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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE USA IN ALEV LYTLE CROUTIER'S *SEVEN HOUSES*¹

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ABSTRACT

This article is about Turkish-American writer Alev Lytle Croutier's historical novel, *Seven Houses* (2001). In her autobiographical elements carrying novel, Croutier focuses on Turkey and examines changes in Turkish culture as an outsider. The story of the *Seven Houses* starts with the Ottoman State's last days and ends in 1997. *Seven Houses* chronicles the story of the Ipekci family, and the book's primary focus is on the lives of four generations of Turkish women in that family. The women's stories are narrated by the omniscient voices of seven houses. The houses within the book store the characters' memories, dreams, secrets, and thoughts. The seven voices of these seven houses, all of which are situated in the biggest cities of Turkey, such as Izmir, Istanbul, Bursa, and Ankara, act as living characters in the form of a grand villa, a silk plantation, an apartment or a family dwelling. Within its historical context, *Seven Houses* narrates the new freedoms Turkish women had gained and thus reveals their changing perspectives. Within the book, the women characters struggle between the dominating forces of their past and the Western world, which will become their future. The representative of the Western world in the novel is the USA, and the characters' understanding of the USA is crucial. For that reason, through a critical study of Croutier's women characters, this study tries to describe what the USA represents for them and Croutier.

Keywords: Alev Lytle Croutier, *Seven Houses*, USA, Turkey, Historical Novel.

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**ALEV LYTLE CROUTIER’NİN *YEDİ EVİN SIRLARI*
ESERİNDE ABD’NİN TEMSİLİ****ÖZ**

Bu makale Türk-Amerikalı yazar Alev Lytle Croutier’in *Yedi Evin Sırları* (2002) adlı tarihi romanı hakkındadır. Croutier, otobiyografik unsurlar içeren romanında Türkiye’yi odak noktasına koymakta ve Türkiye’ye dışarıdan bakan birisi olarak Türk kültüründeki değişiklikleri incelemektedir. *Yedi Evin Sırları* kitabının hikâyesi Osmanlı Devleti’nin son günlerinden başlar ve 1997 yılında son bulur. Kitapta İpekçi ailesinin öyküsü anlatılmaktadır ve ana odak noktası, ailedeki dört kuşak Türk kadınının yaşamıdır. Kadınların hikâyeleri, içinde yaşadıkları yedi evin her şeyi bilen sesleri aracılığı ile anlatılmaktadır. Kitap içindeki evler, karakterlerin anılarını, hayallerini, sırlarını ve düşüncelerini saklarlar. İzmir, İstanbul, Bursa ve Ankara gibi Türkiye’nin en büyük şehirlerinde yer alan bu yedi evin yedi sesi, büyük bir villa, bir ipek tarlası, bir apartman veya bir aile evi olarak, roman karakterleri gibi hareket ederler. *Yedi Evin Sırları*, tarihsel bağlam içinde Türk kadınının kazandığı yeni özgürlükleri anlatırken onların değişen bakış açılarını da ortaya koyar. Kitapta kadın karakterler, geçmişlerinin hâkim güçleri ile gelecekleri olacak olan Batı dünyası arasında mücadele etmektedirler. Eserde Batı dünyasının temsilcisi Amerika Birleşik Devletleri olduğundan karakterlerin bu ülkeyi algılayışları önemlidir. Bu amaçla çalışmada kadın karakterler ve Croutier için ABD’nin neyi temsil ettiği incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Alev Lytle Croutier, *Yedi Evin Sırları*, ABD, Türkiye, Tarihi Roman.

1. INTRODUCTION

Alev Lytle Croutier (aka Alev Aksoy) is a Turkish-American writer living in the United States. Croutier’s paternal grandmother from Bornova Zehra Barutçu “was the daughter of a wealthy gunpower maker in Macedonia” (Croutier, 1989, s. 9). Alev Lytle Croutier was born in a five-story house in Karatash, İzmir, in 1945. She was the only child of her parents. Her family moved to Ankara in the 1950s, where she had her primary education. She attended *American College for Girls* (ACG) in the Arnavutkoy campus in Istanbul for middle school.² After graduation, she went to Oberlin College in the USA and studied art history. She became well known after publishing her non-fiction work *Harem: The World Behind the Veil* in 1989. The book was translated into more than twenty languages.

In *Seven Houses*,³ Croutier blends history with a rich imagination. The novel is a journey to the history of Turkey and the Turkish people from the eyes of an outsider. The book provides, especially for foreign readers, an

² Today the graduates of this school are called “Robert College” graduates.

³ Croutier writes her works in English, and like all of her other books, she has written her historical novel *Seven Houses* (2002) in English. The book was translated into Turkish by Canan Silay and published in 2005 by Remzi Publishing House.

introduction to some of the significant aspects of Turkish culture. In the novel, one can find the symbols and characteristics of being a Turk, as Croutier often uses concepts that belong to Turkish culture. Besides, in the book, all the details about Turkish culture are provided, so they do not obstruct the narration.

As well as providing information about Turkish culture, the book also gives much information about Turkish history. Faithful to the facts of the period Croutier, in her historical novel *Seven Houses*, uses different houses in different parts of Turkey to narrate the story of a silk-making family and the history of Turkey. For instance, the first narrator in the novel, the House in Smyrna, narrates WWI years and tells how the Allied forces occupied Anatolia. It gives information about Greece's invasion of Smyrna in May of 1919, the end of the Liberation War, and how "overnight, Smyrna became İzmir" (Croutier, 2002, p. 35-36).

The house sees the great İzmir fire as such:

On a dark September day, the Turkish armies entered Smyrna forcing the Greeks to leave, forcing their fleet to sail back, taking with them a shipful of immigrants. A terrible anger, stifled in black smoke, splashed across the sky. When the *imbat* wind began to sway, the tongues of flames spread rapidly while the sirens whined ominously to warn the people of the city. The fire quickly moved from the Armenian quarters to Alsancak to Konak, meandering its way toward the neighborhoods of Karantina and Güzel Yali... In a day, four thousand years of human expression was wiped out. Just like that. Who can forgive such madness! The firemen clamped around on horses, unboarding houses, drilling cisterns in search of water sources. Water pumps broke down. Hoses caught on fire. Men rushed around, filling buckets of salt water from the Bay. (Croutier, 2002, p. 12).

...

Then, it happened. A great thunder overwhelmed the crackling of the fire. An aggressive outpouring of tiny shards of hail countered. Ice curses fell from the sky with deliberate fierceness, sharp and determined, melting like a salve over our burning flesh. Spitting into the fire, sizzling into steam, sizzling until the embers weakened and lost their determinate glow. Within an hour, the fire had subsided, leaving us, the inhabitants of Smyrna, shrouded in black mud and mourning. The white city buried in a shroud of black mist. Like its women. The whole city weeping for human stupidity. As the world wept for the city (Croutier, 2002, p. 34-35).

The House in Smyrna also describes how parades floated down the streets for days.

Young girls with laurel and white flowers crowning their freshly cropped hair, displaying larger-than-life pictures of the blue-eyed man. The same as the one on Esma's dresser. Men paraded in *borsalinos* instead of the fez; the Great Leader himself had appeared in Kastamonu wearing one. Women burned their veils, revealed their faces, at long last allowed in male company, allowed a social life. Slogans read, "Can one half of the population rise to the skies while the other is chained to the ground?" promoting women's rights. And, "Turkey can no longer be the stage of religious fundamentalism and *sharia* schemes." People hung from the balconies around the quay chanting and cheering (Croutier, 2002, p. 38-39).

It also mentions the treaty of Lausanne, population exchange, and the country's leaning toward the West and Atatürk. "A dashing blond man with an iron face, a strong jaw, and penetrating blue eyes—eyes capable of the greatest hatred and of the greatest love" (Croutier, 2002, p. 38). It narrates Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as "the ancestor of the Turks. (*Ata* meant ancestor.) The savior from the tyranny of the Sultans, the greed of the Allies. The hero of Gallipoli. The new God. The blond savior. The man of great reforms" (Croutier, 2002, p. 39).

The Silk Plantation in Bursa, the novel's second narrator, describes the Turkish Republic's early days and the importance of Bursa. It mentions Bursa's being once the capital of the Ottoman Dynasty and "the center of the world" (Croutier, 2002, p. 109). The third narrator, Spinster's Apartment in Ankara, describes how Atatürk elevated the city to the status of the new Turkish Republic's capital. It highlights the American influence on Turkish culture between 1959 and 1960. It also narrates that "a whole ancient city lay not yet discovered" underneath it and had the remnants of six thousand years ago (Croutier, 2002, p. 121-122). The fourth narrator of the novel, the Turquoise House on Seven Whiskers Street in Karshiyaka, Izmir, portrays the years between 1961 and 1962, and the US remains at the center of its focus.

Other narrators in the second part of the novel, the apartment in the Essence of Honey Street in Istanbul and the Turquoise Cottage and the House in Izmir, all depict the situation of Turkey in 1997. The apartment in Istanbul details the influence of US popular culture on Turkish youth back in the 60s and compares Turkey and the US through women characters. In the Turquoise Cottage's narration, the reader gets information about the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Liberation War. "We'd lost our country to the Allies who were dissecting it as if it were some laboratory animal, dividing up the sections, devouring us. So Atatürk and the rebels had begun a war against them" (Croutier, 2002, p. 259). The great Izmir fire in 1922 in that section is described as follows:

Someone said, 'Look! Smyrna is burning.' Over the garden, through a sea of olive trees, I saw three lofty pinnacles of smoke rising, flecked with bursts of orange flame, tilting like banners in the wind, melting and distending into the slopes. That's how I saw the great Smyrna conflagration. The Greeks' revenge, they told us, although the Greeks claimed the Turks had burnt the Armenian and Rum segments of their own city. They had poured gasoline into the Bay, set all the boats on

fire, in the process destroying most of the fish and the dolphins. The four thousand-year-old city lost just like that. Above and below (Croutier, 2002, p. 261).

The events that took place in the history of Turkey are described in a straightforward talented way in all sections of the novel. However, Atatürk's secularization, the growing American influence in the 1960s, and the revival of religious fundamentalism in the 1990s are the most dominant political changes mentioned in the novel.

2. *Seven Houses*: Synopsis

In literature, 'the house' has often been used as a cultural symbol reflecting social and historical changes and is often associated with its inhabitants. Therefore, "house" as a cultural phenomenon is significant, and one can trace the changes in people and society. The houses in *Seven Houses* witness the family members through time and history and narrate the individuals' strengths and weaknesses while revealing the political upheavals in Turkey. The story spans from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century.

In *Seven Houses*, the Ipekci family's fortunes and tragedies, as well as Turkey's political and socio-economic changes, are told from the perspectives of seven different houses that the family occupies. The novel has two main parts. The first part consists of four sections: "The House in Smyrna", "The Silk Plantation", "The Spinster's Apartment", and "The Turquoise House on Seven Whiskers Street". These sections cover the period between 1908 and 1962.

Croutier gives clues about the narration in the book by starting the first part named "The Delicate State of Silk" with a quotation from Pierre Loti's *The Desert*:

One should know beforehand that there will be in this book no terrible adventures, no extraordinary hunts, no discoveries, no dangers; nothing but the fancy of a slow walk, at the pace of a rocking camel, in the infinite bliss of the pink desert (Croutier, 2002, s. 3).

The novel has tales within tales. The author narrates the story like a slow camel ride in the first part. As a person who grew up in a society where superstition and magic were prevalent, Croutier also injects magical realism into her work and starts each section in both parts of the novel with an opening quote.

In the first section of part one, the House in Smyrna narrates the story of Esma and her two sons, Aladdin and Cadri. It begins with Esma's buying the house and gives details of her love affair with Süleyman, her sons' tutor. Her daughter Aida is a product of this love affair, and Aida's beauty is a source of both pleasure and hardship in the novel. The first section finishes with Esma's granddaughter Amber's birth and Esma's death. In the second section, the Silk Plantation in Bursa recalls the beauty queen Aida's adolescence and Esma's brother Iskender and Amber's stories. Amber experiences a sheltered childhood in Bursa, and the section ends with her parent's decision to leave Bursa. At the beginning of the third section, the reader learns that a fire had killed İskender Bey and devastated the silk plantation. Being the oldest male relative, Amber's father, Cadri succeeds him and loses the family's fortune. The family moves to the Spinster's Apartment in Ankara. In the third section, the apartment gives information about the family's coffee business and concludes with selling it to pay its debts. Ultimately, Amber's parents decide to go to Ann Arbor, Michigan, for a year and leave Amber in Turkey with her grandparents. The whole Ipekci family scatters over the world. The last section of part one is narrated through the eyes of the Turquoise House on Seven Whiskers street in Karshiyaka, Izmir. It details Amber's relationship with her mother, Camilla, and grandmother, Malika. The first part ends with Cadri and Camilla's return from the US in 1962.

The second part of the novel, named "The Prodigal Daughter's Return," starts with a quotation from Aeschylus' *Medea*: "You navigated with raging soul far from the paternal home, passing beyond the seas' double rocks and now you inhabit a foreign land" (Croutier, 2002, s. 193).

This quotation represents Amber's going to the USA and gives clues about her feelings. The second part contains three sections: "Essence of Honey Street", "The Turquoise Cottage", and "The House in Izmir". All of the sections in this part take place in 1997. In the novel's second part, Amber returns to Istanbul after twenty-five years with her American-born daughter, Nellie. The apartment in the Essence of Honey Street narrates Amber's relationship with her mother and the changes experienced in Turkey during those years. In the second section of part two, Amber with Nellie goes to Karshiyaka to visit her grandmother Malika. She learns more about her family secrets and tries to convince Malika to live with Camilla in Istanbul. Finally, in the last section, Amber buys the House in Izmir, and the novel ends.

3. Autobiographical Elements in *Seven Houses*

The novel's characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's real life and imagination, and it carries many autobiographical elements. Croutier recollected her emotional status when she decided to write the book as such:

I started *Seven Houses* because I was deeply moved to describe an afternoon in my hundred-year-old grandmother's garden in Izmir.

That story began clustering with other scenes with other family members, and then the fictional characters attached themselves, and soon I had a great tangle, a chaotic mélange of story and history (Croutier, 2003, s. 234).

The author's grandmother, mentioned here, is Maria (Malika in the novel), and the house described is the Turquoise Cottage in the book.

The book narrates the tragedies, triumphs, secrets, and sacrifices of the Ipekci (Turkish for silk-making) family, but it includes details from the life of Alev Lytle Croutier, her parents, her maternal and paternal grandmother, and some of her other family members. Croutier mentions those names in the acknowledgments part of the novel as follows: "Every book is a great collaboration, and for this one, I credit my grandmothers Maria and Zehra, Grandpapa Hamid, Uncle Aladdin, Aunt Ayhan, and, of course, my parents, Sadri and Yümniye, for giving me the yarns to spin" (Croutier, 2002, s. 306).

The real protagonist in the book, Amber, is an architect and appears in all seven houses. In one of her conversations, Croutier names Amber as the "architect of the novel" (Croutier, 2003, p. 235-236). Thus, Amber can be interpreted as being the author herself. Also, Esma carries autobiographical traits from Croutier's paternal grandmother Zehra in the novel. Esma's sons Aladdin and Cadri can be viewed as Croutier's uncle Aladdin and father Sadri. Amber's maternal grandfather Hamid can be Croutier's grandfather Hamit. Esma's daughter Aida can very well be Croutier's aunt Ayhan. Cadri's wife Camilla and her mother Malika can be interpreted as Croutier's mother Yümniye and maternal grandmother Maria.

The novel is narrated by the omniscient voices of the seven homes in which the Ipekci family occupies. Telling the story through houses with different personalities makes the story interesting. Croutier describes this experience as such:

One of my European editors said to me, "But Alev, houses don't talk."

Literally they don't, of course. But this is a point of view that allowed me to stay in the precinct of one house at a time, the constraint of one place, like a steady camera recording the incidents as in cinema vérité.

The inherent challenges were the unity of the place. Everything had

to occur within the vicinity of the houses. This constraint liberated me in a sense to explore the interior world of the characters through an objective lens (Croutier, 2003, p. 235).

Each house in the novel represents a specific era in Turkish cultural history; they reflect Turkey's changes throughout the 20th century. The houses reveal the secrets of female characters in the novel, which also explains the attitudes toward women and society at a given time. They also reflect the family fortunes' rise and fall. All the houses in the novel represent the image of Croutier's family's houses in Turkey. Instead of telling her life story directly to the readers and writing an autobiography, she prefers to create a fictional atmosphere and fictional characters.

4. Houses, Women and the Representation of the US in *Seven Houses*

Croutier puts houses and women at the center of her novel and forms a linkage between them. The houses have similarities with the women characters living in them. In a way, the architecture of the houses in the novel, reflecting the change from tradition to modernization, is effective for women living in. Daily routines of Turkish women's lives, eating habits and foods, traditions, and clothes, even hairstyles are narrated in the novel.

The book chronicles the lives of four generations of women: Esmâ, Malika, and Mihriban belong to the first generation. Aida, Papatya, Sibel, and Camilla are the second generation, whereas Amber, Maya, and Mihriban are the third generation. Finally, Nellie, the daughter of Amber, represents the fourth generation in the novel. Within the book, the women characters are all ambitious and determined and make their own decisions about what to do with their lives.

4.1. "The House in Smyrna" (1918-1952): Esmâ, Mihriban, Camilla, and Amber

The grand villa in Smyrna knows and sees everything. It even sees the dreams of its inhabitants. It hears everything, even the whispers hissing like snakes on all floors. It listens and peers into characters' lives, the most private moments when they close their doors. It manipulates situations when it can. It has frailties and has a soul. It exists not "only in space but in the silence of time" (Croutier, 2002, p. 32). It has feelings. When an evil character urinates on its outer walls, the house says, "If I had tears, I'd cry. If I had a voice, I'd swear, If I had hands, I'd slay" (Croutier, 2002, p. 30).

The House in Smyrna desires a lovely setting, a good design, solid construction, kind inhabitants, constant maintenance, tender love, and care, like the women characters it narrates. It needs to be the "center of interest and the object of desire" (Croutier, 2002, p. 37). Women characters "infuse the

house with life". They touch the walls, give them their breath, and try to bring the spirits back, but once abandoned, the house begins to fall apart.

The relationship between the House in Smyrna and Esma is described as love at first sight. Only fate could pull them apart in the novel. They resemble each other. Ferret, the antagonist in this story, "pursues Esma's scent through the corridors, inhales the rooms she had recently walked through" (Croutier, 2002, p. 18). He licks the house's walls as if kissing Esma.

The world outside the house is depicted as "a world unkind to the woman" (Croutier, 2002, p. 18), and women's entrance to the outside world is possible only through men. Thus, Esma feels that all the doors to the outside are closed when she thinks that her beloved is dead.

The women in the house find themselves in a difficult situation when they have no resources to keep it. As in the case of Pasha's wives, who ended up as "curiosities" (Croutier, 2002, p. 9) and displayed from village to village like "dancing bears" (Croutier, 2002, p. 10). The women during those days are narrated as follows:

The women existed to serve their men since it was their only chance of acquiring a soul. They were not born with souls, but by attaching themselves to a man, they could share theirs, thus gaining an entry into the cennet, or paradise. But even in cennet, the celestial hour is served the men. No other paradise existed for women (Croutier, 2002, p. 144).

A young woman cannot live alone. Once stolen from their homes, no one remembers them. They become "nameless", and they have no place to go. Women can be stoned, defaced, or buried up to the neck in the sand for having an affair. They can be exposed to pelvic exploration when thought to have an affair or if there is evidence of misdeed.

In this part of the novel, Westernization is represented by America, and America means permanent loss. When her son Aladdin leaves Izmir for Boston, Esma knows that "the loss would not simply be a temporary one" (Croutier, 2002, p. 47). The USA symbolizes "glamour photos of artists and Nickelodeon. It represents 'mysterious lust. Unfamiliar tongues. Unspeakable delights'" (Croutier, 2002, p. 47).

4.2. “The Silk Plantation” (1930-1958): Aida, Amber, and Camilla

The Silk Plantation is “a vast plantation above Bursa, in the foothills of Mount Olympus” (Croutier, 2002, p. 65). It is populated with mulberry trees. It is constructed in a big garden, with silk houses and silos. It gathers information and rumors from others. “I only know what happened from hearsay. This is what I’ve been able to conjecture, putting all the bits and pieces together” (Croutier, 2002, p. 70). It knows some of the events that took place outside of its borders. The reader does not hear its interpretations as often as in the House in Smyrna. At the end of the second section, a fire devastates the house.

The plantation tells the reader the story of Aida, a symbol of modern Turkish women in the 1930s. She becomes a beauty queen and appears in the novel as “a living emblem of Atatürk’s ideal of youth” (Croutier, 2002, p. 68). Aida has a birthmark, a crescent, and a five-pointed star on her left breast.

The women characters in this section are lush, well-kept, and beautiful, just like the silk plantation. They spend endless hours “soaking in the mineral baths, scrubbed, exfoliated, anointed, detoxified by the sulfurous steam” (Croutier, 2002, p. 65-66). Women are portrayed as sex objects, and they have nothing but their beauty. Since their beauty is their power, they have to look after themselves. “Eastern gentlemen like women with flesh (after all, what’s a body for?), not like those toothpick foreign hussies” (Croutier, 2002, p. 66).

The East is represented through evil characters in the House in Smyrna and the Silk Plantation. For example, Pasha, a selfish man cultivating the white opium poppy, goes to exile to the purgatorial ice lands of Kars and commits even worse things there. Iskender Bey sees Osman, the troublesome son of Aida and General, as a person who belongs to the ice lands of Kars. In the novel, Osman is referred to as “a bad egg, which should not be allowed to hatch” (Croutier, 2002, p. 105).

4.3. “The Spinster’s Apartment” (1959-1960): Amber, Papatya, Aida, Camilla, and Sibel

The family moves from a silk plantation to an apartment complex with only a tiny garden due to the loss of the family’s fortune in section three. So the story of the Spinster’s Apartment starts. The apartment is a symbol of degeneration in the novel. It is built in Ankara (Ancient Angora), “a dusty city in the arid of Anatolian plains” (Croutier, 2002, p. 120). Ankara is depicted as “a modern city reborn out of a need to find fulcrum for the revolution” and is described as a city of new beginnings with excellent opportunities. “Everything is new and modern in this city” (Croutier, 2002, p. 121).

Ghostless and hollow inside, the apartment in Ankara has a low ceiling and tiny holes for windows to economize heat. Water hisses out of its radiators. It has concrete and narrow stairways. Its outer appearance is not good, but underneath the apartment lies an ancient city. Years later, people

would discover the remnants of six thousand years ago when it was demolished. It has an old soul deep down, despite its mask of modernity. The Spinster's Apartment refuses to talk about the things it has not seen.

There is no privacy in the apartment, and people have to share certain places with others. Life in an apartment is depicted as "an undesirable intrusion" (Croutier, 2002, p. 124), and one has to or is expected to share "bread and hope" (Croutier, 2002, p. 123). Windows on each story and faces on windows are described as signs of the end of privacy.

The Spinster's Apartment is mortgaged to buy a citrus plantation along the Taurus Mountains to grow decaf coffee. Ultimately, the Ipekis sell the apartment to pay their debts and scatter "all over the world to unrelated destinies". Passers-by make up stories about a family of spinsters who once lived in the Spinster's Apartment. However, "they imagine a different sort of spinsters, the kind who spin stories" (Croutier, 2002, p. 159).

In this part of the novel, America is described as insinuating itself into the characters' lives, seducing the women with "Frigidaire and Hoover" (Croutier, 2002, p. 123). Synthetic, American-made wall-to-wall carpets displaced Hereke carpets because the family had concluded that their old carpets had no use for them anymore. They put them in their doorway, and the precious Shiraz, Isparta, and Hereke carpets "ended up serving as bedding for vagabonds, beggars, and gypsies" (Croutier, 2002, p. 123).

The pieces of newspaper are replaced by the toilet paper in rolls of mud color or dirty pink. Communal bathing, with "creature warmth," is replaced by modern bathrooms with coffin-shaped tub, which became "an emblem of loneliness and desertion" (Croutier, 2002, p. 124). America is recalled through listening to Elvis's song "It's now or never" and having a Donald Duck watch (Croutier, 2002, p. 132). Also, America is described as "not a good place to travel with children" (Croutier, 2002, p. 158), and the Americans are described as milk, carrot, and onion-loving people. Women at the end of the 1950s are designated as being under the influence of American popular culture icons. They go to cafes and beauty parlors, and the magazines they read, the films they watch, and the celebrities they admire are all American.

4.4. "The Turquoise House on Seven Whiskers Street" (1961-1962): Amber, Camilla, and Malika (Maria)

The Turquoise House on Seven Whiskers Street is in Izmir. It is the home of the Taşınars, Camilla's parents. Amber learns while staying in this house that she is one-quarter Greek. The house has an enormous carved door, which is always open and hard to close. Like its door, the house's upper shutters perpetually remained open, inviting all sorts of flying things. It signifies the house's and its owners' tolerance as Amber's grandmother went through hard times when the Greeks invaded Smyrna and its aftermath. Therefore, the

house never sleeps. Its owners have gone through tough things; they do not want to remember, and the house is always alert in case of a sudden attack.

In that section, the USA is represented as something that snaps the inextricable cord that bonds the child to parents. The bond between Amber and her parents loosens when they go to the USA and leave Amber in her grandparent's house. The USA is described as a country that separates loved ones from each other and drifts people into an inexplicable aloofness. It means separation or running away, as in the case of Süleyman.

4.5. "Essence of Honey Street" (1997): Camilla, Aida, Amber, and Nellie

The apartment in the *Essence of Honey Street* starts narrating the situation of Istanbul after Amber's return from the US after many years. In the second part of the novel, which takes place in 1997, the atmosphere of Turkey is described as "Girls wearing scarves. Women wearing long coats, their heads covered, moving about the streets like black bundles...and all these bearded men wearing beanies" (Croutier, 2002, p. 201).

The apartment in Moda was built in a place where there was a row of pretty houses with gardens and verandahs. It retained the memory of afternoons when Amber was an adolescent, as it is built in the place of a villa, which the family had built after Camilla and Cadri returned from the USA. It is portrayed as having seven stories, bland windows, and sharp balconies and is in the middle of "a bustling metropolis" (Croutier, 2002, p. 197).

The apartment in Istanbul compares the old and the new, just like Amber does. Amber recalls the social life in Turkey in the 1960s, whereas the apartment recalls the structure of houses in those days. The new apartments are described as "identical blocks, stacked-together Lego cities but in the shades of gray. Two windows and a balcony" (Croutier, 2002, p. 205). They are "concrete monoliths, placed at obtuse angles, lurked above them like oversized constructivist robots" (Croutier, 2002, p. 205). They are "muted" and "hard-edged" (Croutier, 2002, p. 205). "Like mechanical Japanese robots, they look like they're marching to crush the city" (Croutier, 2002, p. 205). However, the environment was spacious and green when Amber left Istanbul, like Amber's new place in California. In the old times, the environment was green; now, it is described as gray and black in Istanbul.

The apartment in the *Essence of Honey Street* tells the story of Amber, who has difficulties adjusting to life in Turkey after living in the USA for twenty-five years. When Amber returns from the USA, she realizes there is not much left to hold on to in Istanbul, and she feels the place devours her. However, the burden suddenly lifts, and she feels relieved and alive again when she forgives her mother later in the story.

America is presented in this part of the novel as "a world oceans away" when Amber recalls her teenage years in the 60s. It symbolizes seeking role models in fan magazines, comic books, and Hollywood musicals. The

popularity of PX black market, smoking Salems and Kents. It means learning a few phrases in English and dating blond American soldiers, and eating hot dogs. It recalls a period when hand-knit sweaters were not wanted, as they belonged to the world teenagers wanted to get rid of. Instead of them, bermuda shorts were popular just because they were American. It was a time when teenagers in Turkey “loved everything American because it was American” (Croutier, 2002, p. 207). Those were the days when both boys and girls wanted to have yellow hair with the help of hydrogen peroxide. They ironed nylon underwear and spent hours in front of mirrors. “Just like American teens in fifties movies” (Croutier, 2002, p. 209), the young girls were going to discos and dancing cheek to cheek with boys or doing the twist.

However, the apartment in the Essence of Honey Street emphasizes that all these things belonged to an era when all the houses “were painted in candy colors with green shutters and quaint gardens” and were single-family dwellings (Croutier, 2002, p. 209).

Within the novel, the apartment narrates the Turks and the meaning of a house for them as such:

In their hearts, the Turks were still nomads who’d lived in tribes for thousands of years, pitching their tents wherever the wind blew, sinking into the earth to sleep unconcerned about rooting. Home was a part of their body, an appendage ready to dismantle and abandon at a moment’s notice. Permanence of home was an incomprehensible notion. Home was transience. Home was the steppes, the desert, the caves, the mountains. Home was you. Your body.

Their invasions stopped here—the farthest stretch to the West. The indestructible doors closed and they would forever be pounding on them, begging to be allowed in, desperately yearning to become part of the West while trying to destroy it. But in their obsession, they found themselves conquered by the need for sameness, imitating forms they did not understand, homes that did not belong to them.

Their confidence gone, they became unfathomable. Like their houses and sacred spaces, they hid behind the emptiness in between the facades of a movie set or locked their women behind lattices, behind veils to cover their shame, which they couldn't contain. They had lost their souls (Croutier, 2002, s. 209-210).

In this section, Amber thinks that if she had stayed in Turkey, she would “become a society bimbo with a leather ton, gold jewelry, and a bunch of dysfunctional children” (Croutier, 2002, p. 216). Camilla believes that Amber could have become a prime minister if she had stayed in Turkey. She says, “I should never have allowed you to go to America” (Croutier, 2002, p. 217). She believes that her daughter has lost all her Turkishness. “Not a drop of Turkishness left – A *gavour* like you” (Croutier, 2002, p. 219). Camilla believes that Amber could have lived like a queen by marrying a son of a good family and could have had everything she ever wanted. She “could've been a star” (Croutier, 2002, p. 217).

However, from Aida's point of view, Turkey is a place where “happiness is a source of envy” and “misfortune is a cause for celebration” (Croutier, 2002, p. 226). For her, people in Turkey “behave as if they are put in this world to make others' lives miserable” (Croutier, 2002, p. 226). Turkey has “spider-brained people”, who are in the habit of “seeing evil in everything,” and unlike America, it is not a suitable place for unusual people (Croutier, 2002, p. 227).

4.6. “The Turquoise Cottage” (1997): Malika, Camilla, Amber, Nellie

The Turquoise Cottage is a tiny cottage where Malika, Amber's grandmother, used to keep the chickens in her house in Karshiyaka. The big house that Malika lived in was in the first part of the novel in section four with the name “The Turquoise House on Seven Whiskers Street”.

The tiny cottage Malika lived in her old age is portrayed in the novel as having open doors and windows (Croutier, 2002, p. 269). Malika lived there till the Turquoise house was torn down by the government officials to widen the street. The Liberation War of Turkey is narrated from the perspective of Malika and Camilla in that section.

4.7. “The House in Izmir” (1997): Malika, Camilla, Amber, Nellie

The House in Izmir is the same house the reader meets at the novel's beginning. It was built in 1890 and is now older than a century, and government officials declared it unsafe. It looks unloved and describes itself as such: “In a sad state of dilapidation and disrepair, the wooden facade rotten

with age, the delicate gingerbread pitifully bug-eaten, I had been on my deathbed for a long, long time...without attention and respect for so long, fragile and brittle, not much hope to be resurrected” (Croutier, 2002, p. 289). Amber was the only child born in it, and she was only five years old when her family left the house. The house remembers Amber as soon as it sees her and resembles her to Esma.

The House in Izmir is described as Amber’s past and her “spiritual home” (Croutier, 2002, p. 302). It tries to understand Amber’s feelings when she decided to leave Turkey for the US and, by quoting Süleyman, warns her that she can only start her new life with another past as she cannot remember her real past life.

What would it feel like to abandon one’s existence, one’s place, and go into another—in the middle of things, like this, not by mitigating circumstances but by one’s own choice? I remember once, going through a dark night of the soul when Süleyman had talked to me of transubstantiation. He described it as completely leaving this life behind, waking up in another one. It seemed like a good solution until he told me that the only catch was, you had no recollection of the life you came from. You started over in total oblivion (Croutier, 2002, p. 302).

5. CONCLUSION

After the collapse of the 600-year-old Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923. After its proclamation, the religious ruling institutions of the Ottoman Empire, the sultanate, and the caliphate were abolished. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk concentrated on modernizing the country and made social, political, and economic reforms between 1924 and 1934. Women were the most significant symbol of the newly founded Republic of Turkey. However, the obsession with becoming a part of the West resulted in imitating Western forms without understanding and comprehending them. Turkish women and houses were used as a token to show the Western world the modernization of Turkey. For that reason, like in most Turkish novels, Croutier too chooses to depict Westernization through her women characters in *Seven Houses*.

Within its historical context, *Seven Houses* chronicles the new freedoms Turkish women had gained and thus reveals their changing perspectives through the decades. Within the novel, the women characters struggle between the dominating forces of their past and the Western world, which will become their future, and whose representative in the book is the US.

Alev Lytle Croutier defines the atmosphere of Turkey in the first part of the *Seven Houses* as leaning to the West after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. She portrays a country where things were changing rapidly, and specific reforms were made to promote women's rights. People believed that Turkey could no longer be the stage of religious fundamentalism and was well aware that half of the population could not rise to the skies while the other was chained to the ground, as Atatürk said. However, in the novel's second part, the author puts the setting in 1997 and exposes her protagonist's disillusionment. After twenty-five years of absence from Turkey, Amber comes to Turkey with her daughter Nellie and does not like the things she sees. The atmosphere of Turkey in the second part is described as dull and colorless compared to the one in the 1960s. The expected change of Turkish society to modernity is described as unsuccessful, and Atatürk's efforts to elevate women and promote women's rights are depicted as going backward.

By ending the story with the same house at the novel's beginning and taking the story to where it started, Croutier tries to show Turkey's reversal. The House in Izmir and the Silk Plantation represent the values of Turkish tradition, whereas the apartments symbolize degeneration and are described as an outcome of imitation. The story in the novel comes full circle when Amber comes to Izmir and buys the house she was born in. Thus it can be concluded from the author's point of view that the Turkish people also drew a circle in its place after so many years of not making any progress and getting lost in the political and sectarian crises. Croutier emphasizes this idea by making one of her characters say, "Atatürk would stir in his grave if he knew what this country has come to after all his efforts to elevate women" (Croutier, 2002, p. 201). According to Croutier, Turkey is in such a degenerate situation because it did not internalize the reforms of Atatürk. Imitation without comprehension has thus resulted in military coups, or interim military governments, that came to power under the pretext of secular government.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this research.

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL / PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. There are no participants in this study.

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