decline and deterioration in the upper layer are described in the example of the Turkish family that has moved away from its own culture and moral understanding. The Turkish family is badly presented.

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